

ANTI-CHRISTIAN

PART I

HISTORY OF SATAN'S ANTI-CHRISTIAN ENDEAVORS

By Arlen L. Chirwood

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof (Matt. 13:31, 32).

Satan is presently directing his activities against two groups of people in the world. On the one hand he is moving against *Israel*, and on the other hand he is moving against *the Church*. He has been at war for centuries, extending into millenniums, against both *the old creation in Jacob* and *the new creation in Christ*.

The reason is very simple and obvious: Both of these creations occupy their place in time at the center of God's preordained activity surrounding His Son throughout the ages (*cf.* Heb. 1:2); and the purpose for the very existence of both, when realized, will result in the end of Satan's present rule over the earth.

Satan has sought for millenniums to use the Gentile nations to do away with Israel, and he has been following a somewhat similar pattern during the past two thousand years in his efforts to do away with Christianity. Aside from an early persecution of Christians at the hands of the leaders in Israel, Satan has used the Gentile nations down through the years

as his main instrument to destroy Christianity. Satan and his angels hold the sceptre in the heavenly sphere of the present kingdom, and the Gentile nations hold the sceptre under Satan and his angels in the earthly sphere. Within this framework, power from the heavens is exhibited through an earthly rule among the nations in Satan's ever-continuing anti-Semitic and anti-Christian endeavors. The Gentile nations are being used by Satan *on both fronts*, though in different ways; and this is a fact which must be recognized.

(For additional information on Satan and his angels' present rule from the heavens through the Gentile nations here on earth, refer to the author's book, "The Most High Ruleth.")

Through Israel First

Though Satan's warfare against Christians down through the years has been channeled through the Gentile nations, there was a short period, comparatively speaking, of persecution by Israel which preceded the Gentile nations becoming involved after this fashion. Rulers in the nation of Israel, already opposed to the message of Christ and His disciples in the pre-Christian era, became the immediate persecutors of Christians following the inception of Christianity in 33 A.D.

The Church at this time, and for the first few years of its existence (possibly as many as ten years), was comprised *only* of converts from the nation of Israel; and the rulers of the Jews looked upon Christianity in several different ways — mainly as a perversion of true Judaism, though also as a rapidly spreading movement which was decimating their constituency.

Thus, in their efforts to stop the spread of Christianity, one finds the early persecution of the Church beginning in Jerusalem under Jewry, subsequently resulting in the Christians being "scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria." And this is the point in the Book of Acts where Saul, later to become the Apostle Paul, appears on the scene (Acts 4:1ff; 6:8ff; 8:1ff; *cf.* Acts. 7:58).

Saul was a strict Pharisee who thought he was performing a service for God by striving to eliminate this "new sect." Saul "made havoc of the Church,

entering into every house, and haling ['dragging'] men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3); and he is seen consenting to the death of numerous Christians during this period (Acts 8:1; 26:10, 11).

Saul was on such a mission, headed for Damascus, when the Lord stopped him enroute and revealed the true nature of his persecutions (Acts 9:1-4). Saul was, at that moment, converted; and after his experiences in "the house of Ananias" and subsequently spending "certain days" with the disciples at Damascus, "straightway ['immediately'] he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:8-20).

Beginning at this point, Saul found himself numbered among the persecuted (Acts 9:21-24); and he then began doing that which he previously thought he had been doing — performing a service for God.

The Jewish persecution can be traced in the Book of Acts through about the first thirty years of Christianity's existence (*cf.* Acts 4:1-22; 21:27-31). Jewish persecution beyond this point though could only have lasted a few more years, for Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews dispersed in 70 A.D.

However, before this occurred, the period of Roman persecution commenced; and this is the point in history where Satan began his efforts to destroy Christianity through the Gentile nations. Although Satan used the nation of Israel in this respect during the opening years of the Christian movement, Israel did not constitute one of the nations through which Satan ruled (Dan. 10:21); nor does Israel constitute such a nation today.

Thus, in this respect, the early Jewish persecution of Christians was not exactly the same as that which later transpired under the Gentiles. When the persecution of Christians began under Rome, Satan, for the *first* time, had the entire matter within the scope of *his kingdom and control*; and this is where one really finds the master plan of Satan, as it relates to the Church, beginning to unfold.

Then Through Rome

So long as Christianity was thought of as associated with Judaism, the Romans had little problem

with Christians in the Empire, for Judaism was recognized as “a legal sect.” But once the Romans began to view Christianity as separate and distinct from Judaism, problems arose — major problems.

Christianity, separate from Judaism, came under the banner of the Roman state; and because of the nonallegiance of Christians to the state, it was seen as “an illegal religion.”

