

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

THE MISSING DIMENSION – SMYRNA (PART 6)

THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

'...BE THOU FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.'



Persecution of Christians – Testimony from History

“Were Christians really fed to the lions?

Yes, Christians were fed to half-starved lions, burned alive, and hacked to death, but the most interesting aspect of this was that the Christians who died in the Colosseum wanted to die there as martyrs”.

About 3,000 Christian martyrs in all died in the Colosseum”.

(The Colosseum: Power, Brilliance, and Brutality. (Written by Jimkuo / 09.08.2004)

“The Roman Governor of Bithynia (on the Black Sea) had no hesitation in sending to immediate execution those who had been denounced as being Christians.

The name alone was a sufficient death warrant”. (Christianity Today)

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-27/persecution-in-early-church-did-you-know.html>

https://depts.washington.edu/hrome/Authors/jimkuo2/IIColosseo/253/pub_zbpage_view.html#253

Ten major periods of persecution of the Church:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. 64 – 68 Nero | 2. 93 – 96 Domitian | 3. 107 – 117 Trajan | 4. 163 -180 Marcus Aurelius |
| 5. 202 – 211 Septimius Severus | 6. 208 – 235 Severus Alexander | 7. <u>250 -253 Decius</u> | |
| 8. 257 Valerian | 9. 272 – 275 Aurelian | 10. Diocletian 303 - 313 | |

Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna and John's disciple (64 AD – 155 AD)

Polycarp was a Christian bishop of Smyrna.

According to the “Martyrdom of Polycarp”, he died a martyr, bound and burned at the stake, then stabbed when the fire failed to consume his body

Polycarp's Arrest

Three days before he was arrested, while he was praying, he had a vision of the pillow under his head in flames. He said prophetically to those who were with him, “I will be burnt alive.” “Immediately [Polycarp] called for food and drink for them, and asked for an hour to pray uninterrupted. They agreed, and he stood and prayed, so full of the grace of God, that he could not stop for two hours. The men were astounded and many of them regretted coming to arrest such a godly and venerable an old man.”

Polycarp Refused to Deny Jesus

“The Proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On hearing that he was, he tried to persuade him to apostatize, saying, “Have respect for your old age, swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent, and say, ‘Down with the Atheists!’” Polycarp looked at the wicked heathen multitude in the stadium, and gesturing towards them, he said:

“86 years have I served Him,” Polycarp declared, “and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?”

(<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/polycarp>)

Polycarp 's Last Prayer:

“I have received the knowledge of You, the God of angels, powers and every creature, and of all the righteous who live before You. I give You thanks that You count me worthy to be numbered among Your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ and the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body, through the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day as an acceptable sacrifice, as You, the true God, have predestined, revealed to me, and now fulfilled. I praise You for all these things. I bless You and glorify You, along with the everlasting Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son. To You, with Him, through the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and forever. Amen.”

Polycarp's Death

“But when they went to fix him with nails, he said, “Leave me as I am, for He that gives me strength to endure the fire, will enable me not to struggle, without the help of your nails.”

“Then the fire was lit, and the flame blazed furiously. We who were privileged to witness it saw a great miracle, and this is why we have been preserved, to tell the story. The fire shaped itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, and formed a circle around the body of the martyr. Inside it, he looked not like flesh that is burnt, but like bread that is baked, or gold and silver glowing in a furnace. And we smelt a sweet scent, like frankincense or some such precious spices”. Remember (Daniel 3:8-30)

“When those wicked men saw that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to pierce him with a dagger. When he did this, such a great quantity of blood flowed that the fire was extinguished. When the Enemy saw the wonder of his martyrdom, his blameless life and now his crowning with immortality, he did his utmost to stop us keeping any memorial of him or taking possession of his holy body”. (the devil disputed the body of Moses with the archangel Michael. Jude 9)

Polycarp – Testimony and Legacy

This is the story of the blessed Polycarp, the twelfth martyr in Smyrna, though he has a unique place memory of all people, being remembered even by all the heathen. He was not merely an eminent teacher, but he was a pre-eminent martyr, whose death all desired to imitate, being altogether consistent with the Gospel of Christ.

Having overcome the unjust governor with patience and acquired the crown of immortality, he now, with the apostles and all the righteous, glorifies God the Father with joy, and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls, the Ruler of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the Church throughout the world.



Why were Christians persecuted?

The persecution of Christians occurred throughout the Roman Empire, beginning in the 1st century AD (under Nero) and ending in the 4th century AD (under Diocletian).

Originally a polytheistic empire in the traditions of Roman paganism and the Hellenistic religion and mythology, as Christianity spread through the empire, it came into ideological conflict with the imperial cult of ancient Rome. Pagan practices such as making sacrifices to the deified emperors or other gods were unacceptable for Christians, as their belief in the one true God prohibited idolatry.

The state and other members of civic society punished Christians for treason, various alleged crimes, illegal assembly, and for introducing an 'alien cult' that led to Roman apostasy. *They were even accused of cannibalism because of 'drinking the blood'*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire



Romans 8:35-39 (New King James Version)

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written:

“For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

“If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you”, said the Lord (John 15:20)



CATACOMB CHURCHES WHERE CHRISTIANS MET



I AM PRAYING

for persecuted Christians.

**RESIST HIM [DEVIL],
STEADFAST IN THE
FAITH, KNOWING
THAT THE SAME
SUFFERINGS ARE
EXPERIENCED BY
YOUR BROTHERHOOD
IN THE WORLD
(1 PETER 5:9)**

