

The Imperial Ideology of Rome and the Principalities and Powers in Romans 8:31-39

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Abstract

The principalities, angels, and powers in Romans 8:38 are hostile powers in the camouflage of the imperial cult of Rome and worked through the earthly domination system of Nero. Through the human agency of the state, the heavenly powers carry out injurious acts, such as oppression, persecution, and aggression, toward Christians. Thus, the spiritual powers, which Paul speak of, are closely related to the historical situation of Christian persecution by the aggrandized domination system of the imperial civic cult of Rome. Paul's paradoxical message of victory is that Christ is the true liberator in this historical struggle against the Roman Empire.

I. Introduction

Recent studies have given more attention to interpreting the historical context in the first century, taking the Roman Empire seriously because its terms and context have been relevant to NT interpretation. In our argument the most important thing is to verify how emperor worship and the imperial cult were not only widespread but pervaded public life within the Hellenistic cities, Asia Minor, and Rome where Paul's missionary work developed.¹

Though New Testament scholars have researched the Epistle to the Romans to the Roman Empire and the imperial cult, little attention has been given to Roman imperialism.² A few studies have given

¹ S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 132. Festivals, architectures, images, and sacrifices were dedicated to Roman emperor worship and the imperial cult. See esp., pp. 101-170.

² Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 3-6; idem, *Matthew and the Margins: A Religious and Socio-Political Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 36-43; idem, "Matthew and the Gentiles:

attention to Paul's opposition to the Roman Empire.³ Biblical scholars have paid less attention to the Roman imperial cult and emperor worship in interpreting the terms ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι in Romans 8:38. In this article, (1) we explore how ἀρχαί and ἐξουσίαι in Romans 8:38 are related to the Jupiter cult promulgated by Nero and the Roman elite in terms of the angels of the nation according to the perspective of Jewish apocalyptic thought and the patron gods of the Roman Empire. (2) We discuss how the Roman imperial system of Nero allowed the principalities and powers to oppress Christians in Rome. (3) We argue that the spiritual powers worked through the aggrandized domination system of the imperial civic cult of Rome.

II. The Roman Imperial Cult of Nero and Romans 8:31-38

The letter to the Romans was written in the context of the new Roman regime in the zenith of the expected return of the Golden age in Nero's time.⁴ It is such a crucial fact that we need to read the Epistle

Individual Conversion and/or Systemic transformation," JSNT 26 (2004): 259-82; Robert L. Mowery, "Son of God in Roman Imperial Titles and Matthew," *Bib* 83 (2002): 100-110; Marianne Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 15-29; Craig Evans, "Mark's Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel," *JGRChJ* (2000): 67-81.

³ Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 184-198; idem, "The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross," in *Paul and Empire* (ed. R. A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 10-72; Neil Elliott, "Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda," in *Paul and Empire*, 184-204; idem, "Paul and the Politics of Empire: Problems and Prospects," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honour of Krister Stendahl* (ed. R. A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 1-16; Dieter Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down: Romans: Missionary Theology and Roman Political Theology," in *Paul and Empire*, 148-157; Helmut Koester, "Imperial Ideology and Paul's Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians," in *Paul and Empire*, 158-166; Karl Donfried, "The Imperial Cults in Thessalonica," in *Paul and Empire*, 215-22; Richard Horsley, "I Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul's Assembly as an Alternative Society," in *Paul and Empire*, 242-252; idem, "The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Reading Rom 8:18-23 within the Imperial Context," in *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (ed. R. A. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2004), 1-23; Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 49-64.

⁴ Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 124.

to the Romans in the reconstructed historical context pervaded by the Roman imperial cult and emperor worship.⁵

The Zenith of the Golden Age under Nero's Regime

We look at Romans from a macroscopic viewpoint written in the quinquennium Neronis (Nero's first five years), a time of enlightened despotism when the young emperor Nero inaugurated his reign. As Paul wrote Romans, the imperial propaganda of peace (the Pax Romana) and faith (*pietas*) contrasted with the Pax Augusta reached its zenith upon Nero's accession. The Roman imperial peace propaganda was at its summit. Its statement supports the proclamation of the Golden age in the poem of Nero's flatterers and courtiers. Two fragmentary eclogues of the Einsiedeln Papyrus celebrate "the accession of the young Nero as the beginning of the golden age."⁶ The Einsiedeln Eclogues proclaim the story of the universe at its zenith (Eclogue 1:22-31) and celebrate the happy union of piety, peace, and the Golden age of Nero. Seneca in his treatise *On Clemency* told Nero: Augustus "was moderate and merciful, but that was, to be sure, after having reddened the Actium sea with Roman blood...human sacrifices and proscriptions at Perusia" (1.2.1.). Seneca continues, therefore, "True clemency is not simply cruelty, but a yet more genuine disposition towards mercy."⁷ Seneca points out that Nero's status is as the vicegerent of god. His absolute power was derived from god.⁸ A propagandist in the early years of Nero, Calpurnius Siculus praises the Golden age.⁹ The poet is "to celebrate the peaceful accession of the prince, his exercise of clemency in jurisdiction, the return of the rule of law, and the freedom of the senate and consuls."¹⁰ He concen-

⁵ Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 195. He continues that "the message of the letter to the Romans congregation is clear: the justice of God is not what the empire calls justice."

