

Section

2

The Christian Church

Guide to Reading

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

In the last section, you read about the origins of Christianity. In this section, you will discover how Christianity grew and was organized.

Focusing on the **Main Ideas**

- Christianity won many followers and eventually became the official religion of the Roman Empire. (page 510)
- Early Christians set up a church organization and explained their beliefs. (page 513)

Locating Places

Rome

Meeting People

Constantine (KAHN•stuhn•TEEN)

Helena (HEHL•uh•nuh)

Theodosius I (THEE•uh•DOH•shuhs)

Content Vocabulary

persecute (PURH•sih•KYOOT)

martyr (MAHR•tuhr)

hierarchy (HY•uhr•AHR•kee)

clergy (KLUHR•jee)

laity (LAY•uh•tee)

doctrine (DAHK•truhn)

gospel (GAHS•puhl)

pope

Academic Vocabulary

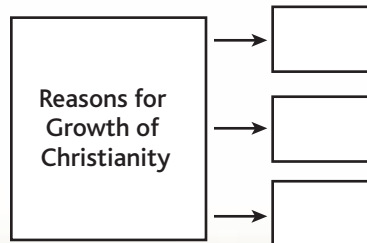
establish (ihs•TAH•blihsh)

issue (IH•shoo)

unify (YOO•nuh•FY)

Reading Strategy

Organizing Information Complete a diagram like the one below showing reasons for the growth of Christianity.



History Social Science Standards

WH6.7.7 Describe the circumstances that led to the spread of Christianity in Europe and other Roman territories.

WH7.1.3 Describe the establishment by Constantine of the new capital in Constantinople and the development of the Byzantine Empire, with an emphasis on the consequences of the development of two distinct European civilizations, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic, and their two distinct views on church-state relations.



Where & When?



A.D. 100

- A.D. 64** Romans begin to persecute Christians

A.D. 300

- A.D. 312** Constantine accepts Christianity

A.D. 500

- A.D. 392** Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire

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A Growing Faith

Main Idea Christianity won many followers and eventually became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

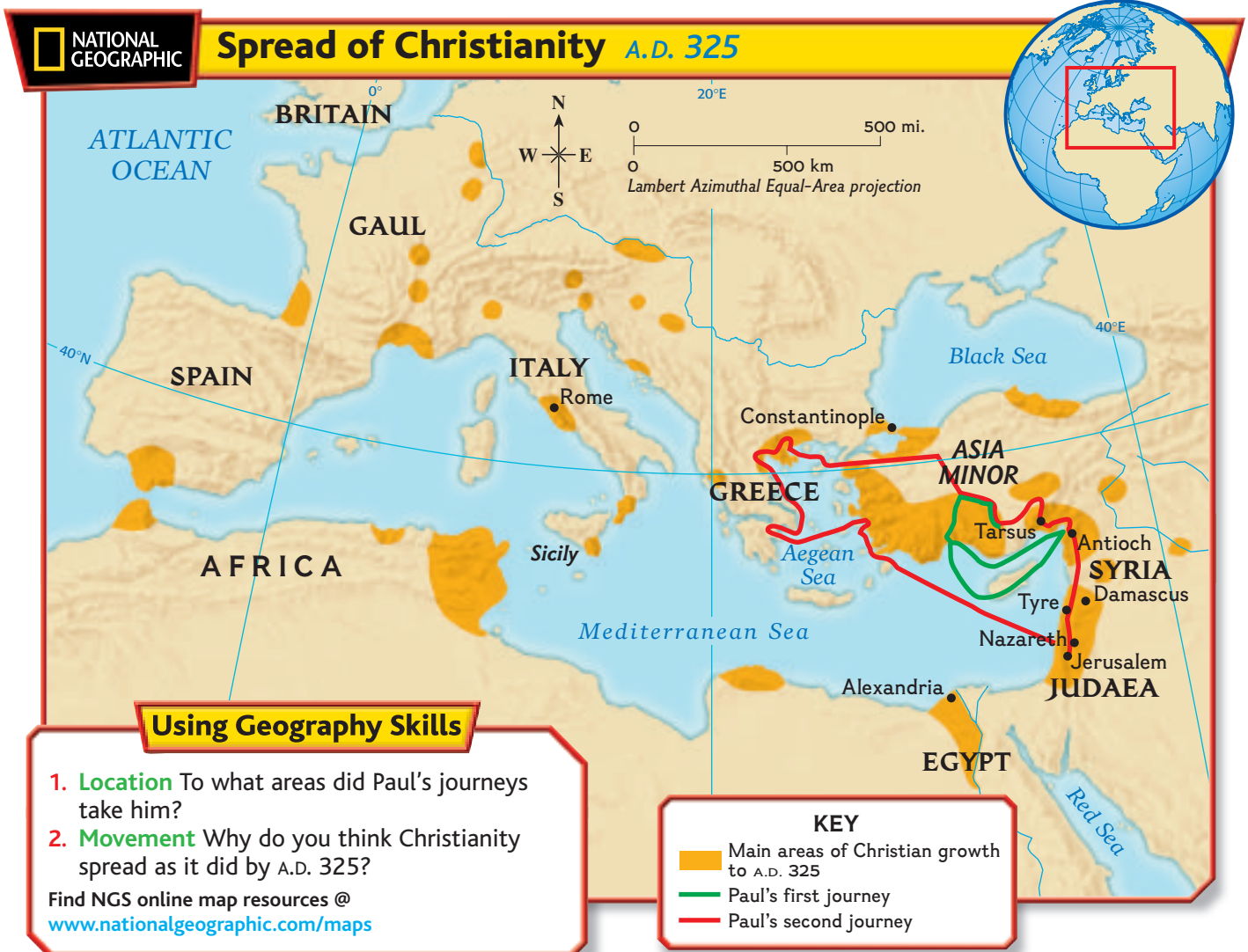
Reading Connection Why do you think people like to belong to a community? Read to learn about early Christian communities.

