

# THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS



## TERMINOLOGY

### persecution

noun [C or U]

UK /,pɜː.sɪ'kjuː.ʃən/ US /,pɜː.sə'kjuː.ʃən/

unfair or cruel treatment over a long period of time because of race, religion, or political beliefs – **Cambridge Dictionary**

As shown in the Cambridge Dictionary, persecution is the act of inflicting harsh treatment on a person or persons over a long period of time, because of what they believe in, as a method of forcing them to relinquish their beliefs.

## WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Before we continue, we need to clarify a phrase used often in the general media as well as this piece: Christian(s) vs Christian believer(s). There is a distinct difference.

- **Christian** in the New Testament was a term first used in Acts:

Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. – **Acts 11:26, New King James Version**

This was the term as it was applied in the first century and it referred to the groups of believers who met mostly in their homes.

- **Christian** today is a word that has been watered down and refers to a grouping of people based on religious association. We will therefore hear and read the terms Christian, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, Atheist and so on. Unfortunately, many people, when asked on a form to indicate their religion, will often tick “Christian” just because they are too ashamed to say “Atheist” but they have no real affiliation with Christianity. Not all “Christians” are thus believers in Jesus Christ.
- **Christian believer** is a phrase that refers to those who have given their lives to Jesus Christ, have surrendered their own lives and ambitions to Him, and now follow Him in everything they do. Sometimes here we use only the term “believer” and then this refers to a born-again Christian believer. This is the same meaning as given to those in Acts.

Of course, in the times we live in, the world has turned its back on Christianity and so even those “Christians” in the second group may not side with this grouping anymore.

## EXAMPLES OF PERSECUTION FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Bible is full of examples of people being persecuted, especially once the Christian movement started. If we take the book of Acts as a starting point, and just to get a chronological perspective, we see the following:

1. Acts 2:13 – ridicule – those who were baptised with the Holy Spirit and started speaking in other world languages, were ridiculed, accused of being drunk at an early part of the day. Persecution often starts with verbal, public ridicule.
2. Acts 4:1 – Peter and his followers are manhandled and jailed because they preached that Jesus rose from the dead.
3. Acts 4:17 – Peter and his followers were threatened.
4. Acts 4:21 – More threats followed.
5. Acts 5:17 – The disciples were manhandled and then jailed.
6. Acts 5:33 – The religious leaders wanted to kill the disciples.
7. Acts 5:40 – The disciples were beaten and threatened.
8. Acts 6:11 – False accusations were brought in against Stephen.
9. Acts 6:12 – Physical manhandling of Stephen.
10. Acts 6:13 – False accusations used against Stephen.
11. Acts 7:58 – Stephen was manhandled, and then stoned to death, v60.
12. Acts 8:1 – Persecution started against the believers in Jerusalem. They fled for their lives – in modern times, we would say that they have been “displaced” and are refugees.
13. Acts 8:3 – Saul, later called Paul, manhandled believers.
14. Acts 9:1 – Saul was on another mission to threaten and murder believers.
15. Acts 9:2 – Saul arrested believers. This would be the last time he could do this!
16. Acts 9:14 – Ananias confirmed that Saul was authorised to arrest believers.
17. Acts 9:23 – The Jews planned to kill Paul. The disciples helped him to escape.
18. Acts 11:19 – The displaced believers (see Acts 8:1) spread but do not proclaim the gospel initially.
19. Acts 12:1 – Herod manhandled believers.
20. Acts 12:2 – Herod killed James, the brother of John.
21. Acts 12:3 – Herod arrested Peter and jails him, v4.
22. Acts 12:6 – Despite being in jail, without a means of escape by himself, Peter was chained.
23. Acts 13:8 – Elymas the magician opposed Paul’s teaching.
24. Acts 13:45 – The Jews spread lies to oppose Paul’s teaching.
25. Acts 13:50 – The Jews and other influential people stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drive them out of the area.
26. Acts 14:2 – Unbelieving Jews stirred up the gentiles against the teaching of Paul and Barnabas.
27. Acts 14:5 – Another effort was made to manhandle and stone Paul and the believers.
28. Acts 14:6 – They flee.
29. Acts 14:19 – Paul was stoned and left for dead. He referred to this incident in 2 Corinthians 12.
30. Acts 14:22 – Christian believers confirmed that we will enter the Kingdom of God only through tribulation.
31. Acts 16:19 – Paul and Silas were arrested.
32. Acts 16:22 – Paul and Silas were beaten with sticks.
33. Acts 16:23 – Paul and Silas were jailed.