⁶ Georgi, "God Turned Upside Down," 151. See also Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 101: "Even Nero was hailed as the bringer of a Golden age."

⁷ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 371. Seneca praises Nero. "Your gentleness of your spirit will be diffused little by little through the whole body of the empire, and all things will be moulded to your likeness." M. T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London: Batsford, 1984), 45.

⁸ J. Rufus Fears, "Nero as the Vicegerent of the gods in Seneca's *De Clementia*," *Hermes* 103 (1975): 486-96.

⁹ Calpurnius Siculus 1.42: "Amid untroubled peace, the Golden age springs to a second birth; at least kindly Themis, throwing off the gathered dust of her mourning, return to the earth; blissful ages attend the youthful prince..."

¹⁰ Griffin, *Nero*, 38.

trates on peaceful maintenance, “the return of the Golden age.”¹¹ He continues “to concentrate on his peaceful accession, his abolition of the abuses of the previous reign, his maintenance of world peace, and the return of the Golden age.”¹² Nero’s Golden age had surpassed that of the Augustan age. Nero’s propaganda for the Roman imperial cult was at a climax.

The Close Context of Romans 8:31-38

In the context of Romans 8:31-39, Romans 8:18-30 reveals that the eschatological freedom is freedom from the dominion of Rome.¹³ It is not based on the hope of Augustus, but on Jewish eschatological hope. The hope accomplished by Jesus will be seen in the day of Jesus. The beginning and the end of this passage (Rom 8:18-30) emphasize the glory of expectation in terms of “his second coming for the ‘apocalypsis’ of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ It is granted by the action of God and Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps the saints in their distress.¹⁵

The suffering of the saints is an effect of the domination of the Roman Empire. Paul paradoxically asserts that the Roman imperial ideology, which Augustus had brought, was a new Golden age and it caused the destruction and devastation of nature.¹⁶

¹¹ *Ecl.* 1.44-5: “Blessed ages attend the young prince who won their case for his mother’s Iulii. That this is an illusion to Nero’s speech that won perpetual tribute exemption for Ilium in 53 is shown by Tacitus’ testimony that the descent of the Julian gens (to which Nero belonged on his mother’s side) from Aeneas was stressed in the speech (*Ann* 12.58.1).” Cited in Griffin, *Nero*, 149, 275.

¹² Griffin, *Nero*, 149.

¹³ Georgi, “God Turned Upside Down,” 155.

¹⁴ Martinus de Boer, “Paul, Theologian of God’s Apocalypse,” *Int* 56 (2002): 25. The apocalyptic eschatology is always characterized by the imminent expectation of the Parousia of Christ; cf. Adela Yarbra Collins, “Apocalypse and Apocalypticism,” *ABD* 1:290.

¹⁵ Olle Christoffersson, *The Earnest Expectation of the Creature: The Flood-Tradition as Matrix of Romans 8:18-27* (ConBNT 23; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 143-45.

¹⁶ Robert Jewett, “The Corruption and Redemption of Creation,” in *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (ed. R. Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2004), 31.

The Accusation against the Elect of God

Romans 8:31 prepares us for the return of the diatribe style and leads us to Romans 9-11 in the question of God's purpose for Israel.¹⁷ This section of Romans 8:31-38 may be regarded as a transition between Romans 8 and 9.¹⁸

The rhetorical expression of Paul about the accusation against the elect of God is emphasized in 8:31: "If God is for us, who is against us?"¹⁹ The reference of these things in verse 31a is as to what has been said in verses 28-30.²⁰ The opening phrase "What then shall we say?" brings us back to the content behind Romans 8:18.²¹ The suffering of the present time is only a very slight thing in comparison with the glory, which is to be revealed with the Parousia of Jesus. And all things including suffering and threat make good together (Rom 8:28). Jesus intercedes for the righteous at the right hand of the Father (vv. 26-27). God predestined, called, justified, and glorified his saints (vv. 29-30).

In Romans 8:31b, if God is for us, who is against us (cf. Isa 50:9)?²² The term *κατά* (against) means hostile speech against the believers.²³ It is plausible that hostile speech from the Gentile groups consisted in saying that Jewish people suffered trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and the threat of sword as the punishment of God in Romans 8:35. The statement "God is for us" is characterized by the death and resurrection of Jesus.²⁴ The expression "the God of Israel

¹⁷ W. S. Campbell, "The Purpose of Paul in the Letter to the Romans: A Survey of Romans 1-11 with Special Reference to Chapters 9-11," (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1974-5), 285.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 286.

¹⁹ Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: the Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 48: The rhetorical question is that the one who impeaches God's elect would be God himself alone. Robert Jewett, "Impeaching God's Elect: Romans 8:33-37 in its Rhetorical Situation," in *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World: Essays in Honour of Alexander J. M. Wedderburn* (ed. A. Christopherson et al.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 44.

²⁰ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; 2 vols; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 1:434.

²¹ Campbell, "Purpose of Paul," 285.

²² Compare Ps 23:4: "...I will fear no evil, for thou art with me..."; Ps 56:9: "This I know that God is for me." Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:435; J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988), 500. There is parallel with the Old Testament law-suit-pattern (cf. Is 50:7-9). Campbell, "Purpose of Paul," 286; P. Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (trans. S. Hafemann; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 138.

²³ BDAG, 406.

