

Church History -Part 2

Smyrna [Myrrh -bitterness] **Rev 2:8-11**

The Persecuted Church
AD 64 - AD 312

Salient feature - 10 Days of Tribulation and suffering.
Roman Persecutions.

Myrrh - a gum resin taken from a shrubby tree, bitter taste but sweet aroma, especially when crushed. The Church is often at its most purest and fragrant when going through persecution. There is little sham and false profession when your life is at stake.

tribulation and poverty, but they are Rich - Kenya! :9

The Devil is clearly revealed as the one behind the persecution. :10 Satan's desire was to destroy the Church, the family, Israel or anything instituted by God. Rather than destroy the Church, the death of the martyrs actually increased admiration and respect for the believers and numbers were won to Christ.

10 Periods of persecution under Roman Caesars.

Caesar is Lord demanded of every Citizen, Christians could not comply as Jesus was Lord. Emperors were considered living deities.

Tertullian 155AD-240AD in Carthage, which is modern day Tunis in North Africa.

"We render honor to Caesar as Caesar, but worship and prayer belong to God alone."

Smyrna was the first place where a Temple to Caesar was built called Dea Roma in 195 BC.

Polycarp 69AD-155AD Smyrna was arrested in his 90's. The Roman Official, met Polycarp, and lifted him into his Chariot, appealed to him to deny Christ, surely he will forgive you. Polycarp responded "86 years I have served Him, He did me no wrong how can I blaspheme or deny Him?"

He was thrown out of the Chariot and His Femur was broken, was taken to the stake. He asked not to be tied as he would willingly die for the Saviour. The wind blew the fire away from the Old man's body, then they pierced him with a spear and the blood which gushed forth put the fire out, Eventually they got there way.

Tacitus was contemporary with Nero, he describes Christianity as a "detestable superstition which at first was suppressed and afterwards broke out afresh, and spread, not only through Judea the origin of the evil, but through the metropolis also, the common sewer in which everything filthy and flagitious [marked by scandal and vice] meets and spreads."

Christians were accused of the following:

Incest- brothers and sisters marrying each other.
Being Atheists –first time this was used as they did not believe in the Pantheon of the gods.
Cannibals –This is my body, This is my blood

Nero AD 64-68 [The Playboy Emperor]

Having ordered Rome to be burned in July 64 and burn it did for six days and seven nights, to satisfy his ego, he intended rebuilding it according to his design, he afterwards laid the blame on the Christians. [A convenient scapegoat]. While Rome burned, this inhumane monster stood on a tower where he could safely watch its progress, and amused himself by singing a poem about the burning of troy to his favorite guitar. [Nero fiddles while Rome burns]. This is the Fiery Trial which Peter warned the saints about in **1 Peter 4:12**. Believers were covered in the skins of wild beasts to be torn by dogs, others were crucified, others were covered with pitch and set on fire that they might serve as torches to light up the Emperors gardens. Peter and Paul died under Nero's persecution.
Peter crucified upside down
Paul beheaded – as a Roman Citizen and crucifixion was beneath the dignity of a Citizen of Rome.
Nero's death by his own hand gave believers peace for about 30 years.

Domitian AD81- 96

He treated Christians with great violence toward the end of his reign. Among the sufferers were his own cousin, Flavius Clemens and his wife [Domitian's niece]. During the reign of

Domitian the apostle John was banished to the Isle of Patmos.
More ruthless than Nero, demanded he be worshipped as both Lord and God!

Trajan AD98-117

Pliny the younger, Roman Governor of Bythinia wrote to the Emperor asking how to deal with Christians. Their impact was such that the Temples were desolate. The accusation against them was not moral, but they refused to worship the images of the gods or the Emperor.

Marcus Aurelius AD 161-180

Aurelius saw with an evil eye the superiority of Christianity over men's minds compared with his own heathen philosophy. He then became an intolerant persecutor, and encouraged the provincial authorities to crush what he considered to be "a contumacious spirit of resistance to his authority."

Example- Province of Gaul in Lyon, Blandina in 177AD

She was a slave girl about 15 years of age.

She was bound to a stake and wild beasts were set on her. According to legend, they did not, however, touch her. After enduring this for a number of days, in an effort to persuade her to recant, she was led into the arena to see the sufferings of her companions. Finally, as the last of the martyrs, she was scourged, placed on a red-hot grate, enclosed in a net

and thrown before a wild *steer* who tossed her into the air with his horns. In the end, she was killed with a dagger.

Septimius Severus AD193-211

He issued an edict that forbade his subjects to embrace either the Christian faith or the Jewish religion. He tried to Unite the Empire under the worship of the Unconquered Sun, Terrible tortures were inflicted on many Christians regardless of age or sex.

