

# The Church at Smyrna

## Revelation 2:8-11

### The Persecuted Church

Introduction: The city of Smyrna was located 40 miles north of Ephesus. When entering the city from the road to Ephesus one would enter through what was called the "Ephesian Gate." Smyrna was a wealthy city, second only to Ephesus in the entire area. Like Ephesus, it was also a seaport city. Unlike Ephesus, which today is uninhabited, Smyrna (now called Izmir) is a thriving city, with a Christian church. "Smyrna is mentioned only here in Scripture, but from other literature it is evident that this city was noted for its wickedness and opposition to the Christian gospel in the first century."

This message to the church at Smyrna is one of only two that had no condemnation given to them. **It was not the wrong that this church would suffer great persecution for, but rather the right.** God was preparing them in this message for the very great trials that were to come. "The very trials that afflicted them assured them of deliverance from any lack of fervency for the Lord and kept them from any impurity or compromise with evil." It says in Revelation 2:10 that this church would endure suffering for "ten days." This probably had a literal interpretation when they endured an actual ten-day period of fearful blood-letting.

The church at Smyrna symbolically represents the church age period from 100 A.D.--300 A.D. This period had ten intensive persecutions by ten Roman Emperors. These persecutions were under Nero (64-68), Domitian (81-96), Trajan (98-117), Pius

(137-161), Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Severus (193-211), Thracian (235-238), Decius (249-251), Valerian (253-260), and Diocletian (284-305).

This church age period is known for its great persecutions. The church suffered much for the cause of Christ, yet never gave up. The introduction of Christ as "the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive" is an indication of His ministry during this time.

As with the study on the Apostolic church, we will look at these verses and apply them to our lives today. As we study this church age period, it is also my aim to show us that we will also suffer persecution today in various forms. The same thing that was true of the church age period mentioned here is also true for us today.

## **I. WHO DO WE LOOK TO WHEN PERSECUTION COMES? – VS. 8**

The message to the church at Smyrna begins like the other of the seven letters, and that is with a truth about the Lamb of God, the Lord, Jesus Christ. In each case, it is a truth that helps them understand a little about the problems they are facing. Such is the case here.

### ***A. We look to the One that's been there before – "the first and the last"***

**Rev 1:8** I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

**Rev 1:11** Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto

Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

**Rev 1:17-18** And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: (18) I *am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

1. He was before time, and He will be after time. Because of that truth, we can be assured that our Saviour has brought others through the same trials we go through. John 16:33

**Joh 16:33** These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

2. This also means that He is "the first (one) and the last (one)," or one who is first and last, the term used to identify the one true God, manifested in his Son Jesus Christ. John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-4

**Joh 1:14** And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

**Heb 1:1-4** God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, (2) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; (3) Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by

himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (4) Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Years ago a small group of Japanese believers were heckled and abused whenever they assembled to worship the Savior. But the persecutors could not shake the faith of the new converts. Each time the Christians gathered, the mob would throw stones at them, but they still faithfully continued to have their weekly meetings.

Eventually the opposition became so great that the outdoor services had to be temporarily abandoned. Later, when a time of relative peace and tolerance had come to the community, many were won to Christ. Returning to the spot where the believers had frequently been attacked, they began to pick up some of the rocks. Using them as part of the building materials, they constructed a small house of worship, rejoicing that God had worked all things together for good.

***B. We look to the One that's seen death before – Mark 15:37-47***

***C. We look to the One that death couldn't hold – Mark 16:1-6; 1 Cor. 15:55-58***

1Co 15:55-58 O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? (56) The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.

(57) But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (58) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

## **II. WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN PERSECUTION COMES – VS. 9**

During this time of church history (100-300 A.D.), there was a time of great "tribulation and poverty." It is recorded for us that during the times of persecution at that time, the Christians lost everything they had in this world. Although there were good times periodically during those two hundred years, the majority of the time was of great persecution and poverty.

As with most major times of persecution in history, this one was brought on by those that said they were "religious." There were in the church at that time those that their whole purpose was to destroy the church and return to the Old Testament way of life. In other words, they were "zealous" for good works but did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

There are certain things that this verse teaches us about persecution, and what to expect when it comes. God told the church at Smyrna, and then, by prophecy, the early church age we are reviewing, and then by application, us today, that not only will persecution come, but it will come with some specific things. That is what we will look at today.

