

PERSECUTION OF CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 19:21-41; Matthew 10:16-28; Luke 21:12-19.

LESSON 346 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:11, 12).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Acts 19:21-41

²¹ After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

²² So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.

²³ And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.

²⁴ For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;

²⁵ Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

²⁶ Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

²⁷ So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

²⁸ And when they heard *these sayings*, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

²⁹ And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Servant and His Master

1. Jesus warned His disciples of coming persecutions, Matthew 10:16-18, 21-23; Luke 21:12, 16, 17

Matthew 24:9-14

9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

Micah 7:5-6

5 Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom.

6 For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies *are* the men of his own house.

Mark 13:9

9 But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.

Mark 13:12

12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against *their* parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.

Mark 13:13

13 And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

2. Jesus advised His disciples that God would inspire them with the proper words for their defence when they were persecuted, Matthew 10:19, 20; Luke 21:13-15;

Exodus 4:10-12

10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?

12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

Jeremiah 1:6-9

6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I *am* a child.

7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver

Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

³⁰ And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

³¹ And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring *him* that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

³² Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

³³ And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.

³⁴ But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians.

³⁵ And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Jupiter?

³⁶ Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

³⁷ For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

³⁸ Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

³⁹ But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall

thee, saith the LORD.

9 Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

Daniel 3:16-18

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter.

17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king.

18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

John 7:46

46 The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.

Mark 12:34

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him *any question*.

3. Jesus explained to His followers the great lesson that the servant is not greater than his master, Matthew 10:24, 25;

Luke 6:40

40 **The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.**

John 13:13-16

13 **Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.**

14 **If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.**

15 **For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.**

16 **Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.**

John 15:20

20 **Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.**

4. The disciples were told not to fear those who were able to kill the body, but to fear Him who could destroy the soul in hell, Matthew 10:26-28; Luke 21:18, 19;

James 4:12

12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

Psalms 119:120

120 My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

Ecclesiastes 5:7

7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there are* also *divers* vanities: but fear thou God.

Jeremiah 5:22

22 Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand *for* the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?

Amos 5:6

6 Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour *it*, and *there be* none to quench *it* in Bethel.

II Trouble at Ephesus

1. Opposition to the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was instigated by Demetrius, a silversmith, Acts 19:21-28;

2 Timothy 4:14

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:

be determined in a lawful assembly.

⁴⁰ For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

⁴¹ And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

Matthew 10:16-28

¹⁶ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

¹⁷ But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

¹⁸ And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

¹⁹ But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

²⁰ For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.

²¹ And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against *their* parents, and cause them to be put to death.

²² And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

²³ But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.

²⁴ The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord.

²⁵ It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have

2 Timothy 3:11

¹¹ Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.

2 Timothy 3:12

¹² Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

2. Paul's companions were seized by a riotous mob and held captive, Acts 19:29.

3. Paul was prevented by friends from entering into the theatre with the mob, and endangering his life, Acts 19:30, 31;

Acts 21:12

¹² And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

John 11:8

⁸ His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?

4. The town clerk finally quieted the mob and dismissed the people, thereby preventing harm from being done to the disciples, Acts 19:32-41.

NOTES:

Perils of Discipleship

It has been said, "Adversity is always the test of moral principle." It has certainly been the test of the quality of salvation in the hearts of those who follow Christ. Some have possessed true salvation but fainted under persecutions, and turned back from following Jesus.

Jesus never encouraged anyone in the false hope that the way of God was particularly an easy one, or one that did not demand solemn decisions and serious responsibilities. The parable Jesus told of the man who began to build a tower and was not able to finish because of a lack of preparation should be a warning to all those who rashly attempt to be His disciples. (Review Lesson 149, Book 12, Vol. III of Apostolic Faith Sunday School lessons, "The Price We Must Pay.")

Men of the world often gain followers for some cause and stir up momentary enthusiasm for it because they do not tell the true hazards of the cause for which they are taking enlistments. God does not tell half-truths, nor does He gain enlistment for His cause by neglecting to tell of future hardships. God speaks the truth without colouring or embellishing it in favour of the Gospel cause. God knows that only those who are fully purposed to serve Him regardless of the consequences will endure hardships until they win the crown of life, and prove themselves true disciples of the Lord.

Jesus unhesitatingly told His disciples they would have to suffer great persecution for His name's sake. Inasmuch as we are forewarned by God of coming difficulties we need not be caught unawares, and can say with Paul, "I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17). Otherwise, Satan, the enemy of God and His people, might easily make the children of God believe that God had forsaken them when opposition arose against them.

The history of the Christian Church bears ample evidence of the great extent to which Jesus' warning of persecution has been fulfilled. Tradition states that John the Beloved was the only one of the twelve Apostles who did not die a martyr's death. Millions more have since given their lives for the Gospel rather than deny their faith in God.

Christ and Beelzebub

Why are Christians persecuted? This finds a ready answer in the Word of God. Jesus said: "If the world hate you, ye know

called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household?

²⁶ Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

²⁷ What I tell you in darkness, *that* speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, *that* preach ye upon the housetops.

²⁸ And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Luke 21:12-19

¹² But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.

¹³ And it shall turn to you for a testimony.

¹⁴ Settle *it* therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer:

¹⁵ For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

¹⁶ And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and *some* of you shall they cause to be put to death.

¹⁷ And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake.

¹⁸ But there shall not an hair of your head perish.

