

THE ROMAN EMPIRE AFTER 70 A.D.

We will now take a look at the history of the Roman Empire after 70 A.D. beginning in the area of pages 121-122 in the new edition of Langer.

The story of what happened in the period of civil war and internal upheaval in the year 69 to 70 is summarized on page 121. These events represent the first major crisis to hit the Roman Empire after the founding of the Empire itself (31 B.C.). You will remember that there was a crisis in the 6th century B.C. (the year 509) which resulted in the expulsion of the kings and the establishment of the Republic. The Republic had its ups and downs, its main crisis coming in the 1st century B.C., which ultimately led to the struggle of Pompey and Caesar—remember the crossing of the Rubicon—that led to the throwing down of Caesar's gauntlet, so to speak, and the demand for some kind of unity that would take power away from the Senate and put it into the hands of someone who was a virtual dictator. Although Caesar himself died, there was a period of transition and struggle that led to the famous Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. which decided the fate of Rome—that is, the fate of the world!—and there we note that the nephew, Octavian, was the man who won the battle and became the first true Emperor of the Empire. From there on we have a series of rulers (chart on p. 118) that continued that family until the crisis that hit it after the death of Nero in 67 A.D. After this we have a series of emperors that carry us through—not only Vespasian's family but the Aurelians. Then we come into the 3rd century or the 200's when there were again a number of crises which ^{was} resolved in the person of Constantine and a change, if you please, of the religious status not only of Christianity but of the entire Empire itself (Diocletian).

Domitian

The Emperor Domitian ruled 81-96 A.D. (Langer, page 122). Domitian is known for his responsibility in the imprisonment of John He was finally assassinated in 96 A.D. (p. 123) which leads to the implication that that is the year when John was released (he had been banished to the island of Patmos, Rev. 1:9). Hence you will often see 96 quoted consistently in material pertaining to the release of John. That seems to be based on this event in 96; and the Greek tradition as cited in some of their historical church literature would so confirm.

Decline of the Upper Classes

The Geography of Intellect by Weyl and Possney points up the fact that the Romans adopted a system—maybe they weren't even consciously in control of it—wherein it became the practice in the upper classes to have perhaps only one child. And, as usually happens, the one child was frequently a girl! Thus all the important figures in the Roman Empire, in general, almost with no exception fit this pattern. This is illustrated by the fact that Caesar had no son, Augustus had no son—all the way down even there the successors were nephews or somebody directly related in that manner to Nero. And then later in the 2nd century what you find is the same thing: Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, the "five good emperors," all followed this dangerous trend—not a single one of them had a male heir for the Roman throne! (Langer pp. 123-125.)

This was due to dietary problems, homosexuality, outlandish birth control methods; and what happened ultimately is that a situation developed in the Roman Empire in which the most able leaders ceased to multiply and the slaves, most of them reasonably competent, began to replace the population that had previously been most numerous.

The end result was that the level of accomplishment of all the countries in the Mediterranean Basin deteriorated—from North Africa to Egypt, from Syria (we'll skip Turkey because of the factor of incoming people) to Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia if you want—any of these areas. It is a remarkable thing that the level of accomplishment of this whole area has deteriorated! Not one of these countries, in terms of people, has made the same contribution since!

Now it took centuries. But, as I have pointed out before, on the basis of merely of multiplying at the ratio of 4 to 3—4 for the lower classes, 3 for the upper classes—that, if this were consistent, in 300 years that which had been 5% lower class and 95% upper class has become 50-50! And in another 300 years, or in a total of 6 centuries time, the 5% of the lower class multiply to become 95% of the population and the 95% of what we call the upper classes—if we measure it in terms of money and ability in politics—has become now only 5%! This can happen on the basis of multiplication at a rate so similar as to be only a ratio of 4 to 3! Think of that!

Jewish Revolt of 135 A.D.

Emperor Hadrian ruled 117-138 (page 124). During his reign occurred the most famous Jewish revolt after the one of 66-70: In 132 A.D. the Jews of Judaea revolted "upon the founding of a Roman colony (Aelia Capitolina) in Jerusalem...." If you happen to go to Jerusalem in the summer to the "big dig" you will hear of Aelia Capitolina. This is a very famous expression and you should take special note of it. (See Werner Keller, The Bible as History, pp. 407-8.) This was the attempt on the part of Hadrian—remember that Hadrian is also famous for his wall in Britain—to found a Roman colony in Jerusalem "and the dedication of a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus on the site of the temple." This never did develop because, apparently, there were supernatural balls of fire that came out to strike those who attempted to build the pagan temple on the site! This is recorded in Eusebius' Church History; and it is reflected in the fact that the Emperor of all the Empire was unable to build what he wanted to build—and not because the Jews wanted to stop him either, because they couldn't. The leaders of the revolt were "the priest Eleazar and the fanatic Simon Bar Cocheba (Kokhba)." Read the remainder of the paragraph here with care.

Rome's Decline

On page 126 in Langer is an important section—important trends in the early empire. Politically there were minor internal changes; the most important changes are in the area of the economy—I'm going to skip over the other categories, the administrative and social. Here is the statement that, "economically, the financial breakdown of the municipal system, which was accompanied by a loss of local pride, and the increased burdens of the imperial government; and militarily, greater and more constant pressure on both frontiers, north and east, at the same time."