²⁴ Harald Riesenfeld, "ὑπέρ," *TDNT* 8:508-10. God is on our side in the way indicated by the Christ events. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:435; J. A. Fitzmyer,

works for us” is the description of a strong Jewish monotheism. “The confidence is rooted not simply in some god being for us, but the One God.”²⁵ The divine name ὁ θεός is clearly the God of Israel,²⁶ compared to the gods and goddesses of Rome. The God of Israel is for Christians, while the gods and Jupiter are for the Romans and Rome. According to the imperial propaganda, the safety of the entire human race is in the hands of Jupiter (Cicero, *Fin.* 3.20.66). Jupiter is Rome’s god and he stands on the Roman side (Enn, *Ann.* 258 VAHL). The Roman commonwealth and its institutions are his special concern (Cicero, *Phil.* 11.12.28). Rome is governed by the power and authority of the gods (Cicero, *Cat.* 3.9).

The text says that “there are many (vv. 38-39) against us, but in relation to the God of Israel these are as nothing.”²⁷ Romans 8:32 says that the God of Israel has handed over Jesus for his creatures as the vicarious, representative and sacrificial death. The terminology of vicarious sacrifice in Jesus is derived from the LXX Isaiah 53:6, 12. Paul had already used the verb παραδίδωμι in Romans 4:25 in the same sense (cf. Gal 2:20), but it has a different nuance of handing over to degradation in Romans 1:24, 26, 28.²⁸

In the imperial propaganda Jupiter had handed over world dominion to Augustus and gave the place of earthly representative to the Roman emperor. According to the imperial ideology, the Roman emperors, Augustus (Horace, *Odes.* 1.12.53-60) and Nero (Seneca, *Clem.* 1.1), are the vicegerents of Jupiter ruling on earth while Jupiter rules the heavens.

For Paul the discourse of Genesis 22 is a story of a crucified Jesus in which God himself gives up,²⁹ in parallel with Augustan propaganda

Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 530.

²⁵ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 500.

²⁶ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 530.

²⁷ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 500; cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:435; T. R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 458.

²⁸ Cf. Friedrich Büchsel “παραδίδωμι,” *TDNT* 2:170. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 531, suggests that there is no mention of the “vicarious, soteriological, or expiatory understanding of that sacrifice.” See also Cranfield, *Romans*, 436; cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 459; M. Hengel, *The Atonement* (London: SCM, 1981), 35; cf. B. H. McLean, *The Cursed Christ: Mediterranean Expulsion Rituals and Pauline Soteriology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 50; L. Morris, “Sacrifice,” *DPL* 856.

²⁹ Cf. Hengel, *The Atonement*, 35; idem, *The Cross of the Son of God* (London: SCM, 1976), 11-12; Alan F. Segal, “He who did not spare his own: Jesus, Paul and the Akedah,” in *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in Honour of Francis Wright Beare* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 178. Rom 8:32a is likely

that Jupiter had appointed Augustus to expiate the crimes of Rome and the resultant divine wrath (Horace, *Odes*. 1.2.). The use of the title “Son” describes “the uniqueness of the saving event and the magnitude of the sacrifice for our sake.”³⁰ The flow of thought in verse 32 is: God has delivered up his dear Son for us, the gift of his Son, and he will also give us all things (τὰ πάντα).³¹ This everything includes the protection of Jesus and the inheritance of eternal life for the saints as eschatological blessings with him in the close context of Romans 8:17.³² In Romans 8:32b the verb χαρίσεται emphasizes all the gifts given by God’s grace (cf. e.g., Phil 1:29; 2:9; Phlm 22) in parallel with the beneficence of the emperor.³³

In verse 33 a rhetorical question with the interrogative τίς is equivalent to an emphatic denial that anyone might dare to do so: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.”³⁴ In Romans 8:33a the verb ἐγκαλέω is a forensic term referring to the formal process of laying charges against someone.³⁵ It implies that the authorities in Rome were making a legal process of prosecution to control the rights of Jews. The Jewish people were forbidden by Roman law to gather in the streets (Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 60.6.6).

There was a view within the groups in Rome that God abandoned Israel just as the Romans saw Jews as a vanquished race and had antipathy towards Jews. Jewett suggests that “the term ἐγκαλέω could have been understood as impeachment in the context of conflict between early Christian groups in Rome.”³⁶ The Gentile group thought that God would have brought secular judgment to Jews as the evidence of divine judgment.

to go back to midrashic interpretation. Isaac is seen as a prototype of the Messiah. Nils Alstrup Dahl, “The Atonement-An Adequate Reward for the Akedah? (Rom 8:32),” in *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black* (ed. E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 18, 20.

³⁰ Hengel, *Cross of the Son of God*, 12.

³¹ Cranfield, *Romans*, 437; Schreiner, *Romans*, 461: The phrase ‘all things’ “means to give a share in Christ’s lordship over the universe.”

³² It implies that saints will judge the world and rule with Jesus Christ in 1 Cor 6:2f: “Don’t you know that saints will judge the world?” Dunn, *Romans*, 502; Grundmann, “πᾶς,” *TDNT* 7:785; Schreiner, *Romans*, 460.

³³ The term χάρις is a fixed term for demonstrations of a ruler’s favour, often used in inscriptions. Hans Conzelmann, “χάρις,” *TDNT* 9:375; James R. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace in Its Greco-Roman Context* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 234.

³⁴ Cranfield, *Romans*, 438; Schreiner, *Romans*, 461.

