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## Persecution Matthew 24:9

By Elder Keith Ellis

"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my names sake."

Matthew 24:9

If this is addressing the modern day Christian, then we have some things to be concerned about. But I am inclined to think religious persecution of this kind has not taken place for quite some time.

But rather this is referring to the disciples with whom Jesus was privately talking. Indeed they did live in a troubled time. The things the Apostles and disciples preached would turn the world upside down. They would literally be delivered up before kings, be imprisoned, beaten and suffer persecution all for the name of Jesus. Let's look at some instances.

In the previous chapter I mentioned Paul and Silas were in prison as recorded in the book of Acts. Paul had experienced what Jesus foretold, firsthand. He knew what it meant to be afflicted for Jesus' name sake. Paul gives a summary of some of the events in his ministry in the second Corinthian letter in the eleventh chapter beginning in the twenty third verse;

"Are they the ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered ship wreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in peril of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."

2 Corinthians 11:23-28

Paul was not the only one to suffer affliction for Jesus' name sake. The other Apostles also suffered. They would preach Jesus under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Time and again they would be delivered before religious leaders, magistrates, rulers, and kings for a testimony. They would often be placed in prison for preaching Jesus. They would be beaten and suffer many other afflictions as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Acts 5:18-42)

Not only the Apostles, but the entire church underwent a time of persecution. (Acts 8:3-4)

Further study of this particular aspect of this subject will reveal to you from God's word there was a great deal of affliction the church had to undergo during its initial stages of growth. Many of the Apostles were actually delivered up before kings for a testimony. The latter parts of the book of Acts describes how Paul made his way up the chain of command of the Roman authorities until he finally came to Caesar himself. History will confirm the death of many of the Apostles, (except John) was at the hands of the authorities for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In AD sixty four, two thirds of the city of Rome was burned with fire. Nero the emperor was most likely responsible himself for the act. Some say this was what Revelation chapter eighteen refers to. Nero was said to have had grand ideas to burn the city and rebuild it on a more magnificent scale. However this time he would have renamed the city Neropolis. C.B. and Sylvester Hassell in their "History of the church of God" states in the introduction of chapter eight; "To divert from himself the general suspicion of incendiarism, and at the same time furnish new entertainment for his diabolical cruelty, Nero wickedly cast the blame on the Christians, and inaugurated a carnival of blood such as heathen Rome never saw before or since. A 'vast multitude' of Christians were put to death in the most shocking manner. Some were crucified, probably in mockery of the punishment of Christ; some were sewed up in the skins of wild beasts and exposed to the voracity of mad dogs in the arena. The Satanic tragedy reached its climax at night in the imperial gardens, on the slope of the Vatican: Christian men and women, covered with pitch or oil or resin, and nailed to post of pine, were lighted and burned as torches for the amusement of the mob; while Nero, in fantastical dress, figured in a horse race, and displayed his art as a charioteer. Burning alive was the ordinary punishment of the incendiaries; but only the cruel ingenuity of the imperial monster, under the inspiration of the devil, could invent such a horrible system of illumination. It is probable that the Neroian persecution of the Christians extended to provinces; and it is believed that the Apostles Paul and Peter suffered martyrdom about this time or soon after (the dates of their deaths varying from AD 64 to 69). It is generally held that Peter was crucified at Rome, whither he had gone for the first time in the same year; and Paul, being a Roman citizen, and not subject to crucifixion, was beheaded about three miles from Rome, on the Ostian road, on a green spot, formerly called *Aquoe Salvioe*, afterwards *Tre Fontane*."

Hassell goes on to say; "There is scarcely another period in history so full of vice, corruption and disaster as the six years between the Neroian persecution and the destruction of Jerusalem. The prophetic description in the last days by our Lord began to be fulfilled before the generation to which he spoke had passed away, and the Day of Judgment seemed to be near at hand."

And no doubt, because of the radical changes which took place in the lives of those receiving the gospel message and the harm which was done to false religions, Christians became the object of the world's scorn. Of course everyone has heard of that "sport" was made of the Christians in those days when they are said to have been thrown to the lions for spectator's enjoyment. No doubt this hatred for God and His church continues until today. And unless things drastically change, this nation will have the gospel taken from it and it will be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it. And if this happens it may be we as a people will have to seal our testimony with our blood. Of course, we will suffer afflictions if

we live godly lives. But the events described in verse nine of Matthew twenty-four saw their fulfillment during the generation of Jews who were witnesses of the earthly ministry of The Lord Jesus Christ. We must learn to rightly divide the word of truth. Remember, we have been put in trust with the gospel to please God, not man. Remember why men misuse text such as Matthew twenty-four, as we discussed in the beginning. Let God be true and every man a liar.