During the 100 years after Jesus' death, Christianity won followers throughout the Roman world. The empire itself helped spread Christian ideas. The peace and order established by **Rome** allowed people to travel in safety. Christians used well-paved

Roman roads to carry their message from place to place. Since most of the empire's people spoke either Latin or Greek, Christians could talk with them directly.

Why did Christianity attract followers? First, the Christian message gave meaning to people's lives. Rome's official religion urged people to honor the state and the emperor. Christianity instead reached out to the poor and the powerless who led very hard lives. It offered hope and comfort.

Second, some ideas of Christianity were familiar to many Romans. They were already aware of many other eastern Mediterranean religions. Like these faiths, Christianity



appealed to the emotions and promised happiness after death.

Finally, Christianity gave people the chance to be part of a caring group. Within their churches, Christians not only worshiped together but helped each other. They took care of the sick, the elderly, widows, and orphans. Many women found that Christianity offered them new roles. They ran churches from their homes, spread Jesus' message, and helped care for those in need.

How Did the Romans Treat Christians?

Over time, Roman officials began to see the Christians as a threat to the government. All people in the empire were usually allowed to worship freely, but the Romans expected everyone to honor the emperor as a god. Christians, like the Jews, refused to do this. They claimed that only God could be worshiped. Christians also refused to serve in the army or hold public office. They criticized Roman festivals and games. As a result, the Romans saw the Christians as traitors who should be punished.

In A.D. 64 the Roman government began to **persecute** (PURH•sih•KYOOT), or mistreat, Christians. At this time, the emperor Nero accused Christians of starting a terrible fire that burned much of Rome. Christianity was made illegal, and many Christians were killed.

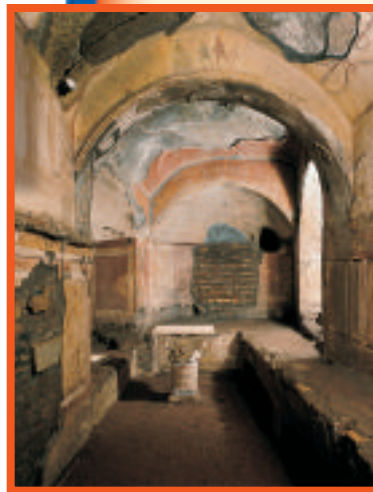
Other persecutions followed. During these difficult times, many Christians became **martyrs** (MAHR•tuhrz), people willing to die rather than give up their beliefs. At that time, Romans required dead people to be cremated, or burned to ashes. Christians wanted to bury their dead. They were forced to bury their dead outside Rome in catacombs, or underground burial places. Catacombs were also used for religious services during times of persecution.

