

293 – Emperor Diocletian developed the “Tetrarchy” by which the Empire was split into two administrative units, each governed by a senior/junior partnership (*Augustus/Caesar*). He chose to govern as the *Augustus* of the East from Nicomedia (Izmit, Turkey), with Galarius as his *Caesar*, headquartered out of Sirmium (in Serbia). Maximian governed as *Augustus* of the West from Milan, with Constantius as his *Caesar* working out of Trier (in Germany). Notice that Rome had already lost prominence as an imperial capital.



303 – *Caesar* Galerius manipulated *Augustus* Diocletian into a grand persecution of Christians. Lactantius (a Christian historian of that period) wrote about this “Diocletian Persecution” in his On the Manner in which the Persecutors Died, chapters 12-16. Here are some excerpts:

“A fit and auspicious day was sought out for the accomplishment of this undertaking; and the festival of the god Terminus, celebrated on the sevens of the kalends of March, was chosen, in preference to all others, to terminate, as it were, the Christian religion. *‘That day, the harbinger of death, arose, first cause of ill, and long enduring woes;’* of woes which befell not only the Christians, but the whole earth. When that day dawned, in the eighth consulship of Diocletian and seventh of Maximian, suddenly, while it was yet hardly light, the prefect, together with chief commanders, tribunes, and officers of the treasury, **came to the church in Nicomedia**,¹ and the gates having been forced open, they searched everywhere for an image of the Divinity. **The books of the Holy Scriptures were found**,² and they were committed to the flames; the utensils and furniture of the church were abandoned to pillage: all was rapine, confusion, tumult. That church, situated on rising ground, was within view of the palace; and Diocletian and Galerius stood, as if on a watch-tower, disputing long whether it ought to be set on fire. The sentiment of Diocletian prevailed, who dreaded lest, so great a fire being once kindled, some part of the city might be burnt; for there were many and large buildings that surrounded the church. Then the Pretorian Guards came in battle array, with axes and other iron instruments, and having been let loose everywhere, they in a few hours levelled that very lofty edifice with the ground.

“Next day an edict was published, depriving the Christians of all honours and dignities; ordaining also that, without any distinction of rank or degree, they should be subjected to tortures, and that every suit at law should be received against them; while, on the other hand, they were debarred from being plaintiffs in questions of wrong, adultery, or theft; and, finally, that they should neither be capable of freedom, nor have right of suffrage. A certain person tore down this edict, and cut it in pieces, improperly indeed, but with high spirit, saying in scorn, “These are the triumphs of Goths and Sarmatians.” Having been instantly seized and brought to judgment, he was not only tortured, but burnt alive, in the forms of law; and having displayed admirable patience under sufferings, he was consumed to ashes.

¹ Church buildings were clearly in use by this time.

² Certain books were also clearly identified as “Holy Scriptures” by this time.

“But Galerius, not satisfied with the tenor of the edict, sought in another way to gain on the emperor. That he might urge him to excess of cruelty in persecution, he employed private emissaries to set the palace on fire; and some part of it having been burnt, **the blame was laid on the Christians as public enemies; and the very appellation of Christian grew odious on account of that fire.**³ It was said that the Christians, in concert with the eunuchs, had plotted to destroy the princes; and that both of the princes had well-nigh been burnt alive in their own palace. Diocletian, shrewd and intelligent as he always chose to appear, suspected nothing of the contrivance, but, inflamed with anger, immediately commanded that all his own domestics should be tortured to force a confession of the plot. He sat on his tribunal, and saw innocent men tormented by fire to make discovery. All magistrates, and all who had superintendency in the imperial palace, obtained special commissions to administer the torture; and they strove with each other who should be first in bringing to light the conspiracy. No circumstances, however, of the fact were detected anywhere; for no one applied the torture to any domestics of Galerius. He himself was ever with Diocletian, constantly urging him, and never allowing the passions of the inconsiderate old man to cool. Then, after an interval of fifteen days, he attempted a second fire; but that was perceived quickly, and extinguished. Still, however, its author remained unknown. On that very day, Galerius, who in the middle of winter had prepared for his departure, suddenly hurried out of the city, protesting that he fled to escape being burnt alive.

