

Liberty University

The Religious Persecution of Christians

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
The Faculty of the School of Divinity
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

By

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Liberty University School of Divinity, 2018

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The thesis project addressed the religious persecution of Christians in Kenya, East Africa, and the United States. The problem is that Christians deny Christ to avoid persecution. There is a need for a proposed solution that emphasizes the need to believe that persecution is a reality, and that every believer should anticipate and prepare for it. Furthermore, the proposed solution should emphasize that God has a purpose for allowing Christians to face persecution. The methodology used for this project was qualitative analysis. The researcher applied the content analysis approach towards interpreting the data that was collected from thirty-one participants completing the questionnaire. The content analysis approach revealed five themes instrumental in developing a proposed solution to the problem. The proposed solution is intended to encourage Christians to have a proper mindset related to God's Word, recognize the importance of spiritual growth, and maintain a focus on eternal rewards. The proposed solution will help Christians maintain a focus on God before, during, and after periods of persecution.

WORD COUNT: 166

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Third, I want to acknowledge and congratulate anyone who is very close to turning seventy years old, like myself and taking this academic journey. If God leads you to take this journey, please obey Him by faith, knowing that His will is the safest place to be. Do not worry about the years that have passed, simply trust God to use you during your remaining years (Jer. 29:11).

Dedication

I dedicate this entire project to my daughter, Ericka who is also my friend. She has used her faith in God to deal with many difficult health problems, while simultaneously encouraging others and me, to “swing for the fences.” Ericka is a precious Christian who enjoys inspiring others.

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List of Abbreviations

AF	<i>Africa</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
EFI	Evangelical Fellowship of India
FW	<i>Freedom of Worship</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
NGO	<i>Non-Governmental Organization</i>
R.I.M.I.	<i>Reaching Indians Ministries International</i>
U.S.	<i>United States</i>

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis project concentrated on the religious persecution of Christians in the United States, and those on the continent of Africa with a focus on Kenya in East Africa. Originally, the project planned to involve Christians in India, Africa, and the U.S., however due to some challenges with the ministry in India, at the last minute, they were not able to participate. The non-participation of the ministry in India had a major impact on the scope of this project.

This project addressed three components of religious persecution. First, it dealt with the importance of Christians believing the biblical warning that religious persecution happens. A concern exists that some Christians are selective about what they believe in God's Word. Since religious persecution can include torture and lead to death, it can easily be regarded as something seemingly unbiblical for the body of Christ. Second, this project addressed ways that Christians could prepare for religious persecution. Christians must understand that religious persecution is biblical and unavoidable. Persecution is to be expected because Jesus Christ said that it would happen (2 Tim. 3:12).¹ Since the warning of religious persecution is biblical, Christians need to believe God's warning and prepare for it. Third, this project addressed the fact that God has a purpose for allowing religious persecution. Christians must realize that religious persecution serves a purpose in the plan of God. There are many reasons that God allows the persecution of Christians, and God knows the exact purpose of each occurrence. The purpose may involve the spiritual growth of the persecuted, the salvation of the persecutor, or an increase in the number of believers in the body of Christ. Even if the persecution leads to death, God has a reason for allowing it. The researcher of this project firmly believes that if all Christians believe the

¹ Unless otherwise noted all scripture is from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

biblical warning of religious persecution, if they prepare for it, and if they believe that God has a purpose for allowing it, they will be better able to endure persecution.

Ministry Context

The ministry context originally consisted of thirty-two confessing Christians over the age of eighteen years old, from various Christian denominations, academic backgrounds, and three countries. The participants known to the researcher were linked together and connected to this research by their confession of faith in Christ, their mindset to witness for him, their love for the Bible, and the service they provide to non-believers and the body of Christ. The symbol that best described the participants known to the researcher was the cross of Christ, because of their sacrifices and desire to see others come into a personal relationship with Christ. All of the participants, chosen by the researcher, indicated a sincere desire to follow Jesus Christ and be like Him. In order to show the variety of individuals participating in the study, the researcher included some of the non-identifying information of the participants, such as Christian denominations, academic backgrounds, and areas of employment that was extracted from the anonymously completed questionnaires.

Ten of the confessing Christians lived in Kenya, East Africa. The researcher met the Kenyan pastor about a year ago when visiting a non-denominational church in Suitland, Maryland. The Kenyan pastor committed to completing the questionnaire and recruiting nine members of his congregation in Kenya to do the same. The nine members of the Kenyan congregation were unknown to the researcher, but the pastor informed them of the project. The church in Kenya, East Africa is prone to religious persecution, and the ten Kenyan participants defined religious persecution, as they understood it. They shared their particular experiences and knowledge of religious persecution within their culture when completing the questionnaire.

Other questionnaire participants included a pastor in India and nine of his congregants. The researcher met this pastor when he visited a church in Capitol Heights, Maryland. The nine congregants that he selected to complete the questionnaire were unknown to the researcher. The researcher had complete confidence that the Indian pastor and his congregants would complete the questionnaire, sharing their understanding and experiences related to the religious persecution of Christians in India. There was the possibility that the ten Kenyans had some experience with religious persecution outside of Africa. It was also a possibility that the Indian pastor and one or more of his congregants may have experienced religious persecution outside of India. These twenty participants were expected to provide valuable information to support the research problem.

The remaining confessing Christians included three pastors in the United States without any of their congregants. The church denominations of the one male and two female pastors were Methodist, Baptist, and Non-Denominational. The Methodist pastor completed her seminary education in New Jersey many years ago. The pastor of the Baptist church completed his Doctor of Philosophy degree at a Baptist seminary in Maryland. The pastor of the non-denomination church completed her seminary education at a Maryland school within the last three years.

The ministry context included four licensed educators. Three work in Maryland and one works in the District of Columbia. The two female and two male educators were divided between the Holiness and Baptist denominations. The educators teach middle or high school students. The two church elders and the one local church member that completed the questionnaire were females practicing the Pentecostal faith tradition. One of the elders is a retired schoolteacher, and the other is an emergency telephone operator on the East Coast of the U.S. The lone church member completed a graduate degree in seminary and is currently

attending class at a local college. The male security guard practices the traditions of the Pentecostal Faith and has credentials and past employment in the jewelry industry. A second participant holding a Doctor of Philosophy degree works and ministers mainly in Arlington, Virginia. However, there was enough distance between all of the participants and the researcher to expect that all responses to the questionnaires would be valid and useful.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed is Christians do not believe in the reality of religious persecution, they do not prepare for it, and they are unaware that God has a purpose for allowing them to go through it. When Christians face persecution, too many of them deny Christ to avoid suffering for the faith. This serves as a strong indicator that they are not prepared for religious persecution. Religious persecution is biblical, but Christians who do not prepare for it, do not know how to respond to it. Christians are faced with severe persecution in at least thirty-six countries around the world.²

Christians, who will not believe the biblical warning of religious persecution, will not prepare for persecution, as they would not see it as a possibility. This oversight on their part is inconsistent with other practical patterns whereby Christians prepare to be impacted by the brokenness of this world. Christians purchase different types of insurance to prepare for events that might happen in their lives. A number of Christians have personal and home protection, sometimes even firearms and special locks on their doors.³ Some Christians purchase health

² Gregory Cochran, *Christians in the Crosshairs: Persecution in the Bible and Around the World Today*, (Weaver Book Company, 2016), 150, Kindle.

³ Carl Gallups, *Be Thou Prepared: Equipping the Church for Persecution and Times of Trouble* (Washington, DC, WND Books, 2015), 181, Kindle.

insurance, life insurance, home insurance, and car insurance just to name a few. They prepare as much as possible for protection against the adversities of life. The fact remains that in everyday acts of living, Christians are in a constant state of preparing, planning, and protecting.⁴ Religious persecution is an adversity also, and Christians have the opportunity to prepare for it. How they prepare for it will depend on at least the culture, the environment, and their faith. However, Christians do not think that religious persecution is real; therefore, many do not see the need to prepare for it. Unbelief regarding the biblical reality of religious persecution does not exempt Christians from experiencing it.

There are Christians that do not think religious persecution serves a purpose. During persecution the hostilities toward Christians are actually mounted against Christ. His followers suffer the degrading insults, beatings, rapes, imprisonments, and other abuses because of the presence of Christ in their lives.⁵ Christians may never understand the exact reason that God allows persecution and suffering. However, it is a certainty that He uses persecution and suffering to accomplish His will. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the epitome of suffering, and it along with His resurrection is the central theme of the Gospel story. Therefore, Christians can say with assurance that God uses persecution and suffering for a purpose.⁶ However, to seek persecution for its own sake is evidence of psychological instability. A healthy understanding of persecution leads to a confidence in trusting God.⁷

⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁵ Cochran, *Christians in the Crosshairs*, 2701.

⁶ Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience: Walking with Jesus in Tough Places*, (B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 418, Kindle.

⁷ Ibid., 624.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to address the fact that the religious persecution of Christians is a reality. Paul told believers to expect to suffer for Jesus' sake (Phil. 1:29). Impending persecution is not a possibility; it is a certainty for those who are obedient to the Christian faith.⁸ The study suggests ways that Christians can prepare for religious persecution. If a Christian is prepared for persecution, it is likely that he will have a Christ-glorying response to it.⁹ Christians need to know whether or not the persecution is self-afflicted. The suffering may be the result of foolishness instead of righteousness on the part of the persecuted. If it is the result of foolishness, the Christian's response should be to seek the wisdom of God. If the suffering is the result of arrogance, pride, or anger, the Christian needs to repent of his sin.¹⁰ Lastly, the study introduced biblical reasons that God could allow the religious persecution of Christians. Since the Bible has different views on suffering, Christians must learn to discern, sort, and weigh the different biblical perspectives when facing persecution.¹¹

Basic Assumptions, Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This section addressed the boundaries set for the research project. The information provided in this section included the researcher's assumptions related to the persecution of Christians. It included the definition of words used in the project. Limitations and delimitations emphasized what could not be covered during the research because of time and other restraints. The

⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹ Cochran, *Christians in the Crosshairs*, 188.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2752.

¹¹ Brian Han Gregg, *What Does the Bible Say About Suffering?* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2016), 17, Kindle.

assumptions, definitions, limitations, and delimitations chosen by the researcher served as a guide for the researcher.

Basic Assumptions

There were four assumptions associated with this thesis project. The first assumption is there are too many Christians who do not believe that religious persecution can happen. On the other hand, an unknown number of Christians do believe that persecution will happen, but do little or nothing to prepare for it. Those who are purposely unprepared may be shocked when they are persecuted for their faith in Christ, and may not respond appropriately to it. A second assumption was that Christians suffer religious persecution for their verbal confession of Christ or their association with other Christians, even if they do not live like they are Christians. Sometimes persecution is based on confession and association and not only on a godly lifestyle. Christians, like sheep, experience what sheep typically experience in the presence of wolves.¹² If the Christian remains true to the faith, the result will be persecution. A third assumption was that if Christians believe that persecution will happen they will prepare for it. However, people do not always apply faith or act with common sense. All Christians do not prepare for future challenges even when the challenges are determined to be inevitable. Some Christians assume they will escape even if they do nothing to make escape possible. Christians, like unbelievers, must prepare for difficult times.¹³ A fourth assumption was if Christians knew that God had a purpose for their suffering, it would help them prepare for and endure the persecution. God has gifted some Christians with the gift of faith; therefore, some are walking by faith to prepare for

¹² Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 338.

¹³ Carl Gallups, *Be Thou Prepared*, 182.

the biblical warning of persecution (1 Cor. 12:9; 2 Cor. 5:7). It is nearly impossible in this world to be faithful to God and not have any pain or stress at the same time. God has a reason for every occasion of persecution. Persecution is the destiny of those who place their faith in Christ.

Definitions

There were three key words defined for this thesis project. The words were 1) persecution, 2) Christian, and 3) spiritual warfare. Persecution is defined differently within Christian circles. The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defined persecution as “harassment and suffering which people and institutions inflict upon others for being different in their faith, world-view, culture, or race.” The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* further indicated, “Persecution seeks to intimidate, silence, punish, or kill people.”¹⁴ There are many types of religious persecution happening to Christians as a result of expressing faith in Christ. Christians experience various types of religious persecution to include imprisonment, rape, torture, injury, and various types of suffering that have ended in death.

A second key term defined was Christian. A Christian is someone who has placed faith solely in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Rom. 10:9-10). In the *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*, a Christian refers to “those who belong to Jesus Christ.” It also states,

¹⁴ Thorwald Lorenzen, “Persecution,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1277.

“Christians believe that Jesus has saved them from the future wrath of God and He will return to rule on the earth.”¹⁵ This definition is sufficient to define a Christian in this research project.

A third key term defined is spiritual warfare. This term is defined by the *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* as “the struggle against the forces of evil, which is a constant feature of the life of faith.” Scripture teaches “the origin of spiritual warfare is in the rebellion of Satan and his angels against God and affirms the hope of God’s final victory over such forces through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection” (Luke 10:18; Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:14-18). An argument has been made that the persecution of Christians is rooted in spiritual warfare (Luke 22:31).¹⁶ Despite demonic opposition, the Gospel of Jesus Christ continues to run wide across the entire globe.¹⁷

Limitations

There were six limitations for this thesis project. One limitation was that thirty-one Christians over the age of eighteen years old were selected to complete the questionnaire, as opposed to a greater number of volunteers. Originally, the project planned to involve ten Christians from India, however due to some challenges with the ministry there, they were not able to participate. As a result, it impacted the number of Christians participating in this project. However, the number of Christians involved in the study provided sufficient information about their personal experiences and knowledge of religious persecution. A second limitation focused on the religious persecution of Christians and not the religious persecution of Jews, Muslims, or

¹⁵ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009), 7120.

¹⁶ Greg Musselman, *Closer to the Fire: Lessons from the Persecuted Church* (Bartlesville, OK: Genesis Publishing Group, 2012), 41. Kindle.

¹⁷ Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 6, Kindle.

other religions. Research might confirm that Jews, Muslims and many others have suffered religious persecution on the same or greater levels as some Christians. However, the religious persecution of Christians was chosen because the researcher is a Christian. A third limitation placed emphasis on demonstrations of religious persecution since 1974. The year 1974 was chosen randomly as a timeframe because it represents a period of time that is less than forty-five years ago. The span of forty-five years is recent history, but yet it reaches back into the twentieth century giving a glimpse of how one century ended and another began. A fourth limitation addressed methods that Christians could use to prepare for religious persecution as opposed to the preparation that might be necessary for other religions. Christians are in a relationship with Christ and do not normally conduct their lives outside of that relationship. Unfortunately, an unknown number of Christians adhere to rules, restrictions, and traditions that are outside of Christian doctrine (Col. 2:8). A fifth limitation addressed the purposes that God allows religious persecution for Christians, as opposed to what He may allow for members of other religions. Understanding God's purpose for adversity can provide strength for the sufferer. No one will ever understand everything that God does or everything that He allows. However, the Bible instructs Christians to trust God in every situation, regardless as to what appears to be happening (Prov. 3:5-7). A sixth limitation was primarily using the New Testament to biblically support the project. This is due to the fact that this project is focused on Christians, and Christians are not named in the Bible until after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some Old Testament scripture was used in this study, but the majority of scripture is found in the New Testament.

Delimitations

There were six delimitations for this project. First, a study of every type of religious persecution affecting Christians in Kenya, East Africa and the United States was not possible. The reason is many persecutors in Africa are creative in their efforts of torturing and killing Christians.¹⁸ Another reason is that it is unlikely that the Kenyans, and U.S. participants completing the questionnaire have heard about or experienced every type of religious persecution in Africa and the United States. Furthermore, even though the responses to each question could be as long as the participant wanted, it was unlikely that the participant would use more than a single page for each response. A second delimitation included knowing the exact number of Christians who do not have a biblical understanding of persecution. It is possible that not all Christians are educated regarding religious persecution and may not have Bibles, or the ability to read. Some who can read and own Bibles may not have the opportunity to study God's Word. The inability to study and meditate on the Bible can keep Christians from having a biblical understanding of persecution.¹⁹ The inability to study might include a lack of training in Bible study methods, no electricity, or not having time to study due to working long hours. Those Christians without a biblical understanding of persecution do not expect to become victims of something they do not know anything about. It is possible to assume that persecution is a normal way of life. A third delimitation dealt with stating everything that Christians could do to prepare themselves for religious persecution. Christians come from different environments and prepare themselves for religious persecution based on their knowledge, culture, economy, and other factors. A Christian living in the United States may prepare for persecution by listening to

¹⁸ Tomislav Sunic, "Marx, Moses, and the Pagans in the Secular City," *CLIO* 24, no. 2 (1995),

¹⁹ Gallups, *Be Thou Prepared*, 1670.

Christian audio books downloaded from the Internet. However, a Christian in Kenya may not have access to the Internet or to any device that would allow him to listen to audio books. The Christian in Kenya may learn first-hand about religious persecution through experience or the death of a loved one who converted from a local religion to Christianity. The Christian in the United States may live his entire life without experiencing the type of persecution that is prevalent in Kenya. A fourth delimitation was the inability to list every purpose that God has for allowing religious persecution to happen. The spiritual growth of the individual and an increase in the body of Christ are not the only reasons that God allows religious persecution. Persecution can even come because of something the persecuted said or did that was inappropriate. Although persecution is not necessarily good or bad, it's value is based on an appropriate response by the believer.²⁰ A fifth delimitation was the researcher's inability to verify the personal salvation and the reported experiences with persecution that were indicated by the participants completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire asks Kenyan and U.S. participants to indicate their knowledge of and experiences with religious persecution. The researcher may be able to verify some of the types of persecution by using scholarly resources, but the verification of those experiences happening to the participants is not possible. Some experiences may be unintentionally inflated or the event happened so long ago that the participant did not have clarity when recalling the experience. A sixth delimitation was that the theoretical approach could not be applied and re-evaluated, because time does not allow for a circumstance of persecution to hit, and then that person be evaluated to see if the proposed study provided help in dealing with the persecution. The project proposed a solution to the problem, however, the researcher will not be able to determine its effectiveness or incorporate any findings because the study will be over.

²⁰ Nik Ripken, *Insanity of God: a True Story of Faith Resurrected* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2013), 67, Kindle.

Thesis Statement

The researcher claims that if Christians believed that religious persecution was biblical and unavoidable, they prepared for it, and accepted that God has a purpose for allowing it; Christians would be better prepared to endure persecution.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework explained why the problem was addressed. The first part of the conceptual framework began with the Review of Precedent Literature. The precedent literature addressed the theory, practice, and theology of the religious persecution of Christians. The second part of the conceptual framework consisted of the Theoretical and Theological Foundation. This section explained why the problem was studied and the importance of ministry intervention to alleviate or lessen the problem.

Literature Review

The selection of directly, closely, and generally-related precedent literature associated with this thesis concentrated on the religious persecution of Christians on the continent of Africa with a focus on Kenya, East Africa, and the United States since 1974. In 1974, the late Billy Graham, one of the leaders of the International Congress on World Evangelism went to Lausanne, Switzerland because of his passion for world evangelism. He helped create a document that was later called *The Lausanne Covenant*, which became a catalyst for churches, seminaries, and global missions to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.²¹ Those who were part of the Lausanne Movement covenanted to evangelize the world. Graham, well aware of religious persecution in the world wrote in *The Journey: Living by Faith in an Uncertain World* that “during times of persecution Christians always have found comfort in Christ’s promise to come back and destroy all evil.”²² The precedent literature had three sub-themes. The first sub-theme focused on believing that religious persecution happens. The second sub-theme focused on understanding

²¹ “The Lausanne Covenant,” 1974, accessed January 30, 2018.

²² Billy Graham, *The Journey: Living by Faith in an Uncertain World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 305, Kindle.

that preparation for religious persecution is imperative. The third sub-theme centered on knowing that God has a purpose for allowing religious persecution.

