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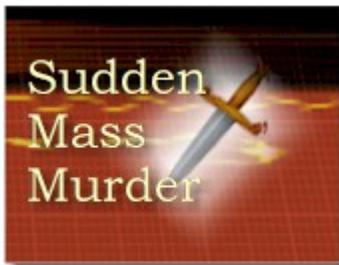
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## Sudden Mass Murder

by David Sielaff, February 2016

Read the accompanying [Newsletter for February 2016](#)



“Sudden mass murder” does not refer to genocidal actions over years, acts of war, nor does it refer to one or a few murderers killing many people. Note the terms “sudden” and “mass.” I would consider the 9/11/2001 attacks in the United States to be an instance of “sudden mass murder.” I refer to a sudden, rapid, unexpected attack and murder of a large number of people to foment a political or revolutionary result. It has happened in history, it is discussed in Scripture, and it may happen in the near future. While such an occurrence is certainly designed to create terror, it is much more than that.

Today it is not unusual to hear of calls for sudden mass murder from Al Qaida or the Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL) to kill all westerners and infidels who do not submit to Islam. That will not happen, of course, but that is what they seek to do — “purify” all people to adhere to their brand of Islam. Comply or die. In a 9/24/2014 *World Net Daily*, article Bob Unruh wrote “[ISIS Plan to Destroy 10 million Uncovered](#),”

**“In a video that was posted on YouTube and later removed, the ISIS leader is seen declaring: ‘If you can kill a disbelieving American or European — especially the spiteful and filthy French — or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever ... including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be.’”**

More than a year later, a headline came out in a January 1, 2016 *Express* (UK) newspaper article: “[ISIS plotting ‘to slaughter THOUSANDS’ in 2016 in bid to spark huge FINAL BATTLE with West.](#)”

**“ISIS is planning to massacre thousands of civilians in public places around the world in 2016 as it desperately seeks to draw the west into a titanic ‘final battle.’ The sick terror group will activate hundreds of sleeper cells in ‘dozens of countries’ in an unprecedented bid to destabilise western governments and spark a huge military retaliation in the Middle East. The shock claim, from one of the world’s leading authorities on the death cult, comes amid fears of a New Year’s Eve terror plot in London and other major world cities.”**

Why should we believe these warnings of “sudden mass murder”? Another reason is because such events have happened before in history. What ISIS really wants is time-coordinated random attacks upon

people everywhere. Occasional attacks will not “**destabilize western governments and spark a huge military retaliation.**” They want the attacks to be initiated on the same day and perhaps even at the same time around the world.<sup>1</sup> Occurrences of coordinated sudden mass murder have occurred time and again in history. Thankfully, such instances of such horror are rather rare. Let us look at one of the most devastating.

### ***Sudden Mass Murder and Mithridates VI, King of Pontus, ca. 132–63 BC***

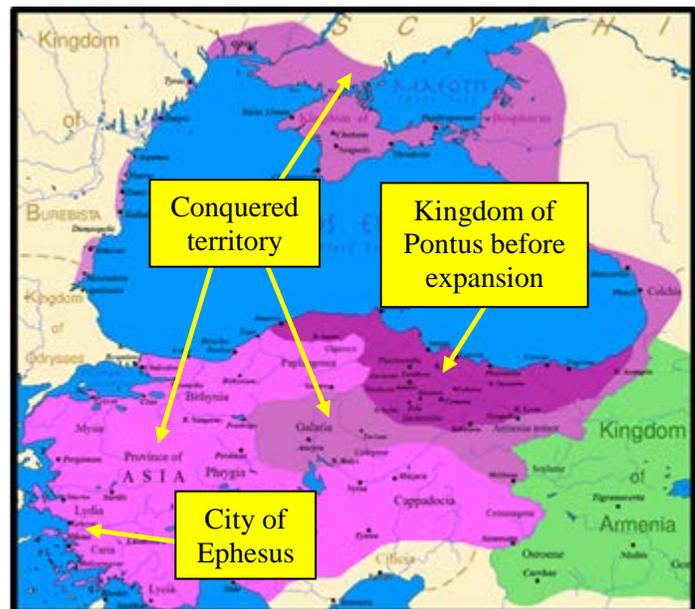
One sudden mass murder stands out in history and it is likely a model for those who would like to do similarly today. Mithridates VI was a brilliant and charismatic leader, known as “the Poison King.”<sup>2</sup> He acquired this title because he took a daily dose of various poisons to defend himself from assassination, almost like an early form of inoculation.

His mother, the queen of Pontus, poisoned her husband, King Mithridates V, when “the poison king” was a teenage boy.<sup>3</sup> Mithridates VI had strong suspicion she would try to kill him, so he fled with a band of men. After a Robin Hood-like existence for a number of years, Mithridates returned to Pontus, seized the throne and put his mother to death. (Yes, what family doesn’t have its little problems?)

After Rome had defeated the Macedonian and Seleucid kingdoms, it ruled all of Greece and most of Asia (western Turkey today). A few kingdoms remained independent. Mithridates VI ruled one of those small but prosperous independent kingdoms in what is today northern Turkey on the southern coast of the Black Sea. He hated Rome and all Romans with a passion rivaling that of Hannibal of Carthage (some 100 years before). Mithridates likewise wanted to destroy the increasingly expansive and repressive control by the Roman Republic, particularly over his beloved Greek-speaking world.

Acting with seemingly superhuman energy, through a series of political actions Mithridates maneuvered to expand his kingdom of Pontus. After a long preparation he arranged for Rome to declare war on Pontus, now an aggrieved party. He defeated a much larger army of Bythnia (to the west of Pontus) and one Roman army, decisively defeating both of them.<sup>4</sup> A third Roman army quickly dissolved and deserted. In this period, Mithridates showed great mercy to defeated enemies and many of the Roman and auxiliary troops joined his army. However, he inflicted harsh judgment on Roman commanders.

