Lesson 3 **Rome and Christianity**

# Rome’s Policy Toward Other Religions

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why was Rome hostile to Christians and Jews?

## A Christian Threat

* Romans allowed other religions
* Romans alarmed by Gentiles becoming Christian
* some Gentiles said they didnʼt have to worship emperor
* appeal of Christianity to women, slaves was troubling

• Christians talked of a Lord who would have a kingdom

- seemed to imply an end to the Roman Empire

## The Roman Persecutions

• Nero blamed Christians for huge fi re in Rome in A.D. 64

- many Christians were tortured, killed

• Some Christians hid to escape persecution

- hid in **catacombs**—underground cemeteries with secret passages

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did the Romans feel threatened by Christianity?

# The Conversion of Constantine

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What was Constantine’s policy toward Christianity?

## The Cross as Sign

• Constantine became Roman emperor in A.D. 306

- had allowed persecution of Christians

• During battle for leadership in 312, Constantine prayed for help

- said he saw cross in sky and prediction of victory

* Had troops put crosses on shields, battle fl ags
* Constantine was victorious

## The Legalization of Christianity

* Constantine ended persecution of Christians
* Edit of Milan made Christianity a legal religion in empire
* Constantine built churches, made Sunday a holy day
* Constantine not baptized—formally converted—until end of his life

## Christianity Changes Rome

• Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the offi cial religion in 380

- closed pagan temples eleven years later

# Beginnings of the Roman Catholic Church

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What were some of the beliefs of the early church?

## The Structure of the Church

• Priest, deacons obeyed **bishops**—local church leaders

- Roman Catholics believe the apostle Peter was Romeʼs fi rst bishop

• Much later, Romeʼs bishop became the **pope**—the most important bishop

- this began the Roman Catholic church; **catholic** means “universal”

## Beliefs and Practices

• Early writers, church fathers, developed **creed**—statement of beliefs

- **Trinity**—union of Father, Son (Jesus), Holy Spirit in one God

* North African church father, Augustine, felt God was everywhere
* Church created sacraments—religious rites such as baptism, communion
* Christian men formed monasteries; became bishops, priests, deacons
* Christianity became a powerful, wealthy religion

REVIEW QUESTION

What is Rome’s bishop called?

## Lesson Summary

* Rome saw the new religion of Christianity as a threat.
* Constantine embraced Christianity in A.D. 312.
* The Roman Catholic Church traces its roots to the apostle Peter.

Why It Matters Now . . .

One-third of the people in the world today are Christian.

# An Empire in Decline

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What problems weakened Rome?

## Economic Problems

* Problems followed death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180
* Empire couldnʼt feed everyone and food shortages caused unrest
* warfare destroyed some farmland
* plantations used slaves instead of fi nding new farming technology
* land wore out, became unproductive; harvests decreased

• People didnʼt pay taxes, so empire couldnʼt pay for army, services

## Military Problems

• Rome at constant war in north, northeast, on eastern borders

- hired foreign **mercenaries**—soldiers for hire

• Mercenaries often loyal to individual leaders instead of empire

- this created independent military powers in empire

• Mercenaries were not as disciplined as Roman soldiers

- resulted in less effective army, weakened defense along border

## Political and Social Problems

• Empireʼs size made it hard to govern

- difficult to get news from regions, to see problems developing

• Corrupt, greedy government offi cials destroyed sense of citizenship

- many Romans no longer felt a duty to empire, chose to get rich

* Education costs increased, so poor Romans often went uneducated
* People were less informed about civic matters

REVIEW QUESTION

What problems weakened the Roman Empire?

# Diocletian Divides the Empire

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What steps did Diocletian take to solve the empire’s problems?