“Religion” and “State” were *one in the Roman Empire*. The people were polytheistic in their worship, and this extended over into the realm of emperor-worship (they deified the emperor); they worshipped many gods, but only one king: *Caesar*.

On the other hand, “Christianity” and “State” were *separate in the Roman Empire*. Christians were monotheistic in their worship; they worshipped the one true and living God, and their only King was *Christ*.

Christian practices were looked upon as *treasonable* in some quarters, not only because they spoke of a King other than Caesar, but also because they refused to join in emperor-worship. Thus, Christianity gradually became quite unpopular among the Romans; and by the time of Nero (54-68 A.D.), Christians were ready-objects for that which was about to occur — *a long-lasting persecution at the hands of Rome*.

The event that sparked the beginning of the official persecution of Christians by rulers in the Roman Empire was their being accused of arson when Rome burned in 64 A.D. Although this persecution was limited to Christians in Rome itself, *the precedent for and manner of persecuting Christians in the Empire was established at this time*.

Christians were burned as human torches, thrown to mad dogs, and slain in other grotesque fashions. And such persecutions were continued at intervals and spread throughout the Empire by nine of Nero’s successors over the next two hundred and fifty years.

But just as a persecution of the Israelites in Egypt resulted in their multiplying and growing (Ex. 1:12), thus it was with a persecution of Christians. Beginning under Jewish persecution and continuing under Roman persecution, the Church experienced phenomenal growth.

Through the persecution and scattering of zeal-

ous, missionary-minded Christians, the gospel message had already spread throughout a large segment of the Roman Empire as a result of Jewish persecution, even before the persecution under Rome began. Then, by the year 200 A.D., Christians could be found in all parts of the Empire; and by the year 250 A.D., it is estimated that Christians constituted five to twelve percent of the population of the Empire, a population totaling about 75,000,000.

This is what led Tertullian, one of the early Church fathers living during the time of Roman persecution, to say:

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

Not all was well with the Church during these years though. *False doctrine* began to make inroads during about the last one hundred fifty years of Roman persecution. *Gnosticism* made its appearance in the Church during this time. *The Origen school of interpretation* then followed (Origen’s system of theology resulted in the influence of an allegorical interpretation of Scripture, with its inherent amillennial eschatology). *The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes* (a priestly class elevated to a position over the common people) was also becoming widespread.

Then, toward the latter part of this period (about the last fifty years), the Church began to become *wealthy*. In fact, by the close of this period, Christianity had become the richest religious organization in the Roman Empire.

Thus, as a whole, by the time of Diocletian (the last of the persecuting emperors [284-305 A.D.]), the Church was not at all the same as it had been during the period of early Roman persecution under Nero. In one sense, the Church was ripe for *the greatest tragedy* that has ever befallen Christianity, a tragedy which some historians, who do not understand Christianity at all, have erroneously called, “The Triumph of Christianity.”

The persecuting edicts of Diocletian were repealed during the opening years of the fourth century by Constantine the Great after he came into power, and Christianity was then regarded as simply another religion in the countries over which Rome ruled. This

move by Constantine set the stage for a succeeding move having far-reaching ramifications: The day came when Constantine (for reasons upon which historians differ) embraced Christianity, an act subsequently followed by his efforts to force Christianity on the Empire as *its one and only religion*.

These efforts of Constantine began a sequence of events which, during the latter part of the century, ultimately resulted in *a complete merger of Church and State*. In the year 380 A.D., Theodosius I issued an edict that made Christianity *the exclusive state religion*; and in the year 395 A.D., Christianity was finally recognized as *the official and only religion of the Roman Empire*.

Christianity then found itself completely enmeshed within a world power in the sphere of governmental authority over which Satan exercised control, completely out of line with God’s plans and purposes for *the new creation “in Christ.”*

Rather than Christianity converting the world, the world had converted Christianity.

It is this position, assumed by the Church, beginning during the time of Constantine, that some have erroneously called, “The Triumph of Christianity,” when, in fact, it was just the opposite. The “Triumph” was on Satan’s part, not Christendom’s part.

Satan then had the Church *exactly where he wanted it*. Where *the pagan persecuting emperors had failed* (although not completely, for Christianity was gradually corrupted during their reign), *the so-called Christian emperors succeeded*. Satan had attacked the Church from *without* during the reign of the persecuting emperors; but once the persecutions stopped and Christianity began to be *one with the state*, the attack by Satan then *came from within*.

And that which resulted and how well Satan succeeded — a success which has continued into modern times, deteriorating as it has continued — can be seen in Part II of this pamphlet.

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