The war created thousands of Roman refugees from the battles and many sought refuge at the Temple of Artemis in the city of Ephesus. Mithridates wrote a public decree to warn against, “**the Romans, the common**



<sup>1</sup> Paris, November 13, 2015: 132 people were killed by coordinated terror attacks involving suicide bombings and various shootings. What if this was multiplied dozens or hundreds of times that day throughout France? Think of the terror.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes spelled Mithradates, I use the more common spelling Mithridates, translated into the English edition by the Roman author Appian. Mithridates was poisoned several times but survived to age 70.

<sup>3</sup> On his father’s side Mithridates claimed lineage back to Cyrus and Darius, founders of the Persian Empire. On his mother’s side he claimed a blood relation with Alexander the Great and Seleucus Nicator, the founders of the Macedonian Empire. See Adrienne Mayor, *The Poison King: the Life and Legend of Mithradates, Rome’s Deadliest Enemy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 162. Most historians believe Mithridates indeed had that lineage. I recommend Mayor’s interesting book.

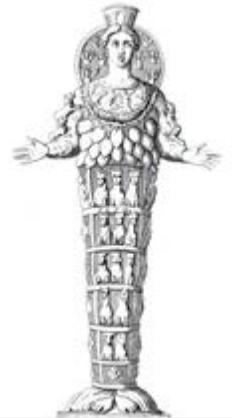
<sup>4</sup> Read “[Appian, The Mithridatic Wars.](#)” Events discussed here are at §17 and particularly §23.

**enemy of mankind.”** Collaborators with Rome were a threat to the plans of Mithridates.<sup>5</sup> They and thousands of Roman residents were still in cities all over western Turkey. As a result of his stunning victories, **“in less than a year he had gone from a minor king of a rich little realm on the Black Sea to one of the most powerful rulers in the ancient world.”** The subject cities of Greece contacted Mithridates to seek how he could help them cast off their Roman yokes. The city of Athens in Greece was particularly interested, and envoys were sent with the message that Mithridates planned to liberate Greece. Athens voted to throw off the Roman yoke, reinstated democratic rule, and killed large numbers of Romans who remained in the city.<sup>6</sup>

Mithridates gave a speech at the city of Pergamos (alternately pronounced and spelled Pergamon and Pergamum) which had a theater that held 10,000 people.<sup>7</sup> Here is a select portion. After describing the enemies of Rome in the past who failed, Mithridates says,

**“The Romans have enemies everywhere. In Anatolia (Turkey), the Romans have hammered deep hatred into our peoples, by their corrupt government, rapacious tax-collecting, and public auctions of our property.”**

Escaping for a while, the chief Roman commander, Aquilius, was captured and brought to Mithridates. He committed great evils on Greeks and other peoples in Anatolia, killing innocent people and appropriating property, lands, and great quantities of gold to himself. After Aquilius was captured he served as Mithridates’ slave for a period of time, then the Roman general received his sentence of death fitting his greed. He was given all the molten gold he could drink. News of Aquilius’ defeats, capture, and humiliating death reached Rome. The Roman Senate desired revenge, but at that moment they were busy with other matters.



goddess Artemis/Diana

### ***The Beginning of Terror***

Mithridates knew Rome would return to wreak vengeance with more armies. He made preparations. Hailed as a hero and a liberator of Anatolia, cities and regions gave him their loyalty and submitted to his rule. Within weeks Mithridates consolidated his rule over most all of what is now modern Turkey. He gathered the treasuries of the lands he had acquired. Having earlier created a mercantile empire on the lands of the shore of the Black Sea (see map above), treasure from his conquests were “acquired” on behalf of his government. Mayor explains what else was happening:

**“... great numbers of Romans and Italians were already camping out in temple sanctuaries for safety. Soldiers from the defeated Roman legions also joined this stream of refugees. This means that the Latin-speaking populations of these cities soared ... By converging in a few major cities, the desperate fugitives became even more vulnerable.”**

• ***Mayor, Poison King, 171***

Next, Mithridates had to break the influence of Rome’s ever tightening grip on the economy and wealth of the new lands he now ruled. He conceived a plan as ruthless as the Romans were. Mithridates executed his plan in a short time period without modern communications. Here is the murderous plan to deeply injure the realms of Roman control in Anatolia and Greece, and hopefully destroy the Roman Republic:

**“Mithridates ... wrote secretly to all his satraps and city governors that on the thirtieth day thereafter they should set upon all Romans and Italians in the towns, and upon their wives**

<sup>5</sup> Mayor, *Poison King*, 154–155.

<sup>6</sup> Mayor, *Poison King*, 158–159. When Roman legions returned to Athens under the command of Sulla, one of Rome’s best generals at the time, the city was almost destroyed. This was done with the knowledge that all Rome loved Athens as the center of culture! Educated Romans considered themselves to be the heirs to Greek culture.

<sup>7</sup> Mayor, *Poison King*, 160. This is the same Pergamum the apostle John wrote to in Revelation 2:12–17.