In other words, what was happening in the Roman system is exactly what is happening in the United States. Our taxes are rising and rising and rising! Recently the Governor of California proposed taxes on hair cuts and automobile repairs! We have pressures on all sides of us in the world; the taxes are rising, we have larger and larger social programs because we have more and more people who are intellectually and economically and characterwise unable to keep up with our complex industrial system! The fact is that we have more and more people born each year who intellectually cannot keep pace with the monster called technology that we have created! And we have to feed these people.

The Romans faced similar problems. They had wars on the German frontiers in Europe over and over again; wars on the eastern frontier with Parthia. Then there was the exhaustion of the gold and silver mines, and the debasing of the currency which is exactly what we have done.

Many writers have tried to understand what was happening, and it is normally stated that it is not possible to properly understand what was happening: "There are too many unknowns, we really don't know why Rome came into such an economic crisis." Well, that's like looking at our world today and saying that there's nothing wrong now; we can't see why we're in any serious situation—and we have leaders who think in these terms!

This is a topic that is worth your time to study more extensively. If you are in International Relations—in fact, if you're in Ambassador College!—you should take a little time and look at the accounts of the economic situation at this time and later in the Roman Empire which is only briefly summarized here. This is in the 100's and into the 200's A.D. It happened when Rome was at its height, if you please, in the "Silver Age" as it is commonly called. (This is no reference to Daniel 2, by the way.) It is that period when literature was abundant, people were living more freely than they had ever lived before. In other words, they were living better as a whole. We also are living better than we ever did before and, at the same time, we're spending more in taxes helping more people on the dole. People, as it says here—listen carefully—it doesn't define why but it makes it very plain, had "a loss of local pride." You might call it loss of nationalism, or pride in good workmanship. Everything was becoming cheaper and cheaper because, in fact, people found it easy to make a living, so why work?! This was the logical result of having an affluent Roman world. There are many parallels with the world today.

This topic is worth a much lengthier discussion. Gibbon's Rome, undoubtedly in long and involved sentences, will cover it—check the index. I would say that we have at least one or more volumes on this subject in the library. There are perhaps books on the Marcomanni wars that might bring up this economic matter. There are books devoted strictly to the economy of the Roman Empire (a major work is Michael I. Rostovtzeff, Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire, Oxford, 1957). I'm not asking you to read an entire volume but I think it would not hurt you to evaluate what part of the problem was.

I would say, ultimately—and I think it is absolutely true in the case of Rome—that it is not so much a question of economics as it is a question of character! It has to be. Economic problems come as a result of character decline.

What we have been doing in Viet Nam, what we have been doing to people by letting them live off the state on welfare (the dole), none of this is good. The Roman family unit was breaking down as is ours today. This is due to faults in character. We are not properly teaching people to take care of their children so that we could be producing a people capable of following through in technology—which could easily be done if we didn't pay the "harlots," or whatever you want to call women who have many men coming to their houses who have several children with no father around, and usually the father is some ne'er-do-well who couldn't hold a job anyway. And that's the stuff we're breeding in the name of the "Great Society." Now that's exactly what the Romans were doing. That's why Italy is what it is today. The Romans bred this kind of degenerate society!

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Roman Religion

Philosophy and religion are discussed on page 126 in Langer in column two. He mentions the rise of Oriental religions including that of the Egyptian Isis; this never got very far because of its rites. It was, in fact, African or Indian or however you want to classify it. It was a religion of the family of Ham and just did not make its appeal felt in Europe.

The religion of Mithras was a man's religion. It had immense appeal for the Roman men. It was a bloody religion—the bull's blood, the sacrifice of the bulls of Mithras. December 25th, Sunday—a number of things such as this that we now characterize as Christianity are, in fact, Mithraic in origin, Persian in origin. And this particular religion vied with Christianity as a result of the bankruptcy of paganism in the Roman Empire. Paganism in the Roman Empire was bankrupt!

The Romans tried to supply a replacement for the old paganism. The famous old Graeco-Roman gods famous in mythology such as Uranus, Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury, Juno—male and female deities—were individuals in a religion that had become bankrupt. The knowledge of who they were had become so garbled and confused as a result of hiding the fact that these were once mortal human beings who had since been deified, that people now became conscious of a kind of atheism. In other words, men like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had proved that there really were no such gods as this, that philosophy doesn't demand gods like this.

As a result of this sort of an atheistic religion that was spreading—not everywhere—but spreading in the close of the Roman Republic, there came to be a need, as visualized on the part of the Emperors, to revive a religion. And this was done by deifying Emperors—having new gods, if you please! These new gods personified the accomplishments of the Roman Empire. Here it was possible for the people to see what Augustus had done, could see what Vespasian had done, could understand what these Emperors were doing in conquering other nations, subduing them—performing, if you please, many of the very same feats that Hercules and Jupiter had done of old, lawgivers such as Minos or Jupiter of Crete; any of these, you see, were famous heroes.

