

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

FROM ANGUISH TO TRIUMPH

30 – 476 CE

**“I Never Did Believe in Miracles
But I’ve A Feeling It’s Time to Try.”**

-- Fleetwood Mac

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Introduction

Why Are We Doing This?*

*** Warning: the Content to Follow Is Abridged, Plagiarized and Somewhat Mangled**

Introduction

- **Query: Is Two Thousand Years a Long Time?**
 - **Part One – From Anguish to Triumph: 30 - 476 CE**
 - **Part Two – A Tale of Two Cities: 476 – 1517 CE**
 - **Part Three – Reform, Division, Expansion: 1517 - 2024 CE**

Introduction

- **We Have An Easy Time Line To Use.**
- **We Can All Agree It Is 2024. Even Kim Jong Un.**
- **Because “Time Itself Has Been Christianized” – Tom Holland.**
- **But Is It A.D. or CE?**

Introduction

- **Have to Say, Christianity Is a Big Deal!**
 - **Largest Religion In The World (5 out of 7 ain't bad)**
 - **The Impact of Civilization: The Art, The Architecture, The Music, The Literature, The Culture, The...Wars (hey, We're Only Human)**
 - **If It Were Not for the Great Civilizing Effect of Christianity, Where Would We Be?**

Introduction

- **Let's Call Where We Are Today Point B**
- **Where Do We Start? Where is Point A?**

THE GARDEN 30 CE



- High Priest: “Are You the Messiah?”

“I am.”

- Pilate: “Are You the King of the Jews?”

“You Say So.”

-
- “Certainly You Are One of Them; for You Are a Galilean.”

Peter: “I Do Not Know This Man You Are Talking About.”

The Disciples 30 CE

Answer: 0.0%

**Wouldn't Be Easier to Just Forget the Whole Thing and Go
Back Fishing?**

THE DISCIPLES 30 CE (Christians = 20+)

- **BUT! the Disciples and Others Witness The Resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 15:5) The Disciples Are Once Again 100% Believers in Jesus as the Messiah.**
- **The Faithful Gather in Jerusalem to Preach Jesus' Message of Forgiveness, Salvation and Eternal Life.**
- **This Is a Very Dangerous Thing To Do.**
- **They, Particularly the Christian Hellenistic Jews, Are Persecuted by the Jewish Authorities (Acts 7) and Scatter. What Should the Jewish Authorities Do?**

BETTER CALL SAUL



- **'...a little man with a big, bold head. His legs were crooked, but his bearing was noble. His eyebrows grew close together and he had a big nose. A man who breathed friendliness...'**

PAUL 33 - 64 (Christians = 1,000 -1,500)

- **About Three Years After Christ's Crucifixion, Saul Witnesses The Resurrected Christ (1 Cor. 15: 8) and Is Transformed.**
- **Paul and Other Early Christians See Themselves Not As Founding a New Religion But As Jewish Worshippers of the Promised Messiah.**
- **But Paul Argues that Christianity Should Be Extended to Non-Jews. The Great Circumcision Debate Ensues.**
- **Paul Famously Extends Full Membership to Include the Gentiles, 93 % of the Roman Empire. Game Changing.**

Who Will the Messiah Save? Everyone!

- **“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)**
- **The Jewish Christians Push Back But Paul’s Vision Prevails (In Large Part Because Jerusalem is Destroyed in 70 CE).**

PAUL 33 - 64 CE (Christians = 1,000 -1,500)

- **Paul and Many Others Preach and Establish Churches Around The Known World Aided by:**

Roman Roads

The Pax Romana

The Jewish Diaspora

Hellenism

PAUL 33 - 64 (Christians = 1,000 -1,500)

- **Paul (and Others) Proclaim Jesus as the Christ (Messiah) and his Second Coming as Imminent – Get Ready and Get Right with God Now. Judgment Day is Coming - There Will Be God's Wrath!**

“...how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead –Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.” First Thessalonians (1:9-10)

- **The Preaching is at the Synagogues, the Market Place, And Most of All at Work.**

