

20. JULIAN THE APOSTATE

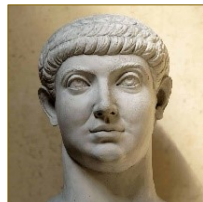


Constantine the Great

When Constantine the Great died, his three sons divided the empire between them. But instead of living in harmony, ruling over their realms, and assisting each other, these three emperors, though brothers, waged

bloody wars. How silly, how foolish! War is always terrible, but civil war is worse because it's often more cruel.

These three brothers marched to war against each other with their mighty armies, and blood flowed in streams. One of Constantine the Great's sons was Constantius II. He inflicted a significant defeat on his brother, who died in this war. The other son of Constantine was also killed in the battle, and now Constantius II became the supreme ruler of the whole Roman realm, just like his father. Now he could do what he wanted!



*Roman
Emperor
Constantius II
(350 – 361
A.D.)*

This political background is necessary to understand this chapter.

JULIAN'S BACKGROUND

The doors of the cathedral in Nicomedia are wide open. The people stream inside. The seats fill up quickly. The service will soon begin.

Nicomedia was situated close to Constantinople and had even been the empire's capital for some time. But Constantine the Great had built Constantinople, which became the Roman Empire's new capital. That new city was bigger and more beautiful than Nicomedia. Yet Nicomedia remained a large and important city for a long time. In chapter 17, we learned that Emperor Diocletian had ordered his henchmen to destroy the Christian cathedral, but Constantine the Great had allowed and encouraged the

Christians to rebuild it again. The time of persecution was over.

Emperor Constantius II had sternly forbidden sacrificing to the gods. Whoever dared to transgress that command would receive the death sentence. All the pagan temples were closed.

Now the doors of the new cathedral are wide open. The Christians stream in from all directions to listen to the preaching of God's Word. Doing so is no longer dangerous; they may meet undisturbed for their church services. How things have changed!

When everyone is finally seated, a young man enters, goes to the front and reads a section of God's Word to the congregation. The name of this reader is Julian. Everyone knows him because he is the emperor's nephew. Julian never knew his father because he died when Julian was very young. Some years later, Julian's mother died too. So Julian was an orphan at a very young age. But his uncle, Emperor Constantius II, took him in and brought him up as a Christian. That's how Julian became a reader in the cathedral at Nicomedia.

When Julian had read the chapter, he sat down and listened attentively to the preaching of the bishop. We would say, "He listened attentively to the minister." No one doubts that Julian is a pious Christian. When the service is over and the people go home, Julian also walks home with a solemn face. Isn't that expected from a reader in the church?

THE REAL JULIAN

It is night. The people of Nicomedia are asleep. Nothing disturbs the peace.

But look! Quietly a door opens, and a young man cautiously steps outside. Silently, he sneaks past the houses and through the city's deserted streets. Finally, he stops at a dreary, dilapidated building. It's a gloomy, dismal-looking place, especially in the dark of night. It's an old pagan temple closed at Emperor Constantius's command and is now

vacant, deserted, and run-down. The large front gates are locked. However, the young man does not hesitate but sneaks around the temple and cautiously knocks on a small, inconspicuous side door.

Now we see that people are in the old temple after all because a hushed voice asks: "Who's there?" He whispers an answer. Then the little door is carefully opened, and the young man quickly slips inside. Immediately the bolt is slid back into place, and nobody can see anything strange about that deserted building. Nothing shows that this temple is not deserted.

But inside, some priests are very busy. They kill a young bull and catch the warm blood in a dish. The young man undresses, and one of the priests sprinkles him with this blood. The bright red blood drops splatter all over his naked body.

The musky scent of incense drifts up before a stone image. With folded hands, the young man reverently kneels before the idol. But, but *that* is not allowed! That carries the death penalty! Hasn't idol worship been strictly forbidden by Emperor Constantius?

Yes, indeed, that is true.

That's why these priests and this young man do this in the middle of the night! What they are doing is very dangerous, for it will cost them their lives if somebody discovers this!