**and children and their freedmen of Italian birth, kill them and throw their bodies out unburied, and share their goods with King Mithridates.**

**He threatened to punish any who should bury the dead or conceal the living, and proclaimed rewards to informers and to those who should kill persons in hiding. To slaves, who killed or betrayed their masters he offered freedom, to debtors, who did the same to their creditors, the remission of half of their debt. These secret orders Mithridates sent to all the cities at the same time. When the appointed day came, disasters of the most varied kinds occurred throughout Asia.”**

• **Appian, “Mithridatic Wars,” Book 2, chapter 4**<sup>8</sup>

The Roman historian Appian goes on to describe the brutality of the murders in 88 BC. (Do not read footnote 9 if you want to avoid graphic descriptions of what the people of Asia did to the Romans.)<sup>9</sup>

One important location where the murderous acts of 88 BC took place was in the city of Ephesus. Many Romans sought refuge in the temple of Artemis (or Diana). They clung to the idols of the goddess hoping that the “holiness” of the temple would give them sanctuary. It did them no good this time. Rich and poor killers alike followed the Romans in and slaughtered them at the idols. All tolled Mithridates’ orders to murder Romans led to over 80,000 dead (the figure cited by most historians) in just a few days. These were 80,000 individual face-to-face murders, executed by sword, knife, or club. Some say as many as 150,000 were killed. Mithridates’ victories and sudden mass murder had this result:

**“Mithradates’ rule extended from the Black Sea and most of western Asia to Greece, and his navy ruled the Aegean Sea. The extermination of Romans in Asia had gone like clockwork. Mithridates’ vast stores of money were multiplying, he enjoyed his new love and basked in popular adulation, and his armies and navies were undefeated. His generals were advancing on Greece by land and sea, to complete the capstone in Mithridates’ new version of Alexander’s great Greco-Persian Empire.”**

• **Mayor, Poison King, 187**

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted from *Appian’s Roman History*, Loeb Edition, translated by Horace White, Vol. 2, Book 12, Chapter 4 (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1912), 279. An internet translation of this citation can be found at [“Appian, Roman History 12. The Mithridatic Wars.”](#)

<sup>9</sup> Again, these quotes are from White’s translation of *Appian’s Roman History*, pp. 279, 281, repeating the last sentence from the Appian quote in the main text above.

**“When the appointed day came, disasters of the most varied kinds occurred throughout Asia, among which were the following:**

- **The Ephesians tore fugitives, who had taken refuge in the temple of Artemis, from the very images of the goddess and slew them.**
- **The Pergameans shot with arrows those who had fled to the temple of Æsculapius, while they were still clinging to his statues.**
- **The Adramytteans followed those who sought to escape by swimming, into the sea, and killed them and drowned their children.**
- **The Caunii, who had been made subject to Rhodes after the war against Antiochus and had been lately liberated by the Romans, pursued the Italians who had taken refuge about the Vesta statue of the senate-house, tore them from the shrine, killed children before their mothers’ eyes, and then killed the mothers themselves and their husbands after them.**
- **The citizens of Tralles, in order to avoid the appearance of blood-guiltiness, hired a savage monster named Theophilus, of Paphlagonia, to do the work. He conducted the victims to the temple of Concord, and there murdered them, chopping off the hands of some who were embracing the sacred images.**

**Such was the awful fate that befell the Romans and Italians throughout the province of Asia, men, women, and children, their freedmen and slaves, all who were of Italian blood; by which it was made very plain that it was quite as much hatred of the Romans as fear of Mithridates that impelled the Asiatics to commit these atrocities. But they paid a double penalty for their crime — one at the hands of Mithridates himself, who ill-treated them perfidiously not long afterward, and the other at the hands of Cornelius Sulla [a Roman general who defeated Mithridates].”**

These acts as listed are merely representative. Similar killings occurred in other cities and villages throughout Mithridates’ realm.

## *The Apostle Paul at the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus*

Artemis was the Greek name for the goddess known to the Romans as Diana. Her temple in Ephesus was more famous than the Parthenon in Athens.<sup>10</sup> Technically a shrine, it had several idols inside it and not one large one. Artemis was “Nature” personified, therefore the idol could be represented by almost anything. Although common idol artifacts found in Ephesus by archaeologists are crude representations of the shrine, the Book of Acts tells us that there were idols made due to the demand by pagan Temple worshippers. *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* gives us this information:

**“Her most noted temple was that at Ephesus. It was built outside the city walls, and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. First and last it was the work of 220 years; built of shining marble; 342 feet long by 164 feet broad; supported by a forest of columns, each 56 feet high; a sacred museum of masterpieces of sculpture and painting. At the centre, hidden by curtains, within a gorgeous shrine, stood the very ancient image of the goddess, on wood or ebony reputed to have fallen from the sky. Behind the shrine was a treasury, where, as in ‘the safest bank in Asia,’ nations and kings stored their most precious things.<sup>11</sup> The temple as St. Paul saw it subsisted till A.D. 262, when it was ruined by the Goths.”**

The temple of Artemis in the time of Mithridates was the same structure in Acts 19:21–20:1 where a riot occurred when a mob seized two companions of the apostle Paul, Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia (Acts 19:29).<sup>12</sup> This took place in 55 AD, some 142 years after Mithridates ordered his mass murders, some occurring at the temple of Artemis.<sup>13</sup> Miracles performed by Paul (Acts chapter 19) caused people to doubt the power and validity of the goddess whose temple was an economic windfall to the city.

Paul stayed teaching for two years in Ephesus, the center of the Diana/Artemis worship. The miracles by Paul threatened the livelihood of the idol makers in the city. They made various sized idols of the goddess Artemis and small models of the shrine out of wood, silver, gold, and precious stones. One silversmith decided to end Paul’s actions (not knowing they were God’s acts) that threatened the livelihood of his guild of artisans. Paul’s two companions were seized, taken to the temple, and accused of a serious crime.

**“For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said,**

**‘Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover you see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worships.’**

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia, “[The Temple of Artemis](#).”