### **A. "Tribulation"**

1. This word "tribulation" means a pressure, a pressing; hence, pressure from evils, affliction, distress. It was more than just having problems. This was having problems directly related to our Christianity. John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3; 8:35; 12:12

**Joh 16:33** These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

**Act 14:22** Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

**Rom 5:3** And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

**Rom 8:35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

**Rom 12:12** Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

2. When persecution comes, we will know it. It will come in the form of pressure:
  - a) Pressure to do evil
  - b) Pressure from evil itself
  - c) Pressure because we're not evil

3. At this time in history, there was great pressure on the true church to conform to the "religion" of the day; to compromise its stand for the right. The next church age we will study will see the beginning of the time in church history where that is exactly what happened to the church.

**B. "Poverty" (physical) – yet they were "rich"**

1. The church at Smyrna then was a poor church, as were many churches of the New Testament era. Not much is known as to what happened to it to bring it to that place of poverty, but it must have been a traumatic time for many for it to be recorded in Scripture.
2. The church age period seen in the prophecy of this passage shows us that the true church then would have the same trouble. The church was poor, and more specifically, the Christians were poor because of their Christianity. (See point "A" for the reason. More will be given on this point later in this study.)
3. The true church today will be poor, in comparison to the world and its standards, and even some of its churches. Christians today, for the most part, will be poor in comparison to others around us. Yet, the Bible says we can be "rich" in what matters. Luke 12:20-21; 2 Cor. 6:10; 1 Tim. 6:17-18; James 2:5-6

Luk 12:20-21 But God said unto him, *Thou*

fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? (21) So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

2Co 6:10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things.

1Ti 6:17-18 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; (18) That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

Jas 2:5-6 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? (6) But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

Money can buy medicine, but not health.

Money can buy a house, but not a home.

Money can buy companionship, but not friends.

Money can buy entertainment, but not happiness.

Money can buy food, but not an appetite.

Money can buy a bed, but not sleep.

Money can buy a crucifix, but not a Savior.

Money can buy the good life, but not eternal life.

That explains why we are told in the Scriptures that it



is God (alone) who is able to supply us "with all things to enjoy." As Seneca, the Roman statesman once said: "Money has never yet made anyone rich."

### ***C. False witnesses among us***

1. There was a specific claim in the church at Smyrna by some that lied about their Jewish heritage simply to gain a foothold in the church. God says they are of the "synagogue of Satan" as compared to the true Jewish synagogue.
2. As to the early church age that we are studying, this was the period that began a decline away from the cardinal doctrines of the Bible.
  - a) Towards the close of the second century, the great doctrine of Salvation itself was questioned. The church was infiltrated with paganism that placed great importance on ceremonials, and hence they began to teach baptism was essential for salvation - "baptismal regeneration."
  - b) Then, because of placing greater importance on baptism than the Bible does, the subjects of baptism (those who were to be baptized) changed. This is when they began baptizing infants for the first time.
  - c) Even during this time there were those churches that did not compromise, or conform, and the lineage of the true church continued to be seen and grow

3. As for the church today, there will always be a certain people in churches that will not conform to the doctrines of the Bible, and will try to cause divisions in the church. What is needed is a spiritual eye to be able to recognize these people and avoid them. 2 Tim. 3:6-7; 2 Pet. 2:1-2; Jude 1:4

**2Ti 3:6-7** For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, (7) Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

**2Pe 2:1-2** But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. (2) And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

**Jud 1:4** For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **III. WHAT TO DO WHEN PERSECUTION COMES – vs. 10A**

#### ***A. Fear nothing the devil can do to us – "Fear none of those things..."***

1. The word for "fear" here is where we get our word "phobia"

2. This is a fear that causes extreme action
3. Its definition is "a morbid, compulsive, and persistent fear of any specified type of object, stimulus, or situation"
4. Not simply fearing something because of its outcome, but fearing it because of what it is. Ps. 23:4; Dan. 3:16-18; Matt. 10:28-31; Luke 12:4-7

**Psa 23:4** Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

**Dan 3:16-18** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter. (17) If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. (18) But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

**Mat 10:28-31** And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (29) Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. (30) But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.

**Luk 12:4-7** And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. (5) But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear:

Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. (6) Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? (7) But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.

J.H. Crowell went to work on a sailing vessel at the age of 16. He was the only Christian among a crew of 12. Before leaving home, he had promised his mother he would continue his devotions and pray three times a day. When the other sailors discovered his piety, they taunted him and poured buckets of water upon his head, but they could not put out the fire in his soul! As time passed the intensity of the persecution increased. One day they bound him to the mast and beat him with 39 stripes, but still he prayed. Finally they tied a rope around his waist and threw him overboard. Realizing he might drown, he asked God to forgive his tormentors, and pleaded with them to send his body home to his mother. "Tell her I was faithful and died for Jesus!" he said. When they thought he was dead, they pulled him back on deck, but to their surprise he regained consciousness. Conviction from the Holy Spirit came upon some of the sailors, and two of them were gloriously saved. Later the captain and several others were also converted. This unusual experience highlights the wonderful power of faithfulness.