Directly Related Literature

“Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). Nathan Chapman defined persecution in *Good God: Pain, Suffering, and Persecution*, as the act of “being attacked because of something you are” such as being a Christian. Chapman indicates that attacking Christians is a type of persecution and he has been fully persuaded that persecution happens to those who practice the Christian faith. However, according to Chapman suffering and persecution are not equal, but they have similarities between them.²³ His theology is that suffering is constant because God allows choice, which can bring “intentional and unintentional” harm to others. According to Chapman, he theorizes that God’s goal is to show his faithfulness when men suffer various trials including religious persecution.²⁴ Chapman sees Jesus Christ as an example of suffering for humanity, because he endured pain, suffering, and “persecution for the good of others.”²⁵ He indicated that Christ suffered several types of persecution, including “betrayal, desertion, and malice that led to a torturous death.”

Stories confirm that Christians who were victims of torture practiced in other countries currently live in the United States. Tony Carnes article, “The Torture Victim Next Door: Hidden

²³ Nathan Chapman, *Good God: Pain Suffering and Persecution* (Louisville, KY: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 56, Kindle.

²⁴ Ibid., 63.

²⁵ Ibid., 168.

Victims of Religious Persecution Find Refuge in America,” exposed the brutality of religious persecution affecting a Christian who escaped from Beijing, China to the United States in 1997. The torturers persecuted him by forcing him to drink liquid “medicine” which made him ill. He was incarcerated with hardened criminals who were encouraged to beat him. The article indicated that approximately 200,000 torture victims, including Christians, escaped to the United States in recent decades. Many victims never received treatment or counseling for the abuse. However, as of 1998, there were fourteen torture-victim treatment centers in the United States and approximately one hundred fifty around the globe to welcome Christians and others who had been tortured.²⁶ This article demonstrated that the U.S. has individuals who have experienced significant physical and emotional persecution even though that persecution originated on foreign soil. This article reveals that even in seasons of great freedom for Christians living in the United States, this region of the world still became home for victims of religious persecution. Thus, it is imperative, even in times when persecution is deemed to be minimal in the U.S., that believers are equipped to properly identify and respond to persecution. The persecution of Christians is a global issue, which confirms that it is not always safe to practice the tenets of the Christian faith.

Tom Doyle and Gregg Webster in the book entitled, *Killing Christians: Living the Faith Where It's Not Safe to Believe*, presented persecuted Christians in North Africa who encountered death because they chose to openly express their faith in Jesus Christ.²⁷ In the same book, Curtis Hail, President and CEO of E3 Partners and I Am Second Ministries, commented that as the

²⁶ Tony Carnes, "The Torture Victim Next Door: Hidden Victims of Religious Persecution Find Refuge in America," *Christianity Today* 44, no. 3 (2000): 70.

²⁷ Tom Doyle and Gregg Webster, *Killing Christians: Living the Faith Where It's Not Safe to Believe* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 95, Kindle.

current century unfolds, it has similarities to the first century of the church, which means religious persecution is all around.²⁸ In the Book of Acts, Stephen was martyred (Acts 7:59), the apostle James was beheaded (Acts 12:2), and the Jews were expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2). Globally, Christians have been known to suffer brutal murders of decapitation as a form of persecution for their faith.²⁹ Doyle and Webster indicated that the persecuted Christians of today are the new face of Christianity that is not seeking sympathy from others.³⁰

D.C. Talk in the book, *Jesus Freaks: Martyrs: Stories of Those Who Stood for Jesus: The Ultimate Jesus Freaks*, indicated that Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia completed a global survey, which concluded that 156,000 Christians were martyred globally in 1998.³¹ The researcher found a brief reference to the 1998 Regent University study through Google. D.C. Talk acknowledged that some deaths may seem senseless, but “theologically God has a different way of looking at things.”³² They want Christians to understand that although they may never face dying for Christ, the decision to live for Christ still has to be made.³³

John Allen’s book entitled, *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* exposed the practice of religious persecution in Africa and the horrors of Me’eter, a military camp and prison opened in 2009, basically to serve as a concentration camp for Christians. Me’eter is located off the coast of the Red Sea in the Eritrean

²⁸ Tom Doyle and Gregg Webster, *Killing Christians*: 155.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

³¹ DC Talk, *Jesus Freaks: Martyrs: Stories of Those Who Stood for Jesus: The Ultimate Jesus Freaks, Martyrs* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 322, Kindle.

³² *Ibid.*, 382.

³³ *Ibid.*, 377.

desert. Although Allen could not provide an exact number of Christians killed and attacked Me'eter played a role. Authorities at Me'eter torture Christians by making them kneel on a tree trunk, while someone beats the soles of their feet with a rubber hose. Me'eter has a list of well-documented horrors, such as hanging Christians by their arms, while exposing them to the sun for forty-eight hours or more.³⁴ Confining Christians to crude metal shipping containers is another type of persecution practiced at the prison.³⁵

Paul G. Markel's book, *The Intolerant Christian: Examining the Persecution of Faithful Christians in the United States of America*, advises that sometimes the persecution of Christians is unusually open and public, which is a national pattern and not a local issue.³⁶ Markel presented modern examples of persecution that happened less than six years ago. In 2013, the New Mexico Supreme Court ruled that Christian photographers do not have an option when asked to take pictures at homosexual wedding ceremonies.³⁷ In 2014, the city attorney in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, told two Christian ministers, they would face jail time and a fine if they refused to perform same-sex wedding ceremonies.³⁸ In 2015, a Christian florist, Baronelle Stutzman, in the state of Washington, was found guilty of discrimination by the judge, because she refused to provide a floral arrangement for a homosexual couple. Her decision resulted in hate mail and

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Ibid., 1.

³⁶ Paul G. Markel, *The Intolerant Christian: Examining the Persecution of Faithful Christians in the United States of America* (Louisville, KY: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), 47, Kindle.

³⁷ Ibid., 139.

³⁸ Markel, *The Intolerant Christian*, 136.

threats to burn down the floral shop.³⁹ Also in 2015 the Christian business owner of “Sweet Cakes” in Oregon received a \$135,000 fine that would be paid to a lesbian couple because the Christian business owner refused to provide a wedding cake for them. The judge ruled that the Christian had caused emotional suffering because one of the lesbians began to question her sexual orientation.⁴⁰

Johnnie Moore’s book, *Ten Things You Must Know about the Global War on Christianity*, addressed the depth of the practice of religious persecution in Africa and the United States.⁴¹ The depth and practice of persecution in Africa includes rape, beatings, forced marriages, arrests, abductions, and murder. Moore’s theory is that the persecution of Christians in Africa is a human rights concern that needs attention. The same human rights concern may not apply to those in the United States, because violence against Christians in the U. S. is seemingly uncommon.⁴² Moore’s book was written to help Christians understand that the practice of persecuting Christians is a global matter. He stated that Christians is “the most persecuted religious group on earth.”⁴³

Howie Shute’s book, *Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa*, demonstrated the hostility associated with sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Africa. He indicated that persecutors demonstrated hostility toward Africans by considering them to be

³⁹ Ibid., 130.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 134.

⁴¹ Johnnie Moore, *Ten Things You Must Know About the Global War On Christianity* (Carol Stream, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2017), 46, Kindle.

⁴² Allen, Jr., *The Global War*, 5083.

⁴³ Ibid., 6.

insane, because they accepted Jesus Christ into their lives.⁴⁴ Those who are considered insane because of their faith in Christ received persecution in the form of threats associated with various kinds of abuse.⁴⁵ Although faith in the Gospel meant that Africans would have no more empty dogma and empty rituals, it also meant a forfeiture of the protection of the family and the sacrifice of the family inheritance. Africans experience various forms of persecution for expressing their faith in Christ.

Nancy Fix Anderson's article, "Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500," viewed Christianity from a different perspective. Anderson's view may help Christians understand the severity of persecution in Africa by looking at the basis for the religious persecution of Christians in India. Christianity is thought to be a disruptive alien import to other nations and religions.⁴⁶ Some individuals that convert to Christianity experience persecution in the form of stereotyping. There is one mold cast for Christians, whereby it is assumed that all Christians are a threat to the status quo.

Lancy Lobo's article, "Persecution of Indian Christians," supported Anderson's article when he indicated that Christians are a minority in India and are the target of Hindu nationalism. He indicated that it is necessary that Christians be considered as enemies of the nation so that nationalism can survive.⁴⁷ Nationalism promotes the political, social, and economic interests of a country and creates unity among its citizens. In spite of the hatred practiced for Christians in

⁴⁴ Howie Shute, *Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa* (Kansas City MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2014), 124, Kindle.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁶ Nancy Fix Anderson, "Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication Since 1500." *Anglican and Episcopal History* 73, no. 4 (2004): 1.

⁴⁷ Lancy Lobo, "Persecution of Indian Christians." *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost. Dialog 41, no 2 (2002): 120.

India, the fact remains that, “even those who keep harassing and leveling false charges against Christians rush to get their children admitted to Christian institutions.”⁴⁸ The practice is paradoxical, but nevertheless it is a reality. Persecution that is practiced in the form of denying employment leads individuals to revert back to false religions, which could theoretically secure jobs and education.⁴⁹

David Neff’s article, “Our Extended, Persecuted Family” reported that Christians in the United States don’t experience normal Christian living. He envisions suffering as a normal part of living the Christian life. A person living a biblically sound Christian life is under the real threat of persecution in the form of murder, imprisonment, torture, rape, or some other abuse for exercising faith in Christ.⁵⁰ Christians in the United States find persecution, as practiced in other countries, to be baffling. There is no comparison of persecution between Africa and the United States. He indicated that persecution in Africa is sometimes practiced as “cultural cleansing” whereby Christian children are removed from the home, placed in camps, and forced to grow up as non-Christians.⁵¹ This type of persecution is unthinkable in the United States.

Preparation for Religious Persecution

“But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Religious persecution is biblical and unavoidable. A number of books have been written to encourage

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁰ David Neff, "Our Extended, Persecuted Family: Many Christians in the world suffer for the faith. How can we help them?" *Christianity Today* 40, no. 5 (1996): 14.

⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

Christians to prepare for persecution.

Carl Gallups book, *Be Thou Prepared: Equipping the Church for Persecution and Times of Trouble*, theorizes that knowing what is going on in the world could help Christians prepare for persecution.⁵² Gallups indicates that congregations are ignorant of the persecution of Christians and need to exhibit a willingness to learn about it. Furthermore, Christians need to learn to recognize persecution and prepare to speak out against it.⁵³ The main focus is not should Christians prepare for persecution, but how should they prepare for it?⁵⁴ Gallups theorizes that Christians in North America are unaware, or under-educated regarding the persecution of Christians in other countries.⁵⁵ “The church must always be in the process of learning and staying abreast of what is happening around them.”⁵⁶

Gregory C. Cochran’s book, *Christians in the Crosshairs: Persecution in the Bible and Around the World Today*, wrote that understanding the hostile relationship between the world and God should encourage Christians to prepare for religious persecution.⁵⁷ The practice of persecution should not be addressed as though it is yet to come, but it should be taught to the church as a current reality. The reality of persecution should become part of the Sunday school lesson and the Sunday sermon. The first century church not only stretched itself to prepare for tough times, through fellowship, communion, and prayer, but it effectively ministered to others

⁵² Gallups, *Be Thou Prepared*, 1685.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1690.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1686.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1694.

⁵⁷ Cochran, *Christians in the Crosshairs*, 136.

during times of persecution (Acts 13:1-12). Cochran's book pointed out that Christians around the world suffer religious persecution on a daily basis.⁵⁸ Cochran is another author acknowledging that the persecution of Christians is a global issue.

Os Guinness' book, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization*, indicated that Christians could prepare for religious persecution by understanding the challenges of the times.⁵⁹ Guinness indicated that Christians must be theologically and mentally prepared to wager comfort, livelihood, honor, and their lives for God and against all other claims and authorities. Christians must live as though they are answering a call from God. They must be willing to count the cost of living the gospel regardless of the consequences associated with the practice of a godly lifestyle.⁶⁰ The Gospel is a transforming power than can change the world.

Greg Musselman's book, *Closer to the Fire: Lessons from the Persecuted Church*, indicated that knowing and understanding God's Word could prepare Christians for religious persecution. He indicated that Paul, the Apostle stated to the worshippers in Ephesus that those who follow Christ are fighting a spiritual war (Eph. 6:12).⁶¹ Spiritual warfare is defined in this study by the *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* as "the struggle against the forces of evil, which is a constant feature of the life of faith." This author is making the argument that the persecution of Christians is rooted in spiritual warfare (Luke

⁵⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁵⁹ Os Guinness, *Impossible People: Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2016), 292, Kindle.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 336.

⁶¹ Greg Musselman, *Closer to the Fire: Lessons from the Persecuted Church* (Bartlesville, OK: Genesis Publishing Group, 2012) 41.

22:31).⁶² Musselman looks at religious persecution from a theological standpoint and informs readers, “there are many Scriptures that deal with battle, and one of the most important recognizes that the battle we are fighting is not on the human level.”⁶³

Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson’s article, “Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study on the Religious Persecution among Chinese Pastors” assumes that comparing the practice of religious persecution with the passion endured by Christ and His disciples helps sufferers prepare for persecution because it encourages them to believe in a greater purpose for their suffering. Ting and Watson believe that if captivity is part of religious persecution that it might involve “prolonged and repeated trauma that is worked out in two stages.” The first stage would involve the persecuted individual “shutting down” and the second stage would involve the person losing the “will to live.”⁶⁴ Ting and Watson reported, “nearly all of the individuals interviewed during their research reported they were prepared to suffer before the persecution began.” The concept of framing religious persecution with the passion of Christ may help Christians to endure religious persecution. Armed with the knowledge that Christ died for the ungodly, can strengthen Christians, before, during, and after episodes of persecution (Rom. 5:8).

Brian H. Gregg’s book, *What Does the Bible Say About Suffering?* stated a biblical approach to religious persecution. Gregg believes that Christians who are persecuted could endure the persecution if they believe that their pain and suffering does not compare to the glory that will be

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson. "Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study on the Religious Persecution among Chinese Pastors," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 3 (2007): 35.

revealed in the future (Rom. 8:18).⁶⁵ This is not the same as framing the persecution with the passion of Christ, but it provides a valuable and biblical perspective that may help Christians endure persecution. Christians have the privilege of remembering they can expect the constant presence of God during any period of religious persecution (Heb. 13:5b).⁶⁶

Nik Ripken's book, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected*, advised that his formal education and professional experience is not what prepared him for the mission field. Instead, it was what his parents taught him about treating others right and having a good work ethic. He believes that his parents prepared him in ways that did not come from the pages of a textbook.⁶⁷ Regarding persecution, Ripken's believes there is a difference in suffering persecution for Jesus' sake and being persecuted as the result of a "thoughtless, uninformed, or downright stupid decision or action made unnecessarily by an individual." He thinks that such a case might be sinful.⁶⁸ On his trip to Somalia, he indicated that he and his wife did not want to be "stupid sheep among wolves." He did not want their "ignorance, lack of preparation, or foolish and unintentional mistakes to endanger other sheep."⁶⁹

In another book by Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience: Walking with Jesus in Tough Places*, he encouraged potential victims of persecution to try to understand the intent of the persecutors. All persecutors do not have the same motives in mind. However, trying to understand the

⁶⁵ Brian Han Gregg, *What Does the Bible Say About Suffering?* (Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic, 2016), 85, Kindle.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁷ Ripken, *Insanity of God*, 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

persecutor's intentions could prepare Christians for religious persecution.⁷⁰ Ripken advised that Jesus was very clear in His warning about persecution. He believes that Jesus' warning about persecution is more than a possibility for those who obey Him; it is a certainty.⁷¹

Amy Wharton's book, *Stand Up for Christ's Sake*, encouraged Christians to prepare for persecution theologically by standing on the promises of God, maintaining their focus on Him, and relying on His strength. Wharton is outspoken on suffering and tells readers not to run from religious persecution. She theorizes that whatever struggles Christians may face that God has prepared them for the fight.⁷² Wharton indicated that persecution can create a loss for those who are persecuted, but "letting go of something allows God to give you something greater."⁷³ Wharton wants to assure Christians that persecution is beneficial. Therefore, preparing for persecution is worth the time, energy, and effort put into it.

God's Purpose for Religious Persecution

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:3-5).

Several benefits of religious persecution is disclosed in Clinton LeFort's book, *Persecution & Its Benefits*. One benefit is that religious persecution gives Christians the benefit of

⁷⁰ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 194.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 528.

⁷³ Amy Wharton, *Stand Up for Christ's Sake*, (Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, Inc., 2017), 591, Kindle.

strengthening their motivations and purposes for following Christ.⁷⁴ LeFort lists nine benefits of persecution that can promote spiritual maturity. The benefits deal with freedom, motivation, truth, prayer, humility, giving attention to God, remaining in God, freedom from anxiety, and loving God.⁷⁵ This lets Christians know that God has a purpose for allowing Christians to suffer religious persecution. LeFort's book assumes only nine benefits of persecution, but there are obviously other benefits that LeFort does not include in the book. However, he encourages Christians to think of the benefits of persecution in terms of spiritual maturity.

David Powlison's book, *God's Grace in Your Suffering*, stated that the practice of religious persecution is an "acid test" and a "catalyst" for spiritual growth to the Christian.⁷⁶ Powlison wrote that spiritual growth is the result of "slow forming habits" that can happen as a result of persecution.⁷⁷ God has a purpose for every act of religious persecution suffered by a Christian. The benefits resulting from persecution that God gives to the Christian cannot be taken away. The "better something from God will continue to work out the whole journey long."⁷⁸

Summary

A summary of the directly related precedent literature for this thesis indicated various theories, practices, and theologies associated with religious persecution. The practice of the persecution of Christians was demonstrated as betrayal, desertion, beatings, beheadings, rape, forced marriages, arrests, abductions, hostility, imprisonment, torture, stereotyping, cultural

⁷⁴ Clinton LeFort, *Persecution and Its Benefits* (Union, MO: Melataie Trade Publishing, 2014), 39, Kindle.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁶ David Powlison, *God's Grace in Your Suffering* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2018), 141, Kindle.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 976.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1329.

cleaning and other acts. The physical acts of persecution practiced against Christians give clear indication that persecution is not mere discrimination. Instead, these acts present a reality that requires preparation by all potential victims. Some of the methods of preparing for religious persecution involve knowing what is going on in the world, maintaining sensitivity to the challenges of the time, and understanding the intentions of the persecutors. Preparation for religious persecution may also be possible if the victim focuses on the spiritual benefit of fortifying his relationship with Christ. Lastly, God has a purpose for religious persecution, which may include motivation for serving Him, spiritual growth, and other God-given benefits tailored for the person who endures the suffering.

Believing that Religious Persecution Happens

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Matt. 5:10-11). Kevin R. Dulk and Robert J. Joustra’s book, *The Church and Religious Persecution*, indicate that religious persecution is a tremendous moral challenge of our time.⁷⁹ The moral challenge exists even though religious freedoms, in the United States, allow Christians to manifest their faith without unreasonable interference. However, the absence of unreasonable interference does not protect Christians from ridicule. Secondly, resources need to become available to facilitate change and encourage Christians to prepare for persecution. Dulk and Joustra’s book stated, “religions as abstract entities do not have a legal right to protection from scrutiny, disagreement, or criticism.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Dulk, Kevin R. Den and Robert J. Joustra, *The Church and Religious Persecution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Press, 2015), 550, Kindle.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

Leanne Larmondin's article, "Some Christians Believe Differences between Religions Worth Dying For" stated that Christians in North America experience a particular comfort related to their faith. However, those in Africa and other countries face death and imprisonment because of their decision to exercise their faith in Christ.⁸¹ One of her colleagues, Dr. Paul Marshall, a Toronto Anglican and faculty member of the Institute of Christian Studies, stated in the same article, that the world is a "cushy" place to live. He also said, the world is an "ignorant" place to live, and between the cushiness and the comfort, "we're not aware of what's going on." We're not aware that we're a member of a body, most of whose members are suffering very deeply."⁸² Persecution is more real in some countries than in others.

Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea in the book *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* sends the repeated message that the practice of religious persecution is a global issue. The joint authorship indicated the religious persecution of Christians is intended to affect all traditions operating in the Christian faith, to include Roman Catholics, Protestants, and numerous others.⁸³ These authors also indicated that the practice of religious persecution is sometimes glossed over to accommodate listeners with the latest political news.⁸⁴ Christians become engrossed in the news and are unable to see what is going on around them at home and abroad.