<sup>11</sup> The Temple in Jerusalem was also a type of “safe depository” of wealth for Jews from all over the Roman Empire and from the east in Parthia, particularly the region around Babylon. Dr. Martin explains in his article “[New Evidence for the Site of the Temple in Jerusalem](#)”:

**“Josephus explained the reason why every stone was overturned in the city (including those that made up the very foundations). The Jews were accustomed to hide their gold and other valuables in the walls of their homes. The Temple itself was also the treasury of the Jewish nation (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6:281–287). When the fires consumed the whole of the Temple and City, the gold melted and descended into the cracks and crevices of the stone foundations. In order to recover this melted gold, the Tenth Legion had the Jewish captives uproot every stone of the Temple and the whole of the City. So much gold was discovered in this fashion that the price of the metal in the Roman Empire went down half of its pre-war value (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6:316–322).”**

<sup>12</sup> In this article the biblical citations I give are from the Concordant Literal Version. When you come to a word, a phrase, or a sentence that gives you pause, compare the CLV text with the King James Version. You will learn more than you otherwise would if I simply gave you the KJV.

<sup>13</sup> See Dr. Martin’s article, “[The Chronology of New Testament Times](#).”

**And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians.’”**

• **Acts 19:24–28**

The crowd dragged Paul’s companions to a large outdoor theater where the frenzied crowd threatened murder. Paul tried to intercede but was prevented from doing so by friends (Acts 19:29–30). Eventually the tumult was brought under control, and this time murder at the Temple of Artemis was averted.

### ***Back to Mithridates***

I want to return to the order by Mithridates to commit sudden mass murder. I ask you, where did Mithridates get the idea to commit this horrific act? Did he have an example in history? He very likely may have had a model to follow, although there is no reference to it in any writings about Mithridates.

Mithridates VI and his hatred for Rome came to an end in 63 BC when, after being betrayed by nearly everyone he ever knew,<sup>14</sup> he was tracked down in a small city north of the Caucasus Mountains. After decades, Mithridates’ threat to Rome as an independent king and enemy finally ended. Three times he rose to great power and wealth, gathering mass armies to fight Roman legions. He was defeated in three great wars in spite of thousands of Roman deserters fighting and training his armies in the Roman art of war.

Rome’s best generals: Sulla, Lucullus, and Pompey, each defeated Mithridates in what became known as the Mithridatic Wars. With all their victories they were unable to capture the poison king. At the end Mithridates’ own troops rebelled and proclaimed his son to be their king. Mithridates, still vigorous at 70 years old, was trapped in a castle. He ordered a companion to slay him, much like King Saul (1 Samuel 31:1–6). Mithridates tried to poison himself, but the poison did not work. The Roman general Pompey the Great conquered Jerusalem in 63 AD after the death of Mithridates.

### ***Sudden Mass Murder in the Book of Esther***

An earlier plot to kill Jews occurred in the Kingdom of Persia during the reign of Xerxes. It failed. The story of this plot and how it was averted is the subject of the Book of Esther in the Bible. A man named Haman, descended from Agag which was an ancient term for the leader of the Amalekites, was offended by Mordechai, a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. Informed Bible readers would be expected to know the conflict between the Amalekites and Benjaminites.<sup>15</sup>

Haman was a chief advisor of the Persian king. Haman accused the Jews of being a particularly evil and rebellious people, whose continued existence would be contrary to the good of the subjects of the Persian king.<sup>16</sup> In other words, it would be better if all Jews were dead, wiped off the face of the earth. Haman had a plan and obtained permission from the king to carry out that plan. Haman composed a letter.

Haman did not know that circumstances were conspiring against him and his scheme. Esther, the newly crowned queen of Persia, was a Jew (the niece of Mordecai who raised her as his own child). He told Esther about the plot and asked her to intervene on behalf of her people. Meanwhile, Haman’s letter was sent.

### ***Haman’s Letter to All Provinces in the Persian Empire***

The details of Haman’s plot are chilling but comprehensive, thorough, and precise:

**“<sup>12</sup> Then the king's scribes were called in the first month, on the thirteenth day of it. According**

<sup>14</sup> By 63 BC, most all his strongest supporters were long dead in the many wars, and his soldiers were tired of losing battles against Rome. The rest walked away and stopped supporting him.

<sup>15</sup> Read the full story of Amalek, the Amalekites, and their ruler termed Agag in Genesis 14:7, 36:12, 16; Exodus 17:8–11, 13–16; Numbers 13:29, 14:25, 43, 45, 24:7, 24:20; Deuteronomy 25:17–19; Judges 3:13, 5:14, 6:3, 33, 7:12, 10:12, 12:15; 1 Samuel 14:48, 15:2–3, 5–9, 15, 18, 20, 32–33, 27:8, 28:18, 30:1, 13, 18; 2 Samuel 1:1, 8, 13, 8:12; 1 Chronicles 1:36, 4:43, 18:11; Psalm 83:7. Haman is identified as an Agagite (descended from Agag) in Esther 3:1, 10, 8:3, 5, and 9:24.

<sup>16</sup> To the contrary, this fits God’s description of the Amalekites (Deuteronomy 25:17–19; and Exodus 17:16).

to all the instructions that Haman had given, it was written

- to the king's satraps,
- to the viceroys who were over the different provinces, and
- to the chief officials of the different peoples,
- to each province in its own provincial writing, and
- to each people in its own popular tongue.

It was written in the name of king Ahasuerus [Xerxes] and was sealed with the king's ring.

<sup>13</sup> Letters were sent by means of couriers to all the king's provinces,

- to exterminate, to kill and to destroy all the Jews
- from youth unto old age, both little ones and women,
- [when?] on a single day, the thirteenth of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar), and
- to plunder the loot of them.

<sup>14</sup> A transcript of the written text was to be promulgated as an edict [i.e., made public] in all the different provinces and was to be revealed to all the peoples, namely, to become equipped for this day. <sup>15</sup> The couriers rode forth posthaste by order of the king, and the edict was promulgated in the castle of Susa. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink, but Susa city was doleful.”