³⁵ Schmidt, “ἐγκαλέω,” *TDNT* 3:496; BDAG 273 (Greek Prov 19:5; Sir 46:19; Wis 12:12; Acts 19:38; 23:28).

³⁶ Jewett, “Impeaching God’s Elect,” 43.

The term ἐκλεκτός means to be selected by God (1 Pet 1:1, 2; Titus 2:10; Col 3:12; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet 2:9).³⁷ There may be an allusion to Isaiah 50:8-9: "He who vindicates me is at hand; who is it that prosecutes me?" ἐκλεκτός in context is related to the previous passage (Rom 8:30) and the bearers of the Spirit, the sons of God in Romans 8:14.³⁸

Paul says that the Jewish Christians are the elect of God. He disqualifies the boasting of the Gentile Christians and warns them not to ignore Israel in Romans 11:17-25.³⁹ What Paul wants to say is that the Romans as the elect of Jupiter cannot accuse the true elect of God by making official process to limit the rights of Jews in Rome. Another rhetorical expression is continued in Romans 8:34: "Who announces a sentence after the determination of guilt (κατακρίνω)⁴⁰ against us?" Christ is the helper who is interceding at the right hand of the God of Israel.

The believers applied "verse 1 of Ps 110 to Jesus' post-resurrection and exaltation in heaven and victory over cosmic powers. And Ps 110 is cited and is used for the exaltation of Jesus in the NT (Acts 2:34, 35; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 3:22)."⁴¹ In the light of Psalm 110, God created his "new Christ-centred order for the world."⁴²

God's love protects the new creation with the power of resurrection and enables it to withstand heavenly and earthly powers. Even if the old era represented by the Roman Empire is still present, Jesus is in the present glory at the right hand of the Father.⁴³

The OT and Jewish literature say that God will judge the foreign rulers and Gentile empires which have oppressed the Israelites, the chosen people.⁴⁴ Paul's argument is that God will act to judge the

³⁷ BDAG 306.

³⁸ Jewett, "Impeaching God's Elect," 43.

³⁹ Ibid., 43-45.

⁴⁰ John 8:10; Rom 2:1; 14:23; Matt 20:18; Mark 10:33; 2 Peter 2:6; Rom 8:3; Mark 14:64; 1 Cor 11:32; Js 5:9; Matt 12:41; Luke 11:31f; BDAG 519.

⁴¹ Dunn, *Romans*, 503; cf. J. F. Maile, "Exaltation and Enthronement," *DPL* 277.

⁴² Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1983), 87.

⁴³ Cranfield, *Romans*, 439.

⁴⁴ The Roman Empire will be crushed by the kingdom of God in Daniel chapters 2 and 7: "In the time of those kings (Rome) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed." The death and resurrection of Christ is the beginning of destruction over the Roman Empire and finally will be destroyed by the Parousia. In 2 Bar. 39: 2-8 the Roman Empire will be destroyed: "The days will come when this kingdom that destroyed Zion once will be destroyed...." In the age that the Roman Empire rules the evil will reach at peak in the period preceding the coming of the Messiah (4 Ezra 5:3). The seer sees the destruction of the Roman Empire's wealth. Michael Edward Stone, 4 Ezra, 110. cf. 15:44; 16:1; 12:32-34; cf. 11:44-46. The passages *Sib. Or.* 2:15;

Roman Empire and its ruler because they asserted their divine nature and worshiped the gods of the Romans (Rom 1:18-32; 3: 10-18). But in the apocalyptic tribulation, the kingdom of God begun by the Christ-event will be accomplished at his Parousia.

Romans 8:34 regards it as a present fact that Jesus is now reigning at the right hand of the Father, even if Romans 8:31-39 is primarily concerned with the future. It points to the uniqueness of Jesus.⁴⁵ According to the use of Psalm 110, the explanation in Jewish eschatological hope is that the believers in Jesus will be victorious in spite of the final apocalyptic strife. When Jesus will come in the hope of Christians, those in Christ will rule and judge the world with Christ (1 Cor 6:2-3).

In the context of Romans, it is the beginning of this victory in the realized eschatology set in polemical confrontation with the imperial ideology that Nero has accomplished the Golden age.

The Apocalyptic Sufferings in Romans 8:35

The domination system of Rome had suppressed Jews by expelling them from Rome. The Jews were probably expelled by the magisterial use of *relegatio* (exile for a fixed period or in perpetuity, but without loss of citizenship or confiscation of property) or *exilium* (banishment) as troublemakers (Suet. *Aug.* 16; *Tib.* 50; *Claud.* 23; Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.17, 68).⁴⁶ After Jews returned to Rome under Nero's prescript, "these in Rom 8:35 would have appeared a wretched lot: dispossessed, without sufficient food, without adequate shelter, forbidden from gathering in the streets by Roman laws."⁴⁷

In Romans 8:35, the believers are under persecution, oppression, tribulation caused by human powers and the worldly powers of the imperial civic cult. Jewett has argued that the tribulations in Romans 8:35 are not for divine judgment in terms of exile caused by Claudius's

3:50 say that the universal rule of Rome will be followed by the eschatological destruction (3:355-60; 5:170; 8:35-45, 75-105; *T. Mos.* 10:8; *Pss. Sol.* 7:10; 11; 15:12; 17; 18:6-10). The Dead Sea Scrolls say that the Roman Empire is the principal enemy of the Jewish community. There has been a sharp contrast between the sons of light and the sons of darkness, the final enemy, the Kittim in the War Scroll 1QM, 4Q 491-96.