Jeremy T. Gunn's article, "Full of Sound and Fury" indicated that in 1990 activists began a campaign against religious persecution abroad. The activists chose to lash out at their

⁸¹ Leanne Larmondin, "Some Christians Believe Differences between Religions Worth Dying for." *Anglican Journal*, vol. 123, no. 2 (1997): 10.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁸³ Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea, *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 67, Kindle.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, viii.

persecutors instead of finding solutions to the problems of persecution.⁸⁵ Violence begets violence and Christians knowingly face the challenge of religious persecution on a worldwide basis. Gunn believes that Christians living in the United States should “speak clearly about religious persecution.” However, he notes that it is important to accurately provide “descriptions and analysis” of those who are involved in the practice of it.⁸⁶

Johnnie Moore’s book, *The Martyr’s Oath: Living for the Jesus They’re Willing to Die for*, provided additional information on the military camp and prison on the Eritrean desert in Africa. This is the same military camp and prison previously mentioned in John Allen book, *The Global War on Christians*. Christians imprisoned are forbidden to have bibles or Christian literature.⁸⁷ A method of torture favored by the Eritrean jailers is to tie prisoner’s elbows from the ceiling, tree, or post and allow the feet of the prisoners to touch the floor on tiptoes. Prisoners are kicked and beaten while placed in awkward positions by the guards.⁸⁸ Moore reported that according to Open Doors International more than 7,100 Christians were killed globally in 2015. The same organization indicated that the number of Christians killed in 2015 doubled the number killed in 2014. The 2015 statistics tripled the number of Christians killed in 2013. Statistics related to the practice of religious persecution are difficult to recover in areas that behead, burn alive, and utilize slavery as forms of religious persecution. Christians are reminded that current persecution is not history repeating itself because 2015 statistics indicate that persecution has increased

⁸⁵ Jeremy T. Gunn, "Full of Sound and Fury: Polemics at Home and Abroad Does Not Prevent Religious Persecution." *Christianity Today* 47, no. 3 (2003): 51.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸⁷ Johnny Moore, *The Martyr’s Oath: Living for the Jesus They’re Willing to Die for* (Carol Stream, ILL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017) 25, Kindle.

⁸⁸ Moore, *The Martyr’s Oath*, 75.

dramatically.⁸⁹

Robert Boston's book, *Taking Liberties: Why Religious Freedom Doesn't Give You The Right To Tell Other People What To Do*, indicates that Christians in the United States need to watch what they say because they do not recognize religious persecution. His theory is that the real definition of religious persecution is lived out in other countries.⁹⁰ Boston is not ignorant of the types of religious persecution practiced in the United States. However, he chooses to differentiate between other countries and the United States. Boston indicates it is ineffective to lash out at persecutors as a way to solve the problem of religious persecution. Aggressive behavior will not solve the problem or assist the victims of persecution. Christians in the United States are not able to distinguish between discrimination and persecution. In the United States, churches of all denominations and non-profit organizations enjoy great freedoms that are not part of the religious experience in other countries.⁹¹

Laura Hunt's book entitled, *The Not-Very-Persecuted Church*, wrote that Christians in the United States do not receive threats of abuse when they identify themselves as Christians.⁹² When people do not experience or believe in religious persecution, they tend to merge into the culture. The automatic acceptance into the culture proves beneficial to them because they are not separated from the benefits of society.⁹³ Hunt advocates that Christians are supposed to suffer

⁸⁹ Gunn, "Full of Sound," 51.

⁹⁰ Robert Boston, *Taking Liberties: Why Religious Freedom Doesn't Give You the Right to Tell Other People What to Do* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2014), 153, Kindle.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Laura Hunt, *The Not-Very-Persecuted Church: Paul at the Intersection of Church and Culture* (Searcy, AR: Resource Publications, 2011), 2, Kindle.

⁹³ Ibid., 50.

and are not supposed to cause suffering for others. Furthermore, Hunt believes that slavery was not tied to race, but slaves were recognized by their marks of abuse. This is tied to religious persecution because Christians are slaves for Christ (Eph. 6:5).

Douglas R. Hare's article, "The Relationship Between Jewish and Gentile Persecution of Christians" emphasized that some Christians who say they are victims of persecution have invalid testimonies.⁹⁴ Invalid testimonies may imply that some of the acts of religious persecution are dramatized or fabricated to glorify individuals or groups of people. Christians are limited in their ability to verify the testimonies of religious persecution.

Preparation for Religious Persecution

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne's book, *Perspectives On the World Christian Movement*, wrote that Christians should prepare for religious persecution. Winter and Hawthorne said, "we are to be prepared for opposition, resistance, even persecution, and martyrdom. This Age remains evil and hostile to the Gospel of the Kingdom."⁹⁵ They also indicated that those who are not involved in persecution must find a way to help those who are suffering.⁹⁶ Preparation for religious persecution could be learned through education, personal experiences, or the experiences of others.

⁹⁴ Douglas R.A. Hare, "Relationship Between Jewish and Gentile Persecution of Christians." *Journal Of Ecumenical Studies* 4, no. 3 (1967): 446.

⁹⁵ Ralph Winter D. and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives On the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 3271, Kindle.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6452.

God's Purpose for Religious Persecution

“Blessed [is] the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jas. 1:12).

John Piper's book, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* took time to expound on the growth of Christianity in other countries as a purpose for persecution. Piper predicted that Christianity would become the primary religion in Africa and the African diaspora by 2050, due to significant growth that will occur primarily because of religious persecution.⁹⁷ He wrote there is the possibility for those whose lives are not marked by religious persecution they may have unintentionally sanitized the teachings on affliction and persecution in the New Testament.⁹⁸ Christians can connect with God's global purpose of the Great Commission to gather souls from every tongue and nation as instructed by Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20). An unknown portion of these souls will join God's family due to persecution and even martyrdom. God ultimately has a global purpose for allowing Christians to suffer persecution.

Summary

A summary of the closely related precedent literature for this thesis helped to clarify the reality of the practice of religious persecution of Christians. The focus is not always on physical persecution. Instead, persecution can take the form of disagreement, criticism, and ridicule, which has a tendency to downgrade and disguise religious persecution. Nevertheless, Christians need to prepare for non-physical persecution and may do so through academics and observations.

⁹⁷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 192, Kindle.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1790.

Christians may come to realize that one of God's purposes for religious persecution is nestled in the significant growth of the church.

Believing that Religious Persecution Happens

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

Barrington Moore, Jr.'s book, *Moral Purity and Persecution in History*, offers a theory as to why humans kill and torture those who have different ideas about religion. Moore's basic theory is that some religions are impure. His theory of impure religions is summarized as “attacks on moral purity.”⁹⁹ Christianity is not an impure religion and Christians are commanded to practice moral purity for the glory of God (1 Pet. 1:15-17). However, it is possible that Christians have strayed away from the purity and simplicity of living for Christ and find persecution an unacceptable element of the Christian faith. The Christian's inability to accept religious persecution as a reality will stunt spiritual growth. Christians often do not accept persecution as something fitting for the body of Christ. Moore is not against the reality of persecution in and of itself, but when moral purity becomes the basis for persecution, he considers moral purity to be dangerous because it means that self-righteousness is part of the equation.

Lorraine Woellert's article indicated that a bill entitled, *International Religious Freedom Act, Public Law #114-281 (12/16/16)*, was introduced in 1997, by a group of lawmakers, to include Rep. Frank Wolf, Virginia Republican, suggesting that countries report on the acts of religious persecution by foreign governments. The foreign governments would receive sanctions as punishment if they practiced religious persecution. The sanctions would apply also to governments that are persecuting Christians. However, the penalties mentioned could backfire

⁹⁹ Barrington Moore, Jr., *Moral Purity and Persecution in History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), IX.

on the United States since “most U.S. exports can be obtained anywhere in the world.”¹⁰⁰ Even if the penalties did not backfire on the U.S., the application of sanctions is not sufficient to halt the persecution of Christians around the world. Five of the authors already mentioned in this project indicate that the religious persecution of Christians is global. Those authors are Tony Carnes, Gregory C. Cochran, Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea.

Cyril Orji’s article entitled, “In the Making: Unnamed Martyrs and Saints of Africa” advised readers that the martyrdom of a Christian is an abused form of death. The term martyrdom was defined in Africa to forestall the abuse of it.¹⁰¹ The definition prevents arbitrary forms of self-sacrifice that result in death from being recognized as martyrdom.¹⁰² The practice of martyrdom in relation to religious persecution generates a particular kind of sympathy and heroism that does not apply to normal ways of dying. The concept of martyrdom was defined using three principles. The individual must exhibit courage during persecution, could not deliberately seek death, and if death was a result of war it must have been based on religion.¹⁰³

Christof Sauer’s article, “Theology of Persecution and Martyrdom: An Example of Globalizing Theology” advises that the reality of persecution is not acceptable because it does not seem to be glorious nor does it paint a picture of success. According to Sauer, Christians in the West seem to think that persecution is something that happened a long time ago and it will never happen again, at least not in the West. Therefore, Sauer focuses on the theological

¹⁰⁰ Lorraine Woellert, Bill Seeks to Boost Religious Freedom: Persecuting Nations Would Face Sanctions, *The Washington Times*, Washington, DC. May 21, 1997.

¹⁰¹ Cyril Orji, "In the Making: Unnamed Martyrs and Saints of Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 140, 57 (2011): accessed January 4, 2018.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰³ Orji, “In the Making,” 37.

reflection of persecution and martyrdom and not the reality of it.¹⁰⁴ Sauer's theological reflection of persecution and martyrdom is focused on the theology of the cross. A proper theology of the cross will enable Christians to properly interpret suffering and persecution.

John H. Martin's article entitled, "Religious Persecution and What To Do About It" wrote that the practice of religious persecution in the United States is different when compared to what happens in other countries. The comparison caused Martin to believe that most cases of persecution in the United States are actually discrimination.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, some victims of documented persecution in the United States may have experienced discrimination and not religious persecution when the treatment is compared to other countries. Martin is drawing a thin line between discrimination and persecution. Since the line is thin, persecution is not always recognized.

Previously mentioned was Robert Boston's book, *Taking Liberties: Why Religious Freedom Doesn't Give You The Right To Tell Other People What To Do*, seems to agree with Martin's concept of persecution. Boston believes that persecution is a foreign concept to Christians in the United States. Furthermore, Boston believes the real definition of religious persecution is lived out in other countries.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Christof Sauer, "Theology of Persecution and Martyrdom: An Example in Globalizing Theology," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 37, No. 3 (2013): 267.

¹⁰⁵ John Hilary Martin, "Religious Persecution: And What To Do About It," *A Journal of Theology*, 41, No. 2 (2002): 123.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Boston, *Taking Liberties: Why Religious Freedom Doesn't Give You the Right to Tell Other People What to Do* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2014), 153, Kindle.

Preparation for Religious Persecution

“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13).

The generally related literature for this thesis included several inspirational books that encourage a theological approach for Christians who want to prepare to live and die for Jesus Christ. Daniel I. Block’s book, *For The Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* and David G. Peterson’s book, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* spelled out the reality of worship and the commitment that God expects believers to maintain in their walk of faith with Christ. Those two books presented a biblical response to persecution and biblical methods of preparation for Christians. According to Block, worshippers can prepare for persecution by submitting to God with reverence and complete trust, which means trusting God at all times.¹⁰⁷ Peterson encouraged Christians to prepare for persecution by living out their commitment to God on a daily basis.¹⁰⁸ Peterson makes the point that Christians are to please God with their bodies, meaning their total selves, “not just their skin and bones.” Petersen is writing about self-commitment being synonymous with self-consecration.¹⁰⁹

Jonathan K. Dodson’s book, *The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing*, stated that the threat of physical persecution is not prevalent in the West, although Christians need to prepare for alternate forms of religious persecution. According to Dodson, persecution

¹⁰⁷ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 753, Kindle.

¹⁰⁸ David G. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2002), 177, Kindle.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

in the West is “subtle and clandestine” rather than physical.¹¹⁰ Physical persecution would include beatings and rape. Subtle persecution is difficult to analyze, because of the thin line between persecution and discrimination. However, there is a difference in the severity of persecution in the U.S. and in foreign countries. Persecution in the U.S. seems to border on the side of discrimination.

Marie Kneas’ book, *How to Prepare for Hard Times and Persecution*, described one of the alternate forms of religious persecution as pressuring Christians to do things that conflict with their values. A conflict of values may take the form of coercing Christians to assist in abortions.¹¹¹ Kneas indicated that it is common for Christians to say they never thought persecution would happen to them and ask the question as to why someone did not prepare them for it.¹¹² This study is meant to encourage Christians to believe that persecution will happen to Christians; therefore they need to prepare for the inevitable.

Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey in the book entitled, *Disciple Making Is: How To Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*, urges Christians to approach persecution with a theological mindset. Christians must consider counting the cost associated with salvation and the command to fulfill the Great Commission (Luke 14:28).¹¹³ Earley and Dempsey, knowing that the Gospel is an offense to the world, reminded Christians that they are not to be content until

¹¹⁰ Jonathan K. Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel: Say Something Worth Believing* (Downers Grove, IL: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2014), 92, Kindle.

¹¹¹ Maria Kneas, *How to Prepare for Hard Times and Persecution*, (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2015), 233, Kindle.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 122.

¹¹³ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 99, Kindle.

they have planted churches throughout the whole world (Gal. 5:11).¹¹⁴ Early and Dempsey in no way encourage Christians to shy away from evangelizing the world because of the threat of persecution. Instead, Christians are reminded of the obligation to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 16:18-20).

Klaus Issler's book, *Living into The Life of Jesus*, offers an approach to preparation that was modeled over two thousand years ago. Klaus provides the theological reminder that Jesus prepared himself for trials by vigilance and prayer and therefore set an example for Christians to follow.¹¹⁵ Spiritual disciplines are available to help Christians develop in their faith. Klaus intentionally reminds Christians that Jesus depended heavily on the Holy Spirit and implied that the same principle applies to all believers.¹¹⁶

John Koessler's book, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus*, encouraged Christians to prepare for religious persecution by remaining faithful to Christ. Koessler tells Christians that Scripture implies that the righteousness of Christ is reflected in those who prepare themselves to endure persecution (Matt. 5:10). He indicated that encouragement is not given to cause people to seek persecution, but to remind people that persecution for the sake of the Gospel is unavoidable.¹¹⁷

M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.'s book entitled, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, indicated that believers should prepare for what makes them personally

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 201.

¹¹⁵ Klaus Issler, *Living Into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 1235, Kindle.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 1237.

¹¹⁷ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: A Companion Guide: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 127, Kindle.

uncomfortable. He included death as he looked at the church in Smyrna in the Book of Revelation and brings “the warning up to the present time” (Rev. 2:8-11).¹¹⁸ Mulholland advocates a theological approach, which would include individuals experiencing God in ways they had never known apart from their exposure to religious persecution. Mulholland says that even in persecution, “God must be who He is, and He should not be restricted by the narrow limits of our thoughts or feelings.”¹¹⁹

Jonathan Sacks’ book, *Not in God’s Name: Confronting Religious Violence*, mentions technology, as it is known in the 21st Century and writes that the Internet could spread hate globally through social media. The Internet could also be used for “narrowcasting.” Narrowcasting has specific audiences whereby they are provided facts and opinions to support religious biases or unpopular perspectives. Narrowcasting can also threaten an entire population of people by targeting specific religions. Sacks’ believes that this same technology could be utilized to effectively prepare people for religious persecution.¹²⁰ Technology in the twenty-first century is nanosecond technology that is mobile and capable of positively impacting the persecution of Christians.

Michelle Boorstein’s, Washington Post’s article of October 2017, detailed how United States White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders prepares herself for religious persecution as she reads from her “leather-bound daily devotional” each day that she has to speak from the lectern. Sanders stated, “If someone says something about another faith, particularly liberals

¹¹⁸ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2016), 1557, Kindle.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 859.

¹²⁰ Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*, (New York: Schocken, 2017), 21, Kindle.

come to their defense in a raging motion, but if someone attacks a Christian, it's perfectly fine." Sanders further indicated, "At some point, we became a culture that said that was okay."¹²¹ The article did not indicate the type of ridicule made about the Christian faith, but Ms. Sanders described the culture that exists among those in high governmental positions.

Summary

A summary of the generally related precedent literature for this thesis acknowledged a relationship between religion and politics. Freedom of religion in the United States allows Christians to express their faith in Christ without physical persecution, although forced participation in activities contrary to Christian values is a form of persecution. There is a legal proposal for political sanctions for foreign countries that invest in the practice of religious persecution of Christians and others. However, Christians are encouraged to count the cost of discipleship and prepare for various types of persecution. Preparation for religious persecution may take the form of prayer and vigilance, as practiced by Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:44). Christians can also prepare for religious persecution by committing themselves to God and living out their commitment to Him on a daily basis.

Theological and Theoretical Foundation

The theological and theoretical foundation is the second part of the conceptual framework for this project. This section emphasized the reason the problem was studied and the importance of ministry intervention. If the problem is not recognized and if ministry intervention does not take place, the problem will continue to exist and worsen within the Christian community. The

¹²¹ Michelle Boorstein, "An Evangelical in the Briefing Room." *The Washington Post*, October 21, 2017. Accessed October 21, 2017.

researcher believes that doubt and unbelief about the reality of religious persecution, and ill preparedness for it, will endanger the spiritual growth of Christians.

Theological Foundation

The theological foundation for this project had a biblical premise. The premise was that if God says something will happen, then those who believe Him should prepare for it (John 16:33). Believers should understand that God, in His sovereignty, has a purpose for whatever He allows to happen (Eccl. 3:1). The adversity of religious persecution fits into this premise. The theological foundation and the thesis statement have the same focus. The focus is that the religious persecution of Christians is unavoidable. Christians should prepare for persecution and believe that God has a purpose for allowing persecution to happen.

The biblical foundation correlates with John the Baptist believing that the Messiah would come (Mark 1:7). John the Baptist said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah" (John 1:23). John acted on what he believed would happen. He preached the coming of the Son of God and the Bible states that the word of John the Baptist came to pass. God sent His Son into the world for the salvation of humanity (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:19). Christians are wise to believe and act on all of the Word of God, prepare for anticipated events, and have faith in the reality that God does everything for a purpose. God is in control at all times, even during periods of religious persecution.

Religious persecution is a trial that can result in death. The word trial refers to something that interrupts an individual's usual pattern of life and brings unwanted and sometimes unmanageable stress. Every trial is a test of faith that can strengthen the believer if it is not designed to result in

death. If the believer does not respond correctly to the trial, it may become a temptation to sin.¹²² The temptation to sin may manifest as self-condemnation, which can lead to other sins.

John the Baptist preached against sin. He preached a message of repentance to prepare the Jews for the coming of the Messiah (Mark 1:4). The English verb, *prepare* means to make ready. This verb is used in Matthew 3:3b, which says “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” In other words, get the path ready for the Lord. The Old Testament prophet Malachi used the verb prepare, which meant to make ready, to erect, or set up in the same manner. The Bible says, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me” (Mal. 3:1). Since God cannot lie, whatever warning or instruction found in the Bible, Christians should reverence God by believing it and expect that His word will come to pass (Titus 1:2; Num. 23:19; Isa. 55:11).

Ministry intervention is necessary when Christians fail to take God at His word. Several scriptures support reverencing God as a credible source of information (Num. 23:19; Deut. 7:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Cor. 1:9). The reverence of God’s word should apply whether His warning addresses religious persecution, the end time, or the consequences of ungodly living (Rom. 3:4). A close look at 2 Timothy 3:12 and 3:16 encourages reverence for the word of God by indicating that persecution is unavoidable and that all of God’s Word is the truth. Romans 3:3-4 says, “For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.”

¹²² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 10352, Kindle.