34. Acts 16:24 – Paul and Silas were blocked by their feet in stocks.
35. Acts 17:5 – The unbelieving Jews caused uproar and attack the house of Jason.
36. Acts 17:32 – The teaching of the Word was ridiculed.
37. Acts 18:6 – Those who heard the Word, blasphemed.
38. Acts 18:12 – The Jews opposed Paul’s teaching.
39. Acts 19:9 – Those who heard the Word and opposed it, contorted the truth.
40. Acts 21:27 – Paul was manhandled and beaten.
41. Acts 21:31 – These same persons tried to kill Paul.
42. Acts 21:32 – Paul was beaten.
43. Acts 21:33 – Paul was arrested.
44. Acts 22:24 – Paul was flogged.
45. Acts 23:2 – The high priest allowed Paul to be hit in the face.
46. Acts 23:13 – The Jews plotted to kill Paul.
47. Acts 24:1 – Paul was accused by Tertullus.
48. Acts 25:3 – Another plan was made by the Jews to ambush and kill Paul.
49. Acts 25:7 – The Jews accused Paul but have no proof to back up their claims.
50. Acts 27:41 – Paul was shipwrecked.

These examples were taken only from Acts, and do not include other references in the New Testament. If these things were done today to anyone other than a Christian believer, it would be a violation of their “human rights”. When applied to Christian believers though, it is deemed acceptable (not acting against something that is obviously wrong is to condone it), and even promoted.

## JESUS’S WARNING IN MATTHEW

Matthew’s 24<sup>th</sup> chapter gives a lot of insight into what Christian believers can expect to happen to them in future, and much of it has already happened to many. The disciples come to Jesus, and they walk in the temple area. They are amazed at the construction and the precision with which it has been built. They show this to Jesus, and He responds by telling them that not one stone will be left unturned – the entire temple will be demolished. Later they ask Him about the time and conditions of the end times, and He responds by telling them that they should take care that no one deceives them – not exactly the answer they were looking for.

Later, the disciples go to ask Him when these things will happen. Jesus gives them a glimpse into the future, and we can argue that some of this may already have come true. He tells them that these things are the beginnings of sorrows and then states:

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, **and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated** of all nations for my name's sake. – **Matthew 24:9, King James Version**

Another quote by Jesus states this:

They will put you out of the synagogues. In fact, a time is coming when **anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.** – **John 16:2**

The focus of this piece is on the highlighted parts – **and shall kill you and you will be hated.** Throughout the Christian period, the devil has tried everything he can to kill Christian

believers, and thus kill Christianity. No other religious group is more targeted than believing Christians. The entire New Testament is filled with examples.

## STEPHEN BECOMES THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Stephen became the first martyr for Christ, as seen here:

And cast him out of the city, and **stoned him**: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. – **Acts 7:58-60, King James Version**

He was killed by the religious Jews for speaking the truth and his faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Because these spiritual leaders were spiritually blind, as seen in Matthew 23:16-33, they simply did not understand Jesus's mission and hence tried everything to eradicate it. Stephen's death started a persecution of Christian believers that has continued unabated to this day and is going to become worse.

We may ask ourselves what the point is of being a Christian believer on this Earth if we could be killed for our faith. When we committed our lives to Jesus Christ, He did not promise that it would be easy:

I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you will have tribulation.** But take courage; I have overcome the world! – **John 16:33**

Even when we look at a well-known verse, Jesus did not only have this life (on earth) in mind:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. – **John 10:10**

The text above compares the work of the devil, to **steal, kill and destroy**, with the work of Jesus, to **give life**. Since you are given life when you are born, life in the sense that Jesus gives it, is eternal life, and cannot be touched by the devil.

## THIS LIFE IS ONLY TEMPORARY

The apostle Paul describes our time on Earth, referring to our physical bodies, almost as a tent of which the canvas will begin to tear and the pegs anchoring the tent will become loose. He compares it to what we can expect in heaven:

For we know that if **the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed**, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, **longing to put on our heavenly dwelling**, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. – **2 Corinthians 5:1-4**

Many of us may live a long and fruitful life, but eventually this body will decay, and physical life will end. We may of course also die an unnatural death.

There is also the chance that we may face a violent death at the hands of those who think that they are doing God a service by killing us.

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. – **John 16:2, King James Version**

Paul writes to Timothy:

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus **shall suffer persecution**. – **2 Timothy 3:12**

Speaking about Paul, this same man who stood by and watched Stephen being stoned, would himself later be stoned, and survived, as seen in Acts 14:19. However, years later, even after all the work he put in to spread the gospel, he was beheaded.