And now Diocletian raged, not only against his own domestics, but indiscriminately against all; and he began by forcing his daughter Valeria and his wife Prisca to be polluted by sacrificing. Eunuchs, once the most powerful, and who had chief authority at court and with the emperor, were slain. Presbyters and other officers of the Church were seized, without evidence by witnesses or confession, condemned, and together with their families led to execution. In burning alive, no distinction of sex or age was regarded; and because of their great multitude, they were not burnt one after another, but a herd of them were encircled with the same fire; and servants, having millstones tied about their necks, were cast into the sea. Nor was the persecution less grievous on the rest of the people of God; for the judges, dispersed through all the temples, sought to compel every one to sacrifice. The prisons were crowded; tortures, hitherto unheard of, were invented; and lest justice should be inadvertently administered to a Christian, altars were placed in the courts of justice, hard by the tribunal, that every litigant might offer incense before his cause could be heard. Thus judges were no otherwise approached than divinities. Mandates also had gone to Maximian Herculius and Constantius, requiring their concurrence in the execution of the edicts; for in matters even of such mighty importance their opinion was never once asked. Herculius, a person of no merciful temper, yielded ready obedience, and enforced the edicts throughout his dominions of Italy. Constantius, on the other hand, lest he should have seemed to dissent from the injunctions of his superiors, permitted the demolition of churches,--mere walls, and capable of being built up again,--but he preserved entire that true temple of God, which is the human body.

“Thus was all the earth afflicted; and from east to west, except in the territories of Gaul, three ravenous wild beasts continued to rage.”

³ This is very similar to the way that the “Neronian Persecution” began after the burning of Rome in 64.

305 – Diocletian & Maximian retired. Galerius became *Augustus* of the East with Constantius becoming *Augustus* of the West.

306 – Constantius died suddenly in England. The troops there hailed Constantine, his son, as their new *Augustus*. Galerius countermanded this acclamation, naming Severus *Augustus* of the West, but allowed Constantine to become *Caesar*, with responsibility over Britain, Gaul & Spain. Infighting within the Tetrarchy ensued shortly thereafter.

311 – Galerius, very ill & near death, issues his “Edit of Toleration” This record comes from Lactantius’ On the Manner in which the Persecutors Died, chapters 34-35.

"Amongst our other regulations for the permanent advantage of the commonweal, we have hitherto studied to reduce all things to a conformity with the ancient laws and public discipline of the Romans.

"It has been our aim in an especial manner, that the Christians also, who had abandoned the religion of their forefathers, should return to right opinions. For such wilfulness and folly had, we know not how, taken possession of them, that instead of observing those ancient institutions, which possibly their own forefathers had established, they, through caprice, made laws to themselves, and drew together into different societies many men of widely different persuasions.

"After the publication of our edict, ordaining the Christians to betake themselves to the observance of the ancient institutions, many of them were subdued through the fear of danger, and moreover many of them were exposed to jeopardy; nevertheless, because great numbers still persist in their opinions, and because we have perceived that at present they neither pay reverence and due adoration to the gods, nor yet worship their own God, therefore we, from our wonted clemency in bestowing pardon on all, have judged it fit to extend our indulgence to those men, and to permit them again to be Christians, and to establish the places of their religious assemblies; yet so as that they offend not against good order.

"By another mandate we purpose to signify unto magistrates how they ought herein to demean themselves.

"Wherefore it will be the duty of the Christians, in consequence of this our toleration, to pray to their God for our welfare, and for that of the public, and for their own; that the commonweal may continue safe in every quarter, and that they themselves may live securely in their habitations."⁴

"This edict was promulgated at Nicomedia on the day preceding the kalends of May, in the eighth consulship of Galerius, and the second of Maximin Daia. Then the prison-gates having been thrown open, you, my best beloved Donatus, together with the other confessors for the faith, were set at liberty from a jail, which had been your residence for six years. Galerius, however, did not, by publication of this edict, obtain the divine forgiveness. In a few days after he was consumed by the horrible disease that had brought on an universal putrefaction. Dying, he recommended his wife and son to Licinius, and delivered them over into his hands. This event was known at Nicomedia before the end of the month. His vicennial anniversary was to have been celebrated on the ensuing kalends of March.

⁴ Galerius granted toleration so that Christians would pray for his failing health and for the waning peace of the Empire.

312 – The Battle at Milian Bridge pretty much established Constantine as *Augustus* of the West. Lactantius clearly believed that this victory was given by God’s intervention (From On the Manner in which the Persecutors Died, chapter 44).⁵

“At length Constantine, with steady courage and a mind prepared for every event, led his whole forces to the neighbourhood of Rome, and encamped them opposite to the Milvian bridge. The anniversary of the reign of Maxentius approached, that is, the sixth of the kalends of November, and the fifth year of his reign was drawing to an end. Constantine was directed in a dream to cause the heavenly sign to be delineated on the shields of his soldiers, and so to proceed to battle. He did as he had been commanded, and he marked on their shields the letter X, with a perpendicular line drawn through it and turned round thus at the top, being the cipher of CHRIST. Having this sign, his troops stood to arms. The enemies advanced, but without their emperor, and they crossed the bridge. The armies met, and fought with the utmost exertions of valour, and firmly maintained their ground. In the meantime a sedition arose at Rome, and Maxentius was reviled as one who had abandoned all concern for the safety of the commonweal; and suddenly, while he exhibited the Circensian games on the anniversary of his reign, the people cried with one voice, "Constantine cannot be overcome!" Dismayed at this, Maxentius burst from the assembly, and having called some senators together, ordered the Sibylline books to be searched. In them it was found that:--"On the same day the enemy of the Romans should perish."