Believing

The literary form of 2 Timothy is an epistle. An epistle is a letter addressed to a particular person or groups of people (2 Tim. 1:2). This epistle, by the apostle Paul, was sent to Timothy. Timothy was Paul's son in the faith. History indicates that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy shortly before his execution.¹²³ Timothy was the biological son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother (Acts 16:1). His mother's name was Eunice, and his grandmother's name was Lois (1:5).

Historically, Timothy may have read this epistle to the church at Ephesus, since that is where he was located when Paul wrote it (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul was experiencing his second imprisonment in Rome when he wrote this epistle to Timothy in approximately A.D. 67 (1:16; 2:9). Emperor Nero may have been responsible for Paul's second imprisonment in Rome.¹²⁴ During this time, Paul was likely in confinement because during his first Roman imprisonment, he had accessibility to friends (Acts 28:30). Paul experienced abandonment by friends and was lonely (4:10). He was a lonely man awaiting death (4:6).

Paul knew that he was near death and wanted Timothy to understand the reality of persecution and other hardships of life and ministry. The scripture says, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (3:12). The scripture indicates that those practicing a godly lifestyle will be pursued or persecuted. Paul knew that persecution would become part of Timothy's life, because of his confession of Christ and his ministry.

The theme of Second Timothy is Paul's effort to encourage young Timothy in the ministry (4:5). Paul wrote to Timothy from prison in Roman and was aware of his impending death. Paul wanted to instruct Timothy in spiritual matters pertaining to ministry. Paul writes in the book of

¹²³ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 9703.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9708.

Hebrews that Timothy was imprisoned for his faith and released (Heb. 13:23). A second purpose of the letter was to encourage Timothy to visit Paul in Rome (1:4; 4:9-13).

The outline of Second Timothy includes the following encouragements. First, Paul encouraged Timothy to practice faithfulness to God (1:6-14). Second, he encouraged Timothy to be faithful to himself (2:1-26). Third, Paul encouraged Timothy to be faithful to the ministry (3:1-4:15). Fourth, he encouraged Timothy regarding God's faithfulness (4:16-18). Paul emphasized the theme of encouraging Timothy when he spoke about the required discipline of a soldier, athlete, and farmer (2:1-6). Paul's concerns regarding the threat of heresy and religious controversy are also significant. Paul brought attention to the personal desires and lifestyle of Timothy (2:14-26). He communicated his concerns regarding the threat of apostasy and social corruption (3:7-16). It is among these verses that the warning of persecution appears to all who will live godly in Christ Jesus. Paul informs Timothy that the godly are assured to suffer persecution for the faith (3:12). Timothy is forewarned that religious persecution is an unavoidable part of the Christian life (3:12). Paul wants Timothy to expect and prepare for difficult times, including those painful and disappointing times of trials and religious persecution.

The second verse (3:16) was written during the same historical, religious, and political setting as the first verse (3:12). This verse speaks of believing every biblical revelation that God has ever given. The Bible says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (3:16). The adjective all, means entire, complete, and constitutes the full quantity or extent. MacArthur indicates that Paul was telling his son in the faith that all scripture is breathed out by God. The term "breathed out by God" brings to mind Numbers 23:19, which says "God is not a man, that he should lie;

neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” Paul emphasizes that God’s word has authority.

Paul encourages Timothy regarding the authority of God’s Word. The complements used to support this verse (3:16) are that God’s word is profitable for reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. It was necessary that Timothy know he could depend on the Word of God. He must understand that God’s Word is profitable and valuable. Paul gives Timothy a solemn charge to be faithful to preach the useful and God-breathed Word of God (4:1-5). Near the end of the epistle, Paul does not fail to encourage Timothy to visit him as an antidote to his need for companionship (4:10-12).

The sentences in this epistle relate to one another because they confirm that Paul knows he is about to die. Paul wants to cover the areas of hardship that may affect Timothy in life and ministry. He speaks as a father to a son to prepare him for hard times and encourage personal faithfulness to God at all times. Paul provides encouragement and instruction for Timothy to make sure that Timothy is aware of the authority, value, and usefulness of God’s Word.

The warning in this verse (3:12) applies to every Christian. All Christians should expect and prepare for times of persecution. The second verse (3:16) informs Christians that truth backs every word spoken by God. Christians are expected to believe that religious persecution is a reality and accept the entire Bible as truth. Furthermore, Christians are expected to practice faithfulness to God in all situations.

Christians are called by God to endure religious persecution while simultaneously maintaining their faithfulness to Him. Christians are to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2:3). Paul encouraged Timothy to endure hardship. Timothy is to patiently suffer all misfortunes associated with the faith. Paul informs Timothy that he has endured suffering as

an example to other believers (3:11). Paul says, “But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” Paul wants Timothy prepared to endure and suffer misfortune for the faith.

God is aware when Christians suffer for the faith. God has promised never to leave or forsake his children (Heb. 13:5). Paul gives his personal testimony to Timothy. He informs Timothy that God rescued him during hard times (2 Tim. 3:11).

Preparation

An examination of Matthew 7:24 and James 1:22 emphasized the importance of preparing for persecution as a response to biblical truth. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ speaks to Jews listening to the Sermon on the Mount and encourages them regarding the benefit of obedience to God (Matt. 5-7). The verse says, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (7:24). Anyone aware of the judgment that God is sending upon the earth (7:21–23), but chooses to ignore the teachings of Jesus’ is as foolish as a person building his house on the sand.¹²⁵ Some of the warnings that Jesus spoke pertained to righteousness, happiness, discipleship, the Scriptures, morality, human relationships, and salvation.¹²⁶

Matthew, one of the original twelve disciples, also called Levi, wrote this gospel (Matt. 9:9). He wrote to the Jews to convince them that Jesus Christ was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

¹²⁵ Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, 103.

¹²⁶ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 6879.

Matthew left everything to follow Christ (Luke 5:27, 28). He was a tax collector and wrote this Gospel in A.D. 50 (10:3).¹²⁷

Matthew opens this gospel with the genealogy beginning with Abraham and ending with Jesus Christ (1:17). When writing this Gospel to the Jews, Matthew mentions Jewish customs without explaining them in contrast to the other gospels.¹²⁸ His Jewish audience was familiar with the demonstrated customs (Mark 7:3; John 19:40). He writes as an eyewitness to this Gospel message (Matt. 9:9). He quoted many Old Testament scriptures so that he could show the connection between those scriptures and the promised Messiah (Matt. 2:17, 18; 4:13-15; 13:35; 21:4, 5).

The parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders (Matt. 7:24-27) describes two houses with different foundations. The houses represent people. Jesus informs his listeners that listening to his word and applying what is heard will produce a stable foundation for the builder. However, disobedience to God's Word will result in an unstable foundation for the builder. Both of the homes endured the same type of storm, but the house that survived was the one built on faith and obedience to God's word. The disobedient Christian will taste defeat if he does not build on faith and obedience to God. Christians need to believe what God says and respond biblically. If Christians do not think that religious persecution can happen, they will remain on an unstable foundation and unprepared for persecution.

The religious setting in the Gospel of Matthew includes the Pharisees and Sadducees. On several occasions, the Pharisees and other religious leaders demonstrated extreme hatred for

¹²⁷ Ibid., 6744.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 6757.

Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:14; John 11:47-48).¹²⁹ Matthew records the ministry, mission, trials, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The progress of thought for this Gospel begins with the visit of the Magi, flight into Egypt, the slaughter of the male babies, and the return of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus back to Nazareth. Matthew provides information on the ministry of John the Baptist and the temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness. The ministry of Jesus Christ begins in chapter four and moves forward to the Sermon on the Mount. Once the Sermon on the Mount ended, Matthew recorded the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and concluded with the empty tomb and post-resurrection appearances.

According to MacArthur, Matthew presents the life of Christ in themes using five discourses. The first is the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 through 7. The second is the commissioning of the apostles in Chapter 10. The third is the parables of the kingdom in Chapter 13. The fourth discourse is the childlikeness of the believer in Chapter 18. Lastly, the discourse regarding the second coming of Christ is in Chapters 24-25.¹³⁰ The Gospel of Matthew has similarities to Mark and Luke's Gospels. However, despite the similarities there are differences in arrangement and vocabulary.¹³¹ Matthew's signature phrase is "the kingdom of heaven." This phrase occurs 32 times in the Gospel of Matthew, and it is not found anywhere else in the Bible.¹³² Matthew supports the royalty of Christ by referring to Him as "the Son of David (Matt. 12:23)."¹³³

¹²⁹ MacArthur, *The Macarthur Bible Handbook*, 6771.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6772.

¹³¹ Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, (Nashville, TN.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 114, Kindle.

¹³² MacArthur, *The Macarthur Bible Handbook*, 6778.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 6784.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus mentioned persecution in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Jesus is speaking about the persecution of believers that practice godly living. Jesus indicated that those who experience persecution because they imitate Him are blessed. Jesus assures Christians that persecution will come to the body of Christ. Since Jesus forewarned of religious persecution, Christians are to anticipate and prepare for it. Jesus indicated that Christians will experience hatred that is practiced by those in the world. The Bible says, “Marvel not, brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13). Hatred is an intense dislike. Therefore, Christians need to prepare for persecution since the world has an intense dislike for Christians that are bold in their faith. John 15:19 reads, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” Jesus sends the message that the world will always hate Christians. The message in the selected passage (Matt. 7:24) serves to indicate that Christians need to hear what God is saying about religious persecution and prepare for it. Jesus paints a vivid picture of the difference in obeying and disobeying the Word of God. The Bible commands Christians to obey God’s Word.

James 1:22 encouraged Christians to prepare for religious persecution. The epistle by James written around A.D. 44-49 is a letter to Jewish believers. James was the brother of Jesus Christ and Jude. The book bears the name of its author. The believers may have been dispersed (1:1) because of the killing of Stephen (Acts 7). However, it is possible their separation was due to persecution under Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12).¹³⁴

James introduces two theological themes in the book. One theme is the doctrine of works, which indicates that the absence of works is a demonstration of dead faith. A complement to the

¹³⁴ MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 10280.

theme is the inability to exhibit faith without works. The second theme pertains to godly living. James encouraged godly living in practical ways, such as maintaining the right perspective for those who are wealthy and for those who are less fortunate (1:9-11). He also encouraged the proper use of the tongue as a practical way to demonstrate faith (3:10).

This verse (1:22) emphasizes obeying God. The verse says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. If the believer wants to indicate there is no self-deception, he must act on his faith by practicing God’s Word. Christians should not deceive themselves into thinking that God does not mean what He says or that He is not speaking to them. The verse (1:22) implies that Christians need to take God at His word and not assume that God’s word is entertainment.¹³⁵ The original intent of the verse (1:22) is to inform believers that they must not only hear what God has to say, but they must also do what He says.¹³⁶ Practical and everyday demonstrations support the biblical instructions. In a practical sense, James talks about something that humankind can relate to, which is looking into a mirror (1:23). James likens the Word of God to a mirror and informs Christians and all others that the Word of God will reveal the truth to anyone who looks into it. James does not want his audience to ignore the truth of God’s Word.

In the Old Testament, God spoke to Noah warning him of the destruction of the earth’s inhabitants (Gen. 6:13). As a result, Noah believed God’s warning and prepared for the destruction of all humans by building the ark (Gen. 6:14). God had a purpose for destroying humanity. God kept his word and destroyed all humans except for Noah and his family (Gen. 7: 21-22). Christians must learn to take God at His word regarding the warning of religious

¹³⁵ Brian Simmons, *Hebrews and James: Faith Works*, (Savage, MN: BroadStreet Publishing Group, 2014), 1565, Kindle.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1580.

persecution. They must learn to prepare themselves for it before it happens so they can respond to it appropriately. Christians need to understand that according to the Word of God that God has a purpose for allowing persecution to happen. Most importantly when it comes to religious persecution, it is unavoidable for those who have placed their faith in Christ Jesus.

When Christians believe that God is going to bless them financially, they do their best to prepare for it. However, when God speaks of religious persecution, it seems that Christians do not think it is something that can or will happen. Christians are selective about what they believe in God's Word. The epistle of First Peter carries the theme of suffering. It contains verses that encourage Christians to believe that God has a purpose for allowing trials, including persecution, to happen to His children. The Bible says, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet. 5:10).

This epistle, addressed to strangers, refers to them as pilgrims of the dispersion (1 Pet. 1:1). These strangers are also seen as God's elect (1:1 NIV) and also as exiles (1:1 MSG). They were Jewish and Gentile believers struggling in the midst of persecution. They were dispersed throughout five of Asia Minor's Roman provinces. The provinces were Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1). These provinces are now part of Turkey, and there is no biblical evidence that Peter visited any of those places.

The apostle Peter understood that persecution could bring spiritual growth or total dissatisfaction with the Christian journey. Peter wrote this epistle, from Rome, in approximately AD 64 (5:13). However, it is unclear if Peter used the term Babylon as symbolism for the

idolatry in the city of Rome.¹³⁷ Tradition indicates the execution of Peter happened in AD 68 during the reign of Emperor Nero. The theme of the book is persecution and suffering. The word suffering occurs at least fifteen times in the epistle. Peter emphasized that Christians should have a proper response during times of distress. Peter indicated that Christians should not be surprised at difficult and painful trials and they should rejoice at the opportunity to suffer for Christ (1 Pet. 4:12-13). Peter understood that a divine perspective on persecution and everyday trials would help believers endure future hardships. A proper perspective of suffering would help Christians maintain their faith in God. Peter wrote this letter as a response to what he had heard about the difficulties facing believers.

Peter encourages Christians to believe that God has a purpose for their suffering and that good will come out of it (1 Pet. 4:4; Rom. 8:28). Peter indicated that God controls the Christian's life to make the sufferer perfect, established in the faith, strengthened, and settled in the Lord (1 Pet. 5:10; Rom. 8:29). When Peter referred to the perfection of Christians, he was not indicating that Christians would reach spiritual maturity and never make any more mistakes.

The New Testament indicates that Peter was unlearned. However, it does not mean that he was illiterate. The fact that he was unlearned indicated that he did not pursue formal rabbinical training in the Scriptures.¹³⁸ Peter gives hope to those who are experiencing persecution because of their faith in Christ. The qualities developed because of suffering can enhance the Christian's spiritual growth, as the Christian becomes better suited to bring glory to God.

In conclusion, the theological basis for this project is that the religious persecution of Christians will happen because Jesus warned to expect it. However, when the Bible speaks of

¹³⁷ MacArthur, *The Macarthur Bible Handbook*, 10493.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10450.

religious persecution, Christians have a difficult time accepting the warning as fact. If Christians do not expect persecution, they will not prepare for it. Christians need to place complete faith in the Word of God knowing that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). In Mark 13:31 Jesus says, “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.” In John 17:17 Jesus says, that God’s Word is the truth.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation had three components. The first component looked at the necessity to believe a warning from a credible source. The second component consisted of the Christian making adequate preparations because he believed the warning. The type of preparations depended on what the Christian thought might happen if he did not heed the warning. The third component looked at the faith of the Christian to determine how he might handle religious persecution if he believed that God had a purpose for allowing it. How the Christian handles the persecution may include the concept of sowing and reaping, which indicates that people tend to bring punishment on themselves based on something they have said or done (2 Cor. 9:6). However, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God reminds Christians that God is in control of everything, and He has a reason for whatever He allows to happen. Several scenarios were used to explain and support the components of the theoretical foundation.

Believing the Warning from a Credible Source

When the reason for the problem of Christians denying Christ to avoid persecution is observed, it is evident that at least some of them were unprepared and did not believe the biblical warning of religious persecution. If Christians do not believe and heed the warning of

persecution, they will not consider or prepare for the consequences. Sometimes unbelief in one area can have a drastic effect in other areas of a Christian's life.¹³⁹

The concept of believing a warning from a credible source is demonstrated first on a human level through a personal hardship of the researcher. In September 2013, the researcher went to the emergency room of the local hospital. The doctor examined the researcher and explained a major medical problem. The doctor warned of the need for major surgery. The researcher believed the doctor's warning and prepared for the surgery. The researcher's first step was to believe the warning. When it comes to religious persecution and all other biblical warnings, God is our most credible resource (2 Tim. 2:13; 2 Thess. 3:3). "For the word of the LORD *is* right, and all His works *are done* in truth" (Ps. 33:4). When Christians accept that religious persecution is biblical and can happen to them, it is an indication that they realize the warning is coming from a credible source.

Christians receive warnings from their children, spouses, church members, coworkers, and others. When Christians believe that the source of the warning is credible, they begin to prepare themselves to either escape the consequences or figure out how to handle them. Since Christians accept and act on warnings from their children, spouses, church members, coworkers, and others, they also have a responsibility to believe and act on warnings from the Word of God. According to Carl Gallups, "Christians must understand by faith that each beat of their heart and every breath they take belong to God."¹⁴⁰ Therefore, faith and obedience to God's Word are imperative for spiritual growth. Ministry intervention will help Christians learn to acknowledge the need to commit to the truth on biblical and secular levels.

¹³⁹ Allen, Jr., *The Global War*, 280.

¹⁴⁰ Gallups, *Be Thou Prepared*, 183.

The first fictional scenario features a Category 4 hurricane headed in the direction of an individual's home. The dreadful weather information is on the radio, television, Internet, and other credible sources. The individual's home is targeted for destruction. The homeowner will make preparation only if he believes what he has heard. If he does not believe the warning and prepare himself for the hurricane, the atmospheric sciences and history dictate that he may lose everything, including his life. His first step is to believe the warning.

In a second scenario, a college student who is weak in math received a warning. A credible professor warned him that he is currently failing. He was warned that he must pass a particular exam or he will fail the course. If he failed the course, he knew that he would not graduate on time. He will prepare for the exam only if he believes the warning from his professor. If he does not believe the warning and accepts his need to prepare for the exam, he knows that his grade will not improve. His first step is to believe the warning. Christians must believe that all of God's word is true including the warnings about religious persecution. If Christians do not believe what God says about religious persecution, they will not prepare for it. When Christians believe and prepare for upcoming trials, they stand a good chance of performing admirably.¹⁴¹

Making Adequate Preparation for What is Believed

In a previous scenario, the homeowner needed to believe the weather report so that he would prepare for the Category 4 hurricane that was headed his way. The winds associated with this type of hurricane range between 111-129 miles per hour, which is destructive.¹⁴² Once the homeowner believed the weather report, he had the choice of relocating or purchasing items that

¹⁴¹ Gregg, *What Does the Bible*, 118.

¹⁴² National Hurricane Center.

could help him endure the hurricane in his cellar. How he prepared was entirely up to him, but the warning applied to him whether he took heed to it or not. Once he believed he was in danger, preparations were made based on what he thought could happen to him. He acted on what he believed. The warning of religious persecution applies to all Christians even if they do not believe that it will happen. However, once a Christian believes that religious persecution is unavoidable, he will usually take whatever measures are necessary for him to be victorious during the period of persecution. If Christians in a particular locality believe they will be targeted and picked up at dusk to be persecuted, they will return home before the time the persecutors are out looking for them. They will act on what they believe.

In a previous scenario the math student believed the warning that he must pass the exam to graduate on time. He knew that he needed to prepare for the exam or he would experience the consequences associated with failing the course. His preparations for the exam must be sufficient for a passing grade. He could work with others or study privately in his dorm room. He could use the school library and other resources available to him. The professor's warning was for the math student whether he chose to believe it or not. Once the student believed the warning and accepted the predicted consequences of his current failing situation, it became a no-brainer for him to think of ways to prepare for the exam. He acted on what he believed.

God's warning regarding religious persecution is for all Christians. Once Christians believe they will be persecuted for their faith they should adopt an expectation of persecution. They do not know what God will allow them to go through. Therefore, some will hope for the best, but

prepare for the worst. According to Kneas, “Christians, need to prepare themselves spiritually and emotionally for challenges to their faith including times of persecution.”¹⁴³

Faith to Believe That God Has a Purpose for Christians’ Suffering

When Christians believe that God is allowing religious persecution for a purpose, their outlook is different than when they think others are in control of their lives. Furthermore, Spirit-filled Christians do not seem to do well when they think they are living outside of the will of God.¹⁴⁴ The Bible says, “God works things after the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11).