⁴⁵ David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 59-60.

⁴⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.5; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85.4; Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4. See Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 119; J. V. D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 106; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.5; cf., Philo, *Legat.* 159-61; cf. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 202-10.

⁴⁷ Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 216.

decree in 49 CE (Suet. *Claud.* 25.4), but for the sake of Christ. Critics within the groups said that “the elect should be exempt from the misfortunes” because of “the OT tradition of the Deuteronomic principle that promised success and prosperity to the righteous and disasters to the wicked (Deut 30:15-31:22).”⁴⁸ No one therefore can claim that “suffering divorces members of other churches from Christ and his cross.”⁴⁹

The term θλίψις means both external and internal affliction in secular Greek. In the LXX, θλίψις denotes the oppression and affliction of the people of Israel (Exod 4:31; Deut 4:29; Judg 6:9, 10:6-16; Hos 5:15; Neh 9:26; Is 26:16, 37:3, 63:9, 65:16; Jer 10:18; Hab 3:16). In short, θλίψις is used for a religious concept in the LXX.⁵⁰ The afflictions of the church and the apostle are regarded as the suffering of Jesus.⁵¹ The term στενοχωρία means “a set of stressful circumstances, distress, difficulty, anguish, and trouble.”⁵² To summarize, both θλίψις and στενοχωρία are for the sake of Christ in his missionary experiences, while affliction and distress “play a crucial role in Paul’s struggle with the Corinthian super-apostles, who interpret his experience of affliction and distress as the signs of divine wrath and as disqualification for apostolicity (2 Cor 1:4-6; 12:10; Phil 1:17; 3:10; 1:13; 4:14; 1 Thess 1:6; 3:3,7).”⁵³

In the Psalms, διώκω, the verbal form of διωγμός, means “religious persecution as an offence of persecutors” (Ps 7:1,5; 30:15; 34:3; 70:11; 108:16; 118:84, 86; Jer 15:15; 20:11). διώκω in the NT always denotes “the sense of religious persecution” (Matt 10:23; 23:24; John 5:16; 15:20; Acts 7:52; 9:4).⁵⁴ The term διωγμός also means “a program or process designed to harass and oppress someone for reasons of belief (Acts 8:1, 13:50; 2 Tim 3:11; Matt 13:21; Mark 4:17; 2 Thess 1:4; 2 Cor 12:10).”⁵⁵ What Jewish Christians in Rome suffered under the edict of Claudius “would certainly be classed as persecution” and as “a mark of true discipleship.”⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Jewett, “Impeaching God’s Elect,” 46-55: These critics suggested that the afflictions in Rom 8:35 suffered by other believers indicated divine disfavour and inadequate faith; cf. Neil Elliott, “The Apostle Paul’s Self-Presentation as Anti-imperial Performance,” in *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (ed. R. Horsley; New York: Trinity Press International, 2004), 80.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 55. Some groups discredited the status of other groups.

⁵⁰ Schlier, “θλίψις,” *TDNT* 3:139-42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵² BDAG 942.

⁵³ Jewett, “Impeaching God’s Elect,” 50-51; cf. Elliott, “Paul’s Self-Presentation,” 77-80.

⁵⁴ Oepke, “διώκω,” *TDNT* 2:229-30.

⁵⁵ BDAG 253.

⁵⁶ Jewett, “Impeaching God’s Elect,” 51.

The term λιμός means hunger, or famine which denotes the tribulations of the last day.⁵⁷ The term γυμνότης means “being without adequate clothing with connotation of destitution, and lack of sufficient clothing.”⁵⁸ The Jews in Rome are “prevented by economic sanctions or persecution from being able to buy adequate clothing.”⁵⁹ The term κίνδυνος means danger or risk.⁶⁰ The term μάχαιρα perhaps means execution by violent death, the ultimate punishment imposed by the state (Phil 1:20,21; 1 Cor 15:32; 2 Cor 11:32).⁶¹ Paul understands this as eschatological suffering (cf. Rom 8:18; 2:9).

In Romans 8:36 Paul quotes Psalm 44:22: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” Psalm 44 was regarded in Jewish tradition as applicable to Jewish martyrs, especially to the martyrs in the Antiochean persecution as the present distress of powerful and cruel enemies in the second century BCE.

The verb θανατόω in Romans 8:36 is used for the idea of being given up to the danger of death for Christ (1 Cor 15:30; 2 Cor 4:11; 1 Pet 3:18).⁶² The phrase ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν (all day long) is Semitic for the expression of no escape (cf. 1 Cor 15:31; 2 Cor 4:10-11).⁶³ The phrase “they have been reckoned as sheep to be slaughtered” reflects Jesus’ suffering featured in Isaiah 53:7 (cf. Zech 11:4, 7).⁶⁴

The tribulations suffered by believers in the hostile enmity under the reign of Rome are for Christ’s sake, whereas the Maccabean martyrs died for the sake of God’s laws (2 Macc 7:9, 11; 4 Ezra 7: 89). The passage seems to indicate that believers must be ready to die for their belief in him under the paradox of the cross because God has shown his love through the death of Christ.⁶⁵ The insecurity of saints is based on the Roman Empire’s enmity to the chosen people.