Well, this "retread" religion had also to compete on the inside of the Roman Empire with the new religion of Mithraism that had been brought in from the East, and also it had the competition of Christianity! So we have the religion of Rome itself, a revived form of paganism in the form of Emperor worship where one placed a little incense before the statue of a Caesar. This ultimately was discontinued; it had to stop in the days of Constantine, though there was slight revival under Julian the Apostate; so this new paganism also became bankrupt in time.

So the other two religions vied for the lead in the Roman world—Mithraism and Christianity. Why then did Christianity, which had less power, less of the sword if you please, triumph over Mithraism? The answer is very simple, a lot simpler than you might guess. First, of course, Christianity adopted many of the features of Mithraism—but that's nothing, just compromise. Second, and most important: Mithraism appealed to men, but religion is perpetuated by women! Christianity made its appeal to women! The world's Christianity was a woman's religion. It had a unbloody sacrifice; it had mystery, color, music—all the things that appeal to women as a whole! It didn't have very much that was really reasoning because it was a mystery—how you could have Jesus Christ as the everlasting son of the Father is a good question, who was the son from all eternity. That's been one of the great mysteries. Or, how can you have three Gods in one? There are many things about this as defined that have never been resolved, that's why it's called a mystery in Catholic theology still. Women did not like Mithraism—and Mithraism, if it appealed only to half of the population, would be a failure because men are not the carriers, if you please, of this world's religion! You look anywhere in Latin America, anywhere in the Soviet Union, and you will discover that those who still carry on religion are women! See how many women go to churches compared to men. Men are far more inclined to irreligious or rational! That's right, let's face it! That does not mean that to be religious means to be irrational. I am talking about the world's religion and the weakness on the part of each of the sexes. Women are more inclined to have faith than men—in the world's religion! So this explains the rise of Christianity and why, in its false form, it triumphed in the world.

On the top of page 127 we have a list of famous church figures in the earliest period: Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Irenaeus of Lyons in France who originally was from Asia Minor, and Justin Martyr. Polycarp, as far as I know, was the only one who kept the Passover. Polycrates is the one who told the Bishop at Rome, Victor, not to excommunicate all of the people in Asia Minor that still kept the Passover. Polycrates is not listed here. Polycarp is, however, and his encounter with Anicetus, bishop of Rome around 154 A.D., is preserved by Irenaeus at which time he also contended for the custom of observing the Passover, not Easter (see pp. 15-16 of "A True History of the True Church.")

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The Chaotic Third Century

Read closely the introductory section for the period 192-284 A.D. on page 127.

In relation to Elagabalus, see the "Short Answers" section of the Plain Truth in the last two years in relation to Christmas.

On pages 129-130 be sure to notice the short lengths of reign of most of the Emperors in this period, especially the last half of the 200's A.D. In short, the Empire was beginning to come apart again! The Goths were breaking through in the Black Sea region harrying Asia Minor and the Aegean world from ships (bottom of column 2 on page 129) in the 260's. And previous to this (a little above in this same column) there was an attack of the Franks against the Romans in the West in 256 A.D. The Romans had attempted to invade Dacia again in 256 at the same time that the Germanic-speaking tribes (meaning Israelites and Germans) were attacking Rome in the West on the Rhine! The year 256 is a very important year in both the East and the West. The entire northeastern border of the Roman Empire was coming apart as a result of attacks especially of the Gothic people who were coming in more and more from the western part of the Ukraine. At the time that the Israelites were moving into Scandinavia, the Gothic people were moving around in the area of Russia and beginning to attack Rome in the East, coming down to the Aegean through Asia Minor. And, ultimately, much of the Empire was torn apart with major struggles! For example, notice under the reign of Gallienus that, though he "continued to reign alone . . . pretenders appeared throughout the empire and the period has been called that of the "thirty tyrants."

A very important summary is found at the top of column 2 on page 130. "The troubles of the 3rd century had two main causes: the increased pressure on the frontiers from the new Germanic tribes and from the vigorous Persian Empire, and the economic collapse within, the causes of which cannot be wholly established. In part, at least, the economic crisis was due to the heavy burdens of government and defense and to the oppressive and erratic system of taxation; in part, perhaps, to a 'fatigue of spirit.'" Notice that expression—"fatigue of spirit". The people got tired of being Romans just like the English have become tired of ruling the British Empire!—and have decided to discard it! The Romans were tired of having one world and having to keep it up and maintain it! This same fatigue of spirit is now getting hold of America where we don't want to impose ourselves on other people, we just want to keep what we have. This is a very important description here at this point in Langer—the "fatigue of spirit".

Now, for all practical purposes, we have arrived at the date 300 A.D. This is the same as saying that we are at a point 200 years after the close of the apostolic period. The Apostles, by now, had been dead over 200 years! If we used our dates today, that's like saying that they had died in the middle of the 1700's. If they had died in the first half of the 1700's in our day, how much do you or I know of famous men in God's Church 200 or 250 years ago? Except for the fact that we have the written literature, we know nothing of their lives or what they were teaching. And literature can be misinterpreted to deceive people anyway—if there are those who want to be deceivers. The impact of the truth had become nil in the world!