Therefore, nothing in life is beyond His control. Although Christians may never know the reason for their suffering, they believe that God has a reason for allowing it (Jer. 29:11).

A fictional scenario captures a non-Christian employer warning a Christian employee that he will lose his job if his productivity does not increase. In actuality, it was not his productivity that is the problem. Instead, it was the Christian’s unwillingness to live in a manner that does not honor Christ. One instance of persecution finds the employer using his authority to torment the Christian employee in various ways. The employer ridicules and harasses the Christian making embarrassing comments about him losing his job and not being able to support his family. The Christian believes he is doing his absolute best in the area of productivity and that God wants to use the unfair treatment at work to reach his employer and others for Christ. The Christian eventually loses his job. However, he is confident that God has a purpose for allowing the problematic situation to happen. The unfair employer took note of the Christian’s attitude during

¹⁴³ Maria Kneas, *How to Prepare for Hard Times and Persecution* (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2015), 122, Kindle.

¹⁴⁴ John Ortberg, *When the Game Is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 169, Kindle.

the time of persecution and soon gave his life to Christ. God had a purpose for allowing the persecution of the Christian in this scenario.

When Christians believe that God has a purpose for allowing them to suffer persecution, it makes a difference in their attitude. Some Christians may feel an unusual presence of the Lord during their time of suffering and believe that nothing compares to His presence. The presence of Christ is the believer's source of comfort and joy during times of persecution. In Matthew 6, Christians are encouraged to maintain faith during anxious moments, because God sees their circumstances and will meet their needs (6:25-34).¹⁴⁵ When Christian's knowingly suffer persecution in the will of God, they may welcome the persecution. Christians understand that the suffering is temporary, but the rewards are eternal (Rom. 8:18).¹⁴⁶ The purpose of the suffering may have been for them to experience God in a way that was unattainable without a certain degree of suffering, or it may have been to build character. Christians are satisfied in knowing that God will honor their faith during times of suffering, which may be interpreted by the Christian, as extending salvation to loved ones, co-workers, and others.

Another fictional scenario presents a Christian homeowner who receives an eviction notice from the Sheriff's Department to vacate his home. The Sheriff's Department is a credible source. However, the sheriff and some of his deputies have persecuted the homeowner on several occasions because he is a Christian. The homeowner believes that the Lord has placed him in this unfortunate situation for a purpose. God did not allow the homeowner to lose his home. However, the sheriff and several deputies placed their faith in Christ, because of the Christ-like attitude of the homeowner. The homeowner suffered a stressful time of persecution but believed

¹⁴⁵ Cochran, *Christians in the Crosshairs*, 63.

¹⁴⁶ Kneas, *How to Prepare*, 1275.

that God had to put him in that position to win certain law enforcement personnel to Christ. Devout Christians may consider hardship to be a blessing when God uses it to accomplish His will.

The theoretical foundation enforced the fact that Christians have a better attitude when they believe that God has a purpose for their suffering. When Christians believe that God is sovereign and that He is in control of everything, they likely maintain the same attitude during times of testing. Dedicated Christians may be determined to exercise their faith to please the Lord during difficult times (1 Tim. 6:12).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This researcher used the qualitative method of research to address the problem of Christian's denying Christ to avoid religious persecution. When Christians deny Christ to avoid persecution, it is a strong indication they are not prepared to suffer for their faith. This project used email to distribute a questionnaire pertaining to the religious persecution of Christians. It used the method of content analysis to interpret the collected data. Questionnaires were emailed to participants in Kenya, East Africa, and the United States.

A one-page, two-part questionnaire was distributed by email through the researcher's Liberty University email account to participants who were willing to take part in the research. Each participant also received a Consent Form and other recruitment correspondence. The intended collection process was U.S. mail and international courier. However, six U.S. participants chose to return their completed questionnaires by email. Those six participants may have chosen this method because of the convenience. Despite the intended anonymity of the project, five U.S. participants returned their questionnaires by U.S. mail with return addresses on them. The return address might have been a habit for the sender or added in case the questionnaire was not delivered, it could be returned to the sender. Regardless as to how the questionnaires were returned to the researcher, they were not read when received. They were removed from the envelopes or printed from the email account and placed in a stack. A total of thirty-one completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher.

Selection of Leaders

Initially, the Kenyan pastor was selected because he resides in Kenya and his participation would give the researcher an opportunity to compare and contrast first-hand responses with participants outside of the United States. The Kenyan pastor indicated via email that his church

in Kenya has approximately 450 children in their headquarters located in a small town. The church and school cater to disadvantaged children and other orphans suffering from HIV/AIDS. They have 440 children in the school. The pastor indicated that some congregants walk as far as ten miles to the church. Despite the workload of the Kenyan pastor, he agreed to participate in the study. He recruited twelve members of his church to do the same. The thirteen questionnaires returned by the Kenyan pastor accounted for nearly 42% of the completed questionnaires.

The U.S. pastor was selected to replace the pastor in India, who was unable to participate in the study. The participation of the U.S. pastor and his congregants would add to the number of U.S. participants living in the United States. The researcher met the U.S. pastor about twenty years ago in a local college classroom. The time in college with the U.S. pastor happened before God called him to the ministry. There had been little to no contact with the pastor since college. Ironically, the researcher ran into him at an ATM after learning that the pastor in India and his congregation could not participate. The researcher approached the U.S. pastor about the problem. The U.S. pastor indicated his willingness to complete a questionnaire and recruit five Christians in his congregation over the age of eighteen years old to participate in the study.

Distribution and Collection of Information

Initially, the project planned to focus on the persecution of Christians in Hyderabad, India, Kenya, East Africa, and the United States. However, due to some challenges with the ministry in India, at the last minute, they decided not to participate. The extensive research for the project, which included persecution in India, had begun and a tremendous amount of thought and writing the thesis had taken place. However, despite the disappointment, the researcher continued the research, well aware of the great impact that the withdrawal of the ministry in India had on the

project. The researcher was also aware of the need to make changes and recruit others to take their place. The participation of the Christians in India would have counted for ten completed questionnaires or nearly thirty-two percent, which is practically one-third of the questionnaire participants.

The pastor in India had visited the researcher's church last year and through a mutual contact committed himself and nine members of his church to the project. The Christians from India were to complete the questionnaire and return them by international courier. However, on March 8, 2018, the researcher was notified by a mutual contact that the pastor in India and his congregants would not participate in the research. Instead of keeping his original commitment to complete the questionnaire and recruit nine members of his congregation, he emailed the researcher, through his contact, three newsletters published by, *The Evangelical Fellowship of India* (EFI), along with the 2017 Annual Report. The newsletter publications were dated November 2017, January 2018, and February 2018. The newsletters described acts of religious persecution in India and appeared to be distributed publicly. The researcher was able to find these newsletters through an online Google search. The researcher did not understand the pastor's decline in participation, because his ministry, picture, and Christian sermons can be found on Google and YouTube. The researcher is aware that persecution in India is severe and tried to assure the pastor in India that his contribution of the newsletters and the annual report for 2017, were appreciated and his otherwise lack of participation was understood.

Since the pastor in India and his congregants withdrew from the study, a pastor in the United States was asked to complete the questionnaire and recruit five members of his congregation. The researcher tried to gather as many participants as possible in case others needed to withdraw.

The researcher recruited ten additional Christians to replace the ten Christians in India who were unable to participate. The researcher hoped the Kenyan pastor would remain committed to completing the questionnaire and recruiting nine congregants. There had not been any contact with the other U.S. participants, but the researcher hoped they would remain committed to the project. The ten U.S. Christians replacing those in India were two administrative assistants, one licensed addictions counselor, two licensed educators, one pastor, one security officer, two church elders and one local church member. The project continued forward with a focus on the persecution of Christians in Kenya, East Africa, and the United States.

On May 18, 2018, eighteen participants were emailed a ten-question questionnaire on *The Religious Persecution of Christians*. The pastor from Kenya, East Africa and one pastor from the United States were among the eighteen participants. Both pastors would recruit members of their congregation to complete the questionnaire. The deadline to complete and return the questionnaire by U.S. postal or international courier was June 7, 2018. The June date gave participants twenty-one days to complete the questionnaire. The pastor from Kenya and the pastor from the United States would randomly recruit Christians from their congregations over the age of eighteen to participate in the study. The Kenyan pastor would complete the questionnaire and recruit nine members of his group. The U.S. pastor indicated he would complete the questionnaire and recruit five members of his congregation. The recruitment efforts of the U.S. pastor would equal a total of six participants. The congregants recruited by the two pastors were unknown to the researcher. The researcher expected the thirty-two participants to complete and return the questionnaire by U.S. mail or international courier.

The questionnaire asked participants ten questions pertaining to the religious persecution of Christians. The estimated time to complete section one was three minutes. The first part of the

questionnaire provided the researcher's name, school, and the issue and deadline dates of the questionnaire. It also inquired about the country, educational background, age, and sex of the participants. Since the two countries were included in the research, participants needed to inform the researcher which of the two countries they represented. Each participant needed to affirm their faith in Christ since all participants were required to be Christians. Participants were asked to indicate their age since all participants were required to be over eighteen years old. The questionnaire asked the participants to include their sex, in case the researcher determined it had a bearing on the study. The researcher had a genuine concern about the educational background of the participants because the researcher believed the level of education of the participants might enhance the credibility of the data. The pastors knew after reading the recruitment letter they were to choose Christians over the age of eighteen. However, they were not asked to consider the educational background or sex of the participants. The questionnaire asked non-identifying information about each participant, which the researcher could utilize when analyzing the data.

The pastor living in Kenya initially indicated he would complete the questionnaire, and recruit nine members of his congregation to do the same. However, since one U.S. participant informed the researcher by email that she could not complete the questionnaire due to a lifetime of depression, and the U.S. pastor informed the researcher by email that he was unsure if he could recruit five members from his church, the Kenyan pastor was asked to recruit additional participants from his congregation. The Kenyan pastor recruited three additional Christians over the age of eighteen to complete the questionnaire. Therefore, a total of thirteen completed questionnaires would come from the pastor in Kenya. The Kenyan pastor did not share with the

researcher how he recruited congregants from his congregation. Neither did he share with the researcher how he distributed and collected the questionnaires.

The researcher met the Kenyan pastor when visiting a church in the United States. The pastor of the church indicated there was a pastor from Africa on his way to join the service. Once the African pastor and his wife arrived, the pastor gave a compelling appeal for American Christians to visit his church in Kenya. The request from the Kenyan pastor made an impact on the researcher. In regard to the questionnaire, the Kenyan pastor indicated by email that he would type each questionnaire because English is a second language for the Kenyans, and his congregants were not particularly fluent when writing English. The pastor typed each questionnaire and shipped the completed questionnaires to the United States by international courier. The Kenyan pastor advised the researcher that it would cost \$52 in U.S. currency to pay the postage for ten completed questionnaires. The postage increased by \$32 U.S. dollars for the three additional questionnaires. The total cost of postage was \$84 U.S. dollars. The researcher deposited two checks totaling \$84 U.S. dollars into the U.S. bank account of the Kenyan pastor. He confirmed receipt by providing the check numbers and the amounts. The researcher received the thirteen completed questionnaires on June 2, 2018. On the other hand, the U.S. participants paid the postage for all completed questionnaires mailed through the U.S. postal service. All questionnaires received by U.S. mail were placed in an anonymous stack to maintain the anonymity of the project.

The U.S. pastor originally planned to submit a total of six completed questionnaires. He later indicated the probability of his congregants having difficulty understanding the questionnaire. Although the U.S. pastor hoped to send six completed questionnaires, due to uncontrollable circumstances, he was able to submit only five completed questionnaires. He did not share with

the researcher how he selected congregants to participate. He did not share how he distributed or collected the questionnaires. The researcher did not provide specific instructions to the pastor regarding distribution and collection of the questionnaires, because the method of distribution would not provide any substantive impact on the responses for the study.

The U.S. pastor returned four completed questionnaires via U.S. mail with a return address on it before the deadline. The fifth completed questionnaire, from the U.S. pastor, arrived in the mail on May 31, 2018. The thirteen completed questionnaires from the Kenyan pastor along with the five completed questionnaires from the U.S. pastor raised the total of collected questionnaires to eighteen. The eighteen questionnaires received were placed in an anonymous stack to maintain the anonymity of the project. The questionnaire was emailed to sixteen other participants known to the researcher. Thirteen of the sixteen participants responded.

Four of the sixteen participants receiving the questionnaire were licensed educators. Three teach in Maryland, and the fourth teaches in the District of Columbia. Three of the educators returned completed questionnaires by email, instead of U.S. mail. One of the educators missed the deadline therefore the researcher did not accept her questionnaire when it arrived. All of the completed questionnaires that were returned by email before the deadline were printed out and placed in an anonymous stack. They were not read before they were printed. The questionnaire was emailed to two licensed addictions counselors. One licensed addictions counselor returned her questionnaire by U.S. mail on May 31, 2018. The other licensed addiction's counselor returned the completed questionnaire by email. The questionnaires from the two licensed addictions counselors were added to the anonymous stack of completed questionnaires.

The questionnaire was sent to an emergency dispatcher who is an elder in a local church. She contacted the researcher to advise she was about to mail her completed questionnaire.

Unfortunately, she confused the twenty-one-day deadline of June 7, 2018, with the date of June 21, 2018. She wanted to submit the completed questionnaire on June 16, 2018, thinking she was submitting it early. However, she missed the deadline and the researcher would not accept her completed questionnaire. The other church elder, a retired educator, returned her completed questionnaire by U.S. mail. A third church member completed the questionnaire and also returned it by email. The questionnaire was also sent to a Catholic priest who finished the questionnaire and returned it immediately by U.S. mail.

The questionnaire was sent to two female administrative assistants living in two different states. One of the administrative assistants lives in New York, and the other lives in Maryland. The administrative assistants returned their completed questionnaires by U.S. mail. When their completed questionnaires were returned they were placed in an anonymous stack to maintain the anonymity of the project. The researcher received a total of thirty-one completed questionnaires.

Method Used to Analyze Data

The content analysis approach was chosen to interpret the collected data. The content analysis approach involved identifying themes that surfaced when reviewing the completed questionnaires. The researcher was able to identify five themes that could support the problem. First, the researcher identified a theme on the various definitions of religious persecution. The two different countries provided similar definitions of religious persecution. The definitions from the participants in both countries included only five types of persecution. The five types of persecution were a denial of the freedom of worship, mistreatment, discrimination, abuse, and opposition. The thirteen Kenyans may have shared their thoughts and responses with each other prior to completing the questionnaire. This would account for the similarity in their responses. It is also possible they got ideas from the pastor when he explained what needed to be done.

There is the possibility that the U.S. Christians from the local church shared their thoughts and responses with others participating in the study. This would account for similarities for an additional five participants. It is unlikely that the remaining thirteen U.S. participants, who were unknown to each other, consulted with each other prior to completing the questionnaire.

The second theme that emerged was the acts of religious persecution known by the participants. The known acts of religious persecution could lend credibility to the simplistic definitions of the participants. It was possible that the known acts of persecution, prompted the participants to use one or two word definitions. The researcher was aware of the possibility that participants who denied Christ to avoid religious persecution may not have been willing to share their experience about denying Him. They may share the drama of the persecution, but not the exact reason for it. However, knowing the types of persecution familiar to the participant's added variety to the research. It is obvious to the researcher there is more than one way to deny Christ. One way is to imitate the apostle Peter by denouncing Him (John 18:27). One other way to deny Christ is not to claim Him or speak up in His behalf, when prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit. When the Kenyans were asked to describe their personal experiences with persecution, they included abandonment, the threat of incarceration, suspension from school, denial of the freedom to worship, and various forms of discrimination. The types of persecution experienced by the U.S. participants included discrimination, rejection, isolation, ridicule, and threat of unemployment. The participants did not define persecution with the same words they used to describe their personal experiences with it.

The third theme concerned how the participants prepared for religious persecution. Since preparation is key, it was important to learn what Christians were doing to prepare for persecution. The participants who prepared for religious persecution shared different techniques

and methods of preparation. It is likely that participants prepared for persecution in a fashion that complemented their culture. The completed questionnaires indicated the manner that the participants chose to use to prepare for persecution, all of which were familiar to the researcher.

The fourth theme emerged regarding God's purpose for allowing religious persecution. This theme was important, because it could discreetly provides a reason that might encourage participants to endure persecution. The researcher expected and received disagreement in the responses of the participants as to why God allows Christians to suffer religious persecution. One U.S. participant gave an anti-biblical response when he indicated that God does not intend for Christians to suffer for His name's sake. The fifth theme emerged regarding which group the participants perceived was the most persecuted religious group in 2017. The researcher was aware that although the persecution of Christians is global, the participants could identify other religious groups as the most persecuted group for 2017.

These five themes were useful when trying to gain insight into why Christians are not prepared for religious persecution. The themes were also useful in helping the researcher develop a proposed solution that could be effectively applied to the problem of Christians denying Christ to avoid religious persecution. If any of the participants gave biblical responses that were based on reality, the responses could serve as an indication of the spiritual maturity of the participants.

The aim of analyzing the data for this project was to gain understanding into why Christians are not prepared for religious persecution. When Christians deny Christ to avoid persecution for their faith in Him, it is a reminder that they either could not or would not defend their faith. Religious persecution is biblical, but all Christians do not believe it will happen. As a result of their doubt in God's word, they do not know how to respond to it when it does happen.

The estimated time to complete section two, which contained ten questions, was forty-two minutes. The following ten questions were asked on the questionnaire. The questions included a definition of religious persecution, how the participants prepared for it, how they thought they could intentionally avoid it and whether or not they believed God had a purpose for it. The last six questions asked about specific acts of persecution known to the participants, what happened the last time they were persecuted, what caused their persecution, why Christians should consider persecution as unavoidable for them, what they would do to avoid it, and which group was the most persecuted in 2017.

The participant's responses were analyzed, and the researcher used quotes from the completed questionnaires to support the findings. The researcher explained the quotes in context of the statement of the problem. If the participant's response was not focused on the question, the researcher assumed the participant either did not understand the question or intentionally did not choose to answer the question. There was a comparison and contrast of the responses for the Kenyan participants and the participants living in the United States.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The aim of analyzing the data for this project had a three-fold purpose. The first purpose was to determine if any of the thirty-one Christians participating in the study believed in the reality of persecution, prepared for it, and what they thought God's purpose was for allowing the persecution of Christians. The second purpose was to see if any of the participants completing the questionnaire would share information about them denying, Christ to avoid religious persecution. The third purpose for analyzing the data was to develop a proposed solution that could address the problem and help Christians believe and prepare for persecution, while also encouraging Christians to believe that God has a purpose for allowing them to suffer.

