

# Christianity



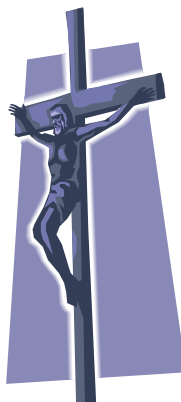
*The Emperor Constantine*

A critical moment in Christian history occurred in A.D. 312, when Roman **Emperor Constantine** was fighting three rivals for leadership of the Roman Empire. Before an important battle, he prayed for divine help [help from the gods] and saw a vision of a cross, the symbol of the Christians. He was victorious [successful] in the battle and believed that the Christian God helped lead his legion to victory.

The next year, the Emperor Constantine declared an end to the persecution of Christians. He issued the **Edict of Milan**, which made Christianity an approved religion in the Roman Empire. Christianity continued to spread along trade routes and Roman roads. By 380 Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire.

## Christianity appealed to the people of Rome in many ways:

- Christianity embraced [accepted] many people who were treated poorly in Rome, such as women, slaves, and the poor
- Christianity and Christian teachings about the afterlife gave hope to people
- Christianity appealed to those who were disgusted with the extravagance [excess, wastefulness] of Roman life and culture
- Christianity offered a personal relationship with a loving God, rather than vengeful Roman gods and goddesses
- Christianity promised life after death



The **Pantheon**, pictured above, was a temple dedicated to all Roman Gods. It is now one of the world's most famous Catholic Churches.

# Military & Political Weakness

By the third century, the Roman military was in disarray [disorder].

Roman soldiers had become less disciplined and loyal. They gave their allegiance [loyalty] to their generals and commanders, not to Rome and the emperor. These military commanders began to challenge the emperors for the Roman throne. To defend the empire, the emperors began to recruit **mercenaries**, or soldiers who fought for money rather than honor and pride in Rome.

Feelings of loyalty weakened among regular Romans as well as members of the military. Romans were once so devoted to the empire that they were willing to sacrifice their lives for it. People no longer believed in Rome and what it once stood for. Citizens no longer wanted to participate in the government and viewed political office as a burden rather than a reward. A series of bad emperors made people lose faith in their government completely.



Several emperors tried to reform the empire in order to preserve it. The emperor **Diocletian** decided to split the Roman empire into two— Eastern and Western in order to better control the empire.

The emperor **Constantine** decided to move the capital from Rome to Constantinople, located in modern day Turkey. This moved the center of power from the Italian peninsula to the east.

*The Western & Eastern Roman Empires*



*The Roman Senate*



# The Economy

During the third century, several factors prompted [encouraged] the weakening of the Roman economy. Barbarians and pirates disrupted trade by making trade routes and roads unsafe.

Having reached the limits of expansion, the Romans lacked new sources of gold, silver, and wealth. This new lack of revenue [government profit and wealth] resulted in the government raising taxes. As the military was no longer successfully conquering new areas the government was no longer able to gain wealth from plundering of other nations.

The government also started to make money that had less gold and silver, this money was worth less. **Inflation**, or the decline in the value of money, occurred as did a rise in prices. There was a widening gap between the rich and poor in Rome which resulted in tension and hostility between social classes.



Agriculture faced serious problems. Harvests in Italy and western Europe became increasingly meager [inadequate, skimpy] because the soil was overworked in order to support the large population of the empire. What's more, years of war had destroyed had destroyed much farmland. Eventually, serious food shortages and disease spread and, as a result, the population declined.

# Barbarian Invasions

## Germanic Invasions

As the empire expanded, barbarian tribes threatened the stability of Rome. The Huns, a nomadic group from Central Asia, moved into Europe and began destroying everything in their path. In an effort to flee from the Huns many Germanic people began pushing into Roman territory. The Romans called all non-Romans barbarians. The barbarians pushed into the Roman lands of Gaul, Spain, and North Africa before plundering [robbing] and destroying Rome for three solid days.

## Attila the Hun

Eventually, the Huns, who were indirectly responsible for the Germanic invasions, became a direct threat. In 444 the Huns united under the leadership of Attila the Hun to try to destroy Rome. Attila and his army of over 100,000 terrorized the Roman empire and plundered over 70 cities. They did not capture the city of Rome but did a lot of damage to the empire and exhausted the weak Roman army.

The last Roman emperor, 14 year old Romulus Augustus, was removed from power and Rome was sacked in 476. The Western Roman Empire was no more.

