

I call your attention to one of the first great exhibits of Satan's power in the persecution of the Christian church. How did it come about that Christians for 3 centuries suffered punishment and torture for their faith. I don't mean continuously for three centuries. It was spasmodic, but in certain periods they were taken and grease was put on them and the were set on fire. They had their ears pulled off, their tongues pulled out, and all sorts of torture. Individuals were thrown to the lions, and various terrible sufferings. Spasmodically. It was not constantly.

If it had been constant, the same thing would have happened to the church in the Roman empire that happened to it later in N. Africa which was a great center of Christianity for centuries and where it is almost worth your life to confess Christ today. And in other areas in which God has permitted that Satan should almost completely wipe out the Gospel.

But in the Roman Empire, God permitted Satan to go a certain distance and then stopped him there. How did it come that the Romans persecuted Christians? The Romans were the most tolerant of people, and as far as religion is concerned. As they conquered ~~xxx~~ country after country, they would have a great god and they called him Cybell, and they worshipped him and they say you worship Cybell. Cybell is another name for our Jupiter. We worship Jupiter. You worship Cybell. We all worship the same god! And they did not want to interfere.

When they met a people they could not understand-- the Jews, a people who did not have any image of their god and a people who had such a crazy idea that one day in seven they would not work, a few things like that that irritated them, they nevertheless gave tolerance to the Jewish religion. And though Jerusalem was destroyed after the great nationalistic rebellion, the Romans tolerated the Jewish religion and allowed them to observe what the Romans thought were rather queer fancies that they had. But it was the Christians that they persecuted.

Now humanly speaking Christianity could not have made a start the way it did if it were not for the Roman Empire. If Christianity had started a few centuries ^{earlier} it would have been shut in within closed borders and it would have been very difficult to get beyond them, but == because the Romans had conquered most of the civilized world and they had established a large amount of order within that area, and a very considerable amount of justice and Paul was able to travel as far ^{as} Spain without interference.

At first the Roman empire was protection for the Christians. The persecution in the first 50 years came from the Jews, not from the Romans. Then Roman persecution began. It began because Nero was looking for an excuse. He burned Rome down and he blamed it on the Christians, these queer people who were'nt content to just stay in their own land and worship their own god and take their worship quietly with them wherever they went, but were trying to win people to their belief