PERSECUTION.

Scars
Archaeologists digging in the remains of a school for

imperial pages in Rome found a picture dating from the third

century. It shows a boy standing, his hand raised, worshiping a

figure on a cross, a figure that looks like a man with the head

of an ass. Scrawled in the writing of a young person are the

words, "Alexamenos worships his God." Nearby in a second

inscription: "Alexamenos is faithful." Apparently, a young man

who was a Christian was being mocked by his schoolmates for his

faithful witness. But he was not ashamed; he was faithful.

Good News is for Sharing,Lieghton Ford, 1977, David C. Cook

Publishing Co., Page 78

In C. Swindoll, Growing Strong, p. 78

NO SCAR?

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?

I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,

I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,

Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?

Yet I was wounded by the archers, spend,

Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent

By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned:

Hast thou no wound?

No wound, no scar?

Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,

And, pierced are the feet that follow Me;

But thine are whole: can he have followed far

Who has no wounds nor scar?

Amy Carmichael

When the emperor Valens threatened Eusebuis with confiscation of all his
goods, torture, banishment, or even death, the courageous Christian
replied, "He needs not fear confiscation, who has nothing to lose; nor
banishment, to whom heaven is his country; nor torments, when his body
can be destroyed at one blow; nor death, which is the only way to set
him at liberty from sin and sorrow."

During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a

mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of

that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word

was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross

underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven

students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she
arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the
firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining
ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. (Today in the Word, Feb 89, p. 17)

In ancient Rome, crowds by the tens of thousands would

gather in the Colosseum to watch as Christians were torn apart by wild
animals. Paul Rader, commenting on his visit to this famous landmark,
said, "I stood uncovered to the heavens above, where He sits for whom
they gladly died, and asked myself, 'Would I, could I, die for Him tonight to get this gospel to the ends of the earth?'" Rader continued,
"I prayed most fervently in that Roman arena for the spirit of a martyr,
and for the working of the Holy Spirit in my heart, as He worked in Paul's heart when He brought him on his handcuffed way to Rome." Those
early Christians "lived on the threshold of heaven, within a heartbeat
of home, no possessions to hold them back." Our Daily Bread, May 2

MARTYRDOM

From boyhood, one of my favorite stories has been the

forty martyrs of Sabaste. These forty soldiers, all Christians,

were members of the famed Twelfth Legion of Rome's imperial army.

One day their captain told them Emperor Licinius had sent out an edict that all soldiers were to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. These Christians replied, "You can have our armor and even our bodies, but our hearts' allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ." It was midwinter of A.D. 320, and the captain had them marched onto a nearby frozen lake. He stripped them of their clothes and said they would either die or renounce Christ. Throughout the night these men huddled together singing their song, "Forty martyrs for Christ." One by one the temperature took its toll and they fell to the ice.

At last there was only one man left. He lost courage and stumbled to the shore, where he renounced Christ. The officer of the guards had been watching all this. Unknown to the others, he had secretly come to believe in Christ. When he saw this last man break rank, he walked out onto the ice, threw off his clothes, and confessed that he also was a Christian.

When the sun rose the next morning, there were forty bodies of soldiers who had fought to the death for Christ.

Good News is for Sharing, Lieghton Ford, 1977, David C. Cook Publishing Co., Page 16

J.K. Laney, Marching Orders, P. 110, 117

George Atley was killed while serving with the Central African Mission. There were no witnesses, but the evidence indicates that Atley was confronted by a band of hostile tribesmen. He was carrying a fully loaded, 10-chamber Winchester rifle and had to choose either to shoot his attackers and run the risk of negating the work of the mission in that area, or not to defend himself and be killed. When his body was later found in a stream, it was evident that he had chosen the latter. Nearby lay his rifle -- all 10 chambers still loaded. He had made the supreme sacrifice, motivated by his burden for lost souls and his unswerving devotion to his Savior. With the apostle Paul, he wanted Christ to be magnified in his body, "whether by life or by death."