¹⁹ In your patience possess ye your souls.

that it hated me before it hated you." (Read John 15:18-25.)

God's condemnation of sin is the irritant in men's souls which often results in their rising up in devilish anger against Christ, against the Spirit of God, and against all those in whom dwells the Spirit of God. Satan was the first transgressor against God; and when Adam and Even disobeyed God, sin and evil entered into the soul of mankind. The forces of Satan, and the majority of the world's systems have been against God and Christ, and against His people ever since. (**Psalm 2:1-4** ¹ Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*, ³ Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. ⁴ He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.) So long as sin is in the hearts of men; so long as that great serpent, the devil, is loose in the world; so long as ungodly men do not acknowledge their obligations to Christ; so long will persecution continue to arise against God, His Son, His people, His cause, and His kingdom. It is true: "If the world hate you, . . . it hated me before it hated you."

Master and Lord

When persecution is strong against the people of God the question naturally is asked: Why does God permit His people to suffer great harm and injury, when He could prevent it if He would? The Bible is not explicit regarding the answer to this question. Much of the reason why God permits persecution will have to remain unanswered until the great day when God shall make all such secrets known to His people.

Jesus said: **"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."** With that statement we shall have to be content. God did not relieve Jesus of the ordeal of suffering the great persecution that came against Him. There was greater good to be accomplished by Jesus' suffering at the hands of wicked men than could have been accomplished had God prevented such persecution. It is true in a lesser degree with the individual Christian. God can prevent all manner of persecution, in whatever manner it might arise, against any and all His people, but He often permits it. It may be difficult for the finite mind to see what good can come from persecution when great harm and injury is seemingly being done to the members of the body of Christ, and when the preaching of the Gospel is being hindered, and even stopped. Be that as it may, God's Word is true and we can trust in it for time and eternity, and safely hazard our lives for its truth. **"Remember,"** Jesus said, **"the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."**

Our faith in God need not be shaken, then, if persecution, even unto death, should come our way. "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" Neither should we think it strange if when doing good we are accused of doing evil. (**Matthew 12:24-28** ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. ²⁵ And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: ²⁶ And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges. ²⁸ But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you **Isaiah 5:20** ²⁰ Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!)

Word of Our Testimony

The Bible states that the word of our testimony to those who might be our persecutors is of the utmost importance. Jesus counselled His disciples not to give thought what they would say when accused unjustly. It would be given them of God what to speak, and it would not be they who spoke, but it would be the Spirit of God in them speaking the wisdom of God. He said: "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist" (Luke 21:15).

Jesus told them, "It shall turn to you for a testimony" (Luke 21:13). Paul spoke of Jesus, "who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (I Timothy 6:13). Finally, in Revelation we read: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Revelation 12:11). While we may not understand the full significance of giving to wicked men our testimony of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, it is undoubtedly of tremendous value and importance that it be done, and done as Jesus said, with the Spirit of God speaking through us the words of God.

We know that God does not do evil that good may come. God does not let His people be persecuted merely that they might testify to wicked men. There are greater issues involved than just that, but that the testimony of a Christian is of great importance in such times cannot be denied.

Fear God

What shall the Christian do when threatened with death because of his allegiance to Christ? "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." These would be foolhardy words, perhaps, if anyone other than Jesus Christ had spoken them, but they are words of justification and authority when spoken by Him. God sees all issues in their proper value. He does not take a light attitude concerning men's lives, for it was God who commanded, "Thou shalt not kill." Yet men must be willing, if need be, to give up their lives for the truth of God and for the salvation purchased by Christ rather than to compromise in favour of sin and falsehood.

Although being destroyed in this mortal life at the hands of wicked men may seem like the ultimate of all catastrophe that can happen to us in the land of the living, yet God tells us not to be afraid of mortal death, or what man can do to us. The great fear of men's hearts should be toward God who can and will cast both the body and soul of sinners into hell. The very worst that man can do is to inflict a certain amount of physical pain and suffering upon the human body for a short season. God can cast men into a place of eternal suffering, where there is no limit to pain and suffering, and where there is no end to it. But the Christian, knowing that whatever must be suffered for Christ will be but for a little while at most, can be firmly set for the defence of the Gospel, even unto death. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints"; and if pain be suffered here for the name of Jesus, God will heal our hurts and wounds, and eternity shall bring forth its blessings for those who remain true to God until the end.

Brother Against Brother

In this very day God's Word is being fulfilled literally as Jesus said: "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death." In Communist China and Korea, and other nations under the rule of Russia, it is

a daily occurrence that some members of the family will rise up and denounce the others for Christian beliefs or opinions, which are against Communism.

In China and Korea, families have been slaughtered because they were known to have been friendly with Christians, or possessed a Bible or hymnbook. The day of the warfare of the Christian against sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil, is not yet past. Jesus' warnings and counsels are as timely today as they were when He first spoke them to His disciples, **"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."**

QUESTIONS

1. Why do persecutions arise against Christians?
2. Why did they persecute Jesus?
3. Why did God permit wicked men to persecute Jesus?
4. Can God prevent men from persecuting His people?
5. Why does God often permit His people to be persecuted?
6. What are Christians to say when they are being mistreated?
7. What should a Christian do when his life is threatened?
8. Whom should we fear the most?
9. What is the most harm that man can do to us?
10. What can God do to men that men cannot do?
11. What do you think Jesus meant when He said, "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master"?