***B. Realize we will suffer – "which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil will cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days..."***

1. There is a historical account to this verse, as well as a future look to it. It would appear that there was an actual ten-day period of intense "blood-letting," in which the church at Smyrna suffered untold agony and despair.
2. That was the immediate fulfillment to the verse. The church age period we are studying is that between 100 AD and 313 AD. During that period, there were ten periods of Roman persecution. The entire period was not one in which every Roman emperor was wicked, for there were some that sympathized with the Christians and let them worship as they wanted to. However, there was extreme persecution, which actually began during the first church age period:
  - a) Nero (64-68) – Killed Peter and Paul
  - b) Domitian (81-96) – thought Christianity was atheistic. Killed thousands of believers, and banished John to Patmos.
  - c) Trajan (98-117) – was the first to pass laws against Christianity. Burned Ignatius at the stake.
  - d) Pius (137-161) – thought Christianity an absurd superstition.

- e) Marcus Aurelius (161-180) – Beheaded the great writer and defender of the faith, Justin Martyr. Killed Polycarp, disciple of John. Polycarp was, by most historical accounts, the pastor of the church in the city of Smyrna (as well as having held that position in Ephesus).
- f) Severus (193-211) – killed Origen's father
- g) Thracian (235-238) – brutal barbarian. Commanded all Christian leaders to die.
- h) Decius (249-251) – determined to exterminate Christianity
- i) Valerian (253-260) – killed Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage
- j) Diocletian (284-305) – last and most severe persecution. For ten years believers were hunted in caves and forests. They were burned, thrown to wild beasts, and put to death by every torture cruelty could devise. But Diocletian's own wife and daughter accepted Christ.

***C. Be faithful even if it costs us our lives – "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."***

Some examples of this period's persecution:

"A great plague ravaged the East in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and popular clamor demanded Polycarp as an atoning victim to the gods; at the age of ninety years he suffered martyrdom, A.D. 166, 167. He had retired to the country, but one of his servants betrayed him. When he approached the city the chief magistrate took him into his chariot, asking him: 'What harm is there

in saying Lord Caesar, and sacrificing?' This, he said, he could not do, when he was cast violently from the chariot, and lamed one foot in the fall. He limped into the stadium, where the crowd cried for his blood; and he believed that he heard a voice commanding, 'Polycarp, play the man!' He was ordered to swear by the fortunes of Caesar, and cry, 'Away with the Atheists,' the proconsul offering him liberty if he would revile Christ. The answer of the simple-hearted old [preacher] was: 'Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any wrong; how, then, can I blaspheme my King and Saviour?' The proconsul cried: 'I have wild beasts at hand, to them I will cast thee, except thou repent.' 'Call them,' answered the holy man. 'Thou despisest the wild beast; I will have thee consumed by fire.' Again he replied, 'Why dost thou tarry? bring forth what thou wilt.' The herald was commanded to cry three times, 'Polycarp has confessed himself a Christian!' At once the multitude gave a shout of fury, and called for a lion to be let loose; but the magistrate said: 'Let him be burned!' A pile of fagots was brought, the elder loosed his girdle, laid aside his outer garments, and when about to be nailed to the stake begged: 'Leave me, I pray, unfastened. He who gives me strength to bear the fire, will hold me to the pile.' They simply tied him with cords; when looking up to heaven, he said: 'O, Lord God Almighty! I give thee thanks that thou hast counted me worthy, this day and this hour, to have a part in the number of thy martyrs, in the cup of the Christ.' The flames were kindled, but they arched over him and would not touch him; seeing which an executioner plunged a dagger into his body, and he ascended to his Lord.

"The homes of Christians in the east and west were plundered; they were driven from the baths and streets to the lists, were dragged from dens and crypts; slaves were forced to charge their

masters with cannibalism, incest and every kind of crime; and children were tortured to extort a criminating word against their Christian parents. They were burned with hot irons, tossed in nets by wild bulls, thrown to ravenous beasts in the arena, and their bones denied burial. Delicate and weak women passed through tortures unheard of, without complaint. An iron chair was devised, made red hot, and the martyrs fastened in it for the delight of the amphitheater. "

