

# Christian Martyrs of Today

By Jay Smoker

**D**o you know that more people have been martyred for their faith in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all the previous nineteen centuries combined? That means that more Christians were killed in the past one hundred years than in all the early church during Roman times and the Reformation put together. *World Mission Digest* states that there have been some 100 million martyrs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century! (1) Who are these martyrs of today? Where do they live? And what does this mean for us as believers in the end times?

Currently we read about persecution of house church groups in China. We hear about brutal attacks on believers by Hindus in India. In Sri Lanka radical Buddhists are destroying churches. Muslim/Christian clashes have claimed the lives of many in Indonesia, Nigeria and other places. And much has been written by Richard Wurmbrand and others to document the incredible suffering and torture of believers under Communism. In its annual update, the *Voice of the Martyrs* presently lists 50 nations where persecution is most severe today, including North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iran as the three worst countries for persecution against Christians.

In countries like Cambodia, Rwanda, Serbia and Sudan millions of people who bore the name Christian were killed in mass genocide and ethnic cleansing. Although agencies like Amnesty International and the United Nations report human rights abuses,

there is not always timely intervention and the perpetrators are not called to account. Public outcry from the West has at times brought Chinese authorities to release house church leaders. But things are smoothed over for the sake of trade and good relations and the cycle continues.

How shall we understand these times in which we are living? The Bible says that the men of Issachar understood the times in which they lived (the socio-political situation) and what Israel should do (the biblical response). In this little introduction about modern martyrs we will look briefly at these two parts.

Francis Schaeffer in his work *How Shall We Then Live?* shows how the Age of Enlightenment gave rise to secular humanism and how this philosophy influences the culture and government of the day. He points out that when societies move away from a biblical basis and absolutes for their behavior, it is only a matter of time till pragmatism and relativism result – i.e., whatever is deemed best for the greater number of people. And who makes these decisions? The people who govern do. Schaeffer demonstrates how this leads to totalitarianism – strong-arm rule. The world has seen what men like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Pol Pot and Idi Amin can do. These men despised and hated believers who would not compromise.

Can this happen here? More and more the laws in our land are being reinterpreted by

the court system so as to not offend anyone. Tolerance is the watch word. For example, prayer in schools and the Ten Commandments in public places are being removed because these offend those of other religions. And perverse men are also pushing their agenda in the name of freedom to throw off moral restraints, resulting in abortion, gay lifestyle, gambling, to name a few. Christian bashing is now popular in Hollywood. TV shows and movies are increasingly hostile toward Christians. The movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, although based on fiction, is just one example of the onslaught of lies and misrepresentations of the historical facts about Jesus Christ. The public's appetite for these kinds of movies and books is astounding! And Harry Potter is popularizing witchcraft, making it look cute and innocent to children. This is the path our society is on. No longer can we trust that the laws of the land will deal with the growing disrespect and disdain for those with strong biblical convictions. They are labeled fundamentalists and fanatics. Already there are voices blaming Christians for the disasters and economic problems our country is facing. Remember Nero? He blamed the Christians for Rome's many problems, and believers were the scapegoats.

Some, upon hearing the language of persecution and affliction, draw back. But this is not God's will. God promises to prepare us for every good work, even suffering, as we daily trust Him. In the Sermon on the Mount (the most important and comprehensive ser-

mon Jesus ever preached on the Kingdom of God) He opens with a series of radical statements. He addresses a common subject: happiness and how to get it. All the world is seeking happiness. People desire peace and joy. But this road to the kingdom of heaven is a peculiar one. It takes us through poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, desire for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart and peacemaking. Each of these avenues (beatitudes) promises an experience of heaven on earth, and beyond. But look! The last one is persecution!! This is where the obedient believer will end up. "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (I Timothy 3:12).

Disciples of Christ do not seek persecution. Persecution will follow them because of who they are. Those who are poor in spirit offend others who are complacently self-sufficient. Those who mourn irritate those who are callous and indifferent. Those who are meek aggravate others who are proud. Those who are spiritually hungry nettle others who are physically lustful. Those who offer mercy rile those who demand justice. Those who have pure hearts unmask others with painted hypocrisy. Those who are peacemakers anger others who are warmongers. If people truly live by the first seven beatitudes, they must expect the eighth to come uninvited: "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake.*" (2)

How shall we then live? The Bible exhorts us: "*Be ye not unequally yoked... come out from*

**T**he Greek word for *witness* is the root of the English word *martyr*. For the early church this meant to risk your life. Most Christians today do not risk their lives when they witness to their neighbors. But in some countries today, radicals may seek to kill you or destroy your property if you openly preach the gospel and hold church services. The absence of persecution today may be proof that the world has grown "Christian" – or it may be evidence that Christians have grown worldly. Where believers compromise they will no longer be salt and light.

*among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.*" Separation has to do first with ideas, the philosophy of this world and its ways of thinking. Our renewed mind leads to a change in behavior and the way we live. The Word of God says we are to be separate, holy, set apart for God, no longer conformed to the changing ideas of the world. Daniel and his friends had convictions about their "temples." They refused to partake in the lavish table of the king. God rewarded them with wisdom. They would not compromise and bow down to the idols of this world. And God delivered them from the wrath of ungodly men. But not all are delivered from death at the hands of ungodly men. Hebrews says *"others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth"* (Hebrews 11:36-38).

As we see the day of Christ's return drawing near, persecution is on the rise. The Bible speaks of the testing of our faith that produces endurance. God wants us to be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. He is preparing a spotless Bride for Himself. And He sent Jesus on ahead as our example. He went before us as a Man in order to show us how to suffer. Friends, the way of the cross is the way of suffering. And the way we can prepare today for persecution is to follow His example. Jesus said, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"* (Luke 9:23). Every

day we must crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. As we die daily God gives resurrection power to live above sin. This is the King reigning in your heart! And should the day come when the body is killed for doing right, you will know how to die because you knew how to live. This is the blessed hope, a living hope, that a better resurrection awaits us!

Brethren, let us not grow weary of well doing. Let us join the great cloud of witnesses who are *"looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:1).



## Resource list

### Newsletters and web sites:

Voice of the Martyrs  
([www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com))  
Open Doors  
([www.opendoorsusa.org](http://www.opendoorsusa.org))  
Asia Harvest  
([www.asiaharvest.org](http://www.asiaharvest.org))

### Books:

*By Their Blood*  
*Their Blood Cries Out*  
*Extreme Devotion*  
*Tortured for Christ*

### Footnotes:

1. We didn't research this figure but it probably includes peoples who were Christians in name only, e.g. the genocide in Cambodia, Ruanda, Sudan, Serbia, etc. where millions were killed in ethnic cleansing.
2. Excerpt from an article entitled "The Martyr's Mirth."