## Diocletian Restores Order

• Rapidly changing series of emperors weakened government

* 37 emperors from A.D. 235 to 284, some of them military leaders
* no sense of orderly rule

• **Diocletian** took power as the emperor in 284

* put permanent troops on borders, made economic reforms
* didnʼt consult with Senate; was an **absolute ruler** with total power

## Splitting the Empire

• Diocletian knew he couldnʼt effectively govern the huge empire

- split it in two in A.D. 285, ruled wealthy eastern half himself

* Appointed Maximian to rule Western Empire

- the two men ruled two halves of empire for 20 years

* Civil war broke out in 306 over control of entire empire

- four commanders, including Constantine, fought for control

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did civil war break out in the Roman Empire?

# Constantine Continues Reform

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did Constantine change the empire?

## A Single Emperor

• Constantine was western military commander

- fought to control Italy during civil war

• Became emperor of western half of empire in A.D. 312

- controlled eastern half by 324

• Empire was reunited under a single emperor

## A New Capital

• Constantine moved capital from Rome to Greek city of Byzantium

* expanded, beautifi ed city which was well-placed for defense, trade
* renamed city Constantinople; today it is Istanbul, Turkey

## Final Division

* Constantine hoped three sons would rule parts of empire after him
* Constantius II, Constantine II, Constans I competed, created unrest
* Confl ict permanently divided empire into east and west again in 395

REVIEW QUESTION

How did Constantine strengthen the Roman Empire?

# The Fall of the Roman Empire

# The Two Roman Empires

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why did the Western Empire weaken?

## Wealthy East

* Eastern Roman Empire much stronger than Western Roman Empire
* Constantinople traded with Asia, Africa, Europe

- Eastern Empire had more wealth as a result of trade

• Eastern cities were larger, better fortifi ed

- Black Sea was natural barrier against invasions

## Weaker West

* Western Empire cities, far from trade routes, were smaller, poorer
* Cities exposed to attack from invaders along northern border

- defense forces were often poorly paid, so less willing to risk lives

## Invaders Raid Cities

• Invaders attacked cities, kidnapped people to sell as slaves

* as attacks increased, citiesʼ inhabitants often left to seek safety
* less populated cities were even more vulnerable to attack

REVIEW QUESTION

In what ways was the Western Empire weaker than the Eastern Empire?

# Invading Peoples

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What groups moved into the Roman Empire?

## The Germanic Peoples

* Defense on north, northeast borders of Roman Empire weakened
* Towns, cities attacked by **nomads**—people who move from place to place
* Nomadic groups known as Germanic peoples, named for their languages
* Romans felt Germanic people, or anyone outside empire, were **barbarians**

- Greek word for people who speak a language other than Greek

• Despite Roman contempt, Germanic peoples had complex culture

* were skilled metalworkers and fond of jewelry
* some groups had elected assemblies
* military organizations were headed by war chiefs

• Germanic peoples were loyal, especially to chieftains

## The German Migrations

* Nomads moved when food ran out or when driven out of an area
* Groups of well-armed nomads threatened groups on Roman border

- border nomads driven into Roman Empire by stronger nomadic groups

• Huns were important group of Central Asian nomads

* pushed people into Roman, Chinese empires between A.D. 370 and 500
* moved into Germanic border lands, drove peoples into Roman territory

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did the Germanic peoples move into Roman territory?

# The Fall of Rome

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the Western Roman Empire end?

## Invaders Gain Ground

* Corrupt government, uncaring citizens, social breakdown hurt empire
* Goths **plundered** Rome in 410—looted city, took things by force
* Germanic peoples invaded what is now France, Spain, northern Africa
* Huns united under Attila in 445, entered Eastern Empire

- attacked 70 Eastern Empire cities, then moved into Western Empire

## The Aftermath of Rome’s Fall

* Western Roman Empire fell in A.D. 476, when last emperor was removed
* Life in Western Europe changed after fall
* roads, public structures fell into disrepair
* trade, commerce declined
* Germanic kingdoms claimed former Roman lands
* Roman Catholic Church became unifying, powerful force

REVIEW QUESTION

What caused the continued weakening of the Western Empire?