The Legacy of Ancient Greece and Rome

BEFORE YOU READ
In this section, you will learn how democracy started in Greece and Rome.
In the next section, you will see how Judaism and Christianity started and you will learn what ideas were spread by the Renaissance and the Reformation.

AS YOU READ
Use the diagram below to take notes on the contributions that Greece and Rome made to the democracy.

Athens Builds a Limited Democracy (pages 5–7)

How did democracy develop?
Throughout history, people have known the need for a government, or a system for exercising authority. For most of history, people have lived under single rulers, such as kings. This type of rule is called a monarchy. These rulers had total power. Other governments that developed included aristocracy, which is a state ruled by the noble class. Later as traded expanded, a class of wealthy merchants often ruled a land. This was known as an oligarchy. The idea of democracy—that people can govern themselves—grew slowly. Many people contributed to that idea over the centuries.

Greek civilization began about 2000 B.C. Ancient Greece was made up of city-states. Each city-state had its own government. The first democracy developed in the city-state of Athens.

Athens had a king at first. Then it became an aristocracy. Each year an assembly of citizens elected three nobles to rule Athens. Citizens were adult male residents given certain rights and responsibilities.

A statesman called Solon created four new kinds of citizenship in the sixth century B.C. All free
adult males were citizens. All citizens were able to vote in the assembly. But only citizens of the three higher classes could hold public office.

Democracy in Athens was limited. Only about one-tenth of the population were citizens. Women, slaves, and foreign residents could not be citizens. Slaves made up about one-third of the Athenian population at that time.

About a hundred years after Solon, a leader named Cleisthenes increased the power of the assembly. He allowed all citizens to present laws for debate and passage. He also created a council whose members were chosen by lot, or at random. The council suggested laws and advised the assembly.

1. How did Cleisthenes help to increase democracy in Athens?

Greek Democracy Changes (pages 7–9)

What changes occurred in Greek democracy?

In the fifth century B.C., armies of Persian Empire invaded Greece. But the Persians were defeated by the Greek city-states in 479 B.C. Athens then became the leader of the city-states. A wise leader, Pericles, ruled Athens.

Pericles strengthened democracy. He increased the number of paid public officials. This allowed poorer citizens to serve in government. He also introduced the idea of direct democracy. This allowed citizens to participate directly in government.

Tensions between the city-states led to fighting among them. Then Greece was defeated by armies from the kingdom of Macedonia. This defeat ended democracy in Greece.

During this troubled time, several philosophers appeared. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle set forth their ideas on government and society.

Greek ideas had lasting influence on government and philosophy. The Greeks did not rely on traditional explanations of the world. Instead they used reason to find patterns that they called natural laws. They developed direct democracy and the three branches of government.

2. How did Pericles change democracy in Athens?

Rome Develops a Republic (page 10)

How was the Roman government organized?

Rome began to rise as Greece fell. By 509 B.C., Rome was a republic. A republic is a form of government in which citizens have the right to vote and to select their leaders. In Rome, as in Athens, citizenship with voting rights belonged only to males who were not born slaves or foreigners.

Rome’s republican government had separate branches. Two officials called consuls directed the government. The legislative branch was made up of the Senate and two assemblies. The Senate was the aristocratic branch of government. The assemblies were more democratic. They included other classes of citizens. In times of trouble, the republic gave vast powers to a ruler called a dictator.

Rome gradually increased its territory through conquest. It then became an empire under the rule of a powerful emperor.

3. How was the Roman legislative branch organized?

Roman Law (page 11)

Why did Romans create a system of laws?

The Romans created a system of laws that they could use throughout their empire. Rome’s laws have influenced democracy. Some of the most important principles of Roman law were: equal treatment under the law; innocent until proven guilty; the burden of proof rests with the accuser; and unreasonable or unfair laws could be set aside.

In 451 B.C., the Romans created the Twelve Tables, the first written collection of Roman laws. They gave citizens the right to be protected by the laws. About 1,000 years later, all Roman laws were put together in the Code of Justinian. It later was used as a guide on law throughout western Europe. The Code established the idea of “a government of laws, not of men.” Under this idea, even rulers and other powerful persons could be held accountable for their actions.

4. Why were the Twelve Tables important?