



Early Church Development

Lesson #4

“The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.”

—Tertullian (quote was before 220 A.D.)

Jewish Persecution of Christians

- ❖ Recall Jesus told His disciples persecution would follow
 - ❖ John 15:20
 - ❖ Luke 21:12-19
- ❖ Acts gives us multiple accounts of Jewish persecution
 - ❖ Saul the great instrument of persecution

Christian Persecution Time-Frame

- ❖ Before A.D. 64 there was not really wide spread persecution from Rome. Most of the “enemies” would have been Jewish religious leaders.
 - ❖ Stephen first Christian martyr (Acts 6)
 - ❖ James brother of John A.D. 42
 - ❖ James brother of Jesus A.D. 62
- ❖ A.D. 64-250 Rome would engage in persecution, but it would be more locale and sporadic. Jewish religious leaders would still be engaged in persecution.
 - ❖ Nero is known as the first Roman emperor to persecute Christians (The story behind 666/1 Kings 10:14)/unbridled power

Christian Persecution

- ❖ Rome viewed Christianity as a Jewish sect, therefore a legal religion but...
- ❖ Rome had a polytheistic religious system - Jews agreed to pray for the emperor.
- ❖ By the middle of the 1st Century Christianity is no longer viewed as a Jewish sect, but rather as a new religion. Monotheistic Jews and Gentiles who had once been polytheistic.

Christian Persecution Continued

- ❖ Rome saw Christians as practicing a religion that was peculiar and troubling.
- ❖ Viewed with superstition because they would not burn incense to the emperor.
- ❖ Considered atheists because Christians denied the existence of Roman gods.
- ❖ The source of all natural disasters - because the Christians had angered the gods not worshiping them.
- ❖ Secret cult - meetings were often at night

Christian Persecution Cont'd

- ❖ Thought of as being sexual deviants
- ❖ As well as being cannibals
- ❖ These were some of the reasons Rome gave as justification for persecuting Christians.

Emperor Nero

- ❖ Murdered his mother Agrippina
- ❖ Murdered his wife Octavia
- ❖ Poisoned his step brother Britannicus
- ❖ Kicked to death his second wife Poppaea Sabbina
- ❖ Relationship with Sporus (a man)
- ❖ Declared a public enemy of Rome
- ❖ Committed suicide in June of A.D. 68
- ❖ 1 Peter and Revelation most likely written during this time



Pliny of Bithynia

- ❖ Complains that the Christian sect is growing so rapidly that the temples to the Roman gods are almost empty.
- ❖ Trajan Emperor - Litmus Test, Recant, Execute
- ❖ This was basically the norm until 250A.D.



Polycarp's Death

- ❖ During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, 155 A.D.
- ❖ Polycarp was 86 years old
- ❖ “If you disregard the wild beasts I have, I will have you destroyed by fire unless you recant.” Polycarp replied, “The fire you threaten burns for only a time and is soon extinguished. But there is a fire that you know nothing about, the fire of the judgement to come, of eternal punishment, a fire reserved for the ungodly. But why do you hesitate? Do as you will.”
- ❖ Polycarp was burned alive in the colosseum.

Blandina and Ponticus

- ❖ Killed in France, A.D. 177
- ❖ Mob violence against Christians so several hundred Christians were rounded up and questioned about their faith.
- ❖ 47 would not recant their faith in Jesus
- ❖ Blandina was a slave girl, Ponticus was a 15 year old boy. Experienced brutal torture, scourging, wild beasts, hot seat. Ponticus eventually dies. Blandina is thrown into a net and tossed to the bulls. After being tenderized by the bulls she was offered as an offering to a pagan god. All to the delight of the crowd in the stadium.

Persecution after 250 A.D.

- ❖ Romans concluded that the gods were angry with them because they were experiencing civil war, invasions, famine, and pestilence. The Romans determined it was because the Christians would not kneel to the pagan gods.
- ❖ Emperor Decius declares an edict - every person under Roman control must worship the gods.
- ❖ Proof of this worship would come in the form of a *libellus* (a document proving a sacrifice had been made)
- ❖ This round of persecution lasted for about 18 months

Rome's Intentional Persecution Cont'd

- ❖ Emperor Valerian, 257 A.D. Bishops, presbyters, and deacons should immediately be executed. People who were in prominent positions of power, such as senators, knights, would only lose their positions provided they ceased being a Christian

Christians Get a 40 Year Break

- ❖ Gallienus issued an edict of toleration for Christians 260-303 A.D.