Time Out! – History Footnote

- **Paul is Arguably the Most Important Person in the New Testament Outside of Jesus. (P.S. - Cross Out “Arguably”)**
- **How Do We Know What Happened Actually Happened?**
- **Scholars Believe That Seven of Paul’s Epistles Were Written By Paul:
(1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, Romans)**
- **Paul Attests to “violently persecuting the church of God” (Gal.1:13) and his Conversion “God...was pleased to reveal his son to me.” (Gal. 1:16)**

Paul's Missionary Journeys 45 - 55

(Christians = 1,000 -1,500)



Christian Communities

- Damascus
- Antioch (Syria)
- Philippi
- Ephesus
- Thessalonica
- Corinth
- Athens
- Rome

O.K., But Why Would Any Gentile* Want to Convert to Christianity?

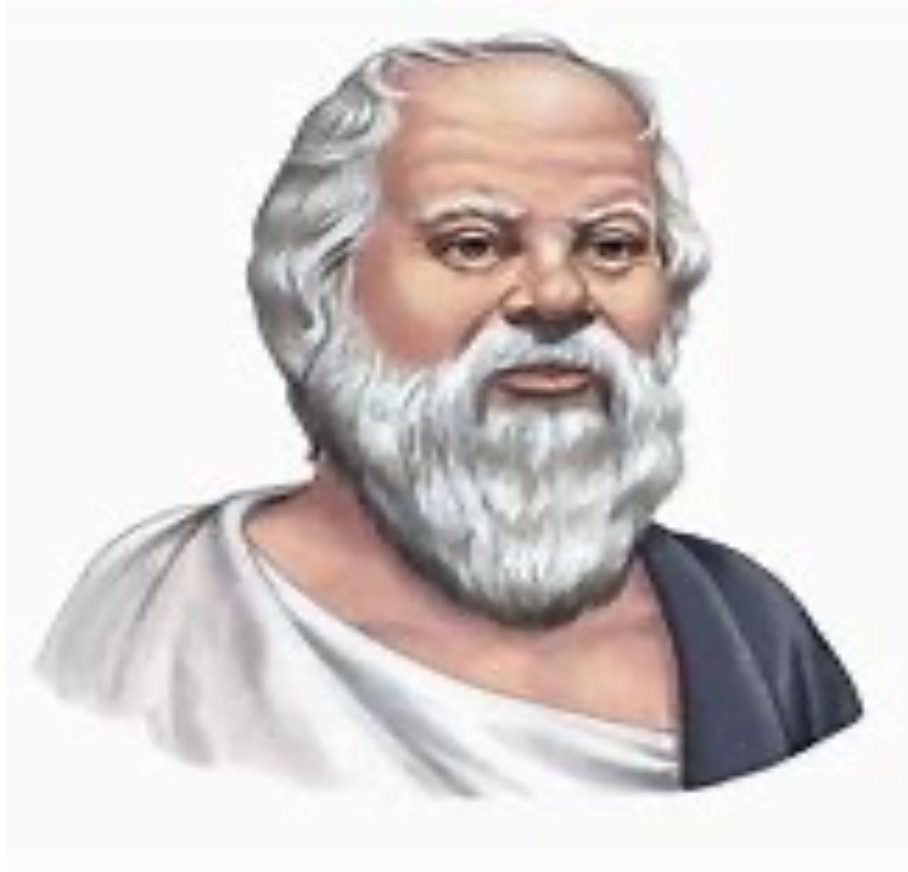
* aka: Pagan, Polytheist, Heathen, Hellene, Just Doesn't Get It, etc.

- **There Is No Money or Power In It – That Comes Later.**
- **Pagan Worship Are Practices Long Established, Inclusive (Pick Your Own Gods), Endorsed By the Powers That Be, Provide Order and Lucre for Some. (Acts 19 Demetrius the Silversmith).**
- **Christianity, On the Other Hand, Demands Exclusivity. You Can't Worship Idols and Jesus (though many do.)**
- **And It IS Potentially Dangerous to Convert.**

There Is a Wide Variety of Pagans

What is Justice?

Party City!



Do You Happen to Know Any Pagans, BTW?



