**Rise of Christianity:**

* Despite their many gods, Romans are tolerant to other religions, allowing people to worship and practice their native rituals.
* At this time, Judaea, the old Jewish kingdom, had been conquered by Rome and become a Roman province.
* Many Jews did not like the Roman rule. They believed that God would come to save Israel from this oppression.
* A prophet named Jesus arose and believed that his mission was to bring about salvation that God had promised to the Israelites.
* Jesus performed miracles, taught ethical concepts such as humility, charity and love towards others, not strict adherence to Roman law.
* Many Romans saw Jesus as a revolutionary who stirred controversy and might lead a revolt against Rome.

**The Spread of Christianity:**

* The Roman procurator Pontius Pilate would have Jesus put to death by crucifixion. However, his message would carry on.
* Apostles such as Paul and Peter spread the message that Jesus was the son of God and savior of all mankind.
* By accepting Jesus as Christ, (Christos is Greek word for Messiah), people could be saved from sin and reconciled with God.

**Persecution:**

* While largely ignored at first, the Christian faith started to spread and made Romans wary.
* Romans feared that Christians would disrupt public order by refusing to worship the gods and the emperors.
* Romans began persecuting Christians during the reign of Nero (1st Century AD). Nero had blamed them for the fire that destroyed most of Rome and subjected them to cruel deaths.

**The Triumph of Christianity:**

* Despite persecution, Christianity grew in the first century, took root in the second, and by the third it had spread widely.
* Christianity was attractive for people of every class – plebian, patrician, men, women, slaves, aristocrats – for it promised eternal life for all.
* Although it did not call for revolution, it stressed spiritual equality, which was a revolutionary idea.
* The last great persecution was by Diocletian at the beginning of the fourth century.
* By this time, Christianity had spread so wide that it was hard to blot out by force.

**Constantine:**

* While battling for control of Rome, Constantine sees a vision of a cross (the symbol for Christians).
* He places the cross on his soldiers’ shields.
* Constantine attributes his victory to God and becomes a Christian himself (the first Christian emperor).
* Constantine issues the Edict of Milan, which officially proclaimed tolerance of Christianity.

**The Triumph of Christianity:**

* Under emperor Theodosius the Great, Romans officially adopted Christianity as their religion.