

The Rise of Christianity

Lesson 2 The Early Church

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do religions develop?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. *How did Christianity change over time?*
2. *How did early Christians organize and explain their beliefs?*

Terms to Know

martyr someone who is willing to die rather than give up his or her beliefs

hierarchy an organization with different levels of authority

clergy church officials

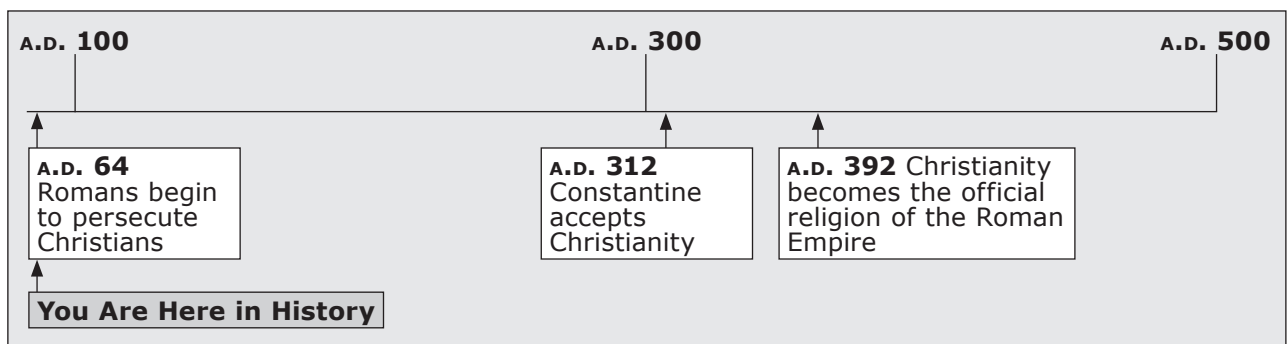
laity regular church members

doctrine official church teaching

gospel an account of the life and teaching of Jesus, written by the apostles

pope the title for the bishop of Rome, who is the head of the Roman Catholic Church

When did it happen?



What do you know?

In the first column, answer the questions based on what you know before you study. After this lesson, complete the last column.

Now...		Later...
	Why did the Romans punish people who became Christians?	
	How did Christians pass on the teachings of Jesus after his death?	
	How is the Christian Church organized?	

The Rise of Christianity

Lesson 2 The Early Church, *Continued*

Christianity and the Empire

The first followers of Jesus taught his messages to Jews and non-Jews in the Mediterranean region. From there Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire. This happened for many reasons. A network of roads made long-distance travel fairly safe and easy. The people who lived under Roman rule spoke Latin or Greek. This made it easier for Christians to share their ideas.

Another reason for the spread of Christianity was that it appealed to people. Christianity promised a better life after death. It gave people hope, something the Roman religion could never do. Christian communities also took care of the needs of their members.

A graphic of an unrolled scroll with decorative, irregular edges. The scroll is light gray and contains a bulleted list of reasons for the spread of Christianity.

Reasons for the Spread of Christianity

- The Roman road network made travel easy.
- The Romans kept the empire peaceful.
- Most people understood Greek or Latin, so communication was easy.
- Christianity offered more hope and security to people than did the official Roman religion.

The Romans tried to stop Christianity from spreading. Rome saw the new religion as a dangerous threat to its empire. Christians refused to worship the emperor as a god. Christians also refused to serve in the Roman army and were against war as a way to solve problems. For these and other reasons, Christians were arrested, beaten, and sometimes killed. Some Christians became **martyrs**, people who were willing to die rather than give up their beliefs.

In the early A.D. 300s, the emperor Diocletian made one last attempt to destroy Christianity. He failed because Christianity had grown very strong.

In A.D. 312 the new religion took a major turn. The night before an important battle, the Emperor Constantine had a dream. In the dream he saw a flaming cross in the sky.



Explaining

1. Why did Christianity appeal to many people more than the old Roman religion?



Marking the Text

2. Underline the word *martyrs* and its definition.



Summarizing

3. Why did the Romans mistreat Christians?

The Rise of Christianity

Lesson 2 The Early Church, *Continued*

Reading Check

4. How did Constantine support Christianity?

Defining

5. How is a *hierarchy* organized?

Explaining

6. How was Church doctrine decided?

The next day he had his soldiers paint the cross on their shields. After his army won the battle, Constantine believed the Christian God had helped him.

Constantine became a strong supporter of Christianity. He built churches in Jerusalem and Rome. He also let Christians serve in the military and work in the government. Constantine allowed Christians to stop paying taxes. In A.D. 313, he issued the Edict of Milan. This important order gave religious freedom to all religions in the empire, including Christianity.

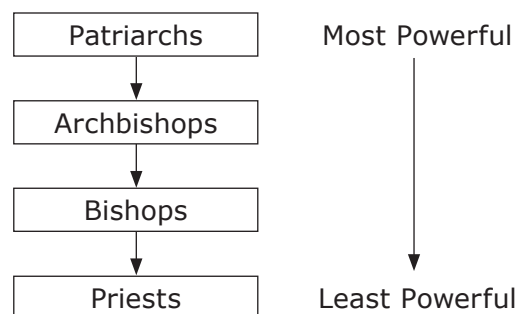
After Constantine's rule, the emperor Theodosius outlawed Greek and Roman religions. In A.D. 392, he made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Organizing the Church

The early Christian church had to become better organized in order to unite its many followers. It also had to make sure that Christian communities shared similar beliefs and practices. Early church leaders used the Roman Empire as a model. Like the empire, the church was ruled by a **hierarchy** of officials. A hierarchy is an organization with different levels of authority.

Leaders of the church were known as the **clergy**. In the early church, only men were allowed to be members of the clergy. Regular church members were called the **laity**. In this hierarchy, archbishops had the most authority. Priests had the least. The five most powerful archbishops were each in charge of an entire city. These leaders were called patriarchs.

Hierarchy of the Early Christian Church



The bishops decided the true teachings of the Church. Accepted teachings became **doctrine**. Teachings that the bishops rejected were heresies. They went against the Christian faith.

