

Church Growth & Persecution - Luke 21:12-19

Sunday AM 08/12/18

Introduction:

Jesus trained the Apostles for three years to preach the Gospel. He gave what is called the Great Commission in *Matthew 28*, *Mark 16*, and *Luke 24*. He told them how the Gospel would spread in *Acts 1.8*. We want to look at the growth of the Gospel and what Christians faced.

I) The Book of Acts (The Book of Conversions)

A) At Jerusalem

1. *Acts 2.41* 3000 people obeyed the Gospel
2. *Acts 4.4* we have 5,000 men obeying the Gospel
3. *Acts 5.14* believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multiplying

B) Judea and Samaria

1. *Acts 8.1* persecution from the Jews caused the disciples to go from Jerusalem
2. *Acts 8.12* Philip preaches the Gospel in Samaria

C) To the rest of the world

1. *Acts 8.37ff* the Ethiopian Eunuch
2. *Acts 9.2* Paul went to persecute the Christians at Damascus
3. *Acts 10* we have the 1st Gentile converts, the household of Cornelius, at Caesarea.

4. *Acts 11.19-22* Antioch of Syria, the first Gentile congregation
5. *Acts 13.13* Paul travels to Perga in Pamphylia
6. *Acts 13.14* Paul goes to Antioch in Pisidia, *vv. 38, 48, 49*
7. *Acts 13.51* Paul travels to Icomium; *Acts 14.1* great multitude believed; then to Derbe and Lystria, *vv. 6-7*
8. *Acts 16-17* Paul's second missionary journey; to Macedonia. There churches established in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. *15.41*
9. *Acts 18* Paul goes to Achaia. Church established at Corinth.
10. *Acts 28.16* Paul goes to Rome.
11. The Gospel preached to every creature, *Colossians 1.23*.

II) Persecution of the Church

A) Beginning at Jerusalem

1. Apostles threatened and arrested, *Acts 4*.
2. Stephen stoned in *Acts 7*.
3. Much of the persecution Paul faced came from his own countrymen. *Acts 23.12*

B) From the Romans

1. Emperor Claudius appointed Herod Agrippa over Judea.

- a. Released Jews from Emperor worship
 - b. Seeking favor from the Jews, Herod persecutes Christians, *Acts 12.2*.
2. Christians expelled from Rome, *"Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Christus he expelled them from the city"* The Eternal Kingdom, page 91.
 - a. 44 AD. Theudas lead revolution in Palestine, *Acts 5.36*.
 - b. 53 AD "the Egyptian" revolt, *Acts 21.38*
3. Charges against Christians - they were Atheist, and guilty of cannibalism.
4. 54 AD Nero reigns.
 - a. July 18, 64 AD Rome burns and Nero blames the Christians.
 - b. Paul beheaded around 67 -68 AD.
5. 70 AD Vespasian destroys Jerusalem. John is banished to island of Patmos
6. 81-96 AD Domitian re-institutes Emperor worship. Christians looked upon as a Jewish sect and persecuted. Foxes Book of Martyrs
7. 98-117 AD Trajan sees Christians as a separate religion. Being a Christian was a crime worthy of death.
8. 249-251 Decius reigns. 250 AD a yearly sacrifice is required to the gods and Emperor. A certificate is to be issued. Christians would be identified and persecuted. Decius dies in 251 AD.

9. 260 - 303 AD persecution ceases and the church grows rapidly.
10. 284 - 305 AD Diocletian rules (abolishes the Senate).
 - a. March 305 Christianity is outlawed. Christians could not gather, all church buildings were taken or destroyed, leaders imprisoned, copies of the scriptures destroyed.
 - b. 305 Diocletian abdicated his throne.
11. 311 AD Galerius issues "Edict of Toleration"
12. 313 AD Constantine issues "Edict of Milan" All religions are to be tolerated. Moreover concerning the Christians, we before gave orders with respect to the places set apart for their worship. It is now our pleasure that all who have bought such places should restore them to the Christians, without any demand for payment" The Eternal Kingdom, page 99.

Conclusion:

The early Christians faced terrible persecution. Seeing their families beheaded, fed to lions, burned at the stake, and so on. Their blood ran through the streets of Roman cities. Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch. Was sentenced to be fed to the lions. To which he replied, *"I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beast, that I may be found pure bread."* Polycarp was 86 years old when he was brought before the proconsul. He wanted Polycarp to say, *"Take away the atheist, and reproach Christ."* To which Polycarp replied, *"I am a Christian - and if you desire to learn the Christian doctrine, assign me a day,*

and you shall hear." Polycarp would not repent and was sentenced to be burned alive. Then said Polycarp, *"You threaten me with fire, which burns for an hour, and is soon extinguished; but the fire of the future judgment, and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly, you are ignorant of. But why do you delay? Do whatever you please?"*