The Roman World and Early Christianity

Lesson 6

Rome and the Roots of Western Civilization

Key Terms and People

Greco-Roman culture  culture developed from the blending of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman cultures
Pompeii  Roman town destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius
Virgil  Roman poet who wrote the Aeneid
Tacitus  Roman historian who recorded the good and bad of imperial Rome
aqueduct  pipeline or channel built to carry water

Before You Read

In the last lesson, you read about the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

In this lesson, you will learn about lasting Roman contributions to Western civilization.

As You Read

Use a chart to list and describe accomplishments of the Roman Empire.

The Legacy of Greco-Roman Civilization

What is Greco-Roman culture?

Rome took aspects of Greek and Hellenistic culture and added ideas of its own. The mixing of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture produced a new culture called Greco-Roman culture. This is also often called classical civilization.

Roman artists, philosophers, and writers did not just copy Greek works. They created a style of their own for their own purposes. Much of Roman art had practical purposes. It was aimed at educating the public.

One example of the mixing of cultures occurred in sculpture. Romans borrowed Greek ideas but made their sculptures more realistic. The Romans also developed a kind of sculpture in which images stood out from a flat background.

Romans were skilled at creating pictures made from tiny tiles, a process called mosaic. Romans were also skilled at painting. The best examples of Roman painting were found in the Roman town of Pompeii. Pompeii was covered with ash after a volcanic eruption. The ash preserved many works of art and culture.
In both literature and philosophy, Romans were inspired by the Greeks. The poet **Virgil** wrote the most famous work of Latin literature, the *Aeneid*. It was modeled on the Greek epics of Homer.

The Romans also produced some important histories. **Tacitus** is an important Roman ancient historian. Among ancient historians, he is known for presenting accurate facts. He described the good and bad parts of imperial Rome.

1. Name three Roman cultural achievements.

   ________________________________

THE LEGACY OF ROME

*What were Rome’s most major contributions to Western culture?*

The Roman language, Latin, was important in European history. It was the official language of the Roman Catholic Church into the 20th century. Many European languages developed from Latin, including French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian. And many Latin words are used in other languages, including English.

Romans also became famous for their skill at engineering. They used arches and domes to build large, impressive buildings. Many of these forms are still used today. They also built an excellent system of roads and several **aqueducts**. Aqueducts carried water from distant lakes or rivers to large cities.

Romans made other great advancements in technology, including glassmaking, dam building, mining, and sanitation. They also developed brass, soap, a harvesting machine, surgical instruments, iron tooth implants, and even a camel harness.

But Rome’s most lasting influence was in the field of law. The Roman government set standards of law that still influence people today. Some of the most important principles of Roman law were:

- All persons had the right to equal treatment under the law.
- A person was considered innocent until proven guilty.
- The burden of proof rested with the accuser rather than the accused.
- A person should be punished only for actions, not for thoughts.
- Any law that seemed unreasonable or unfair could be set aside.

2. What important standards of law were set by the Romans?

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As you read about the roots of classical civilization, fill in the chart to identify elements of the Greco-Roman culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Element</th>
<th>Greek Contributions</th>
<th>Roman Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sculpture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Literature</td>
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Identify Roman achievements in the boxes below.

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