What we point out is that the Roman Empire is the agent of the evil powers that persecute believers (Rom 8:38).⁶⁶ The Roman impe-

⁵⁷ *T. Sol.* 18:8; *T. 12 Patr.*; *Jos. Asen.* 4; Mark 13:8; Rev 6:8, 18:8. BDAG 596.

⁵⁸ BDAG 208.

⁵⁹ Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 48; cf. e.g., *T. Zeb.* 7:1; Matt 25:35-6; 2 Cor 11:27; Ja 2:15.

⁶⁰ BDAG 353.

⁶¹ Michaelis, “μάχαιρα,” *TDNT* 6:526; Matt 10:34; Gen 31:26; *Sib. Or.* 8:120; BDAG 622.

⁶² Bultmann, “θανατόω,” *TDNT* 3:21.

⁶³ Dunn, *Romans*, 506.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 505.

⁶⁵ A. T. Hanson, *The Paradox of the Cross in the Thought of St Paul* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 60.

⁶⁶ Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 14; cf. Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 122

rial system, which is a self-aggrandized state, plays a role in oppressing believers in the historical situation of Rome.

The Power Language in Romans 8:38

Paul's recipients probably know that he is referring to evil powers in terms of occults,⁶⁷ since they cannot separate believers from the love of Jesus. Series of tens are "distinctive indications of Jewish rhetoric preferences."⁶⁸ In the power language, "Paul's celestial, temporal, spatial, and cosmic categories" include "everything that presents a potential threat to the believers."⁶⁹ Paul's discourse is that everything listed in Romans 8:38-39 is subject to God's creative power.⁷⁰

Death in Romans 6-8 refers to the great hostile power (Rom 6:9, 16, 21, 23; 7:5, 10, 13; 8:2, 6, 38) in "the fullest measure of sin's power over this age."⁷¹ In Romans 8:38 death means the termination of physical life.⁷² The personification of death is the cosmological, apocalyptic idea of superhuman⁷³ or angelic powers and forces that affect and determine human life and destiny for Paul.⁷⁴ In Romans death is "part of the cluster of motifs or expressions-Adam, sin, the Law, found in Jewish apocalyptic literature."⁷⁵ It is not impossible to assume that personified death, as a tool of Satan and angelic powers, has shown its power as a murderous force in the functionary institution of the Roman imperial,

⁶⁷ Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), 24; cf. Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 122; cf. R. Jewett, "Following the Argument of Romans," in *The Romans Debate* (ed. K. Donfried; rev. and enl.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 275; cf. Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 48; BDAG 138; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 105-106; Schreiner, *Romans*, 465; Cranfield, *Romans*, 442; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 545.

⁶⁸ Jewett, "Argument of Romans," 275-6.

⁶⁹ James L. Jaquette, "Life and Death, ADIAPHORA, and Paul's Rhetorical Strategies," *NovT* 38 (1996): 43.

⁷⁰ Hengen-Rohls, "κτίσις and καινὴ κτίσις in Paul's Letters," in *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World*, 115-6; Schreiner, *Romans*, 465.

⁷¹ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 506.

⁷² BDAG 442.

⁷³ de Boer uses the term 'superhuman' to suggest the notion of enslavement or subjection from above. Martinus C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5* (JSNTSup 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 195.

⁷⁴ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 35-6.

⁷⁵ de Boer, *The Defeat of Death*, 35.

political, economic and religious system, oppressing the chosen people of God.

If we say that the ἀρχαί are the gods of nations in both Jewish apocalyptic thought and the hegemony perspective of Greco-Roman thought, the ἀρχαί can also be spiritual powers relevant to the Roman gods and goddesses such as Jupiter, Apollo, and Roma. If the Roman imperial cult represented by the Jupiter cult is a self-aggrandizement of government, the hostile powers of Satan might work through the domination system of the imperial civic cult of Rome linked with the gods and goddesses of Rome in the historical situation of persecuted believers.

The fact that Nero's rule is expressed at the peak of the Jupiter cult informs how the hostile powers might work through the tyrannical earthy power oppressing believers. According to Fears, "the reign of Nero was central in the re-establishment of Jupiter as the dominant divine figure in official imperial ideology."⁷⁶ According to the imperial ideology of Rome, the emperor as vicegerent of Jupiter and Jupiter as protector of his vicegerent were to form dual pillars for the imperial propaganda in Rome.⁷⁷

Therefore, the spiritual powers such as principalities, angels, and powers might work through the imperial domination system to oppress believers in the political situation of Rome.⁷⁸ Therefore, we conclude that the term ἀρχαί as hostile powers in Romans 8:38 worked through the socio-political structure of Rome oppressing Christians in Jewish apocalyptic tribulations in the imperial context.

The term ἄγγελοι appears in the plural in Romans 8:38. The angels may be Satan's angels (cf. Matt 25:41; 1 Cor 4:9; 2 Cor 12:7; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 12:7, 9), since good angels would not separate believers from the Lord.⁷⁹ The evil angels were called the sons of God or watchers who came down to earth to seduce the beautiful women (*1 En.* 6:1).⁸⁰

⁷⁶ J. R. Fears, "The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology," 71. Nero re-established an ideological foundation deriving the emperors' power directly from Jupiter. According to Seneca, the gods of Rome have transferred into the hands of the young Nero power over the entire human race; and he rules as the earthly vicegerent of the gods (*Sen., Clem.* 1.1). The same theme appears in the poetry of Calpurnus Siculus, who directly associates Nero with Jupiter and wonders. See p. 70.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁷⁸ Cf. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament*, 24; Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 122; Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 48.