Focus on Everyday Life

Christian Catacombs Christians believed in resurrection, the idea that the body would one day reunite with the soul. For this reason, they would not allow their dead bodies to be burned, which was the Roman custom. Also, Roman law did not allow bodies to be buried aboveground. Therefore, starting in the A.D. 100s, Christians buried their dead beneath the city of Rome in a series of dark, cold, stench-filled tunnels called catacombs.

Each tunnel was about 8 feet (2.4 m) high and less than 3 feet (1 m) wide. Bodies were stacked in slots along the sides of the tunnels. The catacomb walls were painted with images from the Bible or from Greek or Roman mythology.

More than five million bodies were buried under Roman streets and buildings. Many of the Christians buried there were martyrs who had been killed for their beliefs.



◀ Christian catacombs in Rome

Connecting to the Past

1. Why did Christians bury their dead in catacombs?
2. What skills do you think would be necessary to dig and plan catacombs?

Rome Adopts Christianity Despite the enormous challenges, Christianity spread. Over time it even began to draw people from all classes. In the A.D. 200s as invaders attacked the empire, many Romans became worried. They admired the faith and courage of the Christians. At the same time, many Christians started to accept the empire.

In the early A.D. 300s the emperor Diocletian carried out the last great persecution of Christians. Diocletian failed, and Roman officials began to realize that Christianity had grown too strong to be destroyed by force.

Then, in A.D. 312, the Roman emperor **Constantine** (KAHN•stuhn•TEEN) accepted Christianity. According to tradition, Constantine saw a flaming cross in the sky as he was about to go into battle. Written

beneath the cross were the words “In this sign you will conquer.” Constantine won the battle and believed that the Christian God had helped him.

