

What does the New Testament say about persecution?



The New Testament includes the gospels, four accounts of the life of Jesus. 'Gospel' means 'good news'. In the gospels, Jesus is described teaching that his disciples would face rejection even from their own families, as well from as the religious leaders of the day.

In the following passage, Jesus is speaking to his disciples, warning them that they will be persecuted for following him. Christian tradition holds that many of the disciples were indeed killed for their faith. Many Christians understand this passage in a more general way as well, warning all Christians that they might face persecution.

Be on your guard! You will be taken to courts and beaten with whips in their meeting places. And because of me, you will have to stand before rulers and kings to tell about your faith. But before the end comes, the good news must be preached to all nations.

When you are arrested, don't worry about what you will say. You will be given the right words when the time comes. But you will not really be the ones speaking. Your words will come from the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters will betray each other and have each other put to death. Parents will betray their own children, and children will turn against their parents and have them killed. Everyone will hate you because of me. But if you keep on being faithful right to the end, you will be saved.

Mark chapter 13 verses 9-13 (CEV)

What forms of persecution does Jesus warn the disciples that they will suffer?

God blesses those people who are treated badly for doing right. They belong to the kingdom of heaven.

God will bless you when people insult you, ill-treat you, and tells all kinds of evil lies about you because of me. Be happy and excited! You will have a great reward in heaven. People did these same things to the prophets who lived long ago.

You have heard people say, "Love your neighbours and hate your enemies." But I tell you to love your enemies and pray for anyone who ill-treats you. Then you will be acting like your Father in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both good and bad people. And he sends rain for the ones who do right and for the ones who do wrong.

Matthew chapter 5 verses 10-12 and 43-45 (CEV)

Many people of Jesus' day believed that suffering happened to people as a punishment because they had done something wrong. It would have been challenging for them to hear that people who were persecuted would be blessed by God. Jesus wasn't saying that to be persecuted was a good thing, but that people who are persecuted will receive God's blessing, love and support.

Compare how the author of Psalm 7 responded to persecution with what Jesus said about it in the passage from Matthew's Gospel

In Psalm 7, the author:

- claimed he was innocent
- cried out for safety
- wanted the persecutors to change their ways
- called on God to judge them
- wanted revenge

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says that:



How difficult is loving your enemies when you are being persecuted? Why do you think Jesus suggested love rather than hitting back?

Give three examples of the teachings of Jesus which could help Christians face persecution today.

Now learn more about Christianity and persecution by watching the video at:

biblesociety.org.uk/e/persecution



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Contemporary English Version, Second Edition (CEV®)

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