

# *Resurrection Life of Jesus Church*

## DECEPTION IN THE END TIMES

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### PART 6: DESCENT INTO APOSTASY

#### **A LACK OF BIBLES**

As I have discussed in previous messages in this series, there were no printing presses or books in 300 A.D. like we have today; instead, scrolls were used and each Old Testament book would be on one large scroll and the same held true for the New Testament Gospels and epistles. It was normal for each city church would have one set of the New Testament and to some extent a few Old Testament books. This meant that the rank and file Christian had to rely upon the teaching from the bishops and the readers in the local churches.

As Christianity continued to spread into the Roman Empire, there were less Christian Jews in leadership and more Gentile Christians who were not educated in the history of Israel or the Old Testament. **Hosea 4:6**

In this vacuum came a number of Gentile Christians like Justin Martyr (100-165), who was born in Judea to Gentile parents. Ireneaus (130-202) resided in Lyon, France, Tertullian (160-220) came from Carthage, Origin (182-254) was from Alexandria, Egypt and hundreds of lesser known Christians, who set forth all manner of Christian theology and doctrine, which became a mix of Christianity, paganism, and the teaching of Plato, etc.

The doctrine of God, His Laws and the creation are clearly spelled out in the Old Testament and did not need any improvement. The apostles and the other writers of the New Testament books had been given clear knowledge of salvation, water baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, living a holy life and the destiny of mankind as presented by Jesus and the apostles Paul and John.

Jesus was aware of the growth of the church after He left the earth and gave a specific command as to how the apostles should handle the expected growth.

#### **Matthew 28:18-20**

Jesus gave specific instructions to Moses on how to set up an educational system for the nation of Israel in order to preserve the doctrine that God had ordained for them. **Deuteronomy 6:3-25**

The second generation of leaders of the church after the death of the apostles could not keep up with the rapid growth of the church. There was an influx of millions of new believers that came from all kinds of pagan backgrounds and the second and third century Christians did not have access to the Bible as we know it today. Much heresy was therefore introduced into the Christian churches that was preserved by the Roman Catholic Church and has come to be known as "church traditions."



## THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN DECLINE

At the time of Christ, the Roman Senate had lost most of its political power and by 284 it only existed symbolically. This further weakened the empire since there were no real legal transitions from one emperor to the other. Once an emperor died or was overthrown, a power struggle began which pitted Roman Army units against each other. From the time of Christ until 337 A.D., there were 57 emperors, some who reigned for only one year.

The general population in Italy became morally corrupt; homosexuality was rampant and the feeling of the empire as a nation began to decline. In order to keep the Roman Army legions filled, men from outlying districts of the empire began to fill the ranks, including recruits from barbarian nations.

In order to divert attention from the weakness of the Roman government, persecution of Christians began and each emperor had their own intensity of persecution.

Jesus knew that His followers would not be kindly treated and taught them what to do when they were arrested and brought to court. **Matthew 10:16-39**

Regardless of how little most Christians knew about the Old Testament and the Gospel writings, they loved Jesus and the Holy Spirit gave them the courage to stand against vicious persecution.

But by the end of the second century, the power of the Holy Spirit began to fade from them and thousands caved to the torture and agreed to renounce Christ and offer a sacrifice to an idol.

During the short two year reign of Emperor Decius (249-251), there was harsh persecution of Christians, especially in Rome. Fabian, the bishop in that city was killed in 250 A.D. Thousands of Christians under extreme pain renounced their faith in Christ, cursed Him and went to an idol altar and bowed their knees as they sacrificed to a demon god.

When Decius' reign ended and the persecution let up, many of these Christians who had denied Jesus sought forgiveness and asked to be received back into the church of Christ.

This caused a rift in the church in Rome since Bishop Cornelius took the approach that sinners could be restored under strict conditions of penance. Novatian was a presbyter and theologian who taught that there was no forgiveness for someone who had renounced Christ.

To settle this conflict, two synods (a church council of different churches) were held, one in Carthage in 251 A.D. and a second in Rome 253 A.D. The consensus was that denying Jesus was not an unpardonable sin.