• *Esther 3:12–15, CLV*

Haman sought to cause a genocide of the entire Jewish race.<sup>17</sup> The edict of Haman, using the King of Persia as a pawn, did not merely threaten the Jews, but all those who were of Israel. At the time of Esther “Jews” was used inclusively for all Israelites. We know this for the following reasons. When the Jews returned from captivity to Jerusalem, only a minority of Jews returned to live in Jerusalem and the land of Israel. They returned in stages, just as they went into captivity in stages, first the people of the Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) and later those from Judah went into captivity. Even during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, in the time of Christ and the apostles, most Israelites continued to live in the area of Babylon, larger Mesopotamia, and what used to be ancient Assyria. Other large groups lived in Turkey, Egypt, and Greece.

**“In fact, a number of northern Israelites fled to the Kingdom of Judah when they saw the Assyrians beginning to invade their country (2 Chronicles 34:9; 35:17–18) and they joined with the Jews of Judah — even returning with them to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity (1 Chronicles 9:2–3; Luke 2:36). All these remnants of the Ten Tribes who joined with Judah in Jerusalem (including Benjamin and Levi) were known as ‘Jews’ from this time onward (e.g. Acts 21:39).”**

• *Ernest Martin, “[Who Are the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel Today?](#)”*

In the capital city of Susa, Haman gave scribes the message on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the year. Because of slow travel to the ends of the immense Persian Empire, the event was to take place on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the twelfth month, far ahead of execution of the king’s command. Every part of the Persian Empire was given adequate time to prepare for, and announce this sudden mass murder.

We do not know how many scribes worked on this letter-writing project. Nor do we know the year this order was given. The letter was an official imperial document, written in the name of the King, and sealed with his personal ring of authority and office that he gave to Haman for the purpose of this murderous act. Literally, the ring was used by Haman to seemingly “seal the fate” of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire. Any official who disobeyed would endure the wrath of the King and be subject to execution.

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<sup>17</sup> This may seem similar to what God commanded Israel to do to all Amalekites, but God’s command was only to those Amalekites who refused to leave the land promised to Israel. See note 15 above.

One point should be made. While Haman appointed a specific day for the empire-wide act to be fulfilled, why did he put the execution date so far ahead of the time of reception? Such news certainly would leak and be communicated throughout the Jewish communities of the Persian Empire. Two reasons come to mind, but they are speculation.

- (1) Perhaps Haman wanted the Jews to stage an ineffective preemptive uprising against Persian authorities and installations, which would have proven Haman's case that the Jews were an evil race, further justifying the order of the king.
- (2) Haman may have wished to terrorize the Jews to increase their mental and emotional suffering as they waited months for their deaths.

Remember also that according to traditional biblical chronologies of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, the time frame of Haman's letter was after the Temple had recently been completed (Ezra 6:15–17), but before the walls of Jerusalem were restored (Nehemiah chapters 2–6) and finished in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). At the time of Haman's attempted genocide, the city of Jerusalem was defenseless, an unwallled city.

### ***The Similarities Are Widely Recognized***

So, there are obvious and close parallels between the sudden mass murder in the time of Mithridates VI and the earlier attempted mass murder in the time of Esther. The two events are separated by some 300+ years, yet their similarity has been noted by several authors and commentators in the past. For example,

**“But the main fact that Ahasuerus at Haman's request resolved to issue an edict which ordered the destruction of all the Jews in the entire Persian empire, is not without analogy. Mithridates, king of Pontus, in his war against Rome, issued secret orders to all the satraps and chief local authorities of his kingdom, to murder on a certain day all Romans without distinction of sex or age, whereby eighty thousand, or as some estimate, one hundred and fifty thousand persons lost their lives.”**

• ***Lange, Schaff, et al., A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Esther, 18 8–9***

**“The attempt of Haman against the Jews had a deep religious-political basis; also in Palestine, as the book of Ezra narrates that the Persian statesmen wrote to the king against the Jews. These statesmen raised considerations with regard to the Jews similar to those which occupied the mind of the Pharaoh who knew not Joseph in Egypt, and to those raised by Mithridates against the Romans, and at [a later] time by Turkish Sultans against the Christians. All those that did not belong to the religion of Iran were looked upon as political and ecclesiastical enemies, and therefore to be exterminated. Such ideas are not very rare even in modern States. In this sense is also the speech of Haman before the king to be understood.”**

• ***Paulus Cassell, An Explanatory Commentary on Esther, 12 19***

Mithridates VI was the king both authors referred to. One difference between Haman (thwarted by God through the actions of Queen Esther) and the sudden mass murder of Romans was that Greek/Persian-descended King Mithridates did not wait so long before the event was to occur. Of course, the Romans did not have God working on their behalf to prevent the massacre.

I believe Mithridates VI did use the example found in the biblical Book of Esther as a model for his sudden mass murder. The Greek version of Esther was part of the Septuagint, the LXX, translated from Hebrew and published sometime between 280 and 180 BC (more precision is not possible). It was available and circulated for a long time by the time Mithradates VI gained his empire of Anatolia in 89 BC.

<sup>18</sup> John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Esther* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 8–9.

<sup>19</sup> Paulus Cassell, *An Explanatory Commentary on Esther: With Four Appendices*, trans. Aaron Bernstein (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888).

Said to be an amazing linguist, Mithridates stayed at Pergamum (Pergamos) for some time after his initial Roman defeats in 88 BC, just before he left and the sudden mass murder of Romans occurred. He may have formulated his plans in Pergamum, which was said to have had a huge ancient library of 200,000 volumes.<sup>20</sup> Important scrolls like the Septuagint would have been in that library, with Esther among them.

While my belief cannot be proven to be fact, the similarities are obvious. Both the Esther mass murder attempt and the Mithradates mass murder fulfillment had these points in common.