That's why they are so quiet and careful to ensure nobody notices anything. And at midnight, all the people are asleep, aren't they? Despite all the emperor's commands, these priests still cling to paganism. They still hope to one day restore paganism to its former glory and open the temples again. They can't and won't bid farewell to the ancient worship of the gods!

What about that young man?

Who is he?

That young man is *Julian*, the reader in the Christian Church in Nicomedia! How is that possible?!

Isn't Julian a pious Christian?

He listens so attentively to the sermon!

He always looks so solemn!

Is that same Julian now kneeling so reverently before an ancient idol?

Yes, Julian plays the pious Christian during the day, but he attends the pagan sacrificial feasts at night!

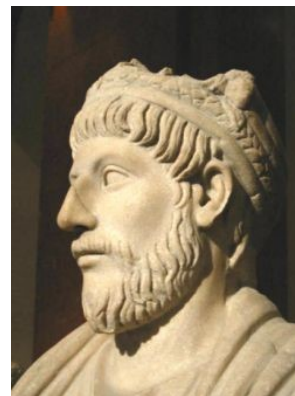
Julian is a hypocrite. He is just pretending

when he looks so solemn in church as he listens so 'attentively' to the preaching of the bishop. In his heart, he hates the Christians and despises their doctrine. During the day, there is a mocking glint in his eyes. A scornful smile, almost invisible, curls his pursed lips. But no one notices that. Of course not, because everyone who sees and knows him thinks he is a serious, pious young man. But at night, in the pagan temple, he does *not* play the hypocrite. Then his eyes sparkle and a determined expression covers his face. However, Julian tells nobody, and his friends, the pagan priests, keep silent, too. They are biding their time...

During the week, Julian studies hard. He works on his lessons night and day, and he learns well. On Sundays, he is the reader in the cathedral at Nicomedia. He becomes a learned man.

JULIAN AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMY

The world empire of the Romans is in great danger. Powerful enemies threaten and attack from all sides. In the east, the Roman soldiers must fight against the Persians. And in the west, they must defend themselves against powerful and hostile Gaulish forces. Emperor Constantius II knows that the situation is serious. Will the Roman legions be able to maintain their position and hold back the invading enemy? Constantius II has his doubts. What must he do? What measures must he take to escape the danger that threatens his empire?



*Julian the Apostate
361 to 363 AD*



Battle of Strasbourg – Argentoratum 357 AD Julian the Apostate defeats the Alamani – [Igor Dzis](#) The Battle of Argentoratum (also known as the battle of Strasbourg) , was fought in 357 A.D. between the Late Roman army under the Caesar and future Emperor Julian, and the germanic Alamanni confederation led by king Chnodomar. [Weaponsandwarfare.com](#)

In despair, he appoints his nephew Julian as commander of the Roman battalions in the west. Not that he likes Julian; he does not trust him but feels forced to appoint him in these extreme circumstances. He cannot do without Julian. And so, Julian becomes commander in chief of the Roman legions in the west. The emperor himself marches east. He will try to beat back the intruding Persians, and Julian must try to repulse the Gauls in the west.

Julian hastens to his post. He is pleased with the honourable task his uncle, the emperor, has given him.

He fights against the Gauls for four years, and sure enough, he is victorious. Triumphantly, his brave troops march forward. The Roman soldiers learn to love their bold commander, for Julian is no coward. On the contrary, with the courage of a lion, he throws himself into the thick of the battle. Julian stands and fights in the most dangerous places while encouraging his soldiers at the same time. He wins one battle after another. He forces the Gauls to retreat, leaving their dead behind.

The emperor hears this and becomes jealous of his nephew. He orders a large part of Julian's army to come to the east to help him fight the fierce battle against the Persians. But Julian's soldiers do not want to be transferred to the east. They do

not want to leave their brave commander. They refuse to obey the command of the emperor! Worse, they proclaim *Julian* as emperor! That is dangerous because now, there are two emperors: Julian in the west and Constantius II in the east. That is sure to end badly.

