

Rome

Decline of the Roman Empire



The Rise of the Roman Empire

Decline of the Roman Empire

Roman Empire Achievements

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.





Timeline





After the death of Caesar in 27 BC, his nephew **Augustus** seized power, becoming the first Roman emperor.

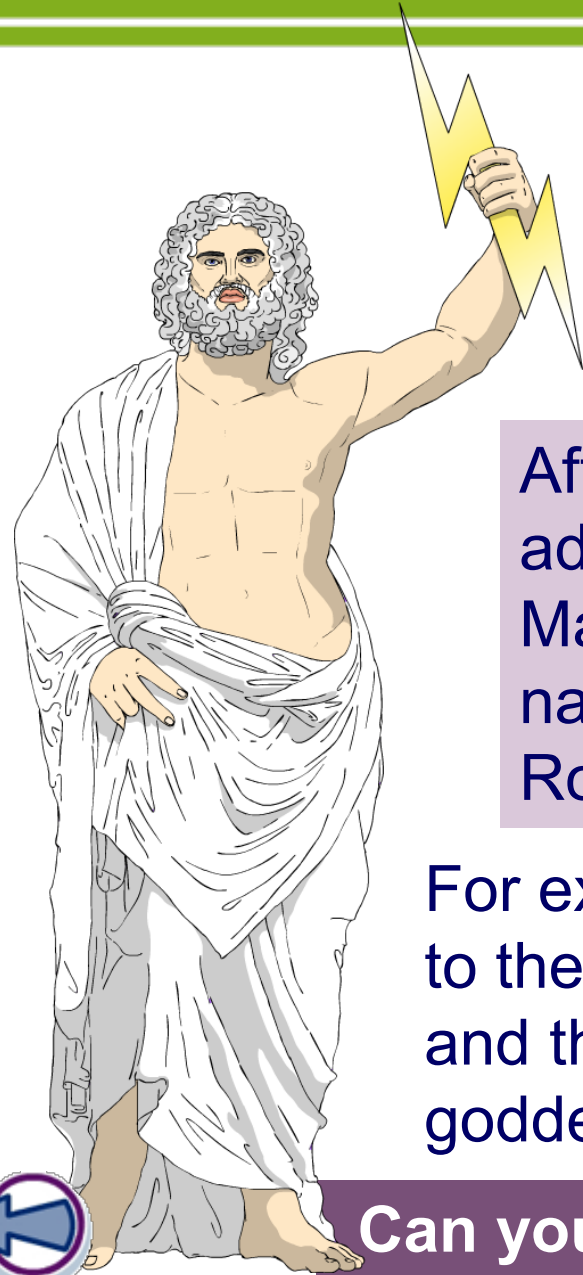
The beginning of Augustus's reign marked a period of history called **Pax Romana**, which in Latin means "Roman peace." It was a prosperous time, as Augustus also expanded the borders of the empire, further adding to its wealth.

Augustus focused some of his changes on Rome itself. He improved the city's grain and water supplies, as well as its roads. He also reduced crime rates and put down any riots that broke out.



This peaceful period hugely increased Augustus's popularity with Roman citizens.





When the Romans conquered new lands, they allowed people to keep their own traditions and beliefs. Often these became absorbed into Roman culture.

After the conquest of Greece, the Romans adopted the Greek pantheon as their own. Many of the Greek gods received Roman names and were worshiped as part of the Romans' pagan religion.

For example, the Roman god **Jupiter** is linked to the Greek god Zeus; both were gods of light and the sky. Other gods included **Venus**, goddess of love, and **Neptune**, god of the sea.

Can you think of any similar Greek gods?

In 63 BC, Rome had conquered the city of **Jerusalem** and made it part of their empire. They built temples and monuments to their own gods in the city, which upset the Jews who believed that Jerusalem was a holy place.

Emperor Hadrian banned Jews from practicing their religious rituals, which led to Jewish revolts against Roman rule.

In 135 AD, the Romans reacted by destroying Jerusalem. They built a new city on the ruins, but Jews were no longer allowed to live there.



Why do you think the Romans were so harsh in their punishment of the Jews?

The coming of the Messiah

One of the most important Jewish beliefs was that a chosen one had been foretold and was destined to be born on Earth. They called this figure the **Messiah**, which means “God’s anointed one” in the Hebrew language.

Around 0 AD, a man named **Jesus of Nazareth** was born. Although there are different stories about him, most historians agree that he existed during this time.

To many Jews, Jesus was the Messiah they were expecting, and they celebrated him as a great teacher and **prophet**.



When he grew up, Jesus traveled around, attracting followers and believers who also spread his message.



However, the Romans viewed Jesus as a threat to their authority, and he was put to death by **crucifixion** – a way of executing someone by nailing them to a cross. Today, the cross is a holy symbol for Christians all over the world.

Jesus's followers claimed that he rose from the dead three days after his execution. They called this the **Resurrection**, and believed that it was proof that Jesus was divine.