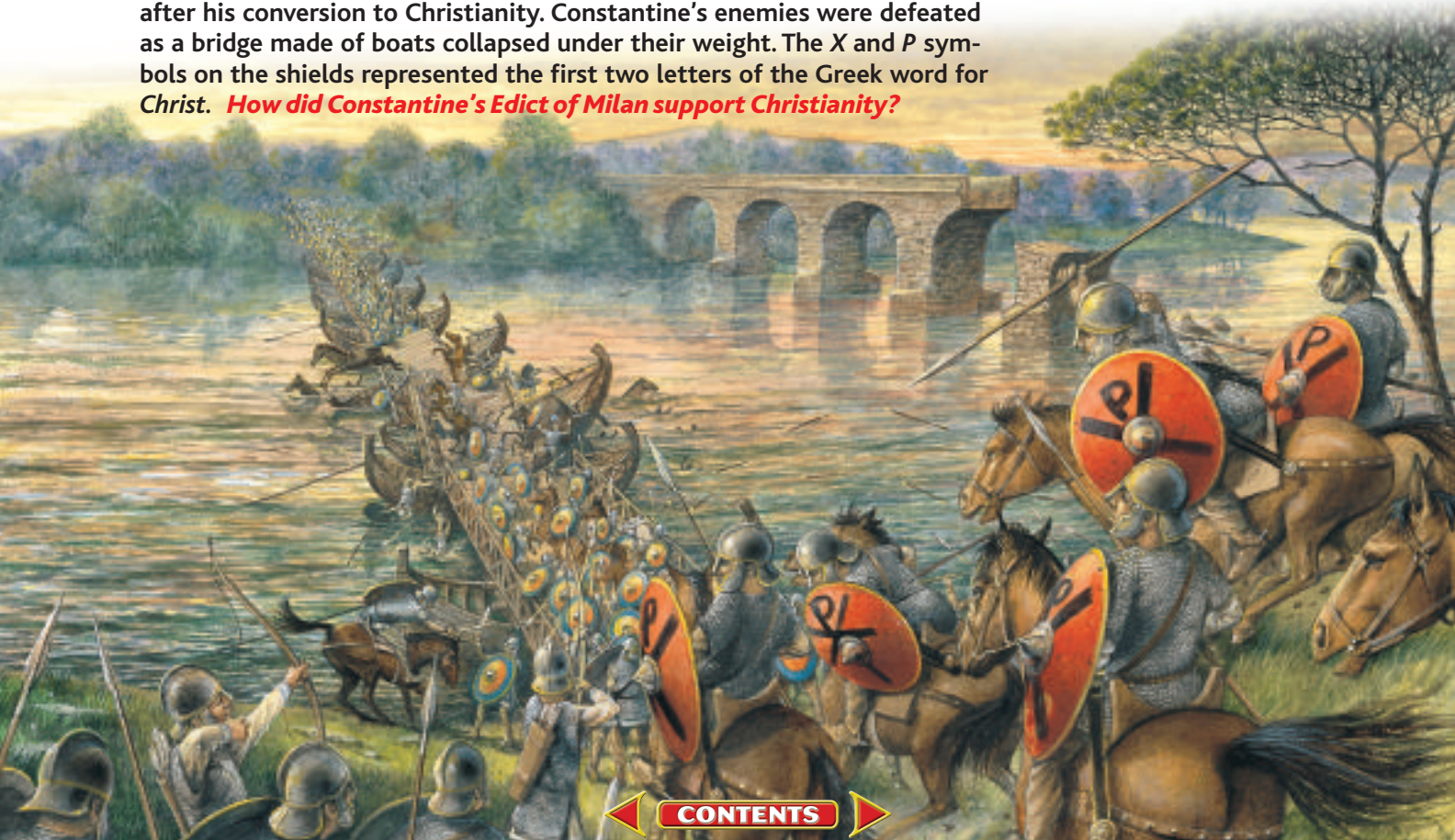
In A.D. 313 Constantine **issued** an order called the Edict of Milan. It gave religious freedom to all people and made Christianity legal. Constantine began giving government support to Christianity. With the help of his mother, **Helena** (HEHL•uh•nuh), he built churches in Rome and Jerusalem. He also let church officials serve in government and excused them from paying taxes.

Constantine’s successor, the emperor **Theodosius I** (THEE•uh•DOH•shuhs), made Christianity Rome’s official religion in A.D. 392. At the same time, he outlawed other religions.

Reading Check Explain Why did the Romans see the Christians as traitors?

Constantine’s Conversion

▼ Constantine led his troops to victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge after his conversion to Christianity. Constantine’s enemies were defeated as a bridge made of boats collapsed under their weight. The X and P symbols on the shields represented the first two letters of the Greek word for *Christ*. **How did Constantine’s Edict of Milan support Christianity?**





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The Early Church

Main Idea Early Christians set up a church organization and explained their beliefs.

Reading Connection How can good organization make the difference between whether a plan or project fails or succeeds? Read how early Christians organized their churches and chose what to include in the Bible.

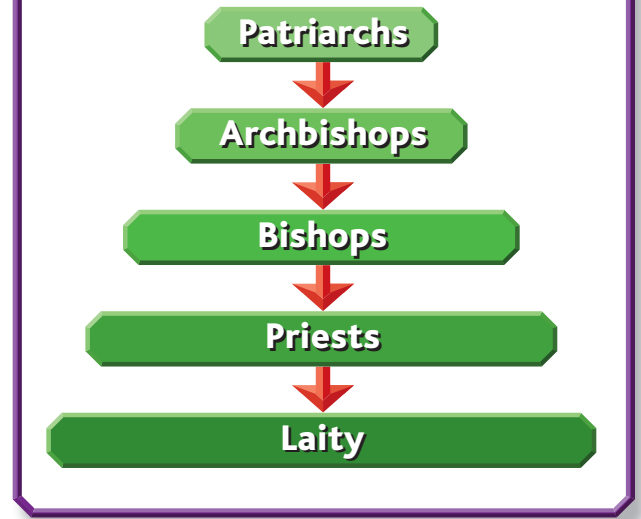
In its early years, Christianity was loosely organized. Leaders like Paul traveled from one Christian community to another. They tried to **unify** the isolated groups. In their teaching, they emphasized that all the individual groups of Christians were part of one body called the church. Early Christians, however, faced a challenge. How were they to unite?

