

Christians and persecution essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The first persecution of Christians was made by the Roman Emperor Nero. He was born in 36 AD, to the parents Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus and Agrippina the Younger.

Nero led a perverted and corrupted childhood. He was a glutton, homosexual, murderer and considered insane by many. He was extremely jealous of anyone suspected of rebellion and he retaliated in persecution, suppression and murder. Nero murdered many people, including his wife, girlfriend. He had his mother killed because she posed as a threat to him.

In July 64AD, two thirds of Rome burnt down. It was rumoured that Nero was behind the fire that destroyed Rome and he had planned in detail to build a plush palace, The Golden House. Nero had to find some scapegoats in which the blamed could be placed. Nero chose the new secret religious sect of the Christians as his scapegoats and punished them severely.

Nero took pleasure in the Christians persecutions and even offered many of them upon stakes to be burned to death as torches for his parties. Many of them were hunted down and tortured; some were sewn into skins of animals and fed to starving dogs while the mobs cheered. The persecution of Christians by Nero revealed the growing resentment the people had towards the early church. Christianity was a new religion and did not appear to be very threatening, this is why the Christians were used as scapegoats. Before Nero had begun persecuting Christians, they were generally non-threatening to the peace of the Roman Empire.

Nero being faced with revolt, committed suicide in June of 68AD. The modern day reader of Mark's Gospel often think they are reading about the teachings

and life of Jesus but really this is not a very accurate view. Mark's Gospel begins with the start of Jesus' public ministry and only about three years before his death. Almost from the start of the gospel, Mark's writing contains warnings that Jesus will suffer and die and that those who follow him will risk the same fate.

One of the most unlikely clues to the fact that the gospel was written for people who might be facing persecution comes in the explanation of the parable of the sower. He says that the seeds that fall on stony ground represents those who "hear the message and gladly receive it but does not sink deep into them and they don't last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once," Ch4 V16-17. Jesus speaks specifically about his own suffering and death he gives a very clear warning to those who wish to follow him.

"If anyone wants to come with me he must forget self, carry his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it." The gospel was written at about the same time as the persecution. The message is very clear, 'Proclaim yourself a Christian could well carry with it a death sentence.' Another example to support the view that the gospel was written for people in danger of persecution is Jesus' answer to James and John when they asked if they could sit at the right and left of Jesus in the kingdom of heaven. He said "Can you drink the cup of suffering that I must drink?" - Then immediately warns them that "You will indeed drink the cup I must drink," Ch10 V38-39.

There is no mistaking the message contained in this statement. In another occasion Jesus again made it very clear that his followers would be persecuted, in Ch13 V9 evidence can be seen, to show that apparently many Christians were handed over to councils and the synagogue leaders, which refer to refers to Jewish persecution. In Ch13 V9, Mark refers to Jesus warning his followers: " You will be beaten in the Synagogues you will stand before rulers and kings for my sake to tell the Good News." Many Christians where taking before the synagogues and publicly whipped, during the period of persecution it seems that even a person's family would betray them. Mark's Gospel provides evidence that the first readers of the gospel were not Jews. In a section on the teaching of the ancestors the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticise Jesus and his disciples for not taking part in ritual washing as the law demanded, Ch7 V1-4.

It follows with a detailed explanation of ritual cleansing. We can only assume that Mark's Gospel is written for non-Jews because the Jews would have a very clear understanding of the rule. Further evidence can also be found in the same section of teaching. Mark explains the meaning of Corban as belonging to God - an unnecessary explanation if the readers were Jews, Ch7 V11. Towards the end of the gospel more evidence can be found that the readers were gentiles because Mark describes how Jesus was taken to his place of death Golgotha and translates it as ' the Place of the Skull', Ch15 V22. As Jesus was dying on the cross, he cried out " Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, " My God, my God, why did you abandon me?" Ch15 V34.

The translation of these Aramaic words surely provides clear evidence that the first readers of Mark's Gospel were not Jews and did not speak the language of Jews. Today we hardly hear of the persecution of Christians, but there is no doubt that in many areas of the world there is persecution. One such example is that of Sean Devereux who in 1993 was shot in the head by an unknown person, at the time it happened he was as a United Nations (UN) volunteer in Somalia. Sean was shot for working peacefully for the human rights of disadvantaged people.

During his life Sean suffered many beatings from military leaders and imprisonment because of his work. He angered the authorities because he refused to lie; he refused to compromise and turn a blind eye to corruption; and he distributed food on the basis of need; not the basis of tribal identity. Sean spoke out bravely and perhaps naively against corruption. Sean's honesty probably cost him his life. Jesus on a number of occasions suffered from beatings for example in Ch15 V16-20 Jesus suffered beatings to his head and verbal abused from soldiers. Sean was a lot like Jesus because in Ch6 V30-44, Jesus fed 5, 000 with five loaves and two fish.

I think that Jesus' teachings helped Sean lead a good life and when he came to his unfortunate death I suppose he went to a good place. Christians are prepared to suffer like Jesus did. Jesus suffered a lot, suffering from a painful death, many beatings and verbal abused. In Ch15 V23, Jesus was offered a drug called myrrh mixed with wine so he would have quick and painless death. But instead he was prepared to suffer.

He refused the drink and was crucified. Many people have suffered just for their beliefs. In Northern Ireland there is fighting over religions many Christians have been killed for what they believe in. Your religion should not be a crime and you should not be killed for your beliefs but many Christians are prepared to give their lives to God. But, in this modern society people are not prepared to suffer as Jesus did.

Today fewer Christians attend church and even less are prepared to dedicate their lives to God. Today many things are taken for granted like food, clothes and many luxury things. People are not prepared to suffer as Jesus did. No they are not because fewer Christians attend church today and even less are prepared to dedicate their lives to God.

The number of priests, nuns and missionaries are slowly decreasing. Today people are more materialistic and live their lives to gain more possessions. In the technological world that we live in today people see little value in suffering, self-sacrifice or pain. Although today people are not prepared to suffer, in Jesus' time people were also not prepared to suffer. The arrest of Jesus, Ch14 V43-52, saw the disciples run away when Jesus was arrested this clearly shows that Jesus' disciples were not prepared to suffer.

My view is the same as many peoples view ' Christians are not prepared to suffer like Jesus did!' This perhaps similar to the incident in the Gospel which I mention earlier (The arrest of Jesus). I think that my view is the same as others because in this modern world that we live some people are not prepared to stand up to their beliefs.