Tell Me More About the Pagans

- **No Standard Orthodoxy; Local Practices Varied Hugely Across the Empire.**
- **The Gods Were Principally Concerned with Prayers and Sacrifices and Would Reveal Their Will in the Present: Good Fortune if Pleased; Bad Fortune if Not Pleased.**
- **Focus and Worship on Life on Earth – Not Afterlife: “*non fui; fui; non sum; non curo*”.**
- **The Ubiquitous Temples and Shrines Are For the Gods, not Places of Congregation For People (Except For Sacrifices)**

But It Isn't Just About Sacrifices

- **BUT Some Pagan Cults Called Mystery Religions (Mithraism, Isis) Are Linked to Immortality and a Supreme Being.**
- **AND, There Are Highly Sophisticated Greek Philosophies That Challenge All Of Us In Matters of Ethics, Behavior, Collective Responsibility, Justice And Other Important Matters That I Vaguely Remember From College.**

Christianity Provides Hope (Besides Judgment)

- **Exclusive In Belief – One God Only - Simple.**
- **But Inclusive in Membership, Even the Least of These, and Easy To Convert, especially for “God-Fearers.” – Everyone Welcome- No Circumcision Necessary. (Thanks to Paul).**
- **Jesus as Messiah Promises Forgiveness, Salvation, Eternal Life – Hope!**
- **Love God, Love Each Other, Do Not Sin.**

Christian Practices Build Community

- **Sunday Service at a Private Home – There Are No Churches.**
- **A Common Meal followed by Communion in Celebration of the Resurrection.**
- **Prayers; Later Are Added Readings of Scripture and Offerings.**
- ***“It Was the Christian Spirit of Mutual Love and Communal Charity Which Most Impressed Pagans.” – Paul Johnson***
- **Most Converts Are From the Lower Economic Echelons.**

And Also...Don't Forget the Miracles

- **Christians Performed Miracles, Plain and Simple. Jesus, the Apostles, Paul the Apostle: All Miracle Workers.**



- **This Was A World That Readily Believed in Magic and Miracles.**

How Do the Romans Feel About All of This?

60 - 100 CE

(Christians = 7,000 -10,000)

- **After All, It Is Their Empire.**
- **The Romans Are Amazingly Tolerant At First --- Just Pay Your Taxes and Don't Cause Any Trouble.**
- **Nero is an Exception But He Needed a Scapegoat for the Fire in 64 CE.**
- **However, Christians Viewed With Suspicion (Rumors of Cannibal Feasts, Incest, Imbibing Blood).**
- **Upper Class Pagans Viewed Christians as Intellectually Inferior Rabble.**

As Christianity Grows It Becomes More Structured...But Faces Internal Threats...

100 -200 CE

Christians = 10,000 -170,000

- **By early Second Century Leadership in the Church Formed: Bishops, Elder, Deacon.**
- **Influenced By Greek Philosophy, Docetism and Gnosticism Challenge Basic Precepts of Christianity – Jesus is Purely a Spirit, All Matter is Evil. (Heresy)**
- **Marcion Creates New Bible and Rejects Old Testament God. (Heresy)**
- **Written Gospels, Acts, and Epistles Written in Late First Century Are Compiled. Apostles' Creed Formed About 150 CE in Response to the Heresies.**
- **Bishops Seen as Successors of the Apostles. THE Bishop of Antioch, etc.**

As Second Century Church Leaders/Teachers Shape the Conversation

- **Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202)** – God’s Purpose is Make Us More Like the Divine.
- **Clement of Alexandria (150-215)** – Any Truth Found in Plato is Revealed in Jesus Christ and in Scripture.
- **Tertullian of Carthage (155-220)** -- Jesus is Both Human and Divine.
- **Origen of Alexandria (185 – 253)** God is Love and, in the End, Even Satan Will Be Saved.
- **These Leaders/Writers Expand the Scope of Christianity to All Social Classes.**

By The Second Century Roman Persecutions Begin In Earnest, Kind Of 100 -200 CE (Christians =10,000 - 170,000)