Julian decides to go to battle against his uncle. It will be a life-and-death struggle. The western battalions are already marching east because Julian realises he must act quickly. Then news suddenly comes that it is no longer necessary because the Persians managed to kill emperor Constantius II.



Julian made emperor. [abouthistory.com](#)

EMPEROR JULIAN

So, Julian suddenly became emperor over the mighty Roman empire without fighting! He is delighted! He has unexpectedly achieved his aim!

Playing the hypocrite is no longer necessary, and he soon shows his true character. He publicly announces that he is a pagan and commands the pagan temples to open again. The ancient worship of the gods is honourably reinstated all over the empire. The pagan altars burn again, and the scent of incense rises in honour of the gods. The pagan priests cheer, but there is fear and alarm among the Christians. They had not expected that!

God's people tremble. A dreadful fear overcomes them. Will believers be persecuted again? Will the blood of martyrs be shed in streams again? Will Christianity again be plunged into mourning and grief? Will the Christians again be delivered to the enemies' lust for blood?

No, that is not Julian's intention. He knows very well that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. He plans to try a different tactic to make Christianity impossible.

He pushes the Christians out of society. He dismisses Christian preachers and teachers and replaces them with pagans. He removes Christian governors from office. He does not permit Christians in any government positions.

Step by step, Julian pushes the Christians back. He even writes books against the Christians, mocking the Lord Jesus in horrible ways. He commands his soldiers to annoy the Christians as much as possible. The soldiers beat and abuse them. Julian orders some of the Christian churches to be closed. He robs the money belonging to the Christian churches and uses that money to restore the dilapidated pagan temples. When the Christians complain to Julian about the injustice, he does not listen. He laughs at them and drives them away.



Coin of Julian the Apostate.

New World Encyclopedia

Mockingly he calls to them:

"That Galilean from Nazareth also permitted Himself to be beaten, didn't He? Why don't you follow His example?"

With "that Galilean from Nazareth", he meant the

Lord Jesus. Isn't that terrible?

How dare he say that! Julian did everything he could to humiliate and insult the Christians as much as possible. It looked very dark for the church of the Lord.

Will the hellish powers conquer the church?

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

There is lots of activity where once the temple stood in Jerusalem. Thousands of men, women and children are working diligently.

Who are they, and what are they doing there?

Just listen!

Julian, the pagan emperor, was a bitter enemy of the Christians. He hated their God and kept mocking the Lord Jesus by calling Him "the Nazarene". We know that the Lord Jesus foretold that the temple at Jerusalem would be destroyed so that no stone would be left on the other. At the same time, the Saviour had said, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

Furiously, Julian said:

"I'll see about that! I'll make sure that this prophecy of Jesus will not happen. Not Jesus, but I am the strongest, the most powerful!"

Do you know what he did?



The temple destroyed again
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/>

He permitted the Jews to return to their country. They may rebuild their destroyed temple. He will help and support them as much as he can. The

Jews receive that command from the emperor with great joy. Thousands of them quickly travel to Jerusalem, and the Jews who can't travel give lots of money. Then they can buy stones and wood and whatever else they need. The Jews prepare to rebuild their temple. It must become beautiful, much bigger and better than the previous one. They don't have to worry about money because there is plenty available! But before they can build, they must first clear the rubble. That's why it's so busy in Jerusalem. The Jews work enthusiastically and energetically from dawn till dusk. Finally, they have cleared away all the rubble, the burnt beams, and the scorched and smashed stones. Now they can start building the new temple.

WHO IS STRONGER?

Julian grins wickedly. Ha, *he* is the strongest; *he* is the emperor!
He will show who's boss — Jesus of Nazareth or the mighty emperor of the Roman empire!

"Start building, Jews!" he commands.
And the Jews build. Of course!
They are elated!
They lay the foundations and build the walls.
They raise the beams of the ceiling.
They're getting there! The temple will rise again!