## **THE APOSTLE PETER**

History indicates that the apostle Peter was crucified upside down, although the Bible only mentions that he would be crucified:

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, **you will stretch out your hands**, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (**This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.**) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.” – **John 21:17-19**

## **THE APOSTLE PAUL**

Paul’s own stoning is recorded in Acts 14:19-20:

But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, **they stoned Paul** and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. – **Acts 14:19-20**

In 2 Corinthians 11:16ff he gives more examples of the suffering he had to endure. He says that he **laboured** more than others (v23); was **beaten** more often; was **jailed** more often; and often his life was **threatened**. Five times (v24) he was **flogged** by the Jews; three times he was **hit with sticks**; he was **stoned** once but survived; he was **shipwrecked** three times; and he spent more than a day **adrift** on the open water, presumably after being shipwrecked. He mentions the dangers he faced while travelling overland (v26): crossing **rivers**; subjected to **robbers**; **shunned** by his own people; **threatened** by the gentiles; **dangers** in cities, the desert, on the sea; and **turned in** by false “brothers”. He continues to mention other uncomfortable experiences: hard **labour**; **sleepless nights**; **hunger** and **thirst**; **cold** and a

**lack of proper clothing.** He states that if anyone has had a share of persecution, it was him, but he will not boast about it. He ends by stating that he had to be smuggled out of Damascus to escape being captured by Aretas.

After this, he recounted what had happened because of his stoning as recorded in Acts 14:19-20:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago **was caught up to the third heaven**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man **was caught up into paradise**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. – **2 Corinthians 12:1-5**

He indicates here that he was raptured to the third heaven and Paradise and heard and saw things that man is not allowed to discuss on this earth. While Paul does not mention his name, and seems to speak of another person, he refers to himself. Even in modern grammar it is common to refer to oneself in the third person. Whichever way you look at it, Paul had a glimpse of life in heaven, after death on Earth, and this alone should be enough reason to endure life on earth, awaiting a better life in heaven. Note that he says that he heard things that mortal man now must wait for until they get to heaven.

## **A LIST OF OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVERS AND NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIAN MARTYRS**

The apostles, as well as other well-known believers mentioned in the Bible, all died a violent death, except for the apostle John who died of natural causes (Eusebius [AD 325] claimed in his Ecclesiastical History that all the apostles were martyred except for John). According to [www.christianity.com](http://www.christianity.com) and [www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com](http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com) this is what happened to each apostle, and where they were at the time, as well as others in the Bible. Where there are references from the Bible to support the claim, they are accepted as fact. Many of the others are not recorded in the Bible but there are historical facts that could back up the claims. Whichever way you look at it, most believers died a horrible death and mostly at the hands of Roman soldiers:

1. **Abel**, beaten to death by his brother Cain, Genesis 4:8, because Abel's offering was brought in faith (Hebrews 11:4)
2. **Zechariah the prophet**, stoned, Matthew 23:35
3. **Isaiah the prophet**, sawn in two, inside a tree stump, Hebrews 12:37
4. **John the Baptist**, beheaded, Matthew 14:12
5. **Stephen**, stoned, Acts 7:58
6. **James**, the brother of John, stabbed with a sword, Acts 12:2
7. **Antipas**, burned to death, Revelation 2:13
8. **The two witnesses** (speculation who they are), to be killed by the beast in future, Revelation 11:7-8
9. **Peter**, crucified upside down, John 21:17-19
10. **Paul**, first stoned but survived (Acts 14:19, alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12:1-10) and then later beheaded
11. **Andrew**, crucified
12. **Thomas**, stabbed with spears by Roman soldiers
13. **Phillip**, put to death by a Roman

14. **Matthew**, stabbed to death
15. **Bartholomew**, various accounts of his death
16. **James**, clubbed and stoned
17. **Simon the Zealot**, killed
18. **Matthias**, burnt to death
19. **John**, of natural causes, but still tortured before his death

Despite these desperate attempts, the Word spread, and as Jesus said, the dispersed believers would become His witnesses:

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. – **Acts 1:8, King James Version**

The more a movement is attacked, the more it grows. As rose petals must be crushed to release their fragrance, so Christian believers are persecuted, and this only makes them stronger and allows the truth of the Gospel to spread.

## **MORE EXAMPLES IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS**

Throughout the history of Christianity there are more examples of how believers were killed for their faith. The letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11, tells that people were sawn through, people lived in caves, people were eaten by animals (in Roman circus arenas, as shown by historians), and many other examples and yet they counted their earthly for nothing, knowing that something much better awaited them (Hebrews 11:35).