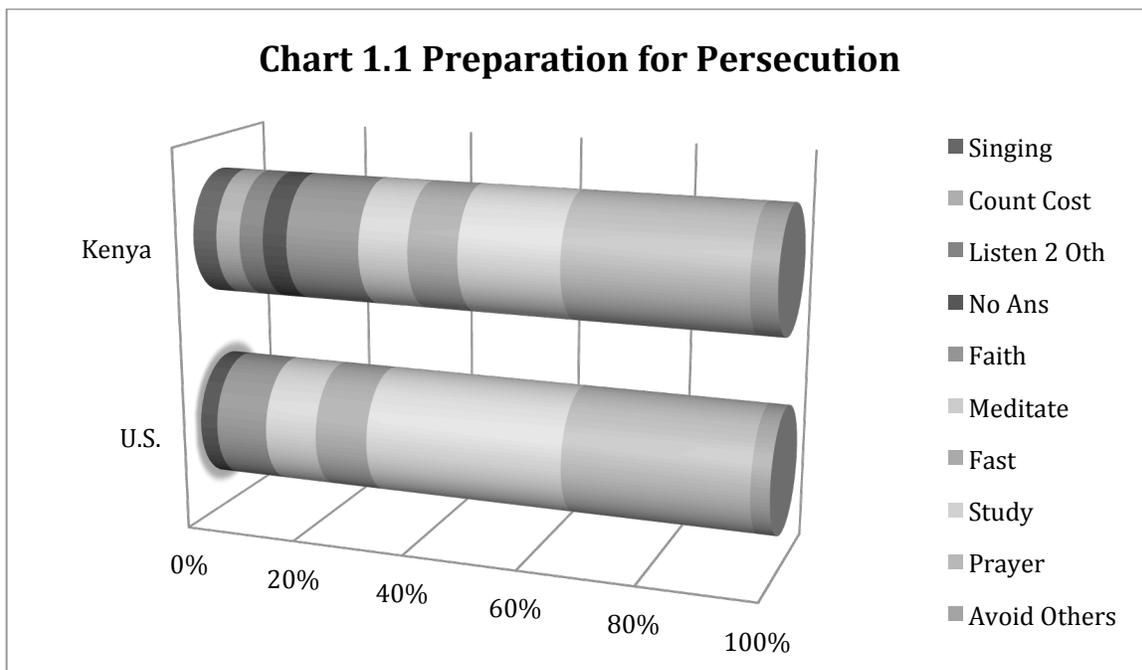
In order to gain insight into why Christians are not prepared for religious persecution, the researcher used the content analysis approach to examine the completed questionnaires with a focus on five themes. First, a theme on the various definitions of religious persecution raised concerns. This was due to the extreme similarity in the responses from two different countries. The thirty-one participants phrased their definitions on only five types of persecution. The five types of persecution were a denial of the freedom of worship, mistreatment, discrimination, abuse, and opposition (Table 1.1). Six of the thirty-one participants defined persecution as a denial of the freedom of worship. These six participants used emotion to describe what it meant personally to have their freedom of worship denied.

Table 1.1 Definitions of Religious Persecution

Country Represented	Deny FW	Mistreatment	Abuse	Discrimination	Opposition
U.S.	3	9	4	1	1
Kenya	3	8	0	2	0
TOTAL	6	17	4	3	1

Abbreviations: FW - Freedom of Worship
U.S. - United States

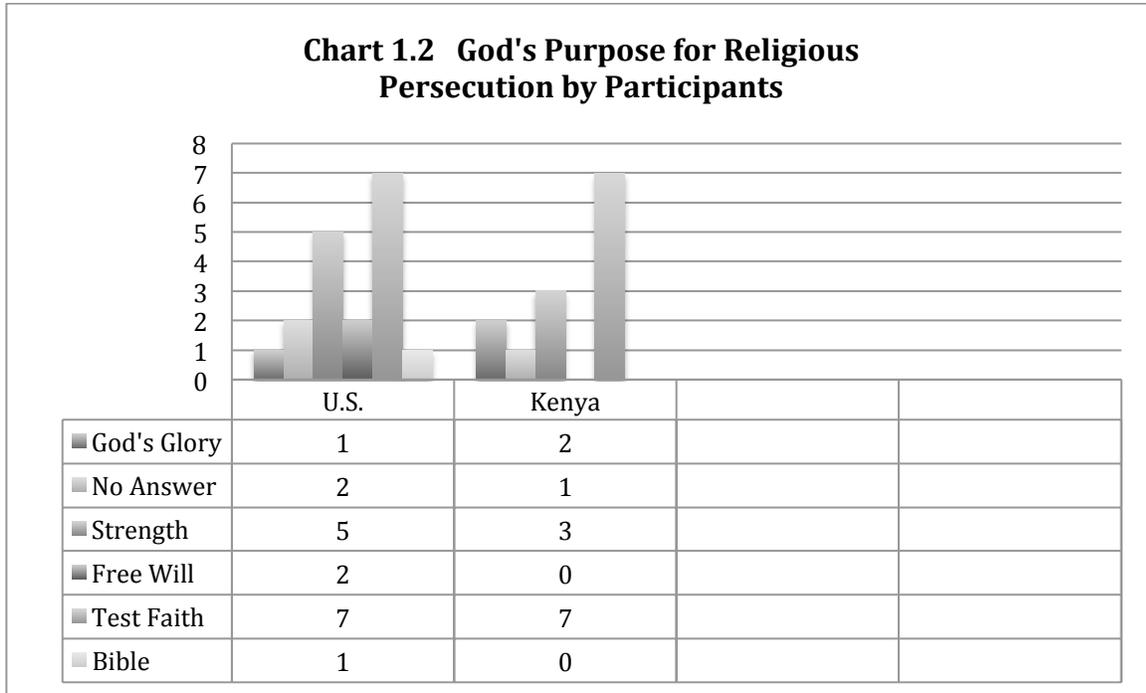
Second, a theme regarding known and experienced acts of persecution became apparent. Sixteen of the thirty-one participants knew about more than one act of religious persecution. However, four of the sixteen participants indicated they had no personal experience with persecution. Third, a theme regarding preparing for religious persecution contributed significant information to the study. Five of the participants utilized the spiritual discipline of fasting and five utilized the discipline of meditation. At least ten of the participants indicated they used both prayer and study to prepare themselves for religious persecution. One U.S. participant and one Kenyan participant indicated they prepared for persecution by avoiding others (Chart 1.1).



Note: Some participants employed more than one spiritual discipline to prepare for religious persecution.

Fourth, the researcher noticed a theme regarding God’s purpose for allowing the persecution of Christians. Fourteen participants indicated that God is testing His children when He allows them to endure religious persecution. Three participants indicated that God allows the

persecution of Christians for His glory. Eight of the thirty-one participants thought that God’s purpose for persecution were to strengthen the believer (Chart 1.2).



Lastly, a theme emerged regarding which group the participants perceived was the most persecuted religious group in 2017. One participant thought that Jews were the most persecuted religious group in 2017. Five participants thought that Muslims were the most persecuted group, and twenty-three indicated that Christians were the most persecuted religious group. One U.S. participant did not answer the question. The completed questionnaires from participants in Africa and the U.S. were closely examined.

Definitions of Religious Persecution

The questionnaire asked participants to define religious persecution. The thirty-one participants completing the questionnaire centered their definitions, around five types of persecution. The five types of persecution were denial of the freedom of worship, mistreatment,

discrimination, abuse, and opposition. Six participants cited a denial in the freedom of worship as their definition of persecution. The breakdown by country was three Kenyans and three U.S. participants. Seventeen participants defined persecution as mistreatment. The breakdown by country was eight Kenyans and nine U.S. participants. Three participants defined persecution as discrimination. The breakdown was two Kenyans and one U.S. participant. Four U.S. participants indicated abuse as their definition of persecution. One U.S. participant indicated that opposition defined persecution. The seventeen questionnaire participants, using the general term of mistreatment to define persecution, described various acts of persecution within their culture, which included torture, death, and rejection.

Three Kenyans and three U.S. participants shared the opinion that persecution is a denial of the freedom to worship. One Kenyan described a denial of the freedom to worship as “preventing people from certain religious acts like the Eucharist.” A second Kenyan described it as “the act of unfairly denying one the freedom of worship.” The third Kenyan described it as “the act of denying someone the freedom to worship God; be it a Christian, Muslim or any other religion.” One U.S. participant described a denial of the freedom to worship as “being unable to worship, reference, or acknowledge the God I serve in public or non-religious settings.” A second U.S. participant described it as “the prohibition of practicing one’s faith freely.” The last U.S. participant phrased his concern by indicating that the “respect for religious freedom has been ignored.” These six participants focused on the denial of the freedom to worship as a form of religious persecution, which appeared to be important to them.

Seventeen participants defined persecution as mistreatment. Eight of the participants that defined persecution as mistreatment were Kenyans. Nine of the U.S. participants completing the questionnaire also defined persecution as mistreatment. The eight Kenyans indicated that

mistreatment is done not only to individuals, but also to groups of people who express their religious beliefs. One Kenyan described the mistreatment she received when employed in North Kenya, at a location that is dominated by persons practicing the Islamic religion. The Kenyan believed she was mistreated when she was not allowed to go to church, while working for an employer of the Muslim faith tradition. The mistreatment expressed by another Kenyan amounted to being demoralized, stressed out, and left feeling as if he had “ failed his religion.” This instance of persecution had a negative effect on the participant, although he does not indicate that he denied Christ during the time of persecution. The mistreatment happened because he shared the Gospel in a story. This Christian believes that other Christians could better endure a similar experience if they, “study to gain more understanding on matters related to religious persecution, and learn about the various ways of dealing with it.” He also believes that if he had “avoided his persecutors, been more prayerful, added periods of fasting, and had more faith and courage that he could have avoided his situation.” Another Kenyan described the mistreatment she experienced as ridicule because she confessed Christ in her first year of high school. As a result of her confession of Christ, she indicated, “My fellow students and teachers told me that I will not make it and whenever we were in class, the teacher always gave examples of people who are failures and quoting me as an example.” This particular Christian indicated that other Christians could be victorious in similar situations if they “cling to the promises of God, turn away from sin, and remember that Heaven is their home.” She believes she can avoid religious persecution if she “chooses tolerance over truth, and don’t look down on other people’s religion.” One Kenyan indicated that religious persecution is mistreatment that can also be based on “race or political standing.” Two other Kenyans suggested a purpose for the mistreatment of Christians. Both Kenyans indicated the purpose of mistreating Christians as a form of

persecution is “aimed at forcing them to renounce their religion.” When Christians renounce their faith in Christ, it is equal to silencing the witness.¹⁴⁷

One of the nine U.S. participants that described mistreatment as a form of persecution stated it is the “awful terrible treatment of people due to their belief in God.” This participant indicated that “taking prayer out of school and being looked over for a job” are types of persecution. She indicated that if she wanted to avoid religious persecution she could do three things. She could, “agree with the things of the world that are evil, believe a lie instead of the truth, and believe in false gods.” The comments from one U.S. participant indicated that “any type” of mistreatment because of religious belief is persecution. Another U.S. participant indicated, “There are times when the mistreatment is subtle, and other times when it is quite obvious and is clearly out in the open.” One U.S. participant described her mistreatment as avoidance by others and strained relationships that were stressful. She was mistreated because of verbal disagreements with others about religion.

Discrimination was defined as a type of persecution by three of the participants completing the questionnaire. The breakdown by country of the three participants indicating that discrimination is persecution, included one U.S. participant and two Kenyans. It has been documented that eighty percent of all religious discrimination is directed at Christians.¹⁴⁸ The U.S. participant indicated that persecution is the “violent discrimination of a group of people based on their religious beliefs.” One Kenyan defined persecution as “all forms of discrimination.” Whereas the other Kenyan indicated that persecution is “when an individual is unfairly discriminated on the basis of his/her faith.”

¹⁴⁷ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 768.

¹⁴⁸ Allen, Jr., *The Global War*, 9.

Abuse was the definition for persecution by four U.S. participants. None of the Kenyans used the word abuse to describe persecution. Two of the four participants provided a personal description of abuse to illustrate their concept of persecution. One participant indicated that persecution is abuse “when a person or persons is physically, mentally, or verbally abused due to their religious beliefs.” A second participant defined persecution as “physical and verbal abuse.” History dictates, “the greater the power, the greater the abuse.”¹⁴⁹

Lastly, one U.S. participant defined persecution as “the expression of opposition.” The participant stated the “opposition is demonstrated as unkindness, unfriendliness and/or violent behavior as well as the denial of certain privileges” based on an individual’s religion. This participant indicated that, “I believe Christians are persecuted, humiliated, discriminated against and denied certain privileges, because of their belief in Jesus Christ as redeemer of mankind.” She believes that “practically all spiritual disciplines are needed and the appropriate discipline needs to be matched to the particular situation.” The five types of religious persecution cited by the thirty-one participants completing the questionnaire were denial of the freedom of worship, mistreatment, discrimination, abuse, and opposition. Some of the participants explained their definitions by giving examples they had heard about or experienced.

Known and Experienced Acts of Persecution

The questionnaire asked participants to give information about the acts of persecution they knew about, and provide information on acts of persecution they had experienced. The researcher wanted to learn about the participant’s personal knowledge of religious persecution and their past or current experiences with it. Sixteen of the thirty-one participants indicated a personal knowledge of more than one act of religious persecution. Fourteen of the thirty-one

¹⁴⁹ Kneas, *How to Prepare*, 776.

participants focused on a single act of religious persecution. One Kenyan completing the questionnaire did not choose to indicate any personal knowledge of religious persecution; although the participant indicated the experience of being threatened with jail because he exercised his faith in Christ. The breakdown by country for those indicating the knowledge of more than one act of religious persecution was seven Kenyans and nine U.S. participants.

The knowledge of acts of religious persecution recorded by one Kenyan included a “denial of job opportunities, restricted movement, killings, and denial of basic human rights.” This participant indicated that he had experienced persecution on a “personal level” but did not elaborate on the occasion or describe his personal experience. Her concept of avoiding persecution is summed up as, “If you want to avoid religious persecution, one has to avoid interfering with other people’s religious beliefs.” A second Kenyan indicated that his personal knowledge of persecution included the killing of Christians, rejection by parents, torture, insults, and ridicule. The participant’s experiences were reported as, “Some are sent away from the church compound or sent out of their homes.” The participant phrased the previous quote as though he had not experienced these types of persecution, but named them to support his personal knowledge of it. He indicated that if he wanted to avoid persecution, he “would pray and fast regularly for God to change their minds.” Furthermore, he believes “Christians are just human beings like other people in the Bible, and they should be therefore ready for anything as Jesus Himself was persecuted.” A third Kenyan disclosed that his personal knowledge of persecution included hate speeches and ridicule. However, he did not indicate he had experienced persecution for his faith in Christ. A fourth Kenyan indicated that his personal knowledge of persecution included destruction of property, incidents of incitement to hate, arrests by government agencies, torture, and imprisonment. He stated his personal experience

with persecution was his suspension from high school in 1990. His persecution was the result of “converting his classmates to Christianity.” A fifth Kenyan indicated that his personal knowledge of persecution included killings, denial of employment, and denial of basic human rights. This participant indicated that his personal experience with persecution occurred in a bus station. The participant indicated that in the bus station, “There are prayer rooms for Muslims so they get to do their prayers before traveling, while the same is not done for Christians.” The sixth Kenyan indicated that his personal knowledge of religious persecution included “ridicule and hate speeches against Christianity.” He disclosed his personal experience with persecution occurred because he is in the Seventh Day Adventist denomination and although he was allowed to worship he was prevented from worshipping on a Saturday. There were nine U.S. participants indicating the knowledge of more than one act of religious persecution.

One U.S. participant declared a historical knowledge of religious persecution, which included, “The Holocaust and various torture and deaths in England due to Roman Catholic belief and Protestant purging under Mary.” The participant did not justify or attempt to explain her statements regarding Catholicism. The participant’s personal experiences with persecution included, “verbal disagreements to include rejection” and persuasion “to become an atheist.” She indicated that if she wanted to avoid persecution she would “avoid discussing religion.” A second U.S. participant indicated her personal knowledge of persecution included an employer threatening to fire Christian employees. Her knowledge of persecution also included the employer forcing Christians to work on Sundays. The employer’s attitude put Christians in a dilemma, because they could either work and get paid for it or go home. If they went home, they would not be able to meet their financial obligations, such as paying rent and meeting other obligations. The participant disclosed that her experience with persecution included the

possibility of losing employment, because she was a Christian. This same participant indicated the employer allowed Jewish employees to be absent from the job on religious holidays, but forced Christians to work on their religious holidays and Sundays. This participant indicated that if she wanted to avoid religious persecution she would have to do the unthinkable, which is to deny Christ. If she denied Christ it meant, “denying everything he has done for me.” A third U.S. participant indicated that his knowledge of persecution consisted of several different types of persecution. The list included, “taunting, making fun of others, public shaming, banishment or exile from community or family, physical violence, murder, and destruction of property.” He indicated that his personal experience with persecution came as a result of the distribution of Gospel tracts on “urban streets.” As a result of his public witness for Christ “many rejected the tracts, threw them on the ground, ignored me, and told me to go away.” This participant indicated that if he wanted to avoid religious persecution he would, “keep quiet, don’t spread the faith, do not tell others that you are a Christian.” A fourth U.S. participant indicated that his personal knowledge of persecution consisted of hate, arrest, torture, and beatings. He indicated that his personal experience with persecution was “alienation” and “isolation.” The participant did not give any details on his experience of alienation and isolation, but indicated that whatever he suffered, he suffered it because he expressed his faith in Christ. If he wanted to avoid religious persecution he would, “do the opposite of all good Christians, don’t pray, don’t read the Holy Bible, do all the worldly things you choose.” A fifth U.S. participant indicated that her knowledge of persecution included murder, bodily harm, kidnapping, and segregation. Her personal knowledge of persecution also included “isolation, ridicule, unkind conversations, and actions.” She did not detail her personal experiences with persecution, even though she had a working knowledge of it. However, she indicated that if she wanted to avoid religious

persecution she “would not identify myself as a believer and blend in with a non-Christian worldview.” A sixth U.S. participant disclosed that her knowledge of persecution included “taking prayer out of school” and “being talked about and looked over for employment.” She also included “killing, Bibles taken away, and separated from my child.” She expressed her experience with persecution as “my child isolated.” Due to the anonymity of the project, there was no way to get clarity from the participant about this situation involving the child therefore, the researcher interpreted this event as someone separating her from her child because of her faith in Christ. The participant indicated that she prays with her spouse “daily” and she prays “on my own.” There was no indication about who separated the mother from her child. The participant indicated that the specific cause of her persecution was that she did not believe “in a false religion, but in the only true and living God, Jesus Christ.” A seventh U.S. participant indicated that his knowledge of religious persecution extends to torture, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. He admits to seeing these types of persecution in Europe, Asia, and Africa, but not in the United States. His witness for Christ caused his personal experience of persecution to include him being “spoken to in a harsh manner.” He indicated he was persecuted because he “spoke on an issue and would no longer be silent.” The participant did not share information about the issue, but indicated that he must “speak what is biblical and speak as a Christian.” Genocide and cultural cleansing are popular types of persecution in Africa. Culture cleaning is the occasion whereby Christian children are removed from the home, placed in camps, and forced to grow up as non-Christians.¹⁵⁰ There were thirteen participants focused on knowing more than one act of religious persecution, whereas seventeen other participants focused on only one act of religious persecution.

¹⁵⁰ Neff, *Our Extended*, 14.

The breakdown by country for the participants that focused on having knowledge of only one act of religious persecution were six Kenyans and twelve U.S. participants. Three of the six Kenyans referenced “killing” as the one act of known religious persecution. Two of the three Kenyans that indicated killing as the type of persecution they knew about, did not provide an answer as to their personal experience with any type of persecution. The third Kenyan who identified killing as a type of persecution indicated that his personal experience with persecution resulted in him being denied the freedom to worship. None of the Kenyans indicated if those killed were friends or family.

The acts of religious persecution known by the Kenyans included torture, death, rejection, killing, denied education, denial of basic human rights, arrests by government agencies, imprisonment, and unknown forms of abuse. The acts of religious persecution known by the U.S. participants included isolation, discrimination, taunting, public shaming, banishment, violence, murder, and destruction of property. The two groups did not indicate if the known acts of persecution happened to them, family, or friends.

The particular acts of religious persecution experienced by the Kenyans included abandonment, threat of imprisonment, suspension from school, and denial of worship. The particular acts of religious persecution experienced by the U.S. participants were discrimination, isolation, ridicule, and being ignored by others. These types of persecution may have had a negative effect on the participants, but no one admitted to denying Christ to avoid persecution.

Preparation and Expectation

The questionnaire asked the participants how they prepared for religious persecution and whether or not Christians should expect it to happen. Persecution is the cost that Christians pay for sharing their faith. However, there is a higher and eternal cost when the Christian faith is not

shared with others.¹⁵¹ Prayer and study were the dominating spiritual disciplines used by the participants to prepare for persecution. The responses of prayer and study may have been the result of how the question was phrased by the researcher. The questionnaire indicated that prayer and study were spiritual disciplines, which may have given the participants too much of a hint, for an independent answer to the question. Nevertheless, twenty-five of the thirty-one participants completing the questionnaire indicated they prepared for persecution by prayer, study, or both. The breakdown of participants by the two countries, were eleven Kenyans and fourteen U.S. participants. One Kenyan and one U.S. participant did not answer the question. Four participants indicated they used their faith to prepare for persecution, but they did not specify in what manner their faith helped them to prepare for persecution. Lastly, one Kenyan indicated that his preparation for persecution consisted of “remembering God’s promises for us, remembering the power of prayer, listening to the testimonies of fellow Christians, counting the costs and remembering all that I will gain in the end.”