Then, suddenly, a terrible earthquake causes all of Jerusalem to shake on its foundations. The ground shakes and trembles, and - the half-finished temple collapses like a cardboard house.
Destroyed!

All that labour and trouble has been in vain!
Bewildered, the Jewish builders stare at the heap of rubble.
Grimly Julian commands:
"Start again. I will help you. I will ensure you get wood or stone if you need it!"
They start building again, but...!
Huge flames of fire burst out of the ground. Fire seems to squirt from the ground! It kills some of the builders. Whirlwinds swirl about, and everything the builders had so laboriously rebuilt is destroyed for the second time! Things get so bad that no one can work there anymore. To keep going is life-threatening, so the Jews stop working. They must because God forces them!

Julian is furious when he learns what has happened, but he cannot continue fighting against God's almighty power. Full of pride and bold wickedness, he had said:
"I am the strongest!"
No, Julian, you are wrong!
Not you, but *God* is the strongest!

Julian suffers a massive defeat. That despised and scorned Nazarene has conquered! God does not permit Himself to be mocked by *anyone*, not by Emperor Julian either!

JULIANS' FINAL EFFORT

It's busy on the eastern Roman front. There is an immense concentration of troops. The soldiers marched east from all parts of the Roman Empire. Why? What is going on?

Persia constantly threatens the borders of the east.
Julian wants to put a stop to that threat.
He wants to conquer the Persian kingdom.

He plans to destroy the Persian army and make Persia a Roman province. If that succeeds, the eastern Roman border will be safe.

His hatred of the Christians is as great as ever. But first, he needs to conquer the Persians. When he returns as a conqueror, he will persecute the Christians and destroy the church of God.

Although he had opened and restored the pagan temples, they remained almost empty. Hardly anyone came to sacrifice to the gods because the people no longer believed in them. In great anger, the emperor curses the Christians and calls them horrible names. He taunts and insults the God of the Christians, but it doesn't help.
"And yet it has to change!" Julian hisses.
First, defeat the Persians and then...!
Julian laughs grimly. Then he will drown God's people in blood!

While preparing for the battle with the Persians, the emperor visits Antioch, a city north of Canaan, near the Mediterranean Sea.
During his stay there, he reopened and restored a large pagan temple, which had been closed for many years. He extravagantly spent much money and effort to make that temple the largest, the

most beautiful of all the temples in that area. But when the work is finally done, and the temple is ready to use, hardly anyone comes to sacrifice. Oh, sure, the emperor himself brings many sacrifices. But it doesn't help. Only one older man comes in and sacrifices a goose.

Julian is furious! All kinds of thoughts of revenge arise in his heart.

That beautiful, splendidly restored temple burns down to the ground a few days later. Now Julian's rage is boundless!

A pagan priest may have been careless with fire, accidentally starting that terrible blaze, but Julian blames the Christians.

He orders the Christian church buildings to be closed. Then he robs all the money he finds in them, and, what's much worse, martyr's blood flows again. But he does not persevere. No, not yet. He must first defeat the Persians; first, subdue their country and then!

During that time, a pagan mockingly asked an ordinary Christian: "What is your carpenter's son making at the moment?"

With 'carpenter's son', that pagan rudely referred to the Lord Jesus. The Christian looks earnestly at that pagan mocker, and then he answers calmly: "Oh, He is making a coffin for your emperor."

Did that ordinary Christian have a hunch that God would soon intervene to stop Julian in his tracks? It does not seem as if that prediction will happen for a while because when finally, everything is ready and thousands of brave Roman soldiers stand at attention, Julian commands: "Forward, march!"

And look, the battalions march into Persia! They are sure that they will gain a brilliant victory. At first, everything goes well. Time and again, the Persian armies are defeated, and Julian marches ever further into Persian territory at the head of his conquering troops. Some experienced officers advise their emperor to turn back and not penetrate too far into a hostile country. But Julian shakes his head decisively. No, not back, but forward!