They were in harmony with Jesus on this matter because he had previously dealt with Peter when he denied Him three times. **Matthew 26:69-75; John 21:15-19**

## **THE MARK OF THE BEAST**

Jesus warned us of a time when Satan will demand that all people worship him and take a Mark of loyalty. **Revelation 13:16-18**

Any person who takes that mark, whether they be pagan or Christian, will never be forgiven for that act. It is a decision with eternal consequences and means that they will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. *There is no repentance for these people!* **Revelation 14:9-11**

## **PERSECUTION DECREASES**

By 260 A.D. the persecution of Christians began to decline and the Church had peace over the next 40 years. By 300 A.D. Christianity had moved into every people group of the Roman Empire with many government officials and military officers making the choice to embrace Christianity but the quality of the church declined too since many of these new converts were not born again and were just Christians in name only. The churches became worldly as more and more pagan traditions were incorporated into the church.

## **PERSECUTION COMES BACK**

Diocletian became the Roman Emperor in 284 A.D. and he wanted the Roman Empire to go back to the worship of the old gods but he had to move slowly. In 303 A.D. he started to purge the army and the imperial palace service of Christians. *(Barack Obama is using the same playbook as he purges Christians from the armed forces of the United States in 2013.)*

Once he felt that he had control of the military, the persecution began with Christian homes being destroyed, Christian literature was confiscated and clergy were arrested and forced to sacrifice to pagan idols or face torture. In 304 A.D. the Roman government required all Christians to sacrifice to pagan idols or be killed. Satan's department of persecution was jubilant as tens of thousands of Christians were sent to their death and many more recanted their Christian faith in order to save their lives.

## **SATAN CLINCHED HIS VICTORY**

When Emperor Diocletian retired, he forced his co-ruler, Maximian, to abdicate in 305 A.D. and a violent struggle broke out within the Roman Empire as six different men fought to take over the empire. One of the men, Constantius Chlorus died in 306 and the Roman Army garrison in York, England claimed his son Constantine as the new emperor. In the meantime Maxentius defeated Severus and proclaimed himself ruler of Italy and North Africa.

Galerius, Constantine and Licinius wanted the large Christian community to stay out of the fight and issued a decree in 311 A.D. that Christians were to be tolerated and no longer persecuted. It was expected that the Christian community would stay neutral in the fight for the seat of the Empire. Galerius died in May of 311 A.D. and that left four contestants.

Constantine and Licinius pooled their resources together to fight Maximinus Daia and Maxentius. The Christian community sided with Constantine and he decided to seek prayer and have the Christians petition their God to give him the victory. Constantine and his forces invaded Italy and in a short time he confronted Maxentius, and in a major battle on October 28, 312, Constantine's army destroyed the other army and Maxentius was killed.

In 312 A.D. Constantine and Licinius issued an edict that Christianity would be treated as one of the many religions of the Empire and that they were free to worship. Property that had been formerly confiscated was returned to the Christians.

Licinius was then sent with an army to the eastern part of the Roman Empire to destroy Maximinus Daia, who heavily persecuted Christians there. Daia was defeated in April of 313 A.D.

The friendship between Constantine and Licinius soon ended and they began to fight each other. Licinius became angry with the Christian community since it favored Constantine and he began a ruthless persecution of Christians in the territory he controlled. In 323 A.D. Constantine's armed forces defeated Licinius and Constantine proclaimed himself the new Emperor of the Roman Empire.

In 325 A.D. Constantine called for a council of all bishops in Nicaea in the province of Bithynia (located in Turkey). All travel expenses for the Bishops and the clergy staff was paid for by the government. It was at this council that Constantine became the supreme ruler of the church and is therefore considered the first pope, contrary to what Roman Catholicism teaches today.

The Devil congratulated his departments for a job well done. The Holy Spirit had been driven out of the Church which was now controlled by the Emperor. From this point on, Christians would be sent out to evangelize, not to make sure that people became born again, but that they adopted the Christian faith and became loyal citizens of the Roman Empire that had conquered their nations.

For the next 1,200 years the unholy Roman Catholic Church would rule the Western world, expand into South America, and everywhere they went, they held people in darkness. The Roman Catholic Church went from being on the receiving end of persecution to the persecutor of all who did not accept their dogma. The blood continued to flow from those who were faithful to Christ.

Jesus said that we would be known by our fruits. **Matthew 7:13-27**

***Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!***

***Do you have an ear to hear with?***