⁷⁹ Kittel, "ἄγγελος," *TDNT* 1:86. Cf. Gen 6:1-4; *1 En.* 6-8; *Jub.* 5:1; *T. Reb* 5:6; for evil angels see Cranfield, *Romans*, 212; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 507. Some have argued that the powers refer to good angels. See Carr, *Angels and Principalities*, 112-14; Moo, *Romans*, 545.

⁸⁰ *1 Enoch* 6:1 says how two hundred angels called watchers bound them-

The concept of pagan gods may also be related to the term ἄγγελοι, “identified with the guardian angels like the Roman gods under which God placed the nations.”⁸¹ The angels, the principalities and powers appear in 1 Peter 3:22 (ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἄγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων) as demonic powers subdued by Christ.⁸² The passage implies that the suffering of believers in the particular situation is closely connected with the angels of nations when we consider the imperial propaganda, namely that the Romans conquered the nations on behalf of the gods of Rome.

The phrase ἐνεστῶτα μέλλοντα indicates that every possible trouble should be included.⁸³ But Paul is convinced that believers are standing in the suffering time of the new aeon as difficult days.⁸⁴

The term δυνάμεις in Romans 8:38 is a title for evil powers in extra biblical Greek as well as Judeo-Christian literature.⁸⁵ The LXX uses δυνάμεις to translate מַלְאָכִים in the expression “Lord of hosts.” The phrase “heavenly host” also appears in the LXX at various points (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2, 18; 1 Kgs 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kgs 3:14; 19:20, 31; Isa 42:13; Jer 40:12). Psalm 148:2 applies to angelic powers. In Jewish thought, the term is found as an expression for angels (1 En. 61:10; 1 En. 82:8; 4 Esra 6:6). These powers are intermediate beings between God and man and rule over the realm between heaven and earth. As heavenly hosts the powers⁸⁶ were identified with angels (Ps 103:21), stars (Isa 34:4),

selves to one another and to their leader *Semjaza* by an oath to take wives from among the children of men. The chief tens are given (6:7) and the name of twenties is Azazel (10:4). The crime of these angelic beings involved not only sexual misdemeanours but also revelation to men of various secrets including charms, enchantment, and astronomy (1 En. 7:1f; 8:3). Azazel and *Semjaza* are bound and imprisoned until the final judgment when they will be confined forever (1 Enoch, cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Rev 20:2). See D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200BC – AD100* (London: SCM, 1964), 249-50; cf. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 93; Dunn, *Romans*, 507. The notion that the newly formed eschatological people of God will judge the fallen angels reflects 1QpHab 5:4; 1 Enoch 1:9; 95:3; Dan 7:22 LXX; Rev 20:4. This idea also is found in more elaborate apocalyptic visions (1 Enoch 67-9; cf. 1 Pet 2:4; Jude 6).

⁸¹ Kittel, “ἄγγελος,” *TDNT* 1:86.

⁸² Cf. Eph 1:22; 1 Cor 15:24; Col 2:10, 15; Eph 6:12; Rom 8:38. J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 219-20.

⁸³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 463.

⁸⁴ Oepke, “ἐνεστημι,” *TDNT* 2:544.

⁸⁵ Cf. BDAG 263; G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 11; Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 17, 159.

⁸⁶ Grundmann, “δύναμις,” *TDNT* 2:295-6. Philo uses the term δύναμις for angelic powers (*Conf.* 171-75; *Migr.* 181). Josephus connects the term as earthly

and even gods (Pss 29:1; 89:5-8).⁸⁷ The worship of heavenly hosts is consistently condemned in the biblical passages. Such worship is identified with the worship of other gods (Deut 17:3; Deut 4:19; Jer 8:2; 2 Kgs 23:4-5). God strictly forbids Israel from worshiping other gods, sun, moon, or stars. The widely held view of Isaiah 24:21-22 identifies the powers (שָׁרִיפִים)⁸⁸ as supernatural beings allied with the kings of the Gentile nations. The host of heaven in Isaiah 24:21 is referred to as heavenly angelic power in terms of the angels of nations in Daniel 10:13, “the prince of the kingdom of Persia.”⁸⁹

The NT recognizes that the term δύνάμεις is rooted in Jewish thought.⁹⁰ O. Betz points out that the cosmic powers are between heaven and earth. But their power has already been broken, or it will shortly be abolished (cf. Matt 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:22; 10:19; 1 Cor 15:24; 2 Thess 2:9; Rev 13:2, 17:3).⁹¹ Jesus refers to the fact that in the eschatological catastrophe the powers will be judged (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24). The Christ-event is the beginning of the destruction of the powers. δύνάμεις can also be related to the demonic powers⁹² linked with the Roman imperial gods. Three powers such as principalities, angels, and powers are interchangeably used; “One, or pair, or a series can be made to present them all.”⁹³

The terms ὑψωμα and βᾶθος are astronomical terms (*1 En.* 18:3, 11, 15; 21:6-7). The term ὑψωμα is the highest point, culmination used by the astrological word (Plutarch, *Sept. sap. conv.* 3). It simply denotes “the

power, especially military forces. See Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 160-1.

