

RUSSELL SANDERS

6-12-2021

HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS – LESSON 3

THIRD ROMAN PERSECUTION – 108 TO 138 A.D.

Fox gives a thirty-year period for the third season of martyrdom by Rome from 108 A.D. to 138 A.D. under two successive emperors.

Trajan was first of the two. Pliny II, who was a very learned and famous man, wrote to Trajan that thousands of Christians were being put to death every day. (What a great testimony of the spread of the gospel message.) What was their crime? It was only that they would meet one day per week before daylight to recite a set form of prayer to Christ as God, and to bind themselves by an obligation never to commit theft, robbery, nor adultery, and to never falsify their word nor defraud any man. After that, they would separate and reassemble to partake a harmless meal together. For this alone, they were being taken and executed by the thousands.

The highly revered Bishop of Antioch (Syria) was captured. He was being taken to Rome to be devoured by wild beasts (lions). Along the route to Rome, he “strengthened and confirmed the churches through all the cities,” exhorting and preaching the Word of God. From Smyrna he wrote a letter to the church in Rome not to try and save him from martyrdom, thus depriving him of the Martyrs Crown.

When Trajan passed in 117 A.D., he was succeeded by Hadrian who continued the relentless killing of Christians. He killed about ten thousand in the city of Rome itself including Alexander, the Bishop of Rome and his deacons, and a Roman nobleman Zenon. He also killed the entire families of Quirinus and Hermes.

In other parts of the empire many were crucified and crowned with thorns and speared into their sides in the same manner as Christ. Loyalty meant nothing to Hadrian. Eustachius was a brave and successful commander in the Roman Army. When Hadrian ordered Eustachius to join in an idolatrous sacrifice to a pagan god in celebration of Eustachius’ victories on the battlefield, the great commander refused because his heart with the Christians. This enraged Hadrian. He then commanded the execution of his own loyal general and all of his family with him.

When Hadrian died in 138 A.D., his successor Antoninus Pius, stopped the persecution of Christians. He looked upon Christians favorably. This period of grace only lasted 24 years until Marcus Aurelius came to power.

It is not unusual for Christian faith to grow in persecution. A commitment to faith must be absolute as people look to God for the meaning for their life. Will it take persecution to bring the Apostate America back to her faith? It probably will.