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HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS – LESSON 2

SECOND ROMAN PERSECUTION – DOMITIAN

Nero's reign of terror brought the killing of numerous apostles plus others mentioned in the Bible such as Erastus (Corinth), Aristarchus (Macedonia), Trophinas (Ephesus), Barsabas, and Ananias (Damascus).

After Nero's suicide, Vespasian became emperor and persecution shifted toward the Jews as his son Titus waged war to suppress rebellion in Judea. Tens of thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed. Following Vespasian and Titus the second son, Domitian became Emperor from A.D. 81 to 96.

Domitian was cruel, so much so that even the Roman Senate despised him and ultimately arranged his assassination for killing many of the Senators. Domitian initiated intense persecution of Christians, setting it as the second period of Roman persecution of Christ's followers.

Many tales were fabricated against the believers. They were even blamed for natural events such as famine, pestilence, plagues, earthquakes, or volcanoes. Any Christian brought before the judges was always condemned to death. Today we would call it a "kangaroo court," guilty automatically regardless of the charge.

Dionysius, an Athenian Greek by birth, had such a marvelous conversion and immaculate lifestyle that he had been appointed Bishop of Athens. He was highly educated, versed in Greek literature, and studied in Egypt where he had become an outstanding astronomer. He was martyred for his faith.

Nicodemus, who had become a Christian of distinction, suffered his death in Rome under Domitian. Protasius and Gervasius were martyred in Milan, Italy.

Timothy, the celebrated disciple considered like a son to his mentor, Apostle Paul, had been appointed as Bishop of Ephesus. As the Ephesians celebrated their pagan feast of Catagogion, Timothy reproved them for their idolatry. Consequently, they fell upon him, beating him with clubs so severely that he died of his injuries after suffering for two days.

This period of Christian persecution under Domitian ended in September of 96 A.D. with his assassination. The last of the great men from Jesus to Paul were now gone with only John surviving.