



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Church History – Part One (100-1500 AD)

Lesson 15 – The Pagans Strike Back under Julian the Apostate

Emperor Constantine released Christians from the fear of persecution. But Constantine died in 337 AD. How would Christians fare under his successors? It seems that Constantine's troops were very much concerned about his successors, and we are told that "the army killed most of his relatives...in order to make sure that power would belong indisputably to Constantine's three surviving sons" (Gonzalez: *The Story of Christianity*, Part 1, p. 168). These three sons were Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans. After Constantine II and Constans died, Constantius II became as the sole ruler. But when Constantius II alone remained in power, he was opposed by a surviving cousin named Julian, who blamed Constantius II for the death of almost all his relatives in 337. Julian was baptized and educated as a Christian, but later he became more interested in philosophical studies and abandoned Christianity. For this reason, he became known as Julian the Apostate. Despite his great dislike for Constantius II and Christian teaching, Julian was an able ruler and a popular commander, so his followers proclaimed him to be the true emperor. The empire was heading into civil war between the two, but before that could happen, Constantius II died in 361 A.D. and Julian gained control of the whole empire.

Constantine and his sons had not persecuted pagans, but they had robbed pagan temples to obtain artwork for the new city of Constantinople. It was Julian's aim to restore the glory of paganism. For this purpose, he organized the pagan priesthood in the same way Christianity was organized, with priests, bishops, archbishops, and one supreme high priest, which, of course, was Julian. He also tried to get the pagan priests to imitate Christians in their morality and in acts of charity. He personally offered huge animal sacrifices to the ancient Roman gods, and he hoped the people would follow his example. He did not order the persecution of Christians, but he wrote against the Christians and ridiculed them by calling them Galileans. He even made plans to rebuild the Jewish temple at Jerusalem in order to make fun of Biblical prophecies concerning its destruction. But his plans came to a sudden end when he was speared to death in a battle against the Persians. His rule over the empire extended only 3 years, from 361 to 363 AD.

Questions:

1. Why were Constantine's relatives murdered after his death?
2. What turned Julian against his Christian training?
3. What is an apostate?
4. Why did Julian imitate the outward structure of the church?

5. How did Julian battle against Christianity?
6. How did the Lord bring about a sudden end to Julian's plans?
7. Is the country where you live dominated by Christianity or paganism? What are some of the effects that you see of this?

