

TURNING POINTS IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY: Learning to spot key moments/movements #2 CONSTANTINE THE GREAT AND THE EDICT OF MILAN

INTRODUCTION:

1. Ruth Tucker, "Parade of Faith" (GR: Zondervan, 2011): *"If there is one figure who stands above all others during the early centuries of the church, it is Emperor Constantine."*
2. Dr. David Potter from the University of Michigan (Constantine the Emperor. 2013). Not many sentences into his introduction he asserts: *"Constantine is best known as the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity and in so doing made it possible for Christianity to become a world religion. Without Constantine Christianity probably would not occupy the place that it does today. Without him it is unlikely that Christianity would have emerged from the mass of conflicting, of often quite similar belief systems coexisting in the empire into which he was born."* Does anyone agree? 😊

I. WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO LIVE AS A CHRISTIAN IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE BEFORE CONSTANTINE CAME TO POWER?

- A. If you had to choose one word to describe that era what would it be? _____
- B. 303 AD four government edicts were issued against Christianity, instigated by Galerius, with the support of the infamous emperor Diocletian

#1. Christian buildings _____

#2. _____

#3. Bishops would not be released from prison unless _____

#4. Sacrifice to _____

* So was it hopeless for the Christians? Not really, because _____

B. Persecution under Emperor Diocletian (284-305) reached a new phase

C. Constantius Chlorus died in 306. So his son Constantine was proclaimed by the troops the new emperor in the west, and Licinius gained control in the East. This opened the door for an important turning point for Christians in the Roman Empire.

II. HOW DID GOD WORK IN THE LIFE OF THE NEW EMPEROR CONSTANTINE?

A. His father was not a Christian but his mother Helena was a humble Christian. Some of the pagan sources claim that when his father died Constantine saw a vision at a temple of Apollo. The meaning of the vision was that he would become emperor.

B. Famous vision at the Battle of Milvian. How did this come about?

1. March on Rome in 312.

2. As he paused to pray what did he see? _____

3. Why did Maximinus destroy the Milivian Bridge over the Tiber? _____
4. What happened to his soldiers? _____
4. So Constantine was able to march triumphantly into the city under the banner ____
_____.

C. Edict of Milan 312: *"Our purpose is to allow Christians and all others to worship as they desire, so that whatever Divinity lives in the heavens will be king to us."* Does this make Christianity the official religion of the empire? _____

III. How did the Edict of Milan and Constantine help Christians?

1. It ended the era of great persecution of Christians.
2. Property _____
3. He made Sunday _____
4. He placed the Chi Rho emblem on some of his coins.
5. He gave churches _____
6. He enlisted the help of Eusebius _____
7. He encouraged building of churches.
8. He established a new capital _____

IV. WAS CONSTANTINE A GENUINE CHRISTIAN?

Here are some of the issues that have been used by both sides:

1. If he was a genuine follower of Christ why did he delay _____
2. He was the one who convened the _____
3. It's risky to _____

CONCLUSION

1. Whatever you think of Constantine, you can give thanks that his reign was a beneficial turning point for Christians. It demonstrates that we need to look at the big picture. If you had lived in the years under Diocletian it looked like the world was coming to an end. They couldn't see how God was working behind the scenes to bring along Constantine. Remember Proverbs 21:1 *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he will."*
2. Once persecution stopped under Constantine did it ever return?