

# Lesson 3 Rome and Christianity

## MAIN IDEAS

**Government** Rome became hostile to Jews and Christians because both groups challenged Roman authority.

**Government** The Roman emperor Constantine accepted Christianity and ended persecutions.

**Government** The church developed into a complex institution with many levels of authority.

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## 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 didn't 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 fire 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?

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# 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 flags
- 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 official religion in 380
  - closed pagan temples eleven years later

## REVIEW QUESTION

What did the Edict of Milan decree?

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# 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 Rome’s first bishop
- Much later, Rome’s 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.