

Bible History Lesson 4 – Persecution to Victory
John 14:15
By Russell Earl

Thesis: I want to show the lessons we can learn from those who paid the ultimate price for their faith.

- Intro:
1. Throughout history we find the blood of the faithful.
 2. Today, we will look at what we can learn from the example of those who gave their life for their faith in God.

I. Chronology of Persecution

1. Gaius (commonly called Caligula, 37-41AD)
 - A. Laid ground work for future persecution.**
 - B. His sister, Drusilla, did the year after he became emperor. He then begin to identify her as “the universal goddess” and himself as the universal god.**
 - C. He required all official oaths be taken in his name and he be considered a deity.
 - D. The Jews refused to accept such, as a result he posted images of himself in Jewish synagogues and erected a large image of himself in Jerusalem. He attempted to even place one in the temple.
2. Claudius (41-54 AD)
 - A. When Claudius become emperor the Jews were no longer expected to recognize Caligula as a deity; Herod was sympathetic to the Jews and they used this to their advantage.
 - B. Claudius gave Judea to Herod, Herod killed James the brother of John (**Acts 12:1-2**)
 - C. The Jews greeted an uproar over Christ and were expelled from the city (**Acts 18:2**).
3. Nero (54 -69 AD)
 - A. Until the time of Nero the church had grown considerably because of the toleration that was shown towards them, however that would change with Nero.
 - B. History says that a fire broke out on July 18, 64 A.D. It burned fiercely for 6 days then slow for three more. Nero wanted to rebuild the city around his palace and to agree more ground for doing so. Some suspected him of starting the fire so he blamed it on the Christians and began a fierce persecution against them.
 - C. Nero caused large numbers of killings of Christians, his killings were known to be intense and gruesome. Christians were his scapegoat for many things.**
4. Vespasian (69-79 AD)
 - A. It is under Vespasian that tradition says that many Christians left Jerusalem at the warning of Christ in Mt 24:15-16.**
5. Domitian (81-96 AD)
 - A. The son of Vespasian, thought himself to be divine.
 - B. It was during his reign that John was banished to the Island of Patmos & wrote the book of Revelation.**
 - C. Some historians believe Domitian was the beast to whom John gave the number 666.**

6. Trajan (98-117 AD)
 - A. **It is under the reign of Trajan that Christians began to be persecuted simple for being a Christian.**
 - B. **The romans looked upon the emperor as diety. Any opposition to this idea was considered conspiracy against the government. Thus we can see why Christians were being eliminated from the empire.**
 - C. During much of this time Christianity is looked upon as a superstition.
7. Hadrian (117-138 AD)
 - A. **Allow the persecution to continue but did nothing to cause it to increase or decrease.**
8. Antoninus Pius
 - A. **He wrote letters that violent measures should not be taken against Christians, but he was opposed by certain influential subordinates.**
9. Marcus Aurelius (161-180AD)
 - A. **Continued the view that Christians were dangerous to the Empire.**
 - B. **After the death of Polycarp the church at Smyrna wrote an account of the recent persecution, this is the earliest known contemporary account of Christian martyrdom.**
 - i. *Polycarp speech before his death; afterwards he was burned, he was said to be praying while they burned him.*
 - C. During this time acusations came against Christians so that the accusers could obtain their property.
10. Emperor Severus (193-211AD)
 - A. **Forbade conversion to Christianity in 201**
 - B. He was guilty of having pregnant mothers put to death when they would not reject Christ, others he had them placed in the arena, no doubt to fight gladitors
11. Decius (249-251AD)
 - A. **Devised a plan to reveal the identity of all Christians.**
 - B. **Being determined to kill all Christians, he made it law that once a year all must give a sacrifice to the Roman gods and the genius of the emperor.**
 - i. This obvisouly would of lead to the death of thousands or more, however a year later he died and the law ended.
12. Valerian (253-260AD)
 - A. **Two years later Valerian continued many policies of Decius and Christians were again persecuted with systematic measures.**
13. Diocletian (284-305)
 - A. **In March of 303, Deocletian tried to suppress all religion contrary to that authorized by the government.**
 - i. This meant Christians could no longer hold meetings, all church building were to be destroyed, leaders were imprisoned, and Christians were to turn in copies of scriptures so they could be burned.
 - B. **This however did not bring the desired results so in April of 304, a second decree was made that all people, without exception, were required to sacrifice to idols.**
 - i. History says that the prisons were overflowing and that Christians were made to work in slave labor camps and were worked to death in the mines.
 - C. Fortunately under Diocletian the organized attempts to destroy Christianity would end.

II. Laws that Protected Christians

A. Edict of Toleration

1. Galerius, who had be associated with Diocletian in persecuting Christians, saw that the persecution accomplished nothing, and issued a toleration edict in 311.

- a. This gave security to Christians so long as they did not oppose the peace of the empire.
2. All persecution however did not end until Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313.

B. Edict of Milan

- 1. This edict not only granted Christians the right to exist, but they are not to be encouraged.**
- 2. All possessions that were taken from them were to be restored without payment.**

III. Lessons for us today.

A. God was with the faithful.

1. Christians survived because God was with them.
2. They had a deep faith in God and were unwilling to depart from their faith in Him.

B. They didn't forget what they had seen & heard.

1. No doubt some of these Christians had seen miracles of the Apostles and heard their teaching.
2. This only encouraged them to "keep the faith" even more, even in the face of death.

Application & Conclusion:

1. As we review such history the words of **Rev 2:10 & John 14:15** really hits the heart of us today.
2. These individuals faced horrible things and remained faithful to God. There is much to be learned from their examples and determination of faithfulness.
3. Full Invitation

Non-Christians must:

Hear – James 1:22, Romans 10:15,17

Believe – Jn 12:44, Jn 8:24, Mt 16:16

Repent – Luke 13:2-3

Confess – John 12:42, Romans 10:9

Be Baptized – 1 Pt 3:21, Acts 22:16, Col 2:11, Mk 16:16, Rom 6:3-4

Live faithfully – John 14:15, Rev 2:10

Christians must:

Repent: Acts 17:20, Acts 8:37, Lk 13:3

Pray: James 5:16, 1 Jn 1:9