One such example of torture was a poor slave-girl, fifteen years of age, by the name of Blandina, martyred at Lyons, A.D. 177. "She was kept in a loathsome dungeon, and brought into the amphitheater every day to see the agonies of her companions as they were roasted in the iron chair, or torn to pieces by lions. Her spirit was clothed with superhuman endurance, for although raced from morning till night, so that her tormentors were obliged to relieve each other for rest, her constancy vanquished their patience, her only answer being: 'I am a Christian, no wickedness is done by us.' Then they took her into the circus and suspended her on a cross, within reach of the wild beasts, to frighten her fellow-confessors. The multitude howled for her life and a lion was let loose upon the poor child, but not a quiver passed over her frame. She looked into its mouth and smiled like a queen, and the monster did not touch her. Taken down from the cross she was removed to her dungeon, but finally brought back into the arena for execution. Her slender frame was a rare victim for the savage populace, and they gloated on her. She stepped as lightly as if she were going to a banquet. She was first scourged, then scorched in the hot chair, and at last cast before a furious bull, which tossed her madly. Even then a sharp blade was needful to take the lingering throb of life; and when her body was burnt to ashes it was cast into the Rhone."



#### **IV. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE PERSECUTION IS OVER – vs. 10c-11**

##### **A. Rewards will be given for faithful service – vs. 10c – "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" – Matt. 25:14-30**

1. This will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ

**2Co 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

**Rom 14:10-12** But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (11) For it is written, *As I live*, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. (12) So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

2. This will be the first thing to take place after the rapture, when the final church age is over. In Revelation 4, we see the 24 elders (which represent the church age saints) casting their crown at Jesus' feet. This is after they received them at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

**Rev 4:4** And round about the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

**Rev 4:10-11** The four and twenty elders fall

down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, (11) Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

3. The reward-giving ceremony is seen as a time for our works to be judged. Anything that was proven to be good works will be rewarded.

4. This is the time when the 5 specific crowns will be given.

a) The incorruptible crown, or the victor's crown – given to those who master the old nature – 1 Cor. 9:25-27

1Co 9:25-27 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. (26) I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: (27) But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

b) The "soul-winners" crown

1Th 2:19-20 For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? (20) For ye are our glory and joy.

- c) The Crown of Righteousness – 2 Tim. 4:8 – this is for those that are looking forward, with much anticipation, to the Lord's return.

2Ti 4:8 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.

- d) The Crown of Life (the "Martyr's Crown) – James 1:12; Rev. 2:10 – this is for all those who faithfully persevered in suffering and sacrifice for Christ unto death.

Jas 1:12 Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Rev 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

- e) The Crown of Glory – 1 Peter 5:3-4 – this is specifically for Pastors

1Pe 5:3-4 Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (4) And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

***B. We will be seen as an overcomer, and with other overcomers – "he that overcometh"***

1. We are that, not because we did anything, but because of Jesus "overcoming the world," and our acceptance of Him – John 16:33; Rom. 8:37-39

**Rom 8:37-39** Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. This will be visible to the world at the Battle of Armageddon

**Rev 19:11-19** And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. (12) His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. (13) And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. (14) And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. (15) And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. (16) And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (17) And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather

yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; (18) That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all *men, both* free and bond, both small and great. (19) And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

### ***C. Eternity in heaven will be ours***

1. Because we will not be "hurt by the second death," we will spend eternity in heaven

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Rev 20:11-15 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. (12) And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. (13) And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. (14) And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (15) And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Rev 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

2. This is finalized for all of humanity to witness at the Great White Throne, when we are on the side of the Judge, rather than on the side of the judged. The ones being judged are the lost, not the saved. We're on the side of the One doing the judging because we accepted the payment for our sins when Jesus judged our sins on the cross.

Heb 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

1Pe 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Conclusion: This whole series of messages on the church age period known as "The Persecuted Church" is one of hope. The final act of the persecuted church here on earth is physical death, but that just starts eternity in heaven, where there is no more death, or sorrow, or pain, or persecution. The only thing that awaits us after this life is over is what we lived this life for - ETERNITY.

A little boy was offered the opportunity to select a dog for his birthday present. At the pet store, he was shown a number

of puppies. From them he picked one whose tail was wagging furiously. When he was asked why he selected that particular dog, the little boy said, "I wanted the one with the happy ending."

If we want to reach out for a life with a happy ending, we have no choice but to accept the living Christ as our Lord and Savior, follow Him daily, and rejoice in the eternal life that awaits us.

**Note:** Events that mark this period of church history include such errors as baptismal regeneration (salvation by baptism) and infant baptism.

It was in the year 251 that the true New Testament church declared nonfellowship with the irregular churches. They refused to accept baptism administered in infancy or for salvation and thus came the oldest nickname -- Ana-Baptists, which means rebaptizers. Before this they were known as the "Montanists," the "Novations," and the "Paterins."

There is no mention of any other denominations at this point because they had not yet come into existence. Until the end of this church period (313 AD) there was only one church, the Christian church.