Two of the eleven Kenyans that used prayer, study, or both to prepare for religious persecution also indicated they occasionally fasted. Two others indicated their studies pertained specifically to religious persecution. The researcher was puzzled by one of the Kenyan’s responses to the question. The Kenyan stated, “Have faith in whatever religion you choose to pursue and be able to understand the doctrines enforced by the various denominations.” The researcher found this troubling since all participants were supposed to be Christians. The participant indicated in Part I of the questionnaire that he was a Christian, but his response to the question does not seem to agree with the doctrine of Christianity. His response was a delimitation for the researcher, since the researcher was unable to verify the salvation of any of

¹⁵¹ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 753.

the participants.

A seventh Kenyan using prayer, study, or both to prepare for persecution, also indicated that he fellowships with other Christian and “sings.” This participant was the only one of thirty-one participants that used singing as an aid to prepare for religious persecution. The participant did not name any songs used to prepare for religious persecution. One Kenyan mentioned Stephen who was martyred in Acts, Chapter 8. The participant indicated that Christians must have “fearless faith as in the case of Stephen.” An eighth Kenyan commented on the importance of a good prayer life as it pertains to persecution, by indicating that “Prayer builds courage, which propels one to face persecution head-on and hence victory is assured.” A ninth Kenyan indicated that an effective prayer life “provides strength to overcome temptation.” Even though some Christians are tempted to yield to their persecutors, “God is committed to the good of His creation and His children.”¹⁵² The remaining three Kenyans placed a great focus on studying the Bible. One of them indicated that, “God’s Word enables one to gain wisdom and understanding on matters pertaining to religious persecution.” A second Kenyan indicated the Christian’s necessity to “study God’s Word and other relevant Christian literature to become knowledgeable.” Lastly, a Kenyan commented on the necessity to “plan Bible studies to equip the faithful with the Word of God.”

The participants gave their opinions as to why Christians should expect persecution. Eleven of the participants believe that persecution is something that simply happens. The breakdown by country was four Kenyans and seven U.S. participants. Six Kenyans and two U.S. participants did not provide an answer to the question. Three Kenyans and seven U.S. participants indicated that persecution happens because Jesus was persecuted. Two U.S. participants indicated that

¹⁵² Gregg, *What Does the Bible*, 694.

persecution happens because the Bible said it would happen. These two U.S. participants further indicated that persecution happens because of spiritual warfare. The participant made the comment “demonic forces,” which are mentioned in the Bible. One of the two participants indicated “demonic and dark forces” bring about religious persecution. The other participant indicated, “The evil one is angry and wants to destroy God’s believers, he wants us to die with him. The devil is on a mission to prove God wrong, so he is coming after all of God’s people” (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Why Should Christians Expect Religious Persecution?

COUNTRY REPRESENTED	JESUS WAS PERSECUTED	DID NOT ANSWER QUESTION	IT HAPPENS	BIBLE SAYS SO
U.S.	7	2	7	2
Kenya	3	6	4	0
TOTAL	10	8	11	2

The Kenyans indicated they prepared for religious persecution by studying God’s Word, praying, not gossiping, fasting, and listening to the testimonies of others. The U.S. applicants indicated they prepared for persecution by studying, fasting, praying, meditating on God’s Word, respecting others, using their faith, and having a devotional time with God. None of the applicants indicated they were adequately prepared when their time of persecution arrived, however, all of the applicants indicated the activities they practiced to prepare for persecution.

God’s Purpose for Religious Persecution

The questionnaire asked participants what they thought God’s purpose was for allowing the religious persecution of Christians. The exact reason for every case of religious persecution is a

mystery, but the fact remains that God definitely uses it.¹⁵³ Fourteen of the participants completing the questionnaires indicated that God is testing the faith of His children when He allows them to endure religious persecution. Nine of the participants indicated that God is using persecution to strengthen His children. Three of the participants indicated that God allows His children to suffer persecution for His glory. Two of the participants indicated that God has given mankind a free will, which humanity can exercise when persecution arises. There was one Kenyan and two U.S. participants that did not answer the question.

The fourteen participants that indicated that God is testing the faith of his children qualified their responses in different ways. The breakdown by country was seven Kenyans and seven U.S. participants. One Kenyan indicated that persecution is used to test the children of God; however the participant did not explain his answer. Four of the Kenyans indicated that God wants to increase the faith and strength of His children. Two other Kenyans indicated that God wants His children to “emerge victorious” and to “believe and obey God.” There were nine participants that indicated that God wanted to strengthen His children.

The breakdown of the nine participants who indicated that God wants to use persecution to strengthen His children was three Kenyans and six U.S. participants. One of the three Kenyans indicated that God allows persecution “to strengthen” the faith of His children. He further indicated, “If one is able to go through the test successfully, then one is therefore capable of handling anything that may come in their way.” A second Kenyan indicated, “The purpose of suffering of any sort and in this case, religious persecution, is meant to strengthen us some more and make us better Christians.” The third Kenyan noted, “God allows religious persecution for one to have strong faith in Him.” One of the six U.S. participants supported her answer with

¹⁵³ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 418.

John 15:21, which reminds Christians of the probability of suffering for Christ's sake. However, the participant also indicated "I do not think that it is God's intention that we suffer for His name's sake, but by allowing us to go through persecution testing it makes us strong in the faith." The researcher is hopeful that this Christian will develop a more theologically balanced view of persecution. A second U.S. participant indicated that "Persecution makes us stronger, because we call on God more and we depend on God more." A third U.S. participant believes that "All of God's trials are to strengthen our faith and shape us for his goal for us in this life." A fourth U.S. participant indicated that God allows persecution to "strengthen the saints." A fifth U.S. participant indicated that the result of persecution is that "our faith is strengthened." The sixth U.S. participant referred to 2 Timothy 3:12, which indicates that all who live godly in Christ will suffer persecution. This participant stated when Christians suffer persecution, "It makes their faith stronger."

Three of the thirty-one participants indicated that God's allows persecution of Christians for His glory. The breakdown by country is two Kenyans and one U.S. participant. One of the Kenyans indicated that, "God allows persecution to happen so that His glory can be seen." A second Kenyan indicated that God allows persecution of Christians, "to prove the power of God." When the power of God is proven, it will "put them on their toes." The U.S. participant indicated that God allows persecution for His glory, referenced 2 Corinthians 11:23-30 in which Paul recalled his testimony regarding persecutions for the sake of Christ. This U.S. participant emphasized that when Paul was delivered from persecution, it brought God glory.

There were two U.S. participants who indicated that God allows persecution because He has given humanity a free will. One of the two participants indicated, "God gave man a free will. Man is free to follow Him or not. In allowing religious persecution God is allowing man to

exercise the gift of free will.” The second participant indicated, “God gave us free will and He will not take it from us, even to have a good outcome from an evil situation.”

There were three participants who did not answer the question regarding their opinion of God’s purpose for religious persecution. One participant indicated that “religious persecution has a historical background; therefore, Christians should be ready for it.” However, the participant’s response does not offer an opinion on God’s purpose for it. Another participant indicated, “Jesus was sent to earth to bring salvation to mankind. He died on the cross, and was resurrected from the dead with the possibility of giving eternal life hereafter.” However, this participant did not indicate God’s purpose for allowing Christians to suffer persecution. A third participant did not offer any answer to the question.

The Kenyans indicated that God’s purpose for allowing Christians to endure religious persecution was to bring glory to God, test their faith, and strengthen their faith in God. The U.S. participants completing the questionnaire indicated that God allows Christians to endure persecution as a test of faith, to strengthen their faith, to bring glory to God, and it gives humanity an opportunity to exercise his free will. Since three of the participants did not answer the question, the researcher cannot account for all of the opinions of the participants.

Most Persecuted Religious Group in 2017

The questionnaire asked participants to share their opinion on which religious group was the most persecuted in 2017. Twenty-four of the thirty-one participants indicated that Christians were the most persecuted religious group in 2017. Five of the participants indicated that Muslims were the most persecuted religious group. One participant indicated that Jews were the most persecuted religious group. One participant did not answer the question. The opinions previously mentioned account for the thirty-one participants completing the questionnaire.

The breakdown by country of the participants indicating that Christians are the most persecuted religious group, were eleven Kenyans and thirteen U.S. participants. The Kenyans and the U.S. participants supported their responses by focusing on the persecution that Christians have experienced in many parts of the world. One U.S. participant was torn between Christians and Muslims. The participant stated “Christians were probably the most persecuted” but he felt he needed to comment on the persecution of Muslims also. He supported his response by mentioning ISIS and the Trump Administration, by indicating that due to “Trump’s Ban that was instituted by the government.” Two of the U.S. participants indicated that Christianity is a growing religion. Three of the U.S. participants indicated that Christianity is a threat to the world. One participant stated, “Christianity is a threat; it is one of the largest growing religious groups in the world.” The other two U.S. participants believe that Christianity is a threat, because of its spiritual claims in a fallen world. These two opinions may align with the one U.S. participant who indicated that Christians are persecuted because they “witness the Gospel to others.” One U.S. participant supported his opinion that Christians were the most persecuted religious group in 2017 by making reference to Fox News in April 2017. Although he did not properly cite his source of information he indicated that Fox News reported, “millions of Christians were persecuted and killed worldwide.” The researcher found the participant’s source of information at which was published by Fox News on January 6, 2017. The online information was entitled, “Christians the Most Persecuted Group in the World for Second Year: Study.” Three other U.S. participants also used statistics to support their responses. One of the three U.S. participants admitted to online research and found out that “people are still being killed for believing in God.” The participant indicated, “The NGO Open Doors report shows that in 2017, persecution of Christians worsened to the extent that 322 Christians were killed

each month.” He further commented, “In the 50 countries analyzed by the organization some 250 million Christians suffer some form of violence that range from hostility, discrimination, extreme persecution, and murder.” His report included “widespread persecution in the areas of Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia, and Afghanistan.” He referred to Christians as the “enemies of the state.” Christians in Somali have been beaten, evicted from their homes and country, and martyred, with their killers known for hiding the slain bodies.¹⁵⁴ A second U.S. participant, who did not indicate her source of information advised, “Eighty percent of the acts of religious persecution in the world are against Christians who make up about one-third of the world’s population.” This participant experienced persecution in the form of being, “brushed off by an authority figure.” The source of persecution came because she disagreed with a “policy regarding abortion.” If she wanted to avoid religious persecution she believes she would need to, “not express my religious beliefs.” The third U.S. participant believed that approximately “ninety thousand Christians have been killed because of their beliefs and six hundred million have been prevented from practicing their faith. There have been imprisonments, beheadings, and genocide.”

The eleven Kenyans who indicated that Christians were the most persecuted group in 2017 did not use any actual statistics to support their responses. However, one Kenyan indicated, “anti-Christian terrorism groups have developed in the world such as, Boko-Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in East Africa and many others. Most of these groups are Muslim based and greatly persecute God’s children.” Another Kenyan indicated that “most Christians found in Muslim areas were either killed or denied basic human rights as in the case of the Al-Shabaab militants who captured a bus carrying innocent civilians, killing them in cold blood.” The same incident

¹⁵⁴ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 137.

was reported by another Kenyan who said, “In Kenya a bus carrying Christians were attacked by the Al-Shabaab militants in Northern Kenya and they killed the Christians.” A third Kenyan supported his response of Christians being the most persecuted religious group by indicating that many Christians “have been killed by terrorist groups.” A fourth Kenyan supported his response by indicating, “The Christian faith was persecuted by the Muslims through killing and kidnappings.”

Five of the thirty-one participants indicated that Muslims were the most persecuted religious group. The breakdown was two Kenyans and three U.S. participants. The responses seemed to be based on a negative reputation assigned to Muslims and sympathy for punishment or restrictions placed on them. One Kenyan indicated that Muslims were the most persecuted, because “Some were prevented from wearing hijabs.” The other Kenyan indicated, “Most of them are assumed terrorist because of their Arab like origin.” One U.S. participant supported his response by saying, “Because of the actions of terrorism by Muslim fanatics throughout the world created an overwhelming hatred for all Muslims.” This participant further indicated, “To make matters worse, many Muslims were forced from their homes by war and became refugees.”

Another U.S. participant supported his response by indicating that Muslims are the most persecuted group, “because of terrorism.” A third U.S. participant indicated that Muslims are the most persecuted religious group because of the “political climate.” The participant further stated, “Anyone who looks as though they are from the Middle Eastern region is accused of being a terrorist or harassed even in jest.”

One of the thirty-one participants, in the U.S., indicated that Jews are the most persecuted religious group. The participant chose to qualify his response in a few words. He indicated, “The Jews face persecution in the Middle East.” One Kenyan participant rambled on indicating

that Muslims, Christians, and Jews should be included in a single response. The researcher was unable to understand the participant’s intent and chose to settle the issue by indicating that the participant did not answer the question. The majority of the Kenyans indicated Christians were the most persecuted religious group, although two Kenyans indicated Muslims were the most persecuted. The U.S. applicants indicated the most persecuted religious group was Christians, however they felt that Muslims and Jews were secondary. One U.S. participant either did not understand the question or did not chose to answer it. Therefore, the researcher is unable to provide one hundred percent responses regarding the U.S. participant’s opinion on the most persecuted religious group in 2017 (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3 Most Persecuted Religious Group in 2017

Country Represented	Jews	Muslims	Christians	No Answer	Other
U.S.	1	4	12	1	0
Kenya	0	2	11	0	0
TOTAL	1	6	23	1	0

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The researcher concluded that a proposed solution to the problem of denying Christ to avoid persecution was attainable, despite the fact that people are not always forthcoming with facts that appear to reflect negatively upon them. The diligence of the participants to complete the questionnaires and the researcher's independent research, helped the researcher develop a proposed solution to the problem. This chapter concludes with the proposed solution, although the researcher recommends that another researcher take the proposed solution and apply it with a group being persecuted. It is further suggested that the mental and spiritual disposition of the members of the group are studied before and after to determine if the study made the difference it was intended to make.

The five chapter titles for this thesis were Introduction, Conceptual Framework, Methodology, Results, and Conclusion. Chapter one, the introduction, presented the ministry context, the statement of the problem, the purpose statement, basic assumptions, definitions, limitations, delimitations, and the thesis statement. Chapter two, the conceptual framework, presented the literature review, the theological and theoretical foundations. Chapter three, the methodology, presented the selection of leaders, the distribution and collection of information and the method used to analyze the collected data. Chapter four presented the results, and Chapter five presented the conclusion.

The introduction to the thesis suggested that if Christians believed persecution was biblical and unavoidable, if they prepared for it, and if they believed that God had a purpose for allowing persecution they would be better able to handle persecution for the faith. Christians do not want to acknowledge they have been in Peter's place as described in the New Testament (John 18:13-27). Peter stated that he would never deny Christ (Matt. 26:35), nevertheless, he denied Christ

three times (Matt. 26:69-75). The Introduction indicated that the project concentrated on the religious persecution of Christians in Kenya, East Africa and the United States. The thesis focused on three components of persecution. There was a focus on believing the biblical warning, preparing for persecution, and believing that God has a purpose for allowing the persecution of Christians.

The ministry context provided information on thirty-two Christians over the age of eighteen, who agreed to complete the questionnaire. The information included education, gender, and the religious affiliations of the participants. As the study went forward, the ministry context changed from thirty-two confessing Christians over the age of eighteen, to thirty-one Christians. There were two leaders among the thirty-one participants. One was a pastor from Kenya, East Africa, who recruited twelve members of his congregation. The other leader was a U.S. pastor who recruited four members from his congregation. The remaining Christians were U.S. participants. The researcher was not acquainted with forty-one percent of the participants completing the questionnaire. Four of the participants that received the questionnaire either did not complete the questionnaire or missed the deadline. The Christians participating in the study had various academic and religious backgrounds. The participants completing the questionnaire were informed of the statement of the problem, either by one of the leaders or by the researcher.

The statement of the problem was that too many Christians are not prepared for religious persecution. The researcher intended to prove this, with information from the participants responding to the questionnaire. The researcher assumed that the data from the participants would provide enough information to suggest and propose a solution to the problem.

The explanation of the problem was threefold. It presented Christians entertaining unbelief regarding the reality of religious persecution, not preparing for persecution, and the possible

unwillingness of Christians to believe that God has a purpose for allowing the persecution of Christians. The researcher expressed concern about Christians not believing that God is a reliable source of information in foretelling what will happen in a fallen world. If Christians do not believe the biblical warnings of persecution, it is unlikely they will prepare for it. Therefore, the purpose statement indicated that the thesis would address the fact that the religious persecution of Christians is a reality. An explanation of the purpose statement emphasized that persecution can be the result of foolishness on the part of the persecuted. However, ways to prepare for persecution would be one of the main focuses of the project. The project would seek to encourage Christians to believe that God has a purpose for allowing the persecution of Christians.

In order to adequately address the statement of the problem the researcher included basic assumptions, definitions, limitations, and delimitations that would service as a guide for gathering information for the project. A questionnaire was distributed by email to participants volunteering to take part in the study. The intention was to determine if any of the thirty-one participants believed that persecution is biblical and unavoidable, if and how they prepared for persecution, and whether or not they believed God has a purpose for it. The researcher believed, that if the participant's believed that persecution happens to Christians, if they prepared for it, and believed that God had a purpose for it, they would be better equipped for handling the persecution, even if it ended in death.

The anonymous ten-question questionnaire was distributed to thirty-one confessing Christians, over the age of eighteen, who made up the ministry context for the project. Initially, the project planned to involve Christians in India, Africa, and the U.S., but concluded with Christians living in Africa and the U.S. Once the researcher was convinced that the pastor in

India and his congregation would not participate, another organization was contacted. The researcher contacted Reaching Indians Ministries International (RIMI), twice to request their assistance. However, RIMI did not respond to the email or letter sent to them by the researcher. As a result, the researcher recruited ten additional U.S. Christians to replace the ten Christians in India who were unable to participate in the study.

The first original assumption pointed to the unbelief of Christians in regard to religious persecution. The second original assumption indicated that persecution could be the result of a verbal confession of Christ or association with Christians, even if a godly lifestyle is not apparent. The third original assumption was that preparation for persecution is automatic when Christians believe that persecution is a reality. The fourth original assumption was that Christians would prepare for and endure persecution if they were sure that God has a purpose for allowing it. However, as the project moved forward the following new assumptions were realized. This insight came after the study was completed. The researcher is aware that, in hindsight, the methodology/research stage should have entertained questions that would bring greater insight and confirm or dismiss these assumptions; however, this was not the case in this situation. As it stands, the original premise was not proven; nevertheless, some key insights came out of the research and are presented as new assumptions. The first new assumption is that the world is more religious now than ever before.¹⁵⁵ The persecution of Christians is a global issue and there is a growing climate of hostility toward Christianity in all parts of the world. The hostility toward Christians, from religious and non-religious groups, is intended to silence the global witness for Christ by distracting Christians from obeying (Matt. 28:16-20).¹⁵⁶ It is

¹⁵⁵ Allen, *The Global War*, 256.

¹⁵⁶ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 305.

possible that Christians have sanitized the New Testament against the reality of persecution when they refuse to believe and accept that religious persecution is a reality for those who exercise their faith in Christ.

The second new assumption was that blessings automatically come when Christians are persecuted. If this is a worthy assumption it leaves the Christian to discern if their persecution is the result of their effective witness for Christ or is it the result of sin or a criminal action.¹⁵⁷ Peter draws a line regarding the reason that God blesses His people. Scripture says, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Pet. 4:15). However, it is worth noting that Christians can suffer religious persecution for their several reasons. Persecution can come because of a verbal confession of Christ, association with other Christians, a godly lifestyle, and unintended disrespect for the culture of the persecutor. Regardless as to why Christians are allowed to face persecution, God has a purpose for it.

