

Lesson 6

Study Guide

Formation & Struggles – The Birth of the Early church AD 33-200

Chapter 9

Persecution and Martyrdom

The Testimony of Blood

It's Time for Review

Let us now do a short review to keep everything in perspective. In effect what we have seen here from the past 5 chapters is the persecution of Christian Jews (CJ's) at 3 different times over the years AD 33 – 200. These "Eras" of persecution for lack of a better word are as follows:

1. The expansion of the Christian movement from the death and resurrection of Jesus AD30 and the call of Paul in AD 36. We know that before Paul, Christians were already in Damascus (Ananias baptizes Paul); in Galilee (Acts 9:31); Samaria (Acts 5:16); coastal towns (Acts 8, 9). Even the Community in Rome was established before AD49, and prior to Paul or Peter getting there. Thereafter, we find our community severely persecuted as our top Christian leaders are taken out: St. Stephen stoned to death by the Jews for "blasphemous words against Moses and God"; St. James, first bishop of Jerusalem, stoned to death by the Jews for he, "transgressed the law"; St. Peter crucified upside-down by the Romans AD64; and St. Paul, the great evangelist, beheaded by the Romans AD67.
2. The destruction of the Temple in AD70 caused many Jews to be sent as slaves to Rome by Vespasian and his son Titus. While in Rome the Jews caused many disturbances over the CJ's insistence that Christ is the Messiah. This conflict expelled all the Jews including the CJ's for the Romans "could not distinguish between the two." Remember that the Jews were given special privileges by Julius Caesar(d.44BC) exempting them from the cult of the emperor and giving them citizenship all due to their historical influence and energy in commerce. Even after the First Jewish-Roman War AD68-70 and the destruction of the Temple, the Jews were still given the right to worship but not in Jerusalem. It was important to Rome to keep the country under control so they always tried to "please the Jews."
3. At this point the CJ's, who would not support any war effort, had migrated out of Jerusalem to Pella, 60 miles north of Jerusalem, under Bishop Symeon, AD 62-107. The Gospel of Matthew written after the fall of Jerusalem (see OSB) helped begin the process of separation between the CJ's and the Jewish religious authorities who had formed the new Jamnia Academy in AD83. This Jewish group to established a rabbinical school with the study of the law. Its real intent was to rebuild the Temple. In so doing, the Jamnian

influence brought measures against CJ's with their Messiah belief in Jesus. By AD100, CJ's are no longer allowed in Temple worship. But Christianity is growing rapidly and taken into "house churches" with greater regularity. Setting the CJ's further apart from the Jews, was a "fake messiah" named Bar Kochba who fails in his attempt to lead the Jews back to Jerusalem in the Second Jewish-Roman War (AD132-135).

The Testimony of Blood

Commentary:

For the Romans, the emperor cult was the reason for peace, order and prosperity. It was the religion of all good people. For the Christian Jews it was sheer idolatry. Christians refused to take part in any cult ritual and were persecuted for it. Rome considered Christians as a competing community. It was a conflict of: worship of "the gods" or worship of Christ. The persecutions started in the second century in Bithynia-Pontus in Asia Minor. Christians were punished for as little as just their name or tortured for the secrets of their group meetings.

The Martyrdom of Polycarp (Bishop of Smyrna AD155)

Bishop by about AD100. Polycarp is a disciple and the spiritual son of the Apostle John. He was consecrated bishop by the Apostles themselves. Asked by the Romans governor to curse Christ, he replied, "For 86 years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" Polycarp was burned at the stake. Afterwards his followers sifted for his bones putting them in a suitable place. A year later they started an annual celebration of his martyrdom.

The Martyrdom of Justin

Justin is considered the best known and most influential Christian apologist of the second century. He was well known as a teacher of Christianity at his own school. His First Apology written around AD150 to the emperor. It is the first record of the pattern of Christian worship found anywhere. In it he outlines the worship pattern as: Synaxis (Greeting, Hymns, readings, homily and dismissal) and Eucharist (Greeting, intercessory prayer, offer of bread and wine, consecration of gifts, communion, giving thanks, and benediction). Among other things, Justin was questioned about where Christian meetings were held. Other Christians reported that they were Christian by "God's gift." When asked who taught them, the normal Christian response was "from their parents." All refused to offer sacrifices to idols and so were beheaded.

Persecutions in Gaul (Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons AD130-200)

Lyons was the center of the province of Gaul (France) with strong commercial links to Asia Minor and Phrygia. It was further strengthened by the arrival of Irenaeus from Asia Minor. Gallic Christians reported untold suffering of their martyrs through abuse, stoning, mob action and interrogation by city authorities. They too had been accused of "Thyestian banquet" (cannibalism) and "Oedipus incest" because they called each other brother and sister with the kiss of peace!!! Those who were Roman citizens were beheaded and others thrown to wild beasts. The bodies of the martyrs were burned and thrown into the Rhone River.

Christians in North Africa (Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch AD 67-107)

One Christian martyred at Scillium (Carthage) in North Africa named Speratus confessed, **“I do not recognize the empire of this world. Rather I serve the God who no one has seen, nor can see, with these eyes.”** When asked what he had in his case he said, “Books and letters of a just man named Paul.” Thus, we can say that by the end of the second century St. Paul’s letters were widespread in the empire. Persecution in North Africa took place in the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius AD161-180.

Ignatius is known by all church historians. He left 7 letters written before his death that we studied in the previous chapter. These letters tell of the presence of bishops in numerous other communities and that they were put there by the Apostles themselves! His spirit of martyrdom was to “imitate Christ in his suffering and to reach God.” His love inspired and strengthened other Christians during this very difficult time. **Martyrs did not draw attention to themselves but to the one who died and arose from the dead.** A Roman Citizen he was arrested in Antioch and fed to the wild beasts in Rome. Ignatius said, “If anyone has Christ in him, let him appreciate what I am longing for, and sympathize with me, realizing what I am going through.”

1. The Christian Martyrs did not rely on their own _____ and _____ but _____ with Christ.
2. T. or F. Christ’s love inspired them all on the road to martyrdom.
3. After AD 70, Christians throughout the _____ lived in a _____.
4. The Martyr Perpetua, a 22 years old and a Roman aristocrat, awaiting baptism was jailed without her _____.
5. After answering governor that she was a _____ she was executed by _____.
6. Perpetua’s slave Felicitas gave birth to a _____ who was raised after her death by a _____.
7. Christians saw their conflict with the imperial authority not in political terms but in _____ as for them it was a struggle between _____ and the _____.
8. Justin Martyr attacked paganism with _____ but viewed pagan Greek philosophy as God inspired and a preparation for _____.
9. T. or F. The author argues that the totalitarian ideologies of Nazism and Communism may have been more vicious.
10. T. or F. These martyrs of the 2nd and 3rd centuries remain as the models for all later witness in Christianity.

+++++++The End+++++++

