

Central Church of Christ

Meeting Location:
NABOR Conference Center
1455 Pine Ridge Road
Naples, FL 34109

~ *Contact* ~
239-961-3390
centralcocnaples.com

~ *Services* ~

Sunday Morning:

Bible Study – 10:00 AM Worship – 11:00 AM

Sunday Evening:

Worship – 6:00 PM

Wednesday Night:

Bible Study – 7:00 PM

John Rose – Preacher
239-227-6925

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Editor – *WORDS OF FAITH*

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the Gospel – Rom. 10:17 Believe the Gospel – John 8:24
Repent of your sins – Luke 13:3 Confess your faith – Acts 8:37
Be baptized for forgiveness of past sins – Acts 2:38
Live faithfully unto death – Rev. 2:10, 1 John 1:7

Scriptural Worship

Preaching the Word of God – Acts 2:42
Giving of Your Means – 1 Cor. 16:1-2
Observing the Lord's Supper – Acts 20:7
A Cappella Singing – Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16
Praying – Acts 2:42

Let us all worship “in spirit and in truth,” (John 4:24).

WORDS OF FAITH

“... nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine ...”
1 Tim. 4:6

Central Church of Christ

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The Book of Revelation – Historical Background

Homer Hailey
Part One

The final persecution against Christians, executed by the emperor Diocletian and his co-rulers, Maximian, Galerius, and later, Maximin II, was so severe that it made all previous persecutions fade into the background. Diocletian was declared emperor by his army September, 284, and reigned until he abdicated the throne May, 305, and was succeeded by Galerius, his son-in-law and the Caesar at the time.

A new order of rule was introduced by Diocletian. Soon after his selection as emperor he turned to Maximian to fill the role of Caesar. Then on April 1, 286, Maximian was appointed joint Augustus with Diocletian and Galerius and Constantius were selected as Caesars to work with the two Augusti. The rule of various portions of the empire was distributed among the four, but Diocletian maintained the chief rule among them. Under him the imperial authority became absolute. The senate lost almost all its power, and at the same time the primacy of Italy was ended. Milan, the headquarters of Maximian replaced Rome as the capital of Italy; Trier, in Germany, was the base of Constantius' rule in the west, Nicomedia, in Bithynia, was made the capital of Diocletian; and Sermium, in the province of Pannonia, was the administrative center for Galerius.

Apparently, the persecution did not begin immediately upon the ascension of Diocletian and his co-Augusti; in fact, it seems that in those early years they did not break the religious truce which had been preserved since Gallienus. However, in spite of Gallienus's edict, Christianity was not yet recognized as a *reli-*

gio licita. Eusebius says was in the nineteenth year of Diocletian's reign that the persecution broke out.

Describing the church before the persecution, Eusebius states that Christians enjoyed freedom, held high offices in government positions, were excused from sacrificing, and possessed spacious buildings. But he also describes the internal condition of the church as corrupt and filled with hypocrisy, avarice, and hatred. The believers were almost ready to take up arms one against another. There were many Christians in Diocletian's household and court. His wife and daughter were exceedingly friendly to the faith, and it is probable that they were Christians.

Space does not permit a thorough discussion of the possible causes of the persecution, and Diocletian appears to have opposed it. Suffice it to say that Galerius was a bitter enemy of the church and possessed an implacable hatred for it. Many historians feel that he was the moving force behind the edicts. It must be remembered that in the Roman mind peace and prosperity depended on popular worship of and reverence for the traditional gods of Rome. The Romans believed that these were still the forces which preserved the universe and the empire. However, the greatest barrier between the Roman and the Christian was the worship of the emperor. To the Roman such sacrifice was a tribute of respect to the ruler of the Roman world, but to the Christian it was the very essence of idolatry. Faith in the gods was on the decline, but the Romans were not ready to accept Christianity as an alternative. Gibbon thinks Diocletian may have been moved by fear of the church's opulence, its organization (as an entity within the state), its government by its own laws and magistrates, and its independent treasury. He also thinks that the church's rejection of the gods and the institutions of Rome were probable contributing factors.

Along with these factors, another enemy had appeared on the scene in the person of Porphyry, the "prophet of the great persecution," who was an able writer and a bitter enemy of Christianity. His weapon was the pen. He wrote voluminously, with telling force against the whole Christian system, and for many years his writings were the chief source of material for opponents of the faith. Finally the time had come for a showdown. Roman paganism, ingrained in the popular mind, and Christianity could not endure side by side – one had to go. The conflict would be a long and

bitter one, fought to the death of one and victory of the other. By this time the fight was inevitable.

Feelings mounted in the provinces; pressures increased; soldiers who refused to sacrifice were discharged, given corporal punishment and returned to civil life deprived of certain privileges and rights. By 301 the handling of this problem was developing into a persecution.

During the winter of 302-303 Diocletian and Galerius spent much time together at Nicomedia where it is thought that Galerius tried to persuade the emperor to issue the edict of persecution. After counseling with his leaders, who approved persecution, and appealing to the oracle of the Milisian Apollo, Diocletian decided in favor of persecution and issued the edict in February, 303. The persecution began in Nicomedia. Since the emperor opposed bloodshed, at first the Christian's buildings were destroyed, their property confiscated, Scriptures burned, and those of honorable station were debased and degraded; but torture and bloodshed soon followed.

Two fires which broke out in the imperial palace, falsely blamed on the Christians by Galerius, inspired the second edict against them. There is strong suspicion and evidence that the fires were set by Galerius himself so that the Christians might be blamed. This second edict was directed especially against the clergy, the church leaders, demanding that they be delivered in chains to the authorities and imprisoned until they were compelled to sacrifice. The third edict, issued December 303, commanded the release of those who would sacrifice, "but to lacerate with myriad tortures those who would not."

The fourth edict was issued in the spring of 304 during a severe illness of Diocletian. It is uncertain whether it was issued by Maximian or Galerius, but most historians ascribe it to Galerius. The most severe edict issued up to this point, it called for a general persecution. All men, women, and children were to offer a libation or suffer the penalty of death. Needless to say, many refused and were put to death.

– *Revelation An Introduction and Commentary*. Baker Book House. 1979. Pages 85-88.