- The description by Appian fits closely what Haman sought to do to the Jews.
- Attacks were to begin on one specific day and continue until the deed was done.
- Elimination of the target people was desired, as far as that could be accomplished.
- No asylum was to be recognized for the victims.
- No prisoners, no surrender was to be respected.
- No mercy, no quarter was to be given to victims. All men, women, and children were to be killed.
- No slaves were to be taken. Death alone was to occur.
- All Roman servants were to be killed, along with business associates of Romans or Italians.
- Latin-speaking non-Roman servants were to be killed.
- The property of the victims was to be given to the murderers, although a “blood tax” was imposed on the property looted from Roman victims. This made Mithridates and his kingdom fabulously wealthy.<sup>21</sup>
- In the crisis of Esther’s day, obedience was expected, as was punishment for disobedience.<sup>22</sup> Mithridates, a king who recently came into a greatly expanded area to rule, needed to publicly declare his policy that disobedience to carry out his orders would be punished by attack and destruction of their town, city, or province. In fact, such retribution did occur.<sup>23</sup>

### *Some Differences in the Mass Murders*

There were differences between the two events. Haman apparently did not care if the Jews knew about the threat to them. Perhaps he thought there was no way they could escape death. Haman wanted the coming day of the Jews’ destruction to be published widely so everyone would know, and the greatest number would participate in the genocide. Perhaps Haman thought the fear of impending death would cause the Jews to be terrorized into inaction by fear.

Mithridates operated differently. Haman unwittingly left a long time for action to be taken. This allowed time for the second letter to arrive at the provinces, giving the Jews and the governors of Persia time to prepare to fight back and keep the property of their attackers. Mithridates kept his intended act and the date secret from his victims. He knew the Romans were ingenious, warlike, and would quickly band together to defend themselves and each other until word could be sent to other Romans for rescue or reinforcement. He did not give them the luxury of time.

Haman, with the authority of the Persian king, assumed obedience from the recipients of his letter. After all, the king commanded the deed be done. Mithridates, on the other hand, did not rule the peoples his letter

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<sup>20</sup> Mayor, *Poison King*, For the Pergamon library, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Mayor, *Poison King*, 154–155.

<sup>22</sup> Esther 8:13, Greek Septuagint. The Greek text is expanded from the Hebrew text, and is for historical interest only.

<sup>23</sup> Mayor, *Poison King*, 174.

was sent to. He appealed to their desire for “liberty” and for them to be free of the yoke of the Roman administration. The Roman Republic was every bit as harsh as the later Roman Empire, and its rule imposed and maintained by the bloody sword. The many peoples, cities, and kingdoms to whom Mithridates sent his letter, wanted to kill Romans for past wrongs, including Romans they knew well or were friends with.

In Esther’s time, forestalling the massacre resulted in an increase of the Jewish population: **“And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them”** (Esther 8:17).

## *Conclusions*

History does not tell us, so we cannot know for certain if Mithridates used “The Esther Incident” as an example for his sudden mass murder.

We can know, because we have the example of Mithridates’ sudden mass murder to inform us, what would have happened to Jews and Israelites all around the Persian Empire if God (through Esther and Mordechai) had not intervened in the proposed course of events. The terror and the horror of that event would have been magnitudes larger than the 80 to 100,000 Romans who were killed. Jews were allowed to travel freely all over the Persian Empire, which was why the letters were sent to all provinces and Satraps. Haman wanted a total genocide against all Jews and Israel, and Esther herself was the daughter of Abihail, a Benjamite from the tribe of Benjamin (Esther 2:5–7, 15). Jews and Israelites all over the Persian Empire were to be exterminated.

This was to include, of course, the Jews and Israelites who returned from Babylon to the land of Israel. They also would have been murdered. According to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the killings in the land of Israel would likely have been happily committed by the Samaritans (who worshipped YHWH, by the way) as well as other enemies of Jerusalem and God’s people in the land of Israel.<sup>24</sup>

The Temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Ezra would not have provided sanctuary in any way to those fleeing to safety. No Jewish Temple ever provided sanctuary, not during the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, during the time of Antiochus, or during the time of Pompey in 63 BC, nor when Herod took Jerusalem, and not when the Temple was last destroyed by Titus in 70 AD. All those found inside were slain, in every instance so far as we are told.<sup>25</sup> Only a remnant of God’s people would have remained.

David Sielaff, February 2016

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## *Addendum by David Sielaff*

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**Editor’s Note:** I think it appropriate to give some relief by **“reason of the hope that is [or should be] in you with meekness and fear”** (1 Peter 3:15). Therefore, I am reprinting a short article from 1980 by Dr. Martin. It relates to mistaken ideas of personal sacrifice and martyrdom by any religious person.

The issue of “dying for God” is large in the world today as practiced by those desiring to express their religious faith by committing suicide and killing others in suicide bombing or other forms of mass killing “for God.” Some people actually believe that committing a “sudden mass murder” will trigger a victorious apocalyptic war resulting in a golden future age. Such ideas do not come from the Bible. These misguided people want to die for their god, killing as many people as possible in the process — expecting (or so they’ve been told) a great personal reward in the afterlife for such acts. This is totally counter to Christ’s teachings and those of His apostles and disciples found in the Bible.

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<sup>24</sup> See Dr. Martin’s book, *The People that History Forgot*. It tells the story of the Samaritans, the Edomites, and the Amalekites and their situations in history after the Bible narratives were written.

<sup>25</sup> The word “sanctuary” in Hebrew means a sacred place, a holy place. Adonijah fled to the horns of the altar of the Tabernacle for sanctuary so he could plead for his life (1 Kings 1:50–53). After King David’s death, Joab tried unsuccessfully to do the same thing (1 Kings 2:28–34). In the land of Israel there were cities of refuge or cities of sanctuary set apart for particular cases of manslaughter (Numbers 35:9–15). This was probably done to forestall multi-generational blood feuds.