Perpetua in Carthage, March 7, 203AD

Perpetua was a Christian noblewoman who, at the turn of the third century, lived with her husband, her son, and her slave, Felicitas, in Carthage (in modern Tunis). At this time, North Africa was the center of a vibrant Christian community. It is no surprise, then, that when Emperor Septimius Severus determined to cripple Christianity (he believed it undermined Roman patriotism), he focused his attention on North Africa. Among the first to be arrested were five new Christians taking classes to prepare for baptism, one of whom was Perpetua. [Catechumens]

Her father immediately came to her in prison. He was a pagan, and he saw an easy way for Perpetua to save herself. He entreated her simply to deny she was a Christian.

"Father do you see this vase here?" she replied. "Could it be called by any other name than what it is?"

"No," he replied.

"Well, neither can I be called anything other than what I am, a Christian."

In the next days, Perpetua was moved to a better part of the prison and allowed to breast-feed her child. With her hearing approaching, her father visited again, this time, pleading more passionately: "Have pity on my gray head. Have pity on me, your father, if I deserve to be called your father, if I have favored you above all your brothers, if I have raised you to reach this prime of your life."

He threw himself down before her and kissed her hands. "Do not abandon me to be the reproach of men. Think of your brothers; think of your mother and your aunt; think of your child, who will not be able to live once you are gone. Give up your pride!"

Perpetua was touched but remained unshaken. She tried to comfort her father—"It will all happen in the prisoner's dock as God wills, for you may be sure that we are not left to ourselves but are all in his power"—but he walked out of the prison dejected.

The day of the hearing arrived, Perpetua and her friends were marched before the governor, Hilarianus. Perpetua's friends were questioned first, and each in turn admitted to being a Christian, and each in turn refused to make a sacrifice (an act of emperor worship). Then the governor turned to question Perpetua.

At that moment, her father, carrying Perpetua's son in his arms, burst into the room. He grabbed Perpetua and pleaded, "Perform the sacrifice. Have pity on your baby!"

Hilarius, probably wishing to avoid the unpleasantness of executing a mother who still suckled a child, added, "Have pity on your father's gray head; have pity on your infant son. Offer the sacrifice for the welfare of the emperor."

Perpetua replied simply: "I will not."

"Are you a Christian then?" asked the governor.

"Yes I am," Perpetua replied.

Her father interrupted again, begging her to sacrifice, but Hilarius had heard enough: he ordered soldiers to beat him into silence. He then condemned Perpetua and her friends to die in the arena.

Perpetua, her friends, and her slave, Felicitas (who had subsequently been arrested), were dressed in belted tunics. When they entered the stadium, wild beasts and gladiators roamed the arena floor, and in the stands, crowds roared to see blood. They didn't have to wait long.

Immediately a wild heifer charged the group. Perpetua was tossed into the air and onto her back. She sat up, adjusted her ripped tunic, and walked over to help Felicitas. Then a leopard was let loose, and it wasn't long before the tunics of the Christians were stained with blood.

This was too deliberate for the impatient crowd, which began calling for death for the Christians. So Perpetua, Felicitas, and friends were lined up, and one by one, were slain by the sword.

Maximinus AD 235-238

At first showed toleration to the Church, but eventually introduced harsh measures particularly against the leadership of the Church.

Decius AD 249-251

Immediately upon being crowned Emperor he issued a decree against Christianity. The Millennium of the founding of Rome was 250AD, a big party was called for, but Rome was in grave danger especially at its Northern Border the Rhine River. The Empire's greatness connected to the gods, Christianity seen as a weakening effect.

He sought to destroy it root and branch and every method of violence and cruelty was employed to this end. Many made to sit on red hot chairs of iron. An annual offering of sacrifice at the Roman altars to the gods and the genius of the emperor was required. A certificate of loyalty was given called a *libellus*. Decius only survived two years and there was a short time of quiet.

Valerian AD 253-260

At first showed tolerance. Began to persecute Christians. Forbade Christian meetings or access to cemeteries, all clergy were to die, all Citizens to worship the Roman gods. He himself was captured by the King of Persia, who put out his eyes and flayed him alive. His son who succeeded him observed that he prospered while he showed kindness to Christians.

Aurelian AD 270-275AD

Short persecution as the emperor was murdered by some of his servants.

Aurelian strengthened the position of the Sun god, **Sol Invictus** [the Unconquered Sun] as the main divinity of the Roman pantheon. During his short rule, Aurelian seemed to follow the principle of "one faith, one empire"

Diocletian AD 284-305

Persecution began in 303, urged on by his pagan adopted son Galerius. [who like Herod was eaten by worms] Sacred books were burned, as a consequence of this we do not have the original manuscripts of the New Testament or much earlier than the fourth century.

All of these Emperors issued edicts of some kind persecuting the Church.

They were covered in tar and set on fire, thrown into the arena with wild animals, crucified upside down and burnt at the stake.

10 is the number of human failure, 10 spies, 10 Tribes, 10 Toes and a Beast with 10 heads.

The enemy, made 10 distinct attempts to destroy the Church, instead it prospered and multiplied. The last persecution lasted 10 years!

The Cause of the Persecutions.

Apart from the obvious, which we have previously stated the satanic hatred of all connected to the true and living God. We must look at the reasons from a human standpoint.

