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6-14-2021

HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS – LESSON 5
PERSECUTIONS 192-313 A.D.

Severus now ascended as Roman Emperor in 192 A.D. and the persecution now shifted to the general pagan populace as the source, not the emperor. Severus had suffered some severe illness. A Christian prayed for him, and he was healed. This brought great favor to the Christians from Severus.

However, people were converting in massive numbers to Christianity. This alarmed the pagan populace, and they started blaming every calamity of nature on the Christians. The pagan citizens of the empire took it upon themselves now to persecute and kill Christians despite the emperor's benevolence to them.

From here on for the next 120 years, various periods of persecution came, sometimes from an order of an emperor, and sometimes stirred up by pagan priests.

The Christian church had grown so large and so rapidly that by 250 A.D. there were many quarreling factions and many different teachings and doctrines. There was little unity and there were at least five different cities, each with a powerful Bishop, that were claiming leadership of the "church."

Persecution of Christians by Rome finally ended in 313 A.D. when Constantine became emperor. Although from a pagan background, he had a benevolent view of Christians as a young prince from 303 A.D. until God gave him a vision which resulted in his conversion. Upon becoming emperor of the Roman Empire in 313 A.D., he immediately decreed that Christianity was now the official religion of the empire. Persecution of Christians was ceased in most of the empire but continued in Persia (Iran).

Constantine took measures to strengthen Christianity and consolidated it around Rome. This resulted in what we know today as the Roman Catholic Church.

Persecutions, however, did not entirely go away. There is a saying, "Yesterday's persecuted become today's persecutors." However, for the next 1,000 years the government was no longer the persecutor. That role now passed to the "church." More on that tomorrow.