

## Church History: “Persecuted” 100 – 311 A.D.

Revelation 2:8-11

“Just as the church at Ephesus in large measure is representative of the spiritual state of the church of Jesus Christ in the world at the close of the first century, the fruit of apostolic ministry and faithful labor, so the trials of the church in Smyrna symbolize the persecution and trials the early church endured until the time of Constantine in the beginning of the fourth century.”

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ” John F. Wolvaard p.65

**How does Jesus reveal Himself to the church at Smyrna?** v.8

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**What does He know?** v.9

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**What are they not to be afraid of?** v.10a

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“Some have found ten specific periods of persecution in these centuries. . . others believe the expression “ten days” signifies a limited period, . . . in any case the church at Smyrna could expect further persecution including the imprisonment for some of their number.”

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ” John F. Wolvaard p.62

**What are the faithful promised?** v.10b

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**What can overcomers be certain of?** v.11

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**Why did Rome persecute Christians?**

“The main cause of the hatred of early Christians in Roman society lies in their distinctive lifestyle. . . simply by living according to the teachings of Jesus, the Christian was a constant unspoken condemnation of the pagan way of life. It was not that the Christian went about criticizing and condemning and disapproving, nor was he consciously self-righteous and superior. It was simply that the Christian ethic was a criticism of pagan life. Fundamental to the Christian lifestyle and the cause of endless hostility was the Christian’s rejection of the pagan gods.

Under Emperor Decius (249-251) Caesar worship was made universal and compulsory for every race and nation within the empire with the single exception of the Jews. On a certain day in the year every Roman citizen had to come to the Temple of Caesar and had to burn a pinch of incense there, and say “Caesar is Lord.” When he had done that, he was given a certificate of guarantee that he had done so. After. . . he could go away and worship any god he liked, so long as the worship did not affect

public decency and order. Thus, we see that Caesar worship was primarily a test of political loyalty.”

“Church History” Bruce L. Shelley pp.42,47

“From the end of the first century onwards many Roman Christians found refuge in what were then termed the Catacombs, a word that appears to denote ‘down the hollow’. They abound in an area near the city of Rome, and originally seem to have been cemeteries with numerous underground passages. When persecution was raging, these passages, and spaces leading out of them, became places of refuge. Even so, many thousands died as men and women faithful to Christ.”

“Sketches From Church History” S.M. Houghton p.19

**Who were the Apostolic Fathers?**

“The Apostolic Fathers are the earliest Christian writers outside of the New Testament. . . Their writings form a bridge between the New Testament and the Apologists who wrote later in the second century. . . They help us to understand the transition from the apostolic church of the first century.”

“Christian Thought” Tony Lane p.12

**Polycarp** was bishop of Smyrna for many years. As a young man he sat at the feet of the apostle John. In the middle of the second century this church was visited with fierce persecutions and he was martyred probably in 155 A.D. as an old man. . . The Roman governor tried to persuade Polycarp to revile Christ in order to gain his freedom, but he replied, “86 years I have been his servant and he has done me no wrong. How can I then blaspheme my king who saved me?”

**Ignatius** was bishop at Antioch for about 40 years at the beginning of the second century and was taken to Rome to be martyred. . . is the first writer clearly to present the threefold pattern of ministry: one bishop in a church with his presbyters and deacons. Apart from his violent death he is remembered for 7 letters he wrote to the churches.

**Who were the Gnostics? What did they teach?**

“In the early church the most ambitious attempt to reshape the gospel was Gnosticism. . . a variety of movements offering some way of enlightenment prescribed by a philosopher who possessed special knowledge of the way of life:

1. Spiritual things are inherently pure, material things are evil.
2. The supreme reality of god is not the creator; the material world must result from disorder, or ignorance.
3. There is a divine element in mankind, his true identity in alien world.
4. There are a series of mediators to help people escape the evil world of matter.
5. Salvation involves the genuine person or spirit being liberated from the evil physical world through knowledge..