

The Eternal Kingdom

Lesson 31

October 16, 2019

We've been studying the history of the Lord's church, and we've primarily been looking at the book, "The Eternal Kingdom" along with trusted external sources. Last week we studying (ns).

Diocletian (284-305) & Galerius (305-311)

- Diocletian assumed dictatorial powers in 284
 - What evidence do we have that he as much?
- He viewed Christianity as a militant group and considered it a threat to his attempt to unify Rome.
- What drastic act did Diocletian embark upon to hurt the church in 303?
- In 304, Diocletian issued a second decree. What did it demand of Christians?
- What horrific stories did Eusebius share regarding Christian persecution?
- In 305 Diocletian renounced his throne.
- Galarius (305-311) attempted to persecute the Christians, but it had no affect on them.

Diocletian assumed dictatorial powers in 284. We have evidence of this because he banned the Senate. He alone ruled Rome.

He viewed Christianity as a threat to his purpose and plans for Rome. He couldn't unify them if pesky Christians were resisting his abuse of power to make them conform to his desires. Interestingly, his wife Prisca, and daughter Valeria were Christians.

In 303, he issued an edict to burn down churches, imprison Christians, and burn copies of the bible. WHAT AND AGGRESSIVE MOVE!!!!

In 304, he demanded Christians worship false gods or die. If you are wondering if his wife and daughter complied, they did!

Eusebius writes about Christians being murdered, and sent off to camps and forced to work.

In 305 Diocletian renounced his throne. He became ill and Galerius persuaded him to resign from office.

Galerius attempted to persecute the church, but realized that it was ineffective. Now begin to take a look at the Edicts (Any questions up to this point)?

The Edict of Toleration

- According to our author, what incorrect assumption or miscalculation did the Roman government make about Christianity?
- What prompted Galerius to establish the “Edict of Toleration”?

(Read pages 96-97 regarding this edict).

The Roman government failed to understand that Christianity was a movement of peace and co-operation, even with governing authorities. Christians are commanded to honor and obey the king and obey law (Romans 13:1-7; 1Pt.2:13-17) and they are commanded to even pray for the king (1Tim.2:2).

It is said that shame and guilt moved emperor Galerius to enact the “Edict of Toleration”. Anyone have issues with the wording of such an edict. The fact that you are going to TOLERATE me? I just find that phrase interesting. How about the “Edict of Repentance”? How about “The Edict of Remorse”? How about “The Edict of Apology”? How about the “Edict of Shame”?

I want us to review this edict a little closer since we are discussing how phrases and words are being used. Let’s look at portions of the Edict.

The Edict of Toleration

"AMONG the other measures that we frame for the use and profit of the state, it had been our own wish formerly that all things should be set to rights in accordance with the ancient laws and public order of the Romans; and to make provision for this, namely, that the Christians also, such as had abandoned the persuasion of their own ancestors, should return to a sound mind; seeing that through some reasoning they had been possessed of so self-will and seized with such folly that instead of following the institutions the ancients, which perchance their own forefathers had formerly established, they made for themselves, and were observing, laws merely in accordance with their own disposition and each one wished, and were assembling various multitudes in divers places: Therefore when a command of ours soon followed to the intent that they should betake themselves to the institutions of the ancients, very many indeed were subjected to peril, while very many were harassed and endured all kinds of death;

The edict of toleration became law on April 30, A.D. 311. As we read this edict, make notes of anything you see that strikes you as odd, strange, different, and maybe even offensive if you are a Christian.

(Read the edict).

And since the majority held to the same folly, and we perceived that they were neither paying the worship due to the gods of heaven nor honoring the god of the Christians; having regard to our clemency and the invariable custom by which we are wont to accord pardon to all men, we thought it right in this case also to extend most willingly our indulgence: That Christians may exist again and build the houses in which they used to assemble, always provided that they do nothing contrary to order. In another letter we shall indicate to the judges how they should proceed. Wherefore, in accordance with this our indulgence, they will be bound to beseech their own god for our welfare, and that of the state, and their own; that in every way both the well being of the state may be secured, and they may be enabled to live free from care in their own homes.

(Read it).

Is there anything that jumps out at you as you as you read this?

First, the fact that Christians would be pressured to give up their religion. Can you imagine such a thing? How would you feel if our government decrees Christianity illegal? AWFUL! Our county was founded on people seeking religious freedom.

Second, the government realizing how they over-reached or over-stepped in violating the convictions of Christians, that they could now return to "sound mind". They said "Christians may exist again..." What arrogance on behalf of the Roman government. Throughout the edict, Christianity was consider folly, but now they can return to sound mind and be Christians again. I'm reminded of Paul's words in (1Cor.2:18-25 read and explain). The world looks at Christianity as foolishness. Also, I find it amazing that the government now identifies Christians of "sound mind". Does this mean that when the government was persecuting Christians they were not of sound mind? Seems like that!

There is one statement that the faithful in Christ could proudly express as they held their head up high, and it is this, "How can I return to something and someone that I never left?" Again, this is that William Wallace moment. You may take my life, but you will never take my freedom! As for you and me, "You may kill me for being a Christian, but you will never deny me from being a Christian!"

The Edict of Milan

- Promoted and implemented by Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D.
- What was so different about this edict as opposed to “The Edict of Toleration”?
- The church would encounter peace instead of persecution; however heresy was about to impact Christianity.

(Read bullet #1)

The history of this edict is very interesting. So the Roman Empire was shared by three different rulers after Galerius' death: Maximinus, Licinius, and Constantine. To make a long story short, Constantine and Licinius formed an alliance to eliminate Maximinus. But something to keep in mind is that before Constantine he was supposed to have seen a vision in the sky that guaranteed him victory. He gave God credit for this vision, and had ordered his soldiers to put the Greek letters Chi and Rho on their shields. Those are the first two letters used in the name “Christ”. Constantine went to war and soundly defeated Maximinus. As a part of honoring God, he honored Christians with the “Edict of Milan”. Constantine began to favor the Christian religion, abandoning pagan gods and their temples. According to most historians, Constantine is considered the first “Christian emperor”, and before Imogene asks the question, I’m going to answer it for her, “no, it was not New Testament baptism.” He was sprinkled upon his deathbed. Constantine died in 337 A.D.

(Read bullet #2)

What was so different about the Edict of Milan vs. the Edict of Toleration was the fact the government restored and provided restitution to Christians for their loss.

(Read bullet #3)

What a change of events. “Christianity” and I use that term loosely at this point, would go from hiding in the shadows, worshipping in homes, to becoming a state

sanctioned religion. Coins were minted with the Christian symbol on them.



Here is an example of what the coin looked like.