A third new assumption was that since God wants the best for His children, Christians assume that religious persecution is an indication of God's disfavor.¹⁵⁸ This assumption places a concern on the relationship that Christians develop with God. As long as trials are minimal and manageable, Christians believe they have obtained the favor of God. When persecution comes, Christians assume that God has left them. All Christians are not prepared for future challenges even when the challenge appears to be eminent. Adequate preparation for religious persecution encourages faith in God during hard times. In a secular sense, Christian living in areas prone to

¹⁵⁷ Cochran, *Crosshairs*, 2356.

¹⁵⁸ Ripken, *Insanity of Obedience*, 90.

hurricanes and tornadoes, do not always have a plan in place in the event of an emergency.¹⁵⁹

Some Christians assume they will escape even if they do nothing to prepare for it. The truth remains is that Christians are generally in a “constant state of preparing, planning, and protecting.”¹⁶⁰ When Christians study God’s Word it becomes apparent that God wants the best for His children and that trials, tribulation, and ultimately persecution serves an intentional purpose in the Christian’s spiritual growth.

A fourth new assumption was Christians always get what they deserve, therefore they have in some way earned persecution.¹⁶¹ In Luke 12:25-26, it states, “And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?” Psalms 115:3 states, “But our God [is] in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.” On the other hand, despite the fact that persecution is difficult, God does not grant permission for Christians to hate their enemies. God loves everyone, including his enemies, and desires that Christians love their enemies also (John 3:16; Matt. 5:44). How does the desire to punish the persecutors fit with Jesus’ instructions to love one’s enemies and pray for the persecutors?¹⁶² The Bible says, “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matt. 5:44).” When Christians apply faith in God’s Word to prepare for persecution, they will accept persecution as a reality and understand that it is

¹⁵⁹ Gallups, *Be Thou Prepared*, 176.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 182.

¹⁶¹ Gregg, *What the Bible Says*, 35.

¹⁶² Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 33.

unavoidable. Christians want to be partners with God during times of persecution, however it is the Holy Spirit who empowers the Christian to love those who intentionally bring harm.¹⁶³

A fifth new assumption was that Christians must rely on their own strength during times of persecution. During times of persecution and hardship, Christians are not capable of understanding the depths of God's love and the wonderful things that God has prepared for them (1 Cor. 2:9). God knows that Christians need him at all times and they are not entirely responsible for their own victories, even though suffering, and sacrifice are necessary for spiritual growth. The methods that God uses to help those faced with persecution may be shrouded in mystery and never completely understood by those who are suffering. However, it seems the persecution of Christians happen because of Christ, on account of His name, or on account of His righteousness (Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-25; 1 Pet. 4:14).¹⁶⁴ Christians to cast their cares upon Him at all times (1 Pet. 5:7). Christians are never to assume that God expects them to rely on their own strength in a fallen world (Prov. 3:5).

The researcher chose to define three words that would be used in the project. The words were persecution, Christian, and spiritual warfare. Every participant because of the subject matter of the thesis used the word persecution. The word Christian was used by every participant because being a Christian was a requirement for participation in the study. The third word, spiritual warfare, was important to the study, because biblical resources indicate that persecution is based in spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:12).

The researcher faced six limitations that restricted activities associated with the project. First, the number of participants chosen to complete the questionnaire did not exceed thirty-one.

¹⁶³ Gregg, *What Does the Bible Say*, 126.

¹⁶⁴ Cochran, *Crosshairs*, 11.

Initially, the questionnaire involved thirty-two participants, but everyone contacted was not able to participate in the study and additional people were asked to participate. Second, the project focused on those who placed faith solely in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Third, although the year 1974 was randomly chosen, as opposed to an earlier or later year, the time period from 1974 until the current year made it necessary for the researcher to include recent acts of persecution. Fourth, there was a concern about how Christians prepared for persecution and not how individuals of other faiths prepared for it. Fifth, there was a concern regarding the purposes that God would allow Christians to suffer persecution. Sixth, the majority of Scripture used for the project came from the New Testament, because the subject matter pertains to those who solely placed their faith in Christ.

There were six delimitations that served as boundaries for the researcher. The first delimitation was that the researcher could not include every type of religious persecution experienced by those in Kenya and the United States. Second, was the researcher's inability to know how many Christians were unfamiliar with religious persecution? Third, the researcher was unable to include all the methods that Christians could use to prepare themselves for persecution. Fourth, the researcher was unable to include all the purposes that God might have for allowing Christians to endure persecution. Fifth, the researcher was unable to verify the indicated experiences of persecution and the salvation of those participating in the study. Sixth, there were time restraints and other limitations placed on the project that were not in the control of the researcher to include the theoretical approach which could not be applied and re-evaluated.

The second chapter was the conceptual framework. It included the Review of Precedent Literature, The Theoretical Foundation, and The Theological Foundation. The Review of Precedent Literature included a list of literary resources that were chosen to support the thesis on

the religious persecution of Christians. The literature also addressed the theory, practice, and theology of the global persecution of Christians. The literature was presented as directly, closely, and indirectly related literature that correlated with three sub-themes. The sub-themes were believing that religious persecution will happen, preparation for religious persecution, and God's purpose for allowing religious persecution. The seventy pieces of literature collected for the project increased as the need for additional information surfaced. The literature was helpful in gathering information for the theoretical and theological foundation for the project.

The theoretical Foundation had three components. The components included the necessity of believing a warning from a credible source. Second, the necessity of Christians to make preparations based on the warnings they received. Third, the consideration that Christians would give to persecution if they believed that God had a purpose for allowing it to happen. The theoretical foundation was supported by the theological foundation that had a biblical premise. The premise for the theological foundation pointed to truth in God's word that religious persecution happens to Christians. Basically, if God says that Christians will suffer persecution, then those who believe His warning should prepare for it (John 16:33). The biblical foundation of the premise was in correlation with John the Baptist acting on what he believed about the Son of God coming into the world. The researcher indicated that John the Baptist acted on what He believed (John 1:23).

The third chapter contained the methodology used for the project. A qualitative research approach was used to distribute and collect the data. The methodology used would allow the researcher to gather information from volunteers completing the questionnaire. The content analysis approach was used to interpret the data. The content analysis approach centered around five themes. The first theme dealt with the participant's definitions of religious persecution.

This theme was chosen because the questionnaires represented two countries, but the thirty-one participants phrased their definitions on the same five types of persecution. The five types of persecution were a denial in the freedom of worship, mistreatment, discrimination, abuse, and opposition. The second theme centered on known and experienced types of religious persecution. Fifty-one percent of the participants knew about more than one type of religious persecution. Twenty-percent of the participants that knew about more than one type of religious persecution did not have any personal experience with it. The third theme focused on how the participants prepared for religious persecution. This is an extremely important theme because it means if Christians take time to prepare for persecution, then they believe it can happen. Secondly, it means if they believe it can happen, they will anticipate it. The statement of the problem is that too many Christians are not prepared for religious persecution. The researcher expected participants to share how they prepared for religious persecution, knowing of the possibility of differences between the two countries. The fourth theme asked participants to indicate whether or not they thought God had a purpose for allowing Christians to suffer religious persecution. Forty-five percent of the participants indicated they thought that God used religious persecution to test his children. Approximately twenty-five percent of the participants indicated that God used religious persecution to strengthen his children. The fifth theme focused on the participant's opinions regarding which religious group was the most persecuted in 2017. Participants centered their responses indicating Jews, Christians, and Muslims, which reference the three major religions. None of the participants indicated they had denied Christ to avoid persecution, however, the researcher is aware that the problem exists. The responses to the questionnaires helped the researcher develop a proposed solution to the problem of Christians denying Christ to avoid religious persecution. The questionnaires also provided information to

determine if Christians in the United States and Africa believed persecution was biblical and unavoidable; whether or not they prepared for it, and accepted that God has a purpose for it.

The researcher chose to define words that would be used in the project. The words were persecution, Christian, and spiritual warfare. This allowed the researcher a broader understanding of the definitions received from the participants in Africa and the United States.

The researcher faced six limitations that restricted activities associated with the project. First, the number of participants chosen to complete the questionnaire did not exceed beyond thirty-one. Initially, the questionnaire reached thirty-two participants, but everyone contacted was not able to participate in the study and additional people were asked to participate. Second, the project focused on the persecution of Christians, instead of other religions. Christians were the main focus of persecution, because the persecution of Christians is a global issue.¹⁶⁵ Third, the researcher randomly chose 1974 and beyond, because it represented a period of fewer than forty-five years. The time period selected would mean the researcher would need to include recent acts of persecution in order to complement the year chosen. Fourth, the various methods of preparation mentioned for persecution were for Christians and not members of other religions. The project focused on methods that Christians used to prepare for persecution, since the project is centered on the persecution of Christians. Fifth, the project addressed God's purposes for allowing Christians to endure religious persecution, as opposed to why God might allow other religions to endure the same. The researcher believes that if Christians accept that God has a purpose for allowing Christians to endure persecution, it will help ease the suffering of persecution. Sixth, the New Testament was primarily used for this project, because those who

¹⁶⁵ Allen, Jr., *The Global War*, 96.

believed in Jesus Christ two thousand years ago were called Christians (Acts 11:26). These limitations encouraged five assumptions to support the thesis.

The original assumptions were that since every word in the Bible is true, Christians will except that religious persecution is real. Second, it was assumed that Christians suffer persecution for their verbal confession of Christ and their association with other Christians. Third, it was assumed that if Christians believe that persecution will happen, they will prepare for it. Fourth, it is assumed that if Christians knew that God had a purpose for their suffering, they will be encouraged to prepare for it. The assumptions support the thesis statement, which is that this project proposes that if Christians believed persecution was biblical and unavoidable, they prepared for it, and accepted that God has a purpose for it, then they would be better equipped for enduring it. The resources that composed the Review of Precedent Literature provided valuable information to support the project. The books chosen confirm that the persecution of Christians is a global issue. However, as the project moved forward six new assumptions were realized. This insight came after the study was completed. The researcher is aware that, in hindsight, questions should have been asked in the methodology/research stage that would help bring greater insight and confirm or dismiss these assumptions; however, this was not the case in this situation. As it stands, the original premise wasn't proven; nevertheless, some key insights came out of the research and are presented as new assumptions. The first new assumption is that Christians live in a secular world. However, there is strong indication that the world is more religious now than ever before.¹⁶⁶ The persecution of Christians is a global issue and there is a growing climate of hostility toward Christianity in all parts of the world. The hostility toward Christians, from religious and non-religious groups, is intended to silence the

¹⁶⁶ Allen, *Global War*, 256.

global witness for Christ by distracting Christians from obeying the final instructions of Jesus, often called the “Great Commission” (Matt. 28:16-20).¹⁶⁷ It is possible that Christians have sanitized the New Testament when they refuse to believe and accept that religious persecution is a reality for those who exercise their faith in Christ.

The second new assumption was the probability that blessing comes through persecution and suffering. This leaves the Christian to discern if their persecution is the result of their effective witness for Christ or is it the result of sin or a criminal action.¹⁶⁸ Peter draws a line regarding the reason that God blesses His people. Scriptures says, “But let as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Pet. 4:15). If the persecution is happening because of sin, then according to Scripture the Christian should not expect God to bless him for it. However, it is worth noting that Christians can suffer religious persecution for their verbal confession of Christ and their association with other Christians, even if they do not live like they are Christians. Sometimes persecution is based on confession and association and not on godly lifestyle. Regardless as to why Christians are allowed to face persecution God has a purpose for it.

A third new assumption was that since God wants the best for His children, Christians assume that religious persecution is an indication of God’s disfavor.¹⁶⁹ This assumption places a profound concern on Christians preparing biblically for religious persecution. Since we are in a fallen world, it is unlikely that all Christians prepare for future challenges. Information that is void of the truth can mislead, deceive, and destroy a Christian’s faith in God. Adequate

¹⁶⁷ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 305.

¹⁶⁸ Cochran, *Crosshairs*. 2356.

¹⁶⁹ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 90.

preparation for religious persecution encourages faith in God during hard times. If a Christian lives in an area prone to hurricanes and tornadoes, is there always a plan in place in the event of such emergencies?¹⁷⁰ Some Christians assume they will escape even if they do nothing to make escape possible. The truth remains is that Christians are generally in a “constant state of preparing, planning, and protecting.”¹⁷¹ When Christians study God’s Word it becomes apparent that God wants the best for His children and that trials, tribulation, and ultimately persecution has an intentional purpose in the Christian’s spiritual growth.

A fourth new assumption was Christians always get what they deserve.¹⁷² However, the Bible indicates that humanity, including Christians, do not receive everything they deserve. Ps. 103:10 says, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” God loves everyone, including His enemies, and desires that Christians love their enemies also (John 3:16; Matt. 5:44). How does the desire to punish the persecutors fit with Jesus’ instructions to love one’s enemies and pray for the persecutors?¹⁷³ The Bible says, “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matt. 5:44).” When Christians apply faith to God’s Word to prepare for persecution, they will accept persecution as a reality and understand that it is unavoidable. Christians want to be exceptional partners with God, but it

¹⁷⁰ Gallups, *Be Thou Prepared*, 176.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 182.

¹⁷² Gregg, *What the Bible Says*, 35.

¹⁷³ Ripken, *The Insanity of Obedience*, 33.

is the Holy Spirit who empowers the spiritual growth necessary to love those who intentionally bring harm.¹⁷⁴

A fifth new assumption was that Christians must rely on their own strength during times of persecution. Christians are not capable of understanding the depths of God's love and the wonderful things that God has prepared for them (1 Cor. 2:9). God knows that Christians need Him at all times and they are not entirely responsible for their own victories, even though persecution, suffering, and sacrifice are necessary for spiritual growth. The methods that God uses to help those faced with persecution may be shrouded in mystery and never completely understood by those who are suffering. However, it is evident the persecution of Christians happens because of Christ, on account of His name, or on account of his righteousness (Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-25; 1 Pet. 4:14).¹⁷⁵ God invites Christians to cast their cares upon Him at all times (1 Pet. 5:7). Christians are never to assume that God expects them to rely on their own strength in a fallen world (Prov. 3:5).

The content analysis approach focused on five themes. The first theme dealt with the participant's definitions of religious persecution. This theme was chosen because the questionnaires represented two countries, but the thirty-one participants phrased their definitions on the same five types of persecution. The five types of persecution were a denial in the freedom of worship, mistreatment, discrimination, abuse, and opposition. The second theme centered on known and experienced types of religious persecution. Fifty-one percent of the participants knew about more than one type of religious persecution. However, twenty percent of the participants had never been persecuted. The third theme focused on how the participants

¹⁷⁴ Gregg, *What Does the Bible*, 126.

¹⁷⁵ Cochran, *Crosshairs*, 11.

prepared for religious persecution. This is an extremely important theme because it supports the thesis and the statement of the problem. The statement of the problem is that too many Christians are not prepared for religious persecution. The researcher expected participants to share how they prepared for religious persecution with the possibility of differences between the two countries. The fourth theme asked students to indicate whether or not they thought God had a purpose for allowing Christians to suffer religious persecution. Forty-five percent of the participants indicated they thought that God used religious persecution to test his children. Approximately twenty-five percent indicated that God used religious persecution to strengthen His children. The fifth theme focused on the participant's opinions of which religious group were the most persecuted in 2017. Participants centered their responses as Jews, Christians, and Muslims. None of the participants indicated they had denied Christ to avoid persecution however, the researcher is aware that the problem exists. The responses to the questionnaires were instrumental in the development of a proposed solution to the problem of Christians denying Christ to avoid religious persecution. The questionnaires also provided information to determine if Christians in the United States and Africa believed persecution was biblical and unavoidable; whether or not they prepared for it, and accepted that God has a purpose for it.

The Proposed Solution

The researcher is under the impression that it is difficult for Christians to acknowledge when they have denied Christ to avoid religious persecution. None of the participants indicated they had denied Christ through confession or disobedience. The possibility that a percentage of the participants denied Christ to avoid persecution could still be a possibility. However, remembering any occasion of denying Christ may be too painful for any of the participants to share the experience. The researcher is aware that the proposed solution cannot be applied and

evaluated, because of time restraints and other limitations. Therefore, the researcher recommends that another researcher take the proposed solution and apply it with a group being persecuted. It is further suggested that the mental and spiritual disposition of the members of the group are studied before and after to determine if the study made the difference it was intended to make.

The proposed solution has three components. The first component is that Christians need the proper mindset of believing the entire Word of God. The second component is that Christians need to understand the necessity for spiritual growth. Scripture encourages Christians to walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh (Gal. 5:16). The third component is that Christians need to focus on eternal rewards (Matt. 25:21).

First, Christians need to have the mindset that religious persecution is biblical. The scripture teaches “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Christians need to understand that God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18). It would be beneficial if Christians had the mindset that persecution is a challenging opportunity that gives Christians the privilege of identifying with the sufferings of Christ. The road that Jesus took ended with the cross. When Christians take the road of obedience that Christ took, it leads them to the same place, which is the cross. True followers of Jesus ultimately end at the cross, a place of suffering.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps, the victory may seem more promising, if Christians saw God on display, instead of themselves.

Second, Christians are biblically encouraged to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:6; 2 Pet. 3:18). When Christians grow in Christ, it brings glory to God. It has a positive impact on the Christian’s spiritual life. When Christians become like Christ in their

¹⁷⁶ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 510, Kindle.

character, they also “become like him in their values.”¹⁷⁷ Christians can implement several spiritual disciplines including studying, praying, fasting, and meditating on God’s Word to enhance their growth in Christ. Christians must understand the importance of spiritual growth, but must not overlook the fact that a preoccupation with Satan’s role in suffering will have negative consequences, because it can shift the Christian’s focus from God to Satan.¹⁷⁸

Third, it is a benefit for Christians to think in terms of eternal rewards. The proposed solution to the problem encourages Christians to think in terms of eternal rewards when they are confronted with religious persecution. The Bible teaches that Christians have a great reward for enduring persecution. Matthew 5:12 says, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” The suffering that God allows Christians to endure is temporary, but the rewards are eternal (Rom. 8:18). God may use the trial of persecution to build godly character, produce spiritual fruit in the life of the persecutor, or increase members in the body of Christ.¹⁷⁹ The three-fold proposed solution is intended to help Christians maintain their focus on God, before, during, and after times of intense suffering and religious persecution.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Brian Han Gregg, *What Does the Bible*, 893, Kindle.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 1277, Kindle.

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APPENDIX A

ANONYMOUS QUESTIONNAIRE The Religious Persecution of Christians

ISSUE DATE: May 18, 2018

RETURN BY: June 7, 2018 (21 days)

You may mail the completed questionnaire to: Rev. Novella Crudup
P.O. Box 471093
District Heights, MD 20753

Investigator: Novella Crudup, M.A., MDiv.
Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity

PART I – Please indicate the area of your response. **CHECK ONE:** Africa ____ U.S. ____

Are you a Christian? YES ____ NO ____

Your age ____ Male ____ Female ____

Your Highest Completed Level of Education: _____

PART II – Please **TYPE OR PRINT ANSWERS** to the following questions. **Use as many sheets of paper as necessary.**

1. What is your definition of religious persecution?
2. What are some of the specific acts of religious persecution that you know about?
3. What specific events happened the last time you were persecuted for your faith in Christ?
4. What do you think you did or said that caused you to be persecuted for your faith in Christ?
5. How do you prepare for religious persecution? What are some of the things that you do?
6. Which spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, fasting, studying etc., do you think can prepare Christians for religious persecution? Why?
7. Explain why all Christians should consider religious persecution as something that can happen to them? Why?
8. Explain your concept regarding any purpose that you think God might have for allowing religious persecution. Why?
9. If you wanted to avoid religious persecution, what kinds of things would you do? Why?
10. Which religious group do you think was the most persecuted in 2017? Why?

APPENDIX B

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 11, 2018

Novella Crudup
IRB Exemption 3210.051118: The Religious Persecution of Christians

Dear Novella Crudup,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
 - (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
 - (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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