The article below counters that argument and deals with a major concept of salvation in the Bible. A longer discussion of this biblical concept is at [ABCs of the Gospel](#) available only online for free (print it to read it). A comprehensive discussion can be found in Dr. Martin's larger book [The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine](#). This book is both online free, and for cost in print at the [Essentials print book page](#).

## *Would You Be Willing to Die for Christ?*

by Dr. Ernest L. Martin, Ph.D., March 1980

Edited by David Sielaff, February 2016<sup>26</sup>

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**The Passover season was when Christ died for mankind. Since the Bible says that Christ was willing to die for us, the question needs to be asked: Would you, as a Christian, now be willing to die for Christ? It may come as a surprise, but the proper biblical answer is: "No." This article explains.**

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Our modern period of history is a time when a great deal of religion is available for mankind to embrace, but there is very little biblical Christianity in evidence. Though the Bible is being used to substantiate beliefs more than ever, the real doctrinal essence of Christianity has retreated into the background. This is especially true regarding the comprehension of biblical principles. So far have we of the 20th [now 21st] century departed from the simple doctrinal teachings of early Christianity, that the title to this article could well have provoked a sense of disbelief in us. Most of us would no doubt be quick to remind anyone that any true Christian should be willing to die for Christ. The truth is, however, such a belief and action would be totally contrary to the basic doctrinal concepts of the biblical revelation.

This is not to criticize anyone (nor should I) because a short ten years ago I, myself, would probably have been very inclined to answer the question with: "Certainly, the Christian should be willing to die for Christ." It would have been the wrong answer! Yet some 400 years ago, when much of the normally educated people in northwestern Europe and Britain were within the period we call the Protestant Reformation, the question would most likely have been answered correctly.

They may not have responded immediately with a "no," but the majority would surely have asked further: "Just what do you mean, 'Die for Christ'?" Once you explained to the educated your intent, I am persuaded that most people would have taken less than a minute to give the proper scriptural answer. The reason for this is because people in that age were much more in tune with biblical teaching — even in everyday parlance. The Bible was so much a part of their community environment. Today, however, the Bible has often been relegated, even in Christian circles, to the level of a simple "religious" book instead of the vibrant document intended to solve not only doctrinal questions, but political and social ones as well.

That is why it appears to me that most educated people during the Protestant Reformation would have given the proper answer to the question at issue: "Would you be willing to die for Christ?" The Christian's answer should be: "No, I wouldn't."

### *What Is the Biblical Teaching on This Matter?*

Let me say that we are not attempting to make a clever play on words or trying to toy with some ambiguous phrase. Nothing could be farther from our minds. All we at [ASK] wish to do is to set forth the plain scriptural teaching on this point in question. It is a fundamental issue indeed. Its outcome contains the very kernel of essential Christianity. Its revelation is nothing more than what true Christianity is all about.

Let me come to the point quickly. Christianity is a teaching about what Christ has done for you, not what you have done for Him. This concept is cardinal to the whole matter. The fact is, the message of the New Testament is designed to show that Christ came into this world to live a righteous life for you and that

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<sup>26</sup> All Bible citations and quotes are from the King James Version.

He came to die for you (for your sins and evil ways). The life and death of Christ are the two central factors of importance that secures to you a righteousness and a forgiveness with the Father.

What Christ has done for you is important! Through the substitutionary role of Christ, you can possess what He earned for you by His death and resurrection. Thus, the fact of Christ's life, His death on the tree, and His resurrection from the dead can now be awarded to you (substitutionally) through the merit of His grace. Grace is a free gift, an award that is absolutely free and unencumbered with human effort or work.<sup>27</sup>

The prime issue is not what man has to do for Christ, but what Christ has done for mankind. Essential to the matter is the fact that Christ died for mankind, not that mankind as a whole (or anyone personally) has to die for Christ. This is the nub of all Christian teaching.

**“But we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”**

• *Hebrews 2:9*

Christianity is not a belief that demands the death of any man for Christ. No, not at all. It is a message of how Christ — a member of the family of God, a divine being, God manifested in flesh — came to die for you!

Christ's death as a substitution for all mankind was something planned by God long before the human family was ever placed on earth (Revelation 13:8) — **“before the world began.”**

**“Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”**

• *2 Timothy 1:9*

Christ's death on the tree was His work for us, it was **“not according to our works.”** His death was **“according to his own purpose,”** not according to our own desire.

Christ's death was something that was performed in power. His death meant something to the Father. Through that death all mankind could arrive at a reconciled state with the Father Himself. Indeed, in God's eyes, Christ's death was absolutely necessary and worthwhile in the process of man's salvation (Hebrews 10:10–14). It was so powerful in effect that it meant the overthrow of Satan and all his authority. **“That through death he might destroy [thwart] him that has the power of death, the devil.”** (Hebrews 2:14). The last enemy of mankind is death (1 Corinthians 15:26). But now, a victory over it has been obtained for man (1 Corinthians 15:22–28).

This teaching about the need for Christ to die for mankind, in order to gain a salvation for mankind, is all carefully worked out by the apostle Paul in his writings. Christ's death was a very powerful circumstance for man. With this in mind, we at ASK want to ask a question: “Just what can the death of any of you (or any of us) do for Christ?”

### *Now to the Point*

Suppose you and I decided to die for Christ. How can that death help Christ? How can the deaths of a million (or several billion) human beings help Him? True, Christ's one death on a cross some 1900+ years ago was powerful enough, according to the Bible, to rescue not only millions, or even billions of human beings into an eternal salvation, but it was effective enough to redeem all mankind to God.