“Led by this response to the hopes of victory, he went to the field. The bridge in his rear was broken down. At sight of that the battle grew hotter. The hand of the Lord prevailed, and the forces of Maxentius were routed. He fled towards the broken bridge; but the multitude pressing on him, he was driven headlong into the Tiber. This destructive war being ended, Constantine was acknowledged as emperor, with great rejoicings, by the senate and people of Rome. And now he came to know the perfidy of Daia; for he found the letters written to Maxentius, and saw the statues and portraits of the two associates which had been set up together. The senate, in reward of the valour of Constantine, decreed to him the title of Maximus (the Greatest), a title which Daia had always arrogated to himself. Daia, when he heard that Constantine was victorious and Rome freed, expressed as much sorrow as if he himself had been vanquished; but afterwards, when he heard of the decree of the senate, he grew outrageous, avowed enmity towards Constantine, and made his title of the Greatest a theme of abuse and raillery.



A 337 coin showing the labarum symbol used by Constantine.

⁵ In chapter 46, Lactantius tells a similar story of miraculous intervention resulting in Licinius becoming *Augustus* in the East.

313 – Constantine & Licinius issued their joint Edict of Toleration from Milan (From On the Manner in which the Persecutors Died, chapter 48).

“When I, Constantine Augustus, as well as I, Licinius Augustus, fortunately met near Mediolanurn (Milan), and were considering everything that pertained to the public welfare and security, we thought, among other things which we saw would be for the good of many, those regulations pertaining to the reverence of the Divinity ought certainly to be made first, so that we might grant to the Christians and others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred; whence any Divinity whatsoever in the seat of the heavens may be propitious and kindly disposed to us and all who are placed under our rule. And thus by this wholesome counsel and most upright provision we thought to arrange that no one whatsoever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the Christian religion, of that religion which he should think best for himself, so that the Supreme Deity, to whose worship we freely yield our hearts) may show in all things His usual favor and benevolence. Therefore, your Worship should know that it has pleased us to remove all conditions whatsoever, which were in the rescripts formerly given to you officially, concerning the Christians and now any one of these who wishes to observe Christian religion may do so freely and openly, without molestation. We thought it fit to commend these things most fully to your care that you may know that we have given to those Christians free and unrestricted opportunity of religious worship. **When you see that this has been granted to them by us, your Worship will know that we have also conceded to other religions the right of open and free observance of their worship for the sake of the peace of our times, that each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases; this regulation is made we that we may not seem to detract from any dignity or any religion.**⁶

“Moreover, in the case of the Christians especially we esteemed it best to order that if it happens anyone heretofore has bought from our treasury from anyone whatsoever, those places where they were previously accustomed to assemble, concerning which a certain decree had been made and a letter sent to you officially, the same shall be restored to the Christians without payment or any claim of recompense and without any kind of fraud or deception, Those, moreover, who have obtained the same by gift, are likewise to return them at once to the Christians. Besides, both those who have purchased and those who have secured them by gift, are to appeal to the vicar if they seek any recompense from our bounty, that they may be cared for through our clemency. All this property ought to be delivered at once to the community of the Christians through your intercession, and without delay. And since these Christians are known to have possessed not only those places in which they were accustomed to assemble, but also other property, namely the churches, belonging to them as a corporation and not as individuals, all these things which we have included under the above law, you will order to be restored, without any hesitation or controversy at all, to these Christians, that is to say to the corporations and their conventicles: providing, of course, that the above arrangements be followed so that those who return the same without payment, as we have said, may hope for an indemnity from our bounty. In all these circumstances you ought to tender your most efficacious intervention to the community of the Christians, that our command may be carried into effect as quickly as possible, whereby, moreover, through our clemency, public order may be secured. Let this be done so that, as we have said above, Divine favor towards us, which, under the most important circumstances we have already experienced, may, for all time, preserve and prosper our successes together with the good of the state. Moreover, in order that the statement of this decree of our good will may come to the notice of all, this rescript, published by your decree, shall be announced everywhere and brought to the knowledge of all, so that the decree of this, our benevolence, cannot be concealed.”

⁶ This edict gave “freedom of religion” to all groups and not just Christians.

Emperor Constantine obviously had a “soft spot” for Christianity, but he himself was clearly **NOT** a Biblical Christian at this time. He permitted coins & other materials up through 325 to present the pagan deity, *Sol Invictus* (“The Unconquered Sun”) as his intimate companion. This should certainly color our understanding of his 321 decree which made “Sunday” a legal day of rest.

“On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country however persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits because it often happens that another day is not suitable for grain-sowing or vine planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost.”