And his thousands of soldiers go forward. They march through endless, dry, hot plains. Laboriously, they drag their way through the

scorching heat. To make matters worse, the supply of drinking water is running low. Thirst plagues the tired soldiers. The soldiers begin to complain. Finally, they become mutinous. Gnashing his teeth, Julian finally commands the soldiers to turn back.

That's what the Persians have been waiting for! These embittered Persians attack the retreating army from all sides. The Roman battalions courageously defend themselves.

One day, the Persian soldiers attack the Roman chariot section. Julian hurries to the scene of the fierce struggle. He does not even give himself time to put on his suit of armour. During the turmoil of battle, an arrow strikes the emperor in the chest. Mortally wounded, Julian falls. The Romans succeed in repulsing the attacking Persians. They succeed in rescuing their seriously injured emperor. They manage to carry him to a tent, but it is too late. A few hours later, Julian dies. Some writers tell us that he clenched his fist and cried out:

"So, You have conquered after all, Galilean!"

I'm not sure if that is true. But one thing *is* true. That Nazarene, Jesus Christ, indeed *has* conquered because Julian, the great enemy of the church, died, and then he had to appear before God's formidable tribunal. God had spoken: "Thus far, and no further!"

Julian died in 363 A.D. at the age of only 32. With his death, the danger threatening God's church passed because Julian's successors did not believe in persecuting the Christians. On the contrary, paganism quickly fell into decay again and soon perished.



Julian the Apostate struck by an arrow. Quora

Julian's efforts were the last convulsive twitch of dying paganism.

Julian was a very gifted man.

God had given him a clear mind.

He *could have* been a good emperor.

Sadly, he misused his gifts, and he misused his powers. He failed to use his God-given talents. They gave him a terrible nickname. In the history books, the writers call him Julian *the Apostate!*

QUESTIONS

1. What happened to the empire of Constantius?
2. Why is a civil war so terrible?
3. Identify Julian.
4. What is a hypocrite?
5. Explain how Julian became emperor.
6. What is an apostate?
7. Why didn't Julian persecute the Christians by killing them as many of his predecessors had done?
8. List the methods Julian used to oppose Christianity.
9. Show how Julian used his knowledge of Christianity to ridicule and mock it.
10. Why did Julian encourage the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem?
11. How did God defeat their purpose?
12. What occurred when they again attempted to rebuild it?
13. How did Julian acknowledge the supremacy of God before he died?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. List at least two lessons we should learn from this story.
2. When a person commits sin against the Holy Spirit, both *light* (a level of knowledge of divine truths accompanied by some feeling attached to it) and *spite* (hatred) must be present. In other words, the person must have had some revelation of the truth, followed it for a time, and then turned against it. This sin involves an open denial of the Lord Jesus, with the sinner willingly committing this sin repeatedly, for he never comes to repentance. Do you feel that Julian committed this sin? Explain your answer.

REVIEW

Decide whether the following statements are true or false. If true, leave them as they are. If they are wrong, change them to true statements.

1. A hypocrite is the same as an apostate.
2. Julian was forced to acknowledge that Jesus, whom he hated, was more powerful than him.
3. Julian succeeded in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, but it was later destroyed by fire and a whirlwind.
4. Julian was a reader in the temple of Constantinople in Asia Minor.
5. The Lord's Supper was served daily in the catacombs during times of persecution.
6. The palm branch signifies peace, while the dove symbolises victory.
7. Constantine's successors closed pagan temples and imposed the death penalty on those who sacrificed to the gods.
8. Constantine was baptised shortly before his death.
9. In the time of Constantine, Christians were allowed to freely worship, rebuild their destroyed churches, and join the army but were forbidden to hold public office.
10. Constantine saw a vision of a cross in the sky and ordered its likeness to be placed on his banners.
11. The rival to Constantine's throne was his cousin Diocletian.
12. The Lord punished Galerius with sudden death at the hands of murderers.
13. The two opposing forces in the Roman Empire during the days of Diocletian were Christianity and paganism.
14. Fifty years of peace followed the reigns of Decius and Valerian.
15. Cremation is a long-standing Jewish custom.