**“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto a knowledge of the truth ... who gave himself a ransom for all.”**

• *1 Timothy 2:4, 6*

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<sup>27</sup> This information is detailed in Dr. Martin's book *Essentials*, “[Chapter 6: Our Sins Are Imputed to Christ](#)” mentioned above.

Christ's death was truly worthwhile for all. Yet we ask, could your own death (even a righteous death as a martyr) help give Christ any blessing? Of course not! Is it possible for you to save anyone in a spiritual way by your death? In no way! Could you even save yourself by your death?

**“Though I give my body to be burned [to die a martyr's death by fire], and have not love, it profits me nothing.”**

• 1 Corinthians 13:3

The fact is, any man's death (though it be for the most holy of causes) cannot profit him (or anyone else) in matters of salvation. If one cannot die for man to help him spiritually, how can one expect to aid Christ by dying for Him? The whole thing is absurd! Christianity does not require man to die for Christ. It is the teaching of how and why Christ died for us!

So again, the question: “Would You Be Willing to Die For Christ?” The proper scriptural answer is: “No, I would not.” This is because you would in no way help Christ by doing so.

### ***Would You However Die for a Good Cause?***

With this question, we are on an entirely different wavelength. You may well be right in saying: “Yes, I might be willing.”

As stated at the beginning of this article, many people during the Protestant Reformation period (when more knowledge of scripture was evident in the general population) might have hesitated to answer your question immediately about dying for Christ. They might have come back with a further question: “Just what do you mean, ‘Die FOR Christ’?” And they would have been right in asking it. “Dying for Christ” might be quite proper if applied in a particular biblical way. Notice what the apostle John wrote:

**“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”**

• 1 John 3:16

This shows something different altogether. Perhaps one could, after all, “die for Christ.” This is because Paul showed that the body of Christ is now made up of people in a symbolic way, who make up His church (1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Ephesians 1:22–23, 5:28–32; Colossians 2:9–10, 19). “Christ” is now composed of many members, numerous human members, on earth! And Jesus made it clear that you can do something “for Him” if you do something for them. **“Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me”** (Matthew 25:40).

You can very much help His “body.” Even laying down one's own life might be profitable! Infinite examples could be given to illustrate this principle, but just look at a few that our modern civilization ought to be thankful for.

Most of Christ's apostles gave up their own lives to maintain the principles of Christianity which they had embraced. They paid the supreme sacrifice not only for themselves, but in order that all of us today can have the message of salvation given to us. They were willing to die for us. Other martyrs of the past died to give us the Scriptures and they have done a great service for us. Those who died (and there are those still willing to give up their lives) for the purpose of spreading biblical teaching around the world, did it (and are doing it) for us.

These are examples of love in action. These are not martyrdoms for Christ — because He needs no one to die for Him in a personal sense. However, to help Christ's “body” is a very different matter.

Another point must be mentioned. Our democratic nations in which we can live and worship God in freedom have been forged into existence, and have been sustained, by many men and women who have died to preserve those freedoms for you and for me. All such persons ought to be highly honored by all of us who enjoy the blessings of freedom today.

Those principles of freedom are worth dying for. Though none of us should want to have a martyr-complex, we all ought to have the courage — and the love — to be willing to stand for (and be willing to die

for, if necessary) the proper principles of maintaining our freedoms within the normal laws of respect, fairness, and love for other human beings.

While it may well be proper and honorable for someone to die for some good person, for a loved one, for a principle, for one's country, or for one's right to worship as he or she pleases, it is not scripturally proper for one to die for Christ in a sense to help Him. That is not necessary because you are incapable of helping Him, in a personal sense, no matter what you do.

Besides, the Christian has already "died" in a symbolic spiritual manner anyway, "died" with Christ. All of our biblical obligations for "dying" have already been met.

**"Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him into death ... our old man is crucified with him ... we be dead."**

• *Romans 6:3–4, 6, 8*

**"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ lives in me."**

• *Galatians 2:20*

**"For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God."**

• *Colossians 3:3*

Granted, these scriptures speak of a Christian's death in a symbolic (or spiritual) way. But recall that Christ dying for us on the tree of crucifixion was also symbolic and spiritual. We have actually already participated in the "death" that Christ underwent in order that all our spiritual "debts" could be paid. In strict New Testament symbolism, each Christian has already gone through the agony of a crucifixion. When Christ was there on the tree of crucifixion, so were all of us (Galatians 2:20).

If this is the case, then one might ask: "Must the Christian have to die again, if he has already died on the tree with Christ?" Or better put, would Christ ever require any Christian to repeat a death with or for Him? Of course not! It was Christ who died for us, we do not have to die for Him. Even Christ does not have to die again for anyone.

**"Christ was ONCE offered to bear the sins of man" (Hebrews 9:28).**

**"For in that he died, he died unto sin ONCE" (Romans 6:10).**

**"We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ ONCE for all" (Hebrews 10:10).**

**"For Christ also has ONCE suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).**

**"For by ONE offering he [Christ] has perfected for ever [to finality] them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).**

**"This man had offered ONE sacrifice for sins for ever [to finality]" (Hebrews 10:12).**

**"For this [death] he did ONCE, when he offered up himself" (Hebrews 7:27).**

It is thus unnecessary for any more deaths to secure any factor of salvation. Even Christ no longer has to die for any of us — and we certainly do not have to die for Him. And though the apostle Paul admitted that **"scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die"** (Romans 5:7), yet Paul did not mean we should personally be dying for Christ.

Only the willingness to die **"for the brethren"** would be acceptable (1 John 3:16). While it might be commendable in some cases, for one to die for a loved one, a principle, one's country, one's right to worship as he or she pleases, and die to protect our nation's right for political freedom, the proper biblical answer to the title of this article is still: "No, I do not have to die for Christ, because He died for me."

Ernest L. Martin, March 1980

Edited by David Sielaff, February 2016