



SESSION 9: DIOCLETIAN, SAINT GEORGE, DONATISM & CONSTANTINE - CONTENT

1. In 284 Diocletian became Emperor of the Roman Empire. He was briefly tolerant of Christians because the Roman gods were not paying attention. In 286, under the influence of Galerius, he divided the Empire into East and West, taking the East and appointing Maximian ruler of the West. They were augustus caesars (senior), and he appointed Constantius I and Galerius as co-ruling caesars for Maximian and himself. This created competitive conflict between the appointees and those who would succeed them. It was after this division in 286 that Diocletian, who had come under the influence of pagan advisors from North Africa, initiated the worst persecution of the early Church.
2. In 305 Constantius I died and his son general Constantine was acclaimed Emperor of the West by Roman legions in Europe. Also in 305 Diocletian became insane and was replaced in the East by Galerius. Maximian's sons Maxentius and Maximin became caesars in the West and East, respectively. Constantine ruled Britain, Gaul and Spain, Maxentius ruled Italy and North Africa and Maximin was in the Eastern empire. Maxentius and Maximin were especially anti-Christian and morally degenerate; they aspired to become augustus caesars and plotted unsuccessfully to kill Constantine.
3. Monasticism: As heremitic monasticism developed in Egypt, coenobitic (communal) monasticism was also beginning there. Soon, Pachomius would become a coenobitic leader, quickly creating nine monasteries based upon service. The monastic positions of abbot and archimandrite appeared, and both heremitic and coenobitic monasticism would grow rapidly with the support of Saint Athanasios, Bishop of Alexandria.
4. Developments within the Church: By 300 virtually every church, large or small, was led by a bishop. He was teacher, enforcer of discipline, selected presbyters and deacons, presided at baptisms and the eucharist, and was ordained by neighboring bishops. Inside the church there were offices of lectors, widows, subdeacons, catechists, acolytes, virgins, exorcists and doorkeepers. Presbyters became pastors in new congregations, under the bishop's charge. Deacons were bishops' assistants and generally limited to seven. Some churches, like Carthage, came to have extended authority and were known as metropolitan churches. They were led by metropolitan bishops. Some churches in major Christian centers (i.e. Rome, Alexandria and Antioch) began to be called patriarchal churches, and their bishops began to be called 'papas' by laity – the origin of the word 'pope'.
5. In 303 Diocletian called a council of governors and magistrates to deal with the problem of Christians. This resulted in an Edict of Persecution, requiring that Christians be excluded from the army, that they be removed from positions of responsibility, that their books and buildings be destroyed, and of course, that they sacrifice to the gods. On the third day of this council a soldier tribune upon whom Diocletian had conferred the honorary title of trophy-bearer, addressed those

gathered. His name was George – a Cappadocian of Christian parents and a martyred father. Because Diocletian had honored and respected the brilliant career of George, he repeatedly alternated extreme torture with opportunities to deny his faith. By his faith George prevailed over extreme tortures including the rack, burial in lime and spiked shoes. On one occasion Diocletian's wizard challenged George to raise a man from the dead, mocking that this would surely validate God. By George's prayer the man was raised and the wizard confessed Christ and was beheaded. After what was probably close to a year of torture, George was beheaded in April of 304. Of great significance was George's young relative Nina, who went to Georgia, converted the king and queen there to Christianity, and the whole nation became Christian!

6. On April 30, 311, six years after Diocletian's death, the dying Emperor Galerius of the East, who had convinced Diocletian to divide the Empire, pardoned Christians, saying, "In return for our tolerating Christians they will be required to pray to their God for us, for the public good, and for themselves."
7. In 311 the heresy of Donatism appeared, started by Donatus Magnus in Africa. It was a response to the apostacizing under Diocletian, and said that the Church must be a Church of saints, not sinners. It said that baptisms administered to those who surrendered during persecution are invalid, and that all sacraments celebrated by clergy who had aposticized under persecution were invalid. In 314 Constantine convened the Council of Arles to reject Donatism, and in 409 it was decreed heretical, with Donatists having to give up their churches. Donatism was still present at the end of the fourth century and disappeared during the Arab conquest of the 7th to 8th centuries.
8. In 313 Eusebius of Caesarea was present at the battle between Constantine and Maxentius at Milvian bridge outside Rome. He lived through relative peace prior to Diocletian, through Diocletian's persecution and into the time of Constantine. He was a noted historian who collected earlier writings and wrote a history of the early Church, to which we have often referred, going back as early as the destruction of the Temple in 70. He wrote a biography of Constantine's life and records Constantine's vision 'chi rho' and 'by this conquer', which was a banner carried into the battle defeating Maxentius. Eusebius delivered an oration in honor of Constantine's thirtieth year of reign, became bishop of Caesarea and Metropolitan of Palestine, and declined Constantine's request in 327 that he become Bishop of Antioch.
9. Following the battle at Milvian bridge, Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan ordering that persecution of Christians be stopped. In 322 Constantine invaded the Eastern Empire and defeated Licinius, thus re-uniting the Empire under his leadership. In 324 he issued an edict that all soldiers worship God on Sunday, and that Sunday be a holiday from work. In 337 he was baptized on his deathbed.
10. The year 313 was significant for the Church: 1) Edict of Milan ending persecution, 2) baptism of Pachomius, 3) Athanasios entering the service of Bishop Alexander as deacon, and 4) Antony going to the Egyptian desert to seek God.