⁸⁷ Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 17, 159; O. Betz, “δύναμις,” *TDNT* 2:602.

⁸⁸ The book of Daniel speaks about an angelic host (Dan 4:35; 8:10; cf. Luke 21:26; Acts 7:42). In other OT passages the host of heaven also refers to the stars (Ps 33:6; Isa 45:12; Neh 45:12; cf. Jer 33:22).

⁸⁹ F. Delitzsch, *The Prophecies of Isaiah* (2 vols.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), 2:403-4. Young points out that “the heavenly hosts are angelic powers on high, who have influenced the rulers on this earth to turn against God and to transgress His laws. The heavenly powers have rebelled against their creator and have stirred up earthly rulers to make war against the Lord and against the anointed.” E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 2:178-9; cf., R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 206; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 506-7.

⁹⁰ Grundmann, “δύναμις,” *TDNT* 2:307.

⁹¹ Betz, “Dynamis,” *NIDNTT* 1:603.

⁹² Grundmann, “δύναμις,” *TDNT* 2:307; cf. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers*, 24; Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 25-26.

⁹³ Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 10.

space above the horizon, the world above which would be the domain of many transcendent forces.”⁹⁴ The term βάθος is opposite to ὑψωμα.⁹⁵

In short, neither human agents (31-37) nor spiritual powers (38), nor time and space can undermine the victory. Paul assures those in Christ because they have a conviction that Jesus’ victory has begun by his death and exaltation, and will be accomplished in his Parousia giving real hope to them.

Paul does not attribute plainly the power language to the imperial gods. However, within the framework of Jewish and Greco-Roman thought correlated to the angels of the nations, or the gods of the nations, the principalities, angels, and powers can be associated with the power language in Romans 8:38. What we point out is that in the historical circumstance in Rome, the spiritual powers in terms of hostile powers as a single entity are closely related to the domination system of the imperial civic cult of Rome oppressing believers by apocalyptic tribulations in Romans 8:35.

Trusting the Real Liberator (Rom 8:37)

Paul suggests that the victory of the saints through Christ is superior to the triumph of Rome (Rom 8:37) by using a rhetorical paradox that they can overcome their sufferings caused by the Roman imperial structure. Paul stands against the victory cult of Augustus by pronouncing what believers achieve as an overwhelming success through the love of Christ. Paul insists that Christ is the real liberator in the historical struggle against “superhuman forces that have held people in slavery including imperial rulers as well as spiritual forces such as death and angels.”⁹⁶

The new age was not begun by the Roman emperor, Nero, but by the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ has given grace to believers and it surpasses that of Caesars in Romans 5-8. The emphasis of Romans 8:31-39 is that the worldly and spiritual powers cannot separate them from the love of Christ (Rom 8:38-9) because his death, resurrection, and intercession are the guarantee of God’s beneficence towards believers.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ BDAG 1046; Bertram, “ὑψωμα,” *TDNT* 8:614; Dunn, *Romans*, 508; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 535; Stuhlmacher, *Romans*, 141. Schreiner, *Romans*, 465 argues that the terms should be interpreted in the poetic cast of the passage (cf. Ps. 139:8-9; Eph 3:18).

⁹⁵ BDAG 1046.

⁹⁶ R. A. Horsley, “Paul and Slavery: A Critical Alternative to Recent Readings,” *Semeia* 83/84 (1998): 175.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 234.

III. Conclusion

Romans 8:31-39 concludes Romans 5-8 and prepares an opening phrase for Romans 9-11 in which it is stated that God is steadfast to the promise for Israel and the plan of universal salvation for both the Gentiles and the Jews. Romans 8:31-39 emphasizes the triumphant statement, expressed by hymn language in which salvation is sure and no power will be able to separate the believers from God's love in Christ in the present suffering of Jewish Christians. The Roman Empire and the emperor, who had played a false kingship and had given peace to make a universal community under the Pax Romana, have oppressed Jewish Christians and the Jews in Rome. The faith of the eschatological hope and the Christ-event having overcome all powers in the cosmos are superior to the conquerors of the Roman military power.

The principalities, angels, and powers in Romans 8:38 are literally hostile powers in the camouflage of the imperial cult of Rome. They worked through the earthly domination system of Nero. The work of heavenly powers to Christians is carried out by the state through human instruments such as oppression, distress, persecution, starvation, destitution, peril, and sword in historical reality. The spiritual powers then are closely related to the historical circumstance of Roman persecution of believers under the imperial civic cult.

The saints are distressed by the earthly structure of Rome with the imperial ideology and self-aggrandizement of the emperor. The Roman government is an agent of hostile powers in Romans 8:38 causing anguish to believers in Rome. The Roman domination system, which had worshiped the emperor as god, lord or the son of god, oppresses the real chosen people, the Israelites who have served only one God, the creator.

Christ, the real liberator, has delivered believers from the worldly and cosmic powers while the Augustan cult claims that Augustus had delivered the world and the republic from factions and wars. Jesus Christ guaranties the safety of saints in the historical struggle with imperial ideology.

The passage gives apocalyptic hope and the assurance of security to Christians. This statement implies that in the Parousia, Jesus will accomplish the eschatological hope for Christians in Rome. Christians will finally be victorious in the apocalyptic struggle against the powers.