Writing on Philippians 1:20 in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Robert P. Lightner said, "Paul's concern was not what would happen to him but what testimony would be left for his Lord. Release would allow him to continue preaching Christ. But martyrdom would also advance the cause of Christ." Daily Bread, April 8

I am not come hither to deny my Lord and Master.

Anne Askew--July 16, 1545/burned at the stake after torture on the rack, at the age of 25

Margaret Wilson, a Scottish girl of eighteen, was tied to a stake where the tide was due to come in. The water covered her while she was engaged in prayer; but before life was gone, they pulled her up till she recovered the power of speech, when she was asked by Major Windram, who commanded, if she would pray for the king. She replied that "She wished the salvation of all men, and the damnation of none." "Dear Margaret," said one of the by-standers, deeply affected, "say God save the king." She answered with great steadiness, "God save him, if he will, for it is his salvation I desire." "Sir, they cried to the major, "she has said it; she has said it!" The major, approaching her on hearing this, offered her the abjuration oath, charging her instantly to swear it, otherwise to return to the water. The poor young woman...firmly replied, "I will not; I am one of Christ's children! let me go." Upon which she was again thrust into the water, and drowned. Margaret Wilson--Early 1680's/drowned for faithfulness to the Reformation.

Polycarp (A.D. 70-155) was bishop of Smyrna and a godly man. He had known the apostle John personally. When he was urged by the Roman proconsul to renounce Christ, Polycarp said: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" "I have respect for your age," said the official. "Simply say, 'Away with the

atheists!' and be set free." The aged Polycarp pointed to the pagan crowd and said, "Away with the atheists!" He was burned at the stake and gave joyful testimony of his faith in Jesus Christ. Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers, W. Wiersbe, p. 214

Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John and an early church leader whose life ended when he refused to betray his Lord. Asked one last time to disavow his Christ, the old man replied, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?" Here is his martyr's prayer, as recorded by the historian Eusebius. "Father of Your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have recieved the knowledge of You, I bless You that You have counted me worthy of this day and hour, that I might be in the number of the martyrs. Among these may I be received before You today in a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as You have beforehand prepared and revealed. Wherefore I also praise You also for everything; I bless You; I glorify You, through the eternal High Priest Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, through whom, with Him, in the Holy Spirit, be glory unto You both now and for the ages to come. Amen." Eusebius adds: "When he had offered up his amen and had finished his prayer, the firemen lighted the fire." Quoted in Closer Walk, July, 1988, p. 22.

The Bohemian reformer John Hus was a man who believed the Scriptures to be the infallible and supreme authority in all matters. He died at the stake for that belief in Constance, Germany, on his forty-second birthday. As he refused a final plea to renounce his faith, Hus's last words were, "What I taught with my lips, I seal with my blood."

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs
is the kingdom of heaven. --Matthew 5:10

Persecution, even martyrdom, has been the cost of discipleship for Christians down through the centuries. In many lands believers still suffer imprisonment and death for their uncompromising devotion to their
Savior. Even in nations that have religious freedom, a person with a bold witness for the Lord may become the target of ridicule.

When we experience hardship because of our Christian commitment, no
verse of Scripture is more comforting than the beatitude spoken by our
Savior, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:10).

At one time in his life, British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon was so
intensely criticized that he became deeply depressed. So his wife printed that beatitude along with the other seven on a large sheet of paper and placed it above their bed. The first thing Spurgeon saw in the
morning and the last thing he read at night was our Savior's glorious
promise.

Are you discouraged because you are suffering for your Christian testimony? The antidote is this one sustaining promise: "Blessed are
those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." --VCG

The consecrated cross I'll bear
Till death shall set me free,
And then go home, my crown to wear,
For there's a crown for me. --Shepherd

If you live for God,
you can expect trouble from the world.

Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. --John 15:19

When high school senior Angela Guidry submitted a copy of her valedictory speech to school administrators, the principal demanded that
she leave out one part. It was the sentence that read, "To me the most
important thing in your life is not whether you have a good education or
a good job, but whether or not you have the Lord in your life."

The situation worsened when the school counselor saw the speech. According to a news report, she "engaged in a tirade of criticism" of Angela in the presence of other students and actually grabbed her arm to
keep her from walking away. All the while she continued making derogatory and slanderous remarks about Angela's religious beliefs.

Sometimes believers invite hatred and rejection by presenting the truth
in an insensitive manner. That was not the case with the Lord Jesus nor
with Angela, and it should never be with us. But sometimes we will

encounter hostility no matter how tactful we are. When this occurs, we
should respond with gentle words and kind deeds, never with vindictive
speech or retaliation (Mt. 5:43-44; Rom. 12:17-21). The gracious
response of love is always the best antidote for the world's hatred.
--HVL

I want the love that always sweetly bears
Whate'er my Father's hand may choose to send;
I want the love that patiently endures
The wrongs that come from enemy or friend. --Anon.

If you're sure of God's approval,
you need not fear the world's disapproval.

When You Are Hated

Read: Psalm 118:1-21

The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me. --
Psalm
118:6

As I was reading about Romanian believers who stood for Christ in the
face of imprisonment, torture, and death, I thought of our Lord's
exhortation, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the
soul" (Matt. 10:28). All through church history, imprisoned and
suffering Christians have found comfort in the assurance that God would
deliver them--either back to their loved ones on earth or through death
to the company of the saints already in heaven.

Although severe opposition to Christianity still exists in parts of the
world, most of us don't face life-threatening persecution. But all
Christians experience faith-testing trials.

Dennis Byrd, a former professional football player who is making an
amazing recovery from a paralyzing injury, spoke of his faith in
Christ
on a secular talk show. But a caller vehemently denounced him for an
earlier appearance on a Christian television program. The caller's
hatred of Jesus Christ came through loud and clear.

Like believers down through the centuries, we can expect that we will be
hated and attacked (John 15:18-19). But we need not be afraid. God is in
control. He will defeat the forces of evil and honor His people. We too
can say, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear" (Ps. 118:6). --HVL

So send I you to hearts made hard by hatred,
To eyes made blind because they will not see,
To spend, though it be blood, to spend and spare not--
So send I you to taste of Calvary. --Clarkson

To be right with God may cause us to be in trouble with man.

Where did Cain get his wife?
The Bible teaches clearly that all human beings are descendants of
Adam
and Eve, thus there had to be inter-marriage between brother and
sister.
There would have been no risk of this causing harmful deformities in
the
offspring, because mutations (accidental changes in the hereditary
information) need time to occur and accumulate in a population. Thus the
first few generations would have inherited perfect or near-perfect
genes, largely undamaged by mutations.
In the pre-Flood world, harmful radiation from the sun and other
cosmic
sources was considerably more filtered than it is in the post-Flood
world. Increased radiation and depletion of oxygen in the atmosphere
(subsequent to the lowering of the atmospheric pressure) may have
contributed greatly to man's rapid degeneration. With the passing of
many centuries, many of these harmful, degenerative changes became added
to the human race, so by the time of Moses it was absolutely necessary
to have laws against incest, as were given to mankind (Leviticus
18-20).Today there would be even more chance of deformity/disease in the
offspring of such a union than in Moses's time.

Additionally, because of the long life-spans (Adam lived to be 930
years
old), Adam and Eve's descendants may have been numerous and widely
dispersed before Cain even took a wife. Although all of the inhabitants
of the land of Nod would have been descendants of Adam and Eve, who had
many sons and daughters, Cain may not have married one of his sisters,
but rather a descendant of one of his siblings.

Excerpt from The Answers Book, Revised Edition, by Ken Ham, Andrew
Snelling and Carl Wieland, published by Master Books, 1992.