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: **and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:** And 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. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: **God having provided some better thing for us**, that they without us should not be made perfect. – **Hebrews 11:33-39**

The highlighted part deserves special mention. Many of these Christian believers lived in horrible conditions. They were poor and had few earthly possessions. They realised that this life could not offer them anything better than what they were about to experience, and therefor they were not interested in being set free so that their lives could be saved.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but **whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.** – **Matthew 16:25**

They knew that this life was nothing compared to what they were about to inherit.

There is an account in Matthew's gospel that also addresses earthly possessions, but shows the sad state of those who focus only on these:

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be **perfect**, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. – **Matthew 19:16-22, English Standard Version**

The problem with this man is that while he kept the commandments and obeyed the law, those things alone could not guarantee him salvation and eternal life. Jesus tells him that if he wants to be perfect, he should sell his possessions and give it to the poor. Once he was free of those things, he had to come and follow Jesus. The man decided eternal life was not worth what he had to give up, and he left, unfulfilled. How sad.

There is one word in the text that stands out. Jesus tells him that if he wants to be **perfect**, he must detach himself from those things that bind him on Earth. Is it possible to be perfect? Indeed.

Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect. – **Matthew 5:48, English Standard Version**

If it were not possible to strive towards perfection, then Jesus would not have given this command to the disciples and the crowds at the time of Him teaching them. It applies equally to the rich man.

The problem with possessions is that for many people (not all), the more they have, the more they want, and the more they gather. We become so fixated on our possessions, that often these things slowly tear us away from God. This young man would probably not have had a problem following Jesus, but his possessions were standing in the way of eternal life, which is what he desired in the first place. Wealth has led many people astray.

Do you know the expression "Money is the root of all evil."? Well, you did not read properly:

For **the love of** money is the root of all kinds of evil. By craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. – **1 Timothy 6:10, English Standard Version**

The text never addresses money itself as the problem, but **the love of** money – the desire to have more than what you need, the craving for it, to hoard it, and probably squander it all away. Paul never had a problem with money as a resource. He needed money to fund his ministry after all. Note that he tells Timothy that if the motive is wrong – love, as used here, has a negative connotation – then problems are sure to follow. Paul makes it clear that this wrong motive has let many people to wander away from the faith. This means that there were

people who lived in faith, then got a stack of money, and then wandered (drifted, walked) away from the faith. Why? Because money is a quick fix, but prayer and faith take time! Money leads to a false sense of security:

For you say, I am **rich**, I have **prospered**, and I need **nothing**, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. – **Revelation 3:17, English Standard Version**

To get back to the main point, those early martyrs had nothing on Earth that they had to cling to. Their inheritance was waiting for them in Heaven.

Revelation 20:4 tells us that John could see the martyrs in heaven who had been **beheaded** for their faith in Jesus Christ. Beheading is not a new concept – there are many examples of beheading of Christians, from the earliest times of Christianity, right up to the present time.

The cruel truth about being a Christian believer is that if we expected to have a cosy life on Earth, we are dead wrong. Right now, Christian believers are being persecuted and killed all over the world. There are many websites that indicate the persecution of Christian believers as if it is a national sport. Obviously the first thought would be that we hope the very worst for the killers. Then the Holy Spirit convicts us and reminds us that we should **love our enemies** and **pray for them** (Matthew 5:44) and **bless those that persecute us** (Romans 12:14). Think about this: The very person who is now going to kill you for your faith in Jesus Christ could be a believer in Christ who is still unsaved! Paul thought he was doing God a favour by allowing Stephen to be killed:

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I **shut up in prison**, having received authority from the chief priests; and **when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them**. And I **punished them often** in every synagogue and **compelled them to blaspheme**; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I **persecuted them** even to foreign cities. – **Acts 26:9-11, New King James Version**

Later he would write these words to Timothy, his protégé:

I was formerly a blasphemer, a **persecutor**, and a **violent** man; yet because I had acted in ignorance and unbelief, **I was shown mercy**. – **1 Timothy 1:13, New International Version**

God forgave Paul even if he killed Christian believers. In the same way, the person who is ready to kill you, can be forgiven too, on condition that he gives his life to Jesus Christ and confesses his sins.