1. Political & Religious. A Question of loyalty.

The Christians faith forbade their offering incense or giving divine honors to the Emperor or to the idols. Thus they were looked upon as being disloyal to the Empire, and, as idol worship entered into the daily life of the people, into its religion and business and amusements, the Christians were hated for their separation from the world around them.

Roman State religion was mechanical and external. It had its altars, idols, priests, processions, rites and practices that the people could see, The Christians had no idols and little visible paraphernalia in worship. Their worship was spiritual and internal.

Public rumor made them guilty of incest, cannibalism, and unnatural practices. It made little difference that there was no truth in these rumors.

2. Social.

Nonconformity to accepted social patterns brought down on them dislike that the non conformist faces in any period of history.

Results of the Persecution.

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Testimonies under persecution showed the reality of

heavenly things and many saw the difference between true faith in the living God and the emptiness of Rome's mechanical religion.

The Church had to face up to several issues.

The issue of the Canon of Scripture became vital, you don't want to die seeking to preserve a manuscript if its not inspired.

What do you do with someone who denies the faith to evade persecution and afterwards repents? The Problem of Lapsi! During the Decian Persecution. You had to be re-baptized to wash away your sin, do penance etc.

Cyprian 200-258

No Baptism & No Salvation outside the Catholic Church. You cannot love God as your Father who does not love the Church as his mother.

The clergy were sacrificing priests, the Church not Christ was the ark of salvation!

Penance –Lapsi having to lay in the entrance of the building for days to show you were really penitent.

A war on two fronts.

External -the Roman Empire, seeking to extinguish the Church.

Internal –the battle to maintain purity of Doctrine. Earnestly contending for the faith.

Judaizers and the Ebionites, sought to keep Christians under the Mosaic Law both those from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, they disliked Paul's writings for obvious reasons.

As a reaction **Marcion the heretic** said only the Epistles of Paul were for the Church and some of Luke's gospel, not all. Again intensifying the need for a Canon!

Gnosticism, Paul seemed to be fighting its inception in the Epistle to the **Colossians**.

Key tenants, Matter is Evil, God is Holy and can't have contact with it. Series of emanations from God , one of which was the Christ.

Alexandria in Egypt the center of this teaching! Where the two so called Older and best manuscripts were found due to its dry climate. Many believe they were corrupted manuscripts due to gnostic influence.

Manicheanism similar to Gnosticism founded by Manichaeus 216-76 sought to combine Christianity, with Eastern religious thought and ideas.

Neoplatonism, a type of mysticism. There was an absolute being who was the transcendent source of all that is. All was created by process of overflow. The goal of the universe was reabsorption into the divine essence from which all had come. The process takes place as one engages in rational

contemplation, seeking to know God and being absorbed into the one from whence all came.

Montanism like modern day charismatic movement, a lot of emphasis on the Holy Spirit, He thought inspiration was immediate and continuous. Reacting against the formalism on the Church and the dominant clericalism. This was a pendulum swing to the opposite extreme. Taught the immanency of Christ's return and that we should live frugal separated lives until the Kingdom came.

In their favor, they emphasized baptism and the Lord's supper, Christian Simplicity but did not believe in a completed canon. A reaction against the deadness.

Monarchianism An ancient form of Unitarianism. Christ not divine, but the divine logos came upon Him at His Baptism. Because of his righteousness he achieved divinity and savior hood. **MORMANISM**
Sabalianism an offshoot of this, gives us God in the Old Testament, becomes Christ in the Gospels and the Holy Spirit in the Acts period. In order to preserve the unity of God.

The Easter Controversy What was the proper date to celebrate Easter? This caused a division into the Eastern and Western Churches in the Roman Empire and what would ultimately become the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox divide.

Donatism As a result of persecution some were traitors to the cause of Christ, after persecution some were reinstated and the donatists denied their right to ordain and continue

on as bishops. Demanding that character fit a man for office, the Catholic Church denied this and continued to ordain men irrespective of character.

ORIGEN -184-253

Allegorical methods of interpretation –part of the Alexandrian school, also Replacement Theology.

Canonization

Canon –measuring rod

Does it measure up

Necessary – Persecution of caught with manuscripts, wanted to die for the true text not some spurious writing!

Marcion the heretic –first to formulate a Canon AD140
Parts of Luke and 10 Pauline Epistles,

Montanists –spoke of continual revelation through the Prophetic Gift

The Church declared that Biblical Revelation had ceased.

Tests of Canonicity

Apostles or definite link to the apostles. E.g. Luke –Paul.
Mark –Peter, James –half brother of Jesus.

Internal Appeal –harmonious with prior revelation both morally and doctrinally.

Authoritative- Thus saith the Lord

Dynamic-life changing power demonstrated

Received & accepted and used by believers

Irenaeus of Lyons (b. 120/140 Asia Minor - d. 200/203 CE)

– 175 Canon essentially same as today

Regarding the New Testament canon, one finds in *Adversus Haereses* quotations from all the books of the New Testament with the exception of:

Philemon, II Peter, III John, and Jude

397 Council of Carthage

451 Council of Chalcedon