

“JERUSALEM MEETS ROME AND FINDS BABYLON: A STUDY IN CHURCH PURITY”

FALL 2022-SPRING 2023

October 05, 2022

“PERSECUTION”

I. THE RELATIONSHIP OF MARTYRDOM AND PERSECUTION

- A. To be a martyr is, in the first place, to be a witness of the person and work of Jesus the Christ.***
 - 1. He is the son of God and the son of man who has lived a perfect life of faith before God. He is without sin.***
 - 2. He died on a persecutor’s cross to pay for our sins as our righteous substitute***
 - 3. Having been buried after His death, on the third day He rose again to demonstrate God’s perfect satisfaction of His payment for our sin and to give those who have trusted Him for His death in their place, everlasting life***
- B. Persecution is hostility and ill-treatment of targeted people, especially because of race or political or religious beliefs.***
 - 1. Persecution is any ill-treatment or hostility shown to those whose religious or political beliefs are disagreed with or despised as well as those who demonstrate ethnic differences.***
 - 2. Persecution may ultimately culminate in the death of the person targeted because of his persistent witnessing of the Christ.***
 - 3. When the targeted person is killed for his religious beliefs, his death is called martyrdom***
- C. Persecution is the giving end of this process and martyrdom is the receiving end.***
 - 1. This completed loop (witnessing and suffering for it) is called “filling up in the flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” Col 1:24***
 - 2. It is what our Lord Jesus Christ told us to expect if we are going to follow Him***
Mt 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NKJV)

Joh 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

20 "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

21 "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. (NKJV)

Mt 24:4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you.

5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

6 "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

8 "All these are the beginning of sorrows.

9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

(NKJV)

3. *It was what Paul told us we should expect for living godly in Christ Jesus*

2Ti 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

(NKJV)

4. *We can know this persecution in varying degrees will continue until the end of the age when Jesus returns*
When Daniel's 70th week, the Tribulation, begins
Re 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.
10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"
11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. (NKJV)

During the tribulation but in particular the second half, the Great Tribulation:

- Re 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,
10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,
12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."
13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"
14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.

16 "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;

17 "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (NKJV)

Near the end of the Great Tribulation:

Re 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (NKJV)

II. EXAMINING A NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF PERSECUTION

ACTS 8

A. From the human side, persecution arises when the cowards are not stopped from a current act of passionate rage

- 1. In Acts 7 we have the record of the effective witness of Stephen in speaking of Jesus being the Messiah as a part of the flow of biblical history organized by the sovereign God and opposed by those alleging to be His people and speaking for Him*
- 2. In their rage over his undeniable witness and their inability to give him a good answer to his points, they took off their coats and gave them to Saul seeking to be freer to throw rocks without the encumbrance of outer clothing. They killed Stephen and felt justified doing it! They became a part of Babylon's desire for blood.*
- 3. The mood of the unbelievers in Jerusalem was victorious and self-righteous. They had killed one of the publicly vocal members of the "cult" that was trying to tear down Judaism. They felt they had done a righteous act with which God was pleased. They had met the threat and defeated it. The desire to be even more pleasing to God and*

to wipe this heretical sect off the map in Jerusalem and all Israel was growing rapidly.

- 4. The unbelieving Jewish leadership had already arrested and mistreated Peter and John for this faith. But they had held off doing more for they thought they did not have public support. With this outburst of passion, they now knew they had enough public support to put some heat on the sect of the Way. Neither the Romans or the Jewish leadership had rebuked the crowd for their angry murder of Stephen. Perhaps the "tide" had turned their direction. They would enlist some help from Herod. The enemy of my enemy is my friend.*
- 5. Chapter 8 begins by letting us know that Saul was consenting to this killing, believing he was doing God a favor*
- 6. As a result of this passionate action, the opposition towards grew more bold and a great persecution broke out.*
- 7. When the persecution broke out, it was zealous and became great enough, it was no longer safe to live in Jerusalem. They fled to the countryside of Judea and Samaria.*

B. From God's perspective: how He used the persecution man created to accomplish His great will in spreading the gospel

- 1. God had already told His "little flock" in Jerusalem that they were going to receive power from the Holy Spirit*
- 2. The purpose and result of this power was to make them witnesses of Him, "...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Ac 1:8 (NKJV)*
- 3. Up to this point, the believers had been content to remain in Jerusalem growing a powerful, wonderful church there.*
- 4. The only witness that was getting out of Jerusalem was that of those from the Diaspora what had received the Holy Spirit while making the trip to Jerusalem during Pentecost who had trusted Christ then. They would take this witness back home, if and when they left for their homes in the Diaspora. How could God convince these new believers to get the job He desired started?*
- 5. Persecution broke out and caused the people to leave the safety and comfort of the Jerusalem church. They fled into*

the country side surrounding Jerusalem: Judea and Samaria. You will notice these are the very areas in which Jesus had told them before His ascension they would be powerful witnesses of Him. God is using persecution to expand the witness of the gospel!

