

Session 7

AS ROME GOES, SO GOES CHRISTIANITY?

Purpose

To learn of the fall of the Roman Empire and to discern how its decline and fall affected the church.

Preparation and Materials

- Read Bainton, *Christianity*, chapter 4, following the story of Jerome, and chapter 5.
- Make photocopies of pages 8–10 in the *Student's Book* for each youth.
- Add names from Session 6 to the banner.
- Prepare a time line on a long strip of plain shelf paper or banner paper. Mark off every twenty-five years from A.D. 400 to 1000.

Gathering

Opening Prayer

Allow a few moments for the youth to gather their joys and concerns and to become quiet. Invite their sentence prayers. If they are reluctant to pray aloud, have a time of silent prayer. Conclude the prayer with:

To your name, Lord Jesus,
help me to bow the knee
and all its worshiping,
bow the head
and all its thinking,
bow the will
and all its choosing,
bow the heart
and all its loving. Amen.¹

Review

Review the names on the banner from the previous sessions. Have the youth recall quick bits of information about the people listed and related events. Rather than hear about each one, ask each youth to select a favorite person and tell one thing about that person. There are no news flashes for this session.

1. *Book of Common Worship*
(Louisville: Westminster/
John Knox Press, 1993),
p. 20.

Hearing the Bad News First Meet the Invaders

Have the youth turn to the map “The Barbarians Arrive” (*Student's Book*, p. 8). Explain that throughout the establishment of the Roman Empire,

tribes and groups of nomadic people crossed their borders. The borders were quite fluid then, and you could not be certain when you entered another territory. Nevertheless, a variety of groups who were not Christian came across the border. Note that the map indicates eight groups. Some of the groups came from northern Europe. Have the youth find those groups and name them. One of these groups, the Visigoths, invaded Rome in 410. Read about this event in “The Gothic and Vandal Wars in the Roman Empire” on page 9 in the *Student’s Book*. In 455 the Vandals invaded. Other invaders came from the East. Have the youth identify those groups.

Until the groups came from the East, the Roman army could control these barbarians, as they called them. But from the East came Attila, a bold warrior of the Huns, forcing people in his path to flee. By the time he reached Rome in June 452, his army was diminished by disease, but the Romans did not know this. So Attila agreed to meet with Bishop Leo of Rome, and a treaty was drawn in which Attila agreed not to destroy Rome and to withdraw from Italy. This act put the bishop in the right place to establish the papacy. Leo’s place as the first pope was assured.

Bringing the Map to Life

Clear the space as much as you can so that you can use the meeting space to make a “map.” Set chairs to indicate the cities and territories shown on the map. Label them with signs prepared by the youth. Then assign each youth to one of the eight groups in the map legend. Have them all go to their beginning points, maps in hand. (Notice that some groups split up along the way and go several directions.)

Have the youth determine who appears to move first. When there is a gap in the time line, take a break. These were not campaigns that moved quickly across the land. As the youth move, add noteworthy dates and events to the time line. Also add these dates to the time line:

- 410 Rome sacked by Visigoths.
- 452 Huns come to Rome and Pope Leo negotiates with them.
- 455 Rome sacked by Vandals; Pope Leo negotiates so the churches are spared.
- 476 Collapse of the Roman Empire.
- 527 Emperor Justinian takes back the Mediterranean coast of Africa, Italy, and the islands of the Mediterranean.

When everyone has gotten to the end of their campaign, pause to see where each youth has ended up. Then ask: “What do you think happened along the way to the native people and to the barbarians?”

Point out that even when these groups came without fighting, their presence had an effect, such as bringing their language and their customs

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to the native people. Many of them became Christians and had to be taught not only Christianity but the Roman customs. Ask: “How might this have changed the work of the church?”

Seeing the Lay of the Land

Have the youth turn to “After the Fall of Rome” (*Student’s Book*, p. 10). This map shows what happened to the Roman Empire after the second sacking of Rome in 455. Also refer to “The Gothic and Vandal Wars in the Roman Empire” (*Student’s Book*, p. 9). Some of those barbarians have now established kingdoms and the Roman Empire is relegated to the East. Ask: “Who did these people eventually become and what nations did they establish?” For fun, find out what ancestors of the group might have been in these earlier groups.

Additional Activity

Create brief messages for the groups traveling across the Roman Empire to send home. For content ideas, see “The Gothic and Vandal Wars in the Roman Empire” (see *Student’s Book*, p. 9).

Closing

Close the Session

Review the causes of the fall of Rome and what happened in the church as a result of this change.

Benediction

Stand in a circle for the benediction, based on 1 John 3:23:

Go forth in the name of the Lord.

This is God’s charge:

to give our allegiance to Jesus Christ

and to love one another as he commanded. Amen.²

Evaluation

- This session and the next one cover the same period of time, more or less. What do you think the youth have taken from this session? What will you want to review at the beginning of the next session?

2. *Book of Common Worship*,
p. 160, no. 5.