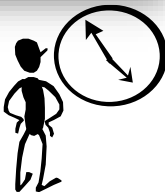


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### Time of Assembly



#### Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
(every other week)	
Worship	5:00 p.m.

#### Wednesday:

Bible Study	7:00 p. m.
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## Early Persecution

By Andy Sochor

As the apostles were commissioned to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19), this would include preparing these disciples to face persecution for the cause of Christ. Jesus warned about this in His Sermon on the Mount: “*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great*” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Paul told Timothy, “*Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” (II Timothy 3:12). Peter encouraged his readers to “not be surprised” when they would inevitably face persecution “*as though some strange thing were happening to [them]*” (I Peter 4:12). As Jesus was put to death on the cross, those who follow Him must be willing to take up their cross as well (Luke 9:23).

From the beginning of the church, Christians faced persecution. In Jerusalem, the apostles were arrested, beaten, and ordered not to preach anymore about Jesus – an order they rightly ignored (Acts 4:1-3, 18; 5:25-29, 40-42). Stephen was put to death (Acts 7:54- 60), initiating a “*great persecution against the church*” which resulted in all but the apostles fleeing Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-3). A little while later, James was put to death and Peter also would have been killed if he had not been miraculously rescued by an angel (Acts 12:1-11). Paul faced angry mobs in many of the places where he preached (Acts 13:50; 14:4-7, 19-20; 17:5, 13-14; 19:41; 21:27-36).

### Principle Persecutors

When we go through the examples recorded in the book of Acts, we mainly read of persecutions against the church that were local and usually provoked by members of the Jewish community who were opposed to the church. However, these

persecutions eventually became widespread throughout the Roman Empire. The following emperors were notable in their efforts to persecute Christians:

**Nero (54-68 AD)** – When the city of Rome burned, Nero deflected suspicion from himself by accusing Christians of being to blame. During his reign, Christians were subjected to torturous treatment, including being sewn up in animal skins to be attacked by dogs and being affixed to trees and used as human torches in his gardens.

**Domitian (81-96 AD)** – The second great persecution by the Romans occurred during his reign. As the historian Eusebius explained, Domitian “established himself as the successor of Nero, in his hatred and hostility to God” (Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History). Under his rule, hundreds of Christians were put to death.

**Trajan (98-117 AD)** – Pliny, who was governor of Bithynia, wrote letters to the emperor about the “increasing number of Christians” which was causing “the temples of the heathen gods [to be] almost forsaken. Those who made their living by selling animals to be sacrificed to heathen gods had suffered great loss in business” (Church History, John D. Cox, p. 19-20). Trajan's response allowed for charges to be brought against Christians and, if they were convicted, they would be given the choice to either renounce their faith or be punished.

**Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD)** – He appealed to a sense of nationalism and nostalgia to justify his opposition to Christians. He endeavored to “restore the ancient religious practices and the old Roman way of life” (ibid, p. 20). Since the gospel was advancing the kingdom of Christ, Christians were seen as a threat and were persecuted for it.

**Diocletian (284-305 AD)** – After a period of relative peace, persecution again became widespread during his reign. In addition to targeting Christians, he also had copies of the Bible seized and burned.

Roman persecution of Christians continued until the time of Constantine who issued the Edict of Toleration in 313 AD.

## Prominent Martyrs

Though many Christians renounced their faith when faced with persecution, not all of them did. We must be willing to be “*faithful until death*” (Revelation 2:10), and there were some who remained faithful even in the face of terrible suffering and cruel forms of death. Notice a couple of examples:

**Ignatius of Antioch** – He was killed under the reign of Trajan in 108 AD. While he was on his way to Rome, he wrote to the Christians there “not to use means for his deliverance from martyrdom, lest they should deprive him of that which he most longed and hoped for” (Fox's Book of Martyrs). He wrote, “Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!” (ibid). When he finally got to Rome, he was killed by wild beasts in the Roman amphitheater.

**Polycarp** – He was believed to have been trained by the Apostle John. When given an opportunity to renounce his faith in Christ in order to escape death, he replied, “Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?” (ibid). After saying this, he was burned at the stake.

These are examples of individuals who were fully convinced that the gospel was true, that Jesus was the Son of God, and that a reward for faithfulness awaited them after this life.

## Why Christians Were Persecuted

Jesus called His disciples to be “peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). Paul admonished the Christians in Rome, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Romans 12:18). With such an emphasis on being at peace with others, why did the church attract such animosity?

In his book, *Church History*, John D. Cox listed nine reasons for these persecutions. Let us consider a few of these:

Heathenism welcomed many gods while Christians worshiped only one God. When Paul was in Athens, he observed that “the city [was] full of idols” (Acts 17:16). When he spoke with the philosophers on Mars Hill, he remarked about “the objects of [their] worship” before proceeding to teach them about the “unknown God” (Acts 17:23). The belief in multiple deities was common throughout the empire, yet one of the fundamental beliefs of Christians was that there was just “*one God*” (Ephesians 4:6).