III. SINCE PERSECUTION IS A VITAL PART OF THE CYCLE OF THE WITNESS OF THE GOSPEL AND ITS CIRCULATION THROUGH THE WORLD, WHAT APPLICATIONS CAN WE MAKE TO THE CHURCH OF TODAY?

- A. The formation of America largely out of biblical principles applied by the descendants of generations of European wars, religious persecutions, religious turmoil, denominational tyranny, theological misunderstandings and confused roles of what the church was to be in the world, the church in America has had a pretty good history of lack of persecution for a couple of hundred years - at least from the government*
- B. In the twentieth century the church went through several serious blows to its theology including evolution, Marxism, critical theory, higher criticism, denial of inspiration of Scriptures, denial of the person or even the historicity of the Christ, the fundamentalist/modernist controversy, scientism, neo-orthodoxy, neo-evangelicalism, charismatic movement, health/wealth/prosperity movements, multiple church/denominational splits and splintering, post modernism, public atheism, public moral scandals, pedophilia, homosexuality...*
- C. For more than 50 years, church leaders, some very prominent, have been calling the church to revival and renewal. There have been several movements toward renewal that have had good starts but ended soon. But with each of these proposed movements has been the tendency to let Babylon run the show for us! We depend on marketing, big name evangelical stars, popular bands, musical and theatrical productions to get them rolling. With every movement we must have the adequate supply of "Jesus junk" trinkets, study guides, caps, tee shirts, marketing ploys, and it must always be a "national" movement. We must have the fiery enthusiast speakers to get us "fired up" after we have had the "praise" bands to get us in the right emotional mindset. We come to the rallies, get fired up, head back home to*

- the same dead folk we left behind when we left for the rally and we just can't get the contagion of our spiritual feelings to rub off on our brothers and sisters; we drift back to deadness and loss of desire to do that again. We get fired up about Jesus coming right away and when He doesn't fulfill our wishes we get down in the dumps. After enough of these false starts, boy-crying-wolf-episodes we just drift back to our old Babylonian lifestyle of consumerism and consumption.*
- D. Additionally the church has become so worldly and so blended in with politics and the economy of consumption that its spiritual power, like that of Pentecost, has dissipated and cannot be found in any large quantities anywhere in the country.*
- E. The church's evangelistic power and authority is practically non-existent; its power in prayer is not even desired; its dependence upon its own business or organizational tools of the flesh have rendered it simply another corporate enterprise like the Walmart centers or theaters looking for a clientele rather than the lost.*
- F. Persecution, we have seen is used by God to motivate an obedient church to greater obedience in spreading the gospel. But persecution can also be used by God as a disciplinary tool.*
- G. Now, there is a rising feeling among those dissatisfied with organized religion, secularists, leftists, progressives, and communists, that religion, especially Christianity, has had too much power and influence in the culture. They would like this influence removed from the culture in a manner completely reminiscent of Psalm 2.*
- H. If the cowards of opposition can pull off an act or two of passionate rage against the church, a persecution will soon follow that will look like it happened overnight! It didn't. It has been a long time in the preparing.*
- I. The church should anticipate a coming persecution to correct the disobedience of the church.*
- 1. Wise believers, desiring to please God, should personally make calculated moves toward godliness.*
 - 2. Spirit-filled believers should take a disciplined approach to Bible-reading, prayer, fellowship with God, Christ and other serious believers, even about such things as worship, and the sabbath principal.*
 - 3. These approaches are personal; we are cleaning up ourselves first before we even approach others about*

joining us. God knows who belongs to Him; He knows who He wants to rally to His cause. He looks for available and willing people not talented folk who want to “help Him along” to get “His work” done. “His work” is often no more than our ideas and desires packed in His wrapping paper to make it look like that is what He wanted.

- 4. Once we are getting our own act together by His standards, we are at the place to blow the shofar for others who might want to join the rally for Christ. Look for souls who want to be disciplined enough to form a mutually assisting group of those who will join you in the good works that have been foreordained that we should walk in them. Let God bring you the things He wants you to do and then do them with all your heart and soul just as anonymously as you can.*
- 5. We should form ourselves into small willing groups of disciples bent on doing God’s will, loving what is good and practicing it, recapturing holiness and godliness, refusing to participate in lies and practicing truth telling with each other*