- **Growing Christian Population – Annoying – Who Are These Weirdos?**
- **Trajan's (98- 117) Policy: Christianity Illegal, But Christians Not Sought Out for Punishment. Just Not Worth the Cost.**
- **But If Christians Brought Before the Authorities They Were Expected to Recant – or Else.**
- **Marcus Aurelius, a Reasonable Man, (Richard Harris) 161- 180 CE is a Persecutor. Commodus (Joachim Phoenix) 171-192 CE, Not So...But He Was Crazy.**

Hmm... Let's Try More Persecutions 200 -300 CE

Christians = 170,000 – 3,500,000

- **To Stop the Spread of Christianity, Septimius Severus, 202 CE, Outlaws Any Conversion to Christianity (and Judaism) Under Pain on Martyrdom (Which Many Saw As a Glorious Honor!!). Doesn't Work.**
- **Decius 250 CE – You've Got to Worship Roman Gods – Or Else. Doesn't Work.**
- **Valerian 257 CE --Tries Decius' Plan – Doesn't Work.**
- **Christianity Steadily Gains More Converts, Even Among the Imperial Household, the Civil Service and...in the Army!**

The Number of Christians Keeps Increasing! Why?

- **Christians:**
- **100 CE 7,000 – 10,000**
- **150 CE 30,000 - 40,000**
- **200 CE 140,000 - 170,000**
- **250 CE 600,000 - 700,000**
- **300 CE 2,500,000 - 3,500,000**

Christian Areas in the Empire



And One Other Thing Before We Go Further...

- **The Roman Empire is Huge, of Course. Too Huge.**
- **There is a Political/Cultural Division Within the Empire That Has Important Bearing for the Future of Christianity.**
- **There is the Western Roman Section, Centered In Rome. It is Latin based and Is the Poorer Half: Italy, Spain, France, England, Carthage**
- **There is the Eastern Roman Section, Centered in What is Now Istanbul. It is Greek based, Richer, and Where the Bulk of Christians Live.**
- **Formal Division into Two Separate Empires Occurs in 395 CE.**

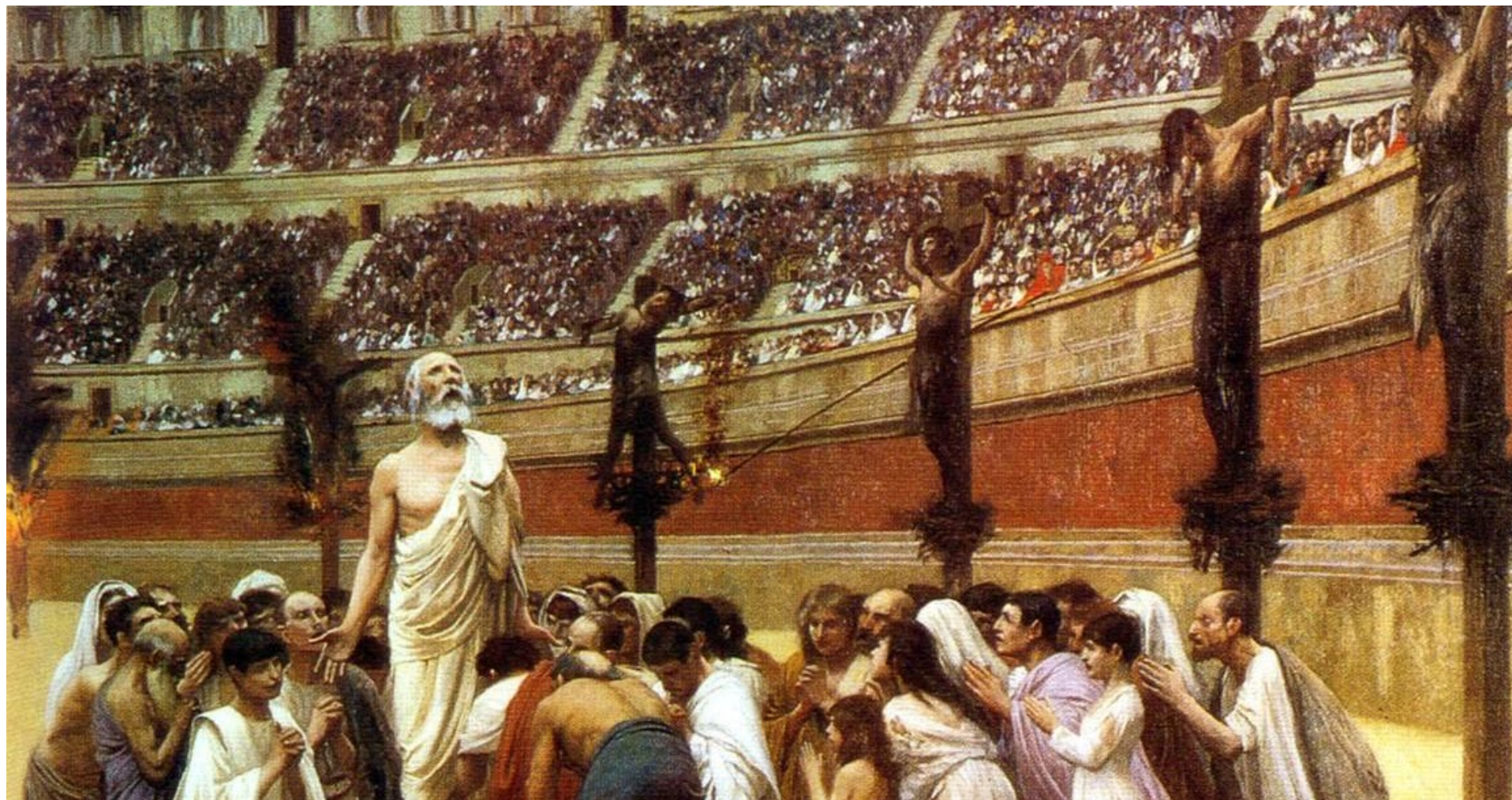
Roman Empire: West and East 300 CE(ish)