- 313** – Emperor Constantine donated a palace to the Bishop of Rome for his residence. This “Latern Palace” became the “Cathedral of Rome” & eventually the location of the “Papal Throne.”
- 314** – Christians began appealing to Emperor Constantine as the ultimate authority to resolve religious disputes. He responded by calling a Council of Bishops to Arles (in France) to settle the issue for him.
- 318** – A dispute breaks out in Alexandria, between “Bishop” Alexander and Arius, one of the “presbyters” there, regarding the exact relationship between God the Father & Jesus the Son.
- 324** – After ten years of inharmonious joint-rule, Constantine defeated Licinius and became the sole Emperor of the Roman Empire.⁷ Seeing Bithynia as the best place from which to govern, Constantine ordered Byzantium to be prepared as the “New Rome,” a project that would take up the next 6 years. By this time it would appear that Constantine was much more committed to Christianity, seeing that he issues a whole host of decrees which favor it over paganism, although he makes it clear that he still intends to offer “freedom of worship” to all (From Eusebius’ Life of Constantine, Book 2, Chapter 56).

“MY own desire is, for the common good of the world and the advantage of all mankind, that thy people should enjoy a life of peace and undisturbed concord. Let those, therefore, who still delight in error, be made welcome to the same degree of peace and tranquillity which they have who believe. For it may be that this restoration of equal privileges to all will prevail to lead them into the straight path. Let no one molest another, but let every one do as his soul desires. Only let men of sound judgment be assured of this, that those only can live a life of holiness and purity, whom thou callest to a reliance on thy holy laws. With regard to those who will hold themselves aloof from us, let them have, if they please, their temples (1) of lies: we have the glorious edifice of thy truth, which thou hast given us as our native home. (2) We pray, however, that they too may receive the same blessing, and thus experience that heartfelt joy which unity of sentiment inspires.”

⁷ Eusebius, who was clearly a “fan” of Constantine, asserts that he was defending Christianity against the anti-Christian actions of Licinius in the East.

324 – Since the dispute between Alexander & Arius had spread all over the Empire, the Emperor wrote a letter to the two men, rebuking them for being so foolish as to discuss the issue in the first place and ordering them to simply forgive one another and move on (Ibid., Chapters 65ff).

“When you, Alexander, demanded of the presbyters what opinion they severally maintained respecting a certain passage in the Divine law, (1) or rather, I should say, that you asked them something connected with an unprofitable question, then you, Arius, inconsiderately insisted on (2) what ought never to have been conceived at all, or if conceived, should have been buried in profound silence. Hence it was that a dissension arose between you, fellowship was withdrawn, (3) and the holy people, rent into diverse parties, no longer preserved the unity of the one body. Now, therefore, do ye both exhibit an equal degree of forbearance, (4) and receive the advice which your fellow-servant righteously gives. What then is this advice? It was wrong in the first instance to propose such questions as these, or to reply to them when propounded. For those points of discussion which are enjoined by the authority of no law, but rather suggested by the contentious spirit which is fostered by misused leisure, even though they may be intended merely as an intellectual exercise, ought certainly to be confined to the region of our own thoughts, and not hastily produced in the popular assemblies, nor unadvisedly intrusted to the general ear.”

325 – Because the issue was not resolved, he called for a Council at Nicea in order to deal with it, together with another issue of dispute, the universal observance of “Easter” (Ibid., Book 3, Chapters 6-22.)

“The result was that they were not only united as concerning the faith, but that the time for the celebration of the salutary feast of Easter was agreed on by all. Those points also which were sanctioned by the resolution of the whole body were committed to writing, and received the signature of each several member.⁸ Then the emperor, believing that he had thus obtained a second victory over the adversary of the Church, proceeded to solemnize a triumphal festival in honor of God.”

THE ORIGINAL NICAEN CREED OF 325

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (ὁμοούσιον)⁹ with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost.”

It is interesting that Constantine’s follow-up letter to Christians of the Empire focuses almost entirely on the “Easter” date & not on the Arian question. However, he does make it exceptionally clear that “whatever is determined in the holy assemblies of the bishops is to be regarded as indicative of the Divine will.”

It should be noted as well, that despite widespread claims that the Nicene Council established the “Canon of Scripture,” there is absolutely no evidence that such a thing occurred.

326-330 – Constantine’s mother Helena was instrumental in establishing Christian sites within the Holy Lands & bringing back all sorts of religious relics to be used in church buildings within the new capital city.

⁸ There were actually seventeen who originally opposed the wording of the document. After adjourning for the night, this number was reduced to five the next day, since many thought the wording actually allowed for their minority belief anyway. After threats of deposition from the office of Bishop, only three (including Arius) remained adamant and were subsequently anathematized.

⁹ This one word is where the entire controversy lies.