

## THE PERIOD OF THE PERSECUTION

### Introduction:

1. Jesus said: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:10-12).
2. Jesus warned His disciples: “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than His master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20).
3. Paul warned all Christians: “Yes, and all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).
4. Persecution may take different forms:
  - a. Ridicule.
  - b. Ostracism or shunning.
  - c. Fines, beatings, and imprisonment.
  - d. Loss of property and civil rights.
  - e. Death.

### Discussion:

- I. THE FIRST PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS CAME FROM JEWS.
  - A. They falsely accused Jesus and delivered Him to the Romans to be crucified (Acts 2:23).
  - B. They persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea.
    1. Peter and John were arrested for healing the lame man in the temple (Acts 4).
    2. All the apostles were arrested, imprisoned, beaten, and charged not to speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 5).
    3. Stephen was stoned (Acts 7).
    4. Saul scattered the church (Acts 8:1-5).
    5. James was beheaded and Peter imprisoned (Acts 12).
  - C. Paul encountered constant opposition from the Jews.
    1. In Antioch they stirred up opposition and expelled Paul and Barnabas from their region (Acts 13:50).
    2. In Lystra, they “stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead” (Acts 14:19).
    3. In Jerusalem, a Jewish mob dragged Paul from the temple and attempted to kill him (Acts 21:30,31).
    4. Because of the Jews, Paul was imprisoned and forced to

5. appeal to Caesar (Acts 22-26).  
When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70, the Jews lost much of their power to stir up persecution against Christians.

## **II. THERE WERE TEN ROMAN PERSECUTIONS OF THE CHURCH.**

### **A. The first was Nero's persecution in 64-68.**

1. Two thirds of Rome burned in the summer of 64.
2. Many blamed it on Nero who wanted to rebuild the area.
3. Nero, needing a scapegoat, blamed the Christians.
4. Thousands of Christians died; some were forced to fight wild beasts; others were dipped in oil, nailed to stakes, and set alight to provide torches for Nero's garden parties.
5. This persecution was confined mainly to Rome.
6. Paul was probably killed during this time (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

### **B. The second was under Domitian in 81-96.**

1. He demanded to be addressed as "Lord and God."
2. He had images of himself set up throughout the empire; all heads of households had to burn incense to him once a year or suffer imprisonment, torture, loss of livelihood, loss of property, or death.
3. This is the background of the book of Revelation.

### **C. The tenth Roman persecution was the most severe of all.**

1. Diocletian became emperor in 284.
  - a. He blamed Rome's troubles on the people having forsaken the old gods to become Christians.
  - b. He feared the rapid numerical growth of the church.
2. He began the persecution in 303.
  - a. Church buildings were burned; sometimes with the members inside.
  - b. Scriptures were confiscated and destroyed.
  - c. Church leaders were imprisoned and tortured to force them to sacrifice to idols and to the emperor.
  - d. Many thousands of Christians died.
3. This persecution continued until Galerius issued the Edict of Toleration in 311.
4. In 313 Constantine issued the Edict of Milan which gave full recognition to Christianity as a legal religion and restored all confiscated property to the church.

## **III. PERSECUTION CONTINUED AS THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH BECAME SUPREME.**

### **A. In the 12th and 13th centuries the Cathari and Waldenses who**

sought to follow the Bible were slaughtered by the thousands at the instigation of Pope Innocent III.

- B. Advocates of reforming the corrupt Catholic Church were relentlessly pursued and killed.**
  - 1. John Wycliffe, professor at Oxford, decried the wealth of the church, translated the Bible into English, and sent out men to preach to the poor.**
    - a. He died before he could be brought to trial.**
    - b. He was excommunicated after death, his body dug up, burned, and his ashes cast into the River Swift.**
  - 2. William Tyndale was hunted down and killed because he translated the New Testament from Greek into English.**

#### **IV. PERSECUTION CONTINUES TODAY IN NATIONS WHERE ISLAM IS IN CONTROL.**

- A. More than 300,000 are known to have been murdered by Muslims in the Sudan in the past 20 years.**
- B. Periodic persecutions break out against believers in Christ in Muslim areas of Nigeria and Ghana where many members of the Lord's church have suffered and some have died.**
- C. Most Muslim nations do not allow religious freedom to believers in Christ.**

#### **Conclusion:**

- 1. As American society continues to become more secular, more restraints will be put on believers in Christ.**
  - a. Believers have had to sue to have the right to pray or take a Bible on school property, yet Muslims are guaranteed that right.**
  - b. Secular teachers, especially in tax funded colleges, ridicule God, Christ, and the Bible, but believers are forbidden to teach what the Bible says.**
- 2. There is growing movement to take away the tax exempt status of churches.**
- 3. Islam, Judaism and New Age religions are extolled, but Christianity is downgraded on television and in the movies.**
- 4. The possibility of persecution in our free land is nearer than we think.**
- 5. Let us press the claims of Christ while we have the freedom to do so.**
- 6. To be saved, one must hear the Gospel, believe in Jesus Christ, repent of all past sins, confess Christ before men, and be buried in baptism for the remission of sins.**