The Romans Feel Threatened: “The Great Persecution” Begins 303 CE

- **After a Period of Political Instability and External threats, Diocletian (284-305 CE) Becomes Emperor and Seeks a Return to Traditional Values. Make Rome Great Again!**
- **Christians Are Targeted and Are Required to Recant and Offer Sacrifice to the Gods. So Began the Great Persecution of the Christians.**
- **Though Many Christians are Killed and their Property Destroyed, the Persecution, Like the Others, Ultimately Fails.**
- **Why? There Are Simply Too Many Christians and Not Everyone is on Board to Persecute Them, Including Constantius, Father of Constantine.**

How Can People Do This to Each Other?



Enter...Constantine the Great

312 – 324 CE

Christians= 4,000,000 – 30,000,000

- **Constantine's Bloody Journey to Becoming Sole Emperor (in 324 CE) Includes His Famous Victory at Milvian Bridge in 312 CE. "In This Sign You Will Conquer". Adds ☩ Chi Rho as His Standard.**
- **Is That How It Works?**
- **Constantine (Whose Mother, Helena, Was a Devout Christian) Issues Edict of Milan in 313 Legalizing Christianity – No More Persecution.**
- **Christianity Is Finally Legit!!!! (Though Not the Official Religion).**
- **The Conversion Rate to Christianity, as One Might Expect, Explodes.**

And Christianity Comes Out of the Shadows

312 – 324 CE

Christians = 4,000,000 – 30,000,000

- **Churches and Bishops Get a Tax Break and Other Perks.**
- **Bishops Get Judicial Powers -- That Leads to Corruption.**
- **Churches Are Built – Constantine Orders Church of the Holy Sepulchre and His Mother, Helena, Builds the Church of Nativity.**
- **Many Churches are Lavish.**
- **Martyrs and Christian Relics Revered (Helena Finds the Very Cross of Christ). Things Are Suddenly Very Different.**
- **In Response, Many Christians Head to the Desert for the Monastic Life to Seek a Purer Christian Life.**

Constantine – If You Can't Beat Them...

