



Julian the Apostate (331 - 363) A.D.

*Julian's Origin and Education*¹⁴

Julian, the nephew of emperor Constantine the great, was born in Constantinople in 331 A.D.. He grew up in Constantinople and studied under the supervision of enunch Mardonius and Ecebolius the Sophist, who taught him rhetoric and who was a Christian at that time. The emperor made sure that Julian had no pagan masters lest he should be influenced by pagan superstitions and thus Julian grew up as a Christian. His proficiency in literature soon became so remarkable that it was said that he was capable of governing the whole Roman empire.

¹⁴ See NPNF, vol II, 2nd series, pp. 76-78

On Mardonius' death, emperor Constantius II, the son of Constantine the great and also Julian's cousin, ordered that Julian and his half brother Gallus be sent to Macellum¹⁵ where Julian studied classics and Gallus came closer to Christianity.

In 348 A.D., the two princes were summoned back to Constantinople. There, Julian came in contact with Libanius and other pagan philosophers and from that time onwards he became devoted to the pagan classics. Hearing about the influence of pagan philosophy on Julian, the emperor's worry was aroused. Julian, between hope and fear, and anxious to lull the awakened suspicions pretended to live a monastic life, yet in private he pursued his philosophical studies. He was even appointed as a deacon in the church where he used to read the sacred writings of the Christians.

In 354 A.D., Julian was allowed to go to Athens where he came in contact with Basilius the great¹⁶ and Gregory of Nazianzus, with whom he studied in the Holy Scriptures. There also, Julian was able to visit famous pagan shrines and finally renounced Christianity.

Julian's rise to the throne and his apostasy to paganism¹⁷

In 356 A.D., emperor Constantius II summoned back Julian from Greece and appointed him as Caesar. In November 361 A.D., following the death of Constantius, Julian ascended to the throne. Finding himself, the sole possessor of the empire, he openly renounced the faith of Christ. He offered sacrifices and renunciatory expiations - as called by

15 A distant imperial estate in Cappadocia.

16 Basilius the great, later became the Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia and is commonly known as Basil. the great.

17 See NPNF, vol ii, 2nd series, p 325.

pagans - and by the blood of animals, purged himself of his Christian baptism. Besides, he commanded that all pagan temples be reopened and old customs and ancestral ceremonies be restored.

Concerning the Christians, he openly manifested his aversions and deprived them of the rights of citizenship and the privilege of participating in assemblies and in forum. They were not allowed to become judges, magistrates or public servants in government offices. Moreover, the sons of Galileans¹⁸, as he called the worshipers of the Saviour, were prohibited from participating in the study of poetry, rhetoric or philosophy. Later, he issued an edict ordering that the Galileans be expelled from the army.

Julian also induced many to offer sacrifice, partly by flattery and partly by gifts, and compelled those who refused to pay a sum of money proportional to what they own. Under the pressure of pagans, Julian the apostate not merely condemned the beloved Pope Athanasius, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, to exile but to death.¹⁹

Moreover, the emperor especially regarded the inhabitants of Caesarea, the large and wealthy metropolis of Cappadocia, with extreme aversion as they were zealously attached to Christianity and had also formerly destroyed the temple dedicated to Fortune - the only one remaining in the city - after his accession of the throne.

Hearing of Julian's many evil deeds*, Basilus the Great accompanied by Saint Libarius and Gregory of Nizianzus went to remonstrate him on his behavior and complain of the abuse which he was heaping on the Holy Scriptures.

18 Julian was accustomed to call Christ "the Galilean", and Christians "Galileans".

19 See NPNF vol ii, 2nd series, pp. 97-98.

On coming into Julian's presence, he addressed them saying :

"What are you looking for ? "

Basilius answered :

" We are looking for a shepherd who will be good to his flocks."

The emperor said :

"Where have you left the ' son of the carpenter ' ? "

Basilius said :

"I have left Him making a wooden coffin for you."

The emperor replied :

"I am not going to enter into a philosophical discussion with you because you are my friend and I do not want to have your head taken off."

Basilius replied :

"You are not a philosopher. If you were, you would not have cast behind the wisdom that you have learned when you were a reader of the books of true wisdom."

The emperor said :

"I read them and I understood them."

Basilius said :

"You did not neither read them carefully, nor did you understand them, for if you have, you would never have talked abusively about them."

Angrily the emperor said :

“I will shut you up in prison until I return from Persia and then I will make you know what it is to oppose the emperor.”

Basilus said :

“If you shall go to Persia and shall return, then God has not spoken by me.”

Julian the apostate ordered that Basilus and his friends be cast in prison until his return from Persia.²⁰ He also threatened that when the war has ended, he would treat the Christians with severity and boasted that the ‘son of the carpenter’ would be unable to help them.

[In Persia and in the heat of the conflict which ensued, a violent wind arose, and the sky and the sun were totally concealed by the clouds, while the air was at the same time mixed with dust. During the darkness which was thus produced, a horseman, riding at full gallop, directed his lance against the emperor and wounded him mortally. After throwing Julian from his horse, the unknown assailant secretly went away. When Julian had received the wound, he filled his hand with blood, flung into the air and cried “Thou hast won, O Galilean.*”]²¹ 12

Thus, in Persia, on the 26th of June, in the third year of his reign and in the thirty first year of his age, the life of Julian the apostate came to an end.