Why do we focus so much on persecution of Christian believers when in most western countries there does not seem to be any persecution? Well, tune in later again if you want, but persecution is coming to a town near you! First, it was decided that we should no longer open our schools with prayer; then traditionally western governments decided not to open proceedings with prayer, lest it offends their “fellow brothers and sisters” from other religious groups. Next, it became illegal to preach the Gospel of Salvation openly on streets. But others, no problem. They can proclaim their atheistic drivel and lies on public media as much as they like, and it is seen as “enlightening” the minds of people, but when a Christian

proclaims the truth about Christian persecution on YouTube, it is banned. What is next? The motto seems to be “if we cannot silence them, let us kill them”.

If you value your life more than your faith in Jesus Christ, then you are going to die anyway, and despite everything you may already have done as a believer, you will be without Him! The Bible is clear that no one who loves even their lives or their family more than Jesus Christ, will inherit the Kingdom of God:

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than **Me is not worthy of Me**; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than **Me is not worthy of Me**. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow **Me is not worthy of me**. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and **whoever loses their life for my sake** will find it. – **Matthew 10:37-39, New International Version**

## THE APOSTLE PAUL’S FINAL DAYS

Let us turn back to Paul. Towards the end of his life, he was in **prison** (2 Timothy 1:8), awaiting execution. Note that this does not refer to the last verse in Acts which speaks of him living in his own rented house:

And Paul dwelt **two whole years in his own hired house**, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. – **Acts 28:30-31, King James Version**

At that stage he lived comfortably, but later he was imprisoned again (2 Timothy 1:8) and lost all the freedom and security he had enjoyed.

The question arises what happened to the trial that Paul was supposed to attend in Rome. We read in Acts 25:11 that Paul defends himself in the presence of Festus and calls to appeal to Caesar, for which Festus grants permission in verse 12. However, when we read the final account of Acts, we never get an answer whether Paul was ever tried, or what the outcome was. He does not mention anything in his later writings and if the trial took place, he would have mentioned this.

Doug and Sherry Ward, from Grace and Knowledge, have written an excellent article in this regard, titled “What happened to Paul after Acts 28?” The article is available for study and you are encouraged to read it: <http://graceandknowledge.faithweb.com/acts29.html>. (Link and content used with permission.)

## PAUL’S SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY

It is from a prison cell that he writes an emotional letter to Timothy. Paul is alone, cold, and has been deserted by just about everyone else, except for Luke. He is certain that his death is at hand but still finds the courage to write to Timothy to encourage him and to ask for a few things that could make life in the prison cell more bearable. He asks for the books and scrolls, as well as the cloak he left behind. Take a good look at the middle part, highlighted here:

1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;  
 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.  
 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;  
 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.  
 5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.  
**6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.**  
**7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:**  
**8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.**  
 9 Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me:  
 10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.  
 11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.  
 12 And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.  
 13 The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when you come, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.  
 14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:  
 15 Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.  
 16 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.  
 17 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.  
 18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. – **2 Timothy 4:1-18, King James Version**

How can such a piece of writing not touch your heart? He first summarises his ministry that has now been completed and passes on the responsibility to Timothy to continue. He warns him of the apostasy that will be evident in the church. Is this only in our day? No. He warned Timothy then already that there will be false teachers and people who do not want to hear the truth but only what they want to hear. If it was bad then, imagine what is happening today? Next, he speaks of his imminent death. He is ready to die – he has completed the race, has fought a good fight and has completed what he started out to do.

His reward was not what one would think God would give to a faithful servant – maybe a house somewhere in the outskirts of Rome, with a few farm animals, watching the sun go down every day and thinking of what he has achieved as the greatest person ever to spread the gospel. Instead, he is in a dark, damp and dirty jail cell, waiting for the footsteps of soldiers coming down the passage, the creaking of the key in the padlock, called to stand up, and follow them. Then, once outside in the bright sun, a final judgement is passed, and suddenly one strike from a Roman soldier's sword ends it all. In that moment, temporary life is exchanged with eternal life. He is with Jesus Christ, the One whose church he initially set

out to destroy; then met the same Jesus while on one of his destroying missions; and then followed for the rest of his life. His **cross**, to be crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), has been turned into a **crown** of victory.

## CONCLUSION

This piece is not meant to scare believers, but to serve as a warning not to be complacent. If a cruel death ended the lives of God's children in the Bible and beyond, what makes us any different today? We should not fear death. Jesus has already overcome death by being raised from the dead, and in the same way we will be raised in a new permanent life once the one we are in now, ends. The question is whether after reading this, we are still prepared to count the cost of what it costs to follow Him as Lord and Saviour.



When Christian believers are being silenced more and more each day, it is important to hear about their persecution. Visit [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com).