325-330 Christians= 30,000,000

- **Constantine's Imperial Dream, like Diocletian, Is To Make Rome Great Again.**
- **In 330 Constantine Moves Capital of Roman Empire to Constantinople (New Rome).**
- **Constantine Does Not Outlaw Paganism But Sees Christianity As the Great Unifier for The Disparate Elements of the Empire.**
- **There Is Just One Little Problem....**

Two Christians, Three Opinions...

- **Shock...The Christians Are Not United: There are Disagreements On A Host of Issues Including: the Church Calendar, Polity and Liturgy**
- **But The One Thing That Threatens to Split the Church Apart, The One Thing That Is Causing Name Calling, Shouting, and Even Blood Shed Is the One Thing That you Would Have Thought Would Have Been Figured Out over the Past Three Hundred Years.**
- **Who Is Jesus Christ?**

The Council of Nicaea 325 CE

- The Basic Issue Is Whether Christ Is God (Athanasius) Or Was He Created By God (Arius).
- Constantine Wants to Settle This Controversy and Convenes A Conference at Nicaea for Church Leaders.
- The Issue is Settled in Favor of Athanasius As Reflected in the Nicene Creed (Jesus and God Share the Same Substance “begotten not made”)
- So We’re Good, Right?

Actually, No.

325- 337 CE

- **Despite the Vote At the Council of Nicaea, Disagreement Among Church Leaders and Rank and File Continues.**
- **Many Ordinary Christians and even Bishops Remain Arians at Heart.**
- **After Constantine Dies in 337, Disagreement Continues. The West Favors the Nicene Solution (Jesus is God); the East Favors the Arian View (God is Greater and Created Jesus.)**

After Constantine: Confusion

- **Lots of Christians Now But Paganism Still Exists.**
- **After Constantine:**
 - **Constantius II (337 – 360) Leans Arian; Pressures Bishops To Do the Same**
 - **Julian (361 – 363) is Pagan; Wants to Restore Old Time Practices and Values**
 - **Valens (364 -378) Wants Religious Compromise But Faces More Pressing Issues, like the Goths. The Roman Empire is Beginning to Teeter.**
- **Meanwhile, Talking Theology Here, the Cappadocian Fathers Develop the Concept of the Holy Ghost (Three Separate Beings But Are One in the Same in Essence.)**

Theodosius Takes Charge: Christianity Becomes the Official Religion of the Roman Empire!!!

- Theodosius I (379-395 CE) Is a Passionately Committed Nicene Christian.
- He Issued Laws Forbidding Paganism.
- In 380 CE Theodosius Makes Nicene Orthodoxy (the Trinity) the Law of the Land.
- Pagans Still Number About Half the Population of the Empire at 380 CE, but Their Numbers Dwindle.

What Happens Now That Christianity Is the Official Religion of The Roman Empire?

- **Sadly, Most Christian Leaders Prove to Be Less Than Tolerant.**
- **The View Is: We Are Right; You Therefore Must be Wrong.**
- **Pagan Temples are Destroyed or Converted; Statues Destroyed; Instances of Violence and Murder.**
- **The Intolerance and Acts of Destruction and Violence Extends to Judaism.**

What Do You Want To Call It?

- **In Less Than 400 Years We Have Gone From:
“I Do Not Know This Man You Are Talking
About.”**

To:

The Official Religion of the Roman Empire.

SUMMARY - PART ONE

- **Jesus of Nazareth Crucified**
- **Apostles Witness Resurrected Jesus**
- **Paul Witnesses Christ**
- **Paul Leads Conversion of the Pagans**
- **Exponential Growth of Christianity**
- **Rome Tries But Fails to Crush Christianity**
- **Emperor Constantine Endorses Christianity**
- **Christianity Becomes Official Religion of Roman Empire**

Musings

- **The Witnessing of the Risen Christ**
- **The Tenaciousness of Paul**
- **The Conversion of Pagans**
- **The Roman Response to Christianity**
- **The Human Interpretation of Christianity**

Storm Clouds in the West– Barbarians Are at the Gate- Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Goths, Vandals....



Storm Clouds in the East – A Child is Born...In Mecca

No Image is Available nor Will Be