

## Church History

### Lesson 3 - The Church Under Fire (Persecution In the Early Church)

#### 1. Introduction - Christianity and Persecution In This World

- 1.1. Christianity has always had a deep theology regarding persecution
  - 1.1.1. Since our Lord was mistreated and ultimately killed, we have no reason to expect an easy time in this world.
    - 1.1.1.1. John 15:20 - Remember the words I spoke to you: **'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.** If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.
    - 1.1.1.2. 1 Thessalonians 2:14–15 - For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: **You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, <sup>15</sup> who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.** They displease God and are hostile to all men
    - 1.1.1.3. From its very beginnings, Christianity was no easy matter. The Lord whom Christians served had died on the cross, condemned as a criminal. (Gonzales, location 909)
  - 1.1.2. In actual experience, the Church was under persecution from its earliest days. It's psyche of life in this world was forged in several centuries of persecution.
    - 1.1.2.1. I will not list all of the times of persecution in the book of Acts here, but a reading of the book will show just how often Christians suffered.
    - 1.1.2.2. In the popular mind, the early church was above all else a noble army of martyrs. In many ways it was... (Shelley, Location 814).
  - 1.1.3. Consequently, Christians came to expect that to follow Jesus would mean suffering in this present age. That was the normal Christian life.
    - 1.1.3.1. 2 Timothy 3:12 - In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...
    - 1.1.3.2. Acts 14:21–22 - They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.**
    - 1.1.3.3. 1 Thessalonians 3:3–4 - so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. <sup>4</sup> In fact, **when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.**

## **2. The First Wave of Persecution - From Jews Who Rejected Jesus & Christianity**

**2.1.** The earliest persecution came, not from the government, but from Jews who rejected Jesus and Christianity.

**2.1.1.** Acts 1:1–5 - In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit **to the apostles he had chosen.** <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, **he showed himself to these men** and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating **with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem,** but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

**2.2.**

**2.3.** The entire book of Acts shows the spread of Christianity from its beginnings in Jerusalem until it reaches Rome and beyond.

**2.3.1.** The structure of Acts is meant to show this expansion

**2.3.1.1.** Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

**2.3.1.1.1.** This is the theme verse for the whole book.

The entire book may be broken down into the following sections:

Acts 1-7      Jerusalem

Acts 8-10     Judea and Samaria

Acts 11-28    The ends of the earth

**2.3.1.1.2.** Thus the whole story of Acts is meant to show how Christianity grew from a few Jewish disciples in Jerusalem into a world wide movement comprised mainly of Gentiles.

**2.3.2.** The outpouring of the Spirit shows this expansion throughout the book of Acts

**2.3.2.1.** Acts 2:7–11 - Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

**2.3.2.1.1.** Note how Luke specifically records people from all over the Mediterranean world as having been there.