A few days later, the death of the wretch was announced and he was carried lying in his coffin together with his threats which have proven vain and God was glorified.

²⁰ See Coptic manuscript no. 6801, The British Museum, London.

²¹ NPNF, 2nd series, vol. ii, p. 346 and vol. iii, p. 106

*Historical Visions of Julian's Death
Seen by a Number of Holy Men
In widely separated Quarters*

Sozomen, the ecclesiastical historian, writing about Julian's death, says that what happened to Julian had been due to divine wrath. As a proof, he relates a divine vision seen by one of Julian's friends :

[This person, on the road during his travel into Persia, with the intention of joining the emperor, he found himself, so far from any habitation that he was obliged to spend the night in a church. That night, either in a dream or a vision, he saw all the apostles and prophets assembled together, and complaining of the injuries which the emperor had inflicted on the church ... they were consulting concerning upon the best measures to be adopted. After much deliberation ..., two individuals are in the midst of the assembly, desired the others to be of good cheer, and left the company hastily, as if to deprive Julian of the imperial power. He who was the spectator of this marvel did not attempt to pursue his journey, but awaited, in horrible suspense, the conclusion of this revelation. He laid himself down to sleep again in the same place and again he saw the same assembly; the two individuals who had appeared to depart the preceding night to effect their purpose against Julian, suddenly returned and announced his death to the others.]²²

Palladius also reports in his book "The Lausiatic History", a conversation he had with Didymus the blind²³:

²² NPNF, vol. ii, 2nd series, p. 346

²³ An ecclesiastical philosopher who dwelt in Alexandria.

[Now he told me this too :’ One day as I was thinking about the life of the miserable emperor Julian, about his being a persecutor, and I was sorely troubled and had not even tasted my bread up to the time of late evening, because of my thoughts, it so happened that as I sat in my chair I fell asleep and I saw in ecstasy white horses running with soldiers and proclaiming: “Tell Didymus, Julian died today at the seventh hour; get up and eat, they said, “ and send word to Athanasius the archbishop that he too may know.’ And I made a note, he said, of the hour and month and week and day, and it was found to be so.]²⁴

In the **chronicles of Malalas**, Basil’s dream is described and the horse rider is identified as Saint Mercurius :

[In the same night, Basil, the most divine Bishop of Caesarea, saw in a dream the heavens open and Christ the Saviour sitting on a throne and saying with a loud voice: ‘Mercurius depart and kill Julian the emperor and the enemy of Christians.’ Saint Mercurius stood in front of (the) Lord wearing a shining coat of mail of iron; and after he had heard the order, he disappeared immediately. And having come back again, he stood in front of (the) Lord and shouted : “Julian the emperor is slain as You, O Lord, commanded, and has died.”]²⁵

Startled by the cry of Mercurius, Basil the great awoke and informed those who were with him.

The **Ethiopian manuscript**²⁶, describes the event as follows :

24 Robert T. Meyer, trans. Palladius : The lausaic History, vol 34 of the series; Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Newman Press, 1964) p. 36.

25 Kurt Weitzman, “Illustration for the Chronicles of Sozomenos, Theodoret and Malalas”, Byzantion 16 (Fascicle 1, 1942) p.116.

26 Ethiopian manuscripts no. 687, 688, The British Museum, London.

About Basil's dream or vision see: Abu Seifein Convent For Nuns, “Life of the Great Martyr Saint Philopater Mercurius, Abu Seifein and his convent's history” Arabic Edition. (Cairo, Anba Reweis Press, 1989), p. 148-150.

[Imprisoned, St Basil and St Gregory constantly prayed and fasted. In their prison was a small church where they used to spend their nights in prayer. One night, while praying, an icon of St Mercurius appeared in front of them on one of the pillars of the church. Immediately, Basil asked for the intercession of the saint and said :

“Mercurius, God’s martyr, ask the Lord to save the church from Julian the apostate.”

Then they left the church and slept till the morning. In a dream, Basil saw the saint who told him :

“I have killed Julian the apostate.”

Basil informed Gregory and they hastily returned to the church to find the icon of St Mercurius still there and his spear drenched in blood. Saint Basil asked the holy martyr :

“Have you killed Julian ?”

The saint nodded yes. They glorified God and left happily.]

Three days later, Julian’s death was announced and the words of Saint Basil were fulfilled for the emperor never returned from war.

After Julian’s death, the senate made Jovianus, a Christian since his youth, emperor. At once, he set all the holy men free, St Basil, his companions and Saint Athanasius, the beloved Patriarch of Alexandria.

The Christians, hearing of Julian’s death, rejoiced and feasted. Not only was their exultant joy exhibited in churches and shrines of martyrs but also in theatres. The victory of the cross was proclaimed and all in one voice cried : **For God has conquered and His Christ.**

*The Life of the Great Martyr St. Philopater Mercurius
The holder of two Swords (Abu Seifein)*

“The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.”

(Ps. 37:14-15)

All glorified God and were grateful to His great martyr Saint Mercurius who delivered the church from the last pagan emperor.