Organizing the Church The early Christians turned to a surprising model to organize the church—the Roman Empire itself. Like the Roman Empire, the church came to be ruled by a **hierarchy** (HY•uhr•AHR•kee). A hierarchy is an organization with different levels of authority.

The **clergy** (KLUHR•jee) were the leaders of the church. They had different roles from the **laity** (LAY•uh•tee), or regular church members. As the church’s organization grew, women were not permitted to serve in the clergy. However, as members of the laity, they were relied upon to care for the sick and needy.

By around A.D. 300, local churches were led by clergy called priests. Several churches formed a diocese (DY•uh•suhs), led by a bishop. A bishop in charge of a city diocese was sometimes also put in charge of an entire region. This made him an archbishop. The five leading archbishops became known as patriarchs (PAY•tree•AHRKS). They led churches in large cities and were in charge of large areas of territory.

Early Church Hierarchy



The bishops explained Christian beliefs. They also took care of church business on behalf of the laity and met to discuss questions about Christian faith. Decisions they reached at these meetings came to be accepted as **doctrine** (DAHK•truhn), or official church teaching.

What Is the New Testament? Along with explaining Christian ideas, church leaders preserved a written record of the life of Jesus and put together a group of writings to help guide Christians. Jesus himself left no writings. His followers, however, passed on what they knew about him. By A.D. 300, four accounts of Jesus’ life, teachings, and resurrection had become well-known. Christians believed these accounts were written by early followers of Jesus named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Each work was called a **gospel** (GAHS•puhl), which means “good news.” Christians later combined the four gospels with the writings of Paul and other early Christian leaders. Together, these works form the New Testament of the Christian Bible.



◀ Matthew wrote one of the four gospels in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. **What is the subject of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?**

Other important writings also influenced early Christians. Scholars known as the Church Fathers wrote books to explain church teachings. One leading Church Father was a bishop in North Africa named Augustine. In his writings, Augustine defended Christianity against its opponents. He wrote *The City of God*—one of the first history books written from a Christian

viewpoint. He also wrote a work called *Confessions*. It was an account of his personal journey to the Christian faith.

Who Is the Pope? As the church grew, the bishop of Rome, who was also the patriarch of the West, claimed power over the other bishops. He believed that he had the authority of Peter, Jesus’ disciple. Also, his diocese was in Rome, the empire’s capital.

By A.D. 600, the bishop of Rome had gained a special title—**pope**. The title comes from a Latin word meaning “father.” Latin-speaking Christians accepted the pope as head of the church. Their churches became known as the Roman Catholic Church. Greek-speaking Christians rejected the pope’s authority over them. As you will learn, they formed their own church in the Eastern Roman Empire.

Reading Check Identify What are the gospels, and why are they significant?

Section 2 Review

History Online

Study Central Need help understanding the early Christian church? Visit ca.hss.glencoe.com and click on Study Central.

Reading Summary

Review the Main Ideas

- After its followers suffered Roman persecution for several hundred years, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Emperor Theodosius.
- As Christianity grew, the church became more united under a hierarchy of leaders. Christian writings were gathered into the New Testament of the Bible.

What Did You Learn?

1. What is a martyr?
2. What writings are included in the New Testament?

Critical Thinking

3. Organizing Information

Draw a chart like the one below. Fill in details describing how each emperor helped Christianity to grow. **CA 6RC2.4**

Roman Emperors		
Diocletian	Constantine	Theodosius

4. **Analyze** Following Jesus’ death, why was Christianity able to attract followers? **CA HI.2.**
5. **Analyze** Why do you think the Christian church became a hierarchy? **CA 6RC2.0**
6. **The Big Ideas** How did the Christian religion affect the Roman Empire? **CA HI.2.**

7. **Analysis Writing Questions** Write five questions that you might have asked Constantine about Christianity. **CA HRI. CA 6RC2.1**