

The Roman World and Early Christianity

Lesson 1

The Roman Republic

Key Terms and People

republic government in which citizens have the right to select their own leader

patrician aristocratic landowner

plebeian farmer, artisan, or merchant; commoner

tribune official who helped the plebeians protect their rights

consul official who was like a king

senate aristocratic branch of Rome's government

dictator Roman leader who had absolute power to make laws and command the army for a brief period

legion military unit of the ancient Roman army

Punic Wars series of wars between Rome and Carthage

Hannibal Carthaginian general who invaded northern Italy

Before You Read

In the last lesson, you read about Hellenistic culture.

In this lesson, you will read about the Roman Republic.

As You Read

Use a timeline to take notes on key events of the Roman Republic.

THE ORIGINS OF ROME

Where was Rome founded?

The city of Rome was founded by the Latin people on a river in the center of Italy. It was a good location, which gave them a chance to control all of Italy. It put them near to the midpoint of the Mediterranean Sea. Two other groups lived in what is now Italy: the Greeks in the south, and the Etruscans in the north. The Romans borrowed some ideas from both peoples.

1. What were the advantages of Rome's location?

THE EARLY REPUBLIC

How was Rome governed?

In 509 BC, Romans overthrew the Etruscan king who had ruled over his people and over Rome. The Romans said Rome was now a **republic**. The people had the power to vote and choose leaders.

Lesson 1, *continued*

Two groups struggled for power in the new republic. One was the **patricians**. They were the aristocratic landowners who held most of the power. The other group was the **plebeians**. They were the common farmers, artisans, and merchants who made up most of the population. At first, the patricians had the most power. Over time, the plebeians got the right to form their own assembly. They could elect representatives called **tribunes**.

The basis for Roman law was the Twelve Tables. This set of rules said that all free citizens were protected by law.

The government had three parts. Two **consuls**, or officials, were elected each year. They led the government and the army.

The second part of the government was the **senate**. It usually had 300 members chosen from the upper classes. The senate passed laws.

The third and most democratic part of government was the assemblies. The assemblies included members from different parts of society, such as citizen-soldiers or plebeians. The assemblies could also make laws.

If there was a crisis, the republic could appoint a **dictator**. This was a leader with absolute power. The dictator made laws and commanded the army. But his power lasted for only six months.

Any citizen who owned property had to serve in the army. Roman soldiers were organized into military units called legions. The Roman **legion** was made up of some 5,000 heavily armed foot soldiers.

2. What were the three main parts of the Roman government?

ROME'S POWER SPREADS

How did Rome spread its power?

In the fourth century BC, Rome began to get larger. Within 150 years, it had captured almost all of Italy. Rome allowed some of the conquered peoples to enjoy the benefits of citizenship. With its good location, Rome saw a growth in trade. This brought it into conflict with Carthage, a trading city in North Africa.

From 264 to 146 BC, Rome and Carthage fought three bitter wars called the **Punic Wars**. In the first, Rome won control of the island of Sicily. In the second, **Hannibal**, a brilliant Carthaginian general, invaded northern Italy. He and his soldiers did much damage. But he was unable to take Rome. It took an equally brilliant Roman general, Scipio, to defeat him. By the time of the third war, Carthage was no longer a threat to Rome. Even so, Rome destroyed the city and made its people slaves. Carthage became a new Roman province.

3. What happened as a result of the wars with Carthage?

Lesson 1, *continued*

As you read about the growth of Rome into a powerful republic, answer the questions about events in the timeline. (Some dates in the timeline are approximate.)

753 BC	Rome is founded, according to legend.	1. How did geography affect the development of Rome?
600 BC	Etruscan becomes king of Rome.	2. How did the Etruscans influence the development of Rome?
509 BC	Roman aristocrats overthrow monarchy and establish a republic.	3. Which were the main groups that competed for power in the early Roman republic?
451 BC	Officials begin writing the Twelve Tables.	4. What is the significance of the Twelve Tables in Roman law?
264 BC	Rome and Carthage go to war, and Punic Wars begin.	5. What were the causes of the first Punic War?
218 BC	Second Punic War begins.	6. What tactic did Scipio use to defeat Hannibal?
202 BC	Romans defeat Hannibal's army.	
149 BC	Third Punic War begins when Rome lays siege to Carthage.	7. What was the significance of the Punic Wars for Rome?
146 BC	Rome destroys Carthage.	