Idolatry was a way of life for the Romans, yet Christians would not participate in the sacrifices. John closed his first epistle with the warning, “*Little children, guard yourselves from idols*” (I John 5:21). Paul asked the question, “*Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?*” (II Corinthians 6:16), in order to make the point that Christians were to “*come out ... and be separate*” from the world around them (II Corinthians 6:17).

In Roman society, slaves were inferior to free citizens, but Christians saw all people as equals. Paul acknowledged the reality of the master/slave relationship and told slaves to “obey” their masters (Colossians 3:22). At the same time, he told masters to “*grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven*” (Colossians 4:1). However, even with the master/slave relationship in place, the message of the gospel is that “*there is neither slave nor free man...for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28). This equality was a radical view to the world at that time.

Some saw their businesses threatened by the spread of Christianity, particularly those businesses whose profit was directly connected to idol worship. This was the reason why Demetrius instigated the persecution against “the Way” in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-24). Since Paul was teaching that “*gods made with hands are no gods at all,*”

there was “*danger that this trade [would] fall into disrepute*” (Acts 19:26-27). As we already noticed, this also contributed to the persecution that occurred under Trajan. When a group of people believes their livelihood is threatened, they will often lash out at whatever or whoever they perceive to be the threat.

It is interesting to consider the similarities between the world that opposed the early church and the world today. As the wise man noted, “*There is nothing new under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). As the early Christians often had to face severe persecution, we must be prepared to endure the same today without abandoning our faith.

## Summary

Jesus told His apostles, “*If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you*” (John 15:18-19). He has called all of us to be different from the world – not “*conformed*,” but “*transformed*” (Romans 12:2). Being faithful to this calling is often what will make us a target. This has been happening to Christians since the beginning. Let us not turn away from the Lord when we face persecution; instead, let us show the same courage as men like Ignatius, Polycarp, and even the apostle Paul who “*fought the good fight ... finished the course ... [and] kept the faith*” (II Timothy 4:7).

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## Mormonism and “Men on the Moon”

By Jefferson David Tant

An unbelievable fact that is not known to most is the fact that Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon religion, taught that people lived on the moon. And his successor, Brigham Young, concurred with this.

“The Inhabitants of the Mood,” an LDS publication from 1892 by Oliver B. Huntington, contains the following:

“Nearly all the great discoveries of men in the last half century have, in one way or another, either directly or indirectly, contributed to prove Joseph Smith to be a Prophet.

“As far back as 1837, I know that he said the moon was inhabited by men and women the same as this earth, and they that lived to a greater age than we do—that they live generally to near the age of 1,000 years.

“He described the men as averaging near six feet in height, and dressing quite uniformly in something near the Quaker style.

“In my Patriarchal blessing, given by the father of Joseph the Prophet, in Kirkland, 1837, I was told that I should preach the gospel before I was 21 years of age, that I should preach the gospel to the inhabitants upon the islands of the sea, and to the inhabitants of the moon, even the planet you can now behold with your eyes.” [The Young Women’s Journal, p. 263, published by the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of Zion, 1892, Vol. 3, pp. 263-64.]

Following is a quote from a sermon preached by Brigham Young, Smith's successor.

"When you inquire about the inhabitants of that sphere you find that the most learned are as ignorant in regard to them as the most ignorant of their fellows. So it is with regard to the inhabitants of the sun. Do you think it is inhabited? I rather think it is. Do you think there is any life there? No question of it. It was not made in vain." [Journal of Discourses, vol. 13, p. 271, confirming the fact that Mormon Prophet Brigham Young taught the moon was inhabited as well as the sun. This sermon was given by Brigham Young in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City on July 24, 1870.]

Mormons today probably would not attempt to defend what their "prophets" taught about the inhabitants of the moon and the sun. But remember, they claim that these men were "prophets of God." And, of course, our astronauts who walked on the moon didn't see any sign of the local inhabitants.

Joseph Smith, who claimed the "moon is inhabited" also claimed a personal visitation from God, as well as visits from Christ, Peter, John, and other "glorious personages" from heaven.

The Mormons believe Smith produced three new volumes of Scripture, and also did a revision of the Bible. In all, 800 pages were received by direct revelation from God. [Deseret News, Church Section, July 18, 1970, p. 14.]

Mormons claim that "Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it..." [Doctrine and Covenants, 135:3.]

**Question:** Was Joseph Smith the greatest prophet who ever lived, or was he one of the greatest deceivers who ever lived? It seems evident that, among other things, Smith had a vivid imagination. His mother, Lucy Mack Smith, gives us some insight into his imagination, even before he received the "gold plates."

"During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling, and their animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them." [History of Joseph Smith by his Mother, 1954 edition p. 83.]

I do not deny that Smith and Young were prophets. I believe they were. In fact, the Bible mentions them in various places, as in I John 4:1: "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*"

It is tragic that for over 150 years millions of people throughout the world have been deceived by this man and the church he established -- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.