

## THE BURNING TIMES (1300's to 1700's)

Starting during the early part of the 1300's began a period in Europe of horrible torturing, murder, and persecution known as the *Witch Hunts*. The reasons were greed, fear and ignorance. The European Witch hunts were some of the most tragic acts committed by human beings against human beings along with the 21st century Holocaust.

### How And Why Witches Were Hunted

The church (Catholic and Protestant) began its persecution for reasons of greed and power. The church leaders caused followers to be afraid of anything related to the devil and created many superstitions in their minds.

One of the main goals of the church at this time was to make all people follow their religion. People who followed the old religion, called Pagans (which worships nature) did not want to convert. So the church wanted to get rid of Pagans who did not want to convert. The church did this by telling their followers that the ways of the Pagan were acts of the Devil, so Pagans were Devil worshipers. They were called heathens and they were thought to be uncivilized. People were so scared of the Devil that they started to become very fearful of acts of the Devil around them. It seems that almost everyone at this point thought, or was convinced to think, that Witches were bad people.

The church had enough power to be able to dictate the way people lived their lives. At this time rules were created that made it mandatory for people to have education and a license in order to practice as a doctor. Only men were allowed to get this education and license. Many of the Pagan healers were women. They collected natural herbs to heal people and they were midwives (delivered babies). Anyone who practiced unlicensed healing was accused of witchcraft, which was punishable by death.

The church was not the only one who could profit from persecuting witches. Licensed doctors did not want competition because they wanted to earn money so they accused many people. Doctors were thought of as experts in figuring out if people were witches, and were often hired as witch hunters by the church. Other who could profit from getting rid of witches were neighbors who didn't like them or wanted their land. The belongings, land, and homes of accused witches became the property of the church. The church sometimes gave land to witch hunters, so there was a profit for many people.

The Witch trials were now used to get rid of anyone for any reason. Anyone could be blamed. Although the majority of the victims were women, men and children were accused too. You did not truly have to be a witch to be accused. The families of people accused of being witched were arrested and executed too so that "witch blood" could not be passed on. Anyone who spoke up and said that witch hunts were not right were accused too, even priests and nuns were accused this way.

Once people became generally afraid of, and hateful of Witches, everything was blamed on them. All the problems of the society from the bubonic plague to poverty and starvation, was blamed on Satan and 'his' Witches.

There was never any defense allowed for the people accused. There was nothing anyone could do to save themselves. The minute someone was accused their lives were over.