Some people started calling Jesus **Christ**, which comes from the Greek word for “anointed.” Those who believed that he was the Jewish Messiah became known as **Christians**.



One important figure in the history of Christianity was **Paul the Apostle**. After Jesus's death, he wrote about how Christianity could lead to salvation, and this helped to establish the differences between Christianity and Judaism. The book of the Bible called **Romans** is a letter written by Paul to the citizens of Rome in the late 50s AD.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. [...] Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans, 12:14–19

Why do you think Paul wrote this?

As the Christian Church began to develop a following, the Romans were suspicious about its beliefs and rituals. They banned the Christian faith and began a system of **persecution** against Christians.

In 64 AD, much of Rome was destroyed in a fire, and rumors spread that Emperor **Nero** was to blame. In response, he accused Christians in the city and had many of them killed. People who are killed for their faith are called **martyrs**.

Over the next 250 years, Christians continued to face discrimination and persecution to different degrees. Some emperors were less harsh and allowed Christians to quietly follow their faith without interference.





Diocletian (244–312) was known for his particularly harsh treatment of Christians. However, he was also concerned with the fate of the empire.

Diocletian realized that the empire was now too large to run effectively. In 285, he decided to split it into two halves: the **Western** and **Eastern Roman Empires**. Each was ruled by a separate emperor.

A new eastern capital was created in a town called **Byzantium**, in modern-day Turkey, and Diocletian became Eastern Roman Emperor.



Do you think Diocletian's plan worked?
Can you see any problems with it?



Problems for the empire



Constantine the Great was proclaimed Eastern Emperor in 306, before attempting to reunite the empire under one ruler. One story claims that Constantine heard God telling him to have his soldiers paint the **Chi Rho** (a Christian symbol) on their shields in order to secure a victory against his enemies.



Soon after, Constantine converted to Christianity. He stopped the active persecution of Christians. In 325, the Council of Nicaea wrote the **Nicene Creed**, establishing solid foundations for the faith.

Constantine failed in his efforts to reunite the Roman Empire. However, he was instrumental in the formation and establishment of the Christian religion.



Constantine's conversion to Christianity established a tradition of Christian Roman emperors. After his rule, only one emperor – his nephew **Julian** – attempted to reinstate the Romans' traditional pagan religion.

In 379 AD, **Theodosius** made Christianity Rome's sole official religion. He introduced several new laws:

- pagan temples were destroyed or converted to Christian churches
- paganism was forbidden and its rites and festivals were no longer allowed to be performed.



From its pagan roots, Rome had become a Christian empire.



From the late 200s, the Romans faced small invasions from tribes in Europe. They called these tribes **barbarians**, from an ancient word for jumbled speech, because their language sounded like meaningless babbling to the Romans.

By this time, their legions were much weaker. There were no longer enough Roman citizens to replace soldiers who died in battle, so military leaders had to look elsewhere for recruits.

Some generals recruited barbarian tribesmen as **mercenaries**. These were hardened soldiers who were paid to fight for the Romans.



What problems might there have been in recruiting mercenary soldiers?

Groups of **Goth** tribes took advantage of the declining Western Roman Empire to seize land in Europe. By 410, the Romans had lost control of **Gaul** (France) and Britain.



However, the Goths were not the only people who wanted to attack the Romans. The **Huns** were beginning to threaten Rome's eastern borders.

As the Huns advanced westwards, many Goth tribes fled to Roman territory in an attempt to find a safe place. In the city of Rome, the government could do nothing to stop them.





As Goth tribes settled closer and closer to Rome, the Senate began paying them not to attack the city. However, Rome's **income** had been reduced as they lost more territory, and they could not afford to keep paying.

In 410, a tribe called the **Visigoths** sacked Rome, shocking its inhabitants. Rome had not been invaded in 800 years and people had believed that it was unconquerable.

Emperors continued to rule, but they had less power than the military generals. In 476, the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustus, was overthrown by the German Goth **Odoacer**, beginning the start of the Dark Ages in Europe.





After the fall of Rome, the remaining power in the Roman Empire lay in the eastern capital of **Constantinople**.

The empire that rose after 476 had its roots in the Eastern Roman Empire, but is called the **Byzantine Empire**, after Byzantium, the Greek city that Constantinople had replaced.

Constantinople was located at a key point between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. It became an important **trading center** – while the western economy was struggling, the east was thriving. Trade included:

- importing food for the people, such as grain from Egypt
- exporting refined goods, such as silk **brocade**.



What did this mean for the Byzantine Empire?





Justinian I and Theodora

Emperor **Justinian I** (482–565) reconquered parts of Europe during his rule, but failed in his aim of reuniting the two halves of the empire. His achievements include:

- simplifying and standardizing many Roman laws into the **Justinian Code**
- improving public buildings and the city's roads, bridges and aqueducts
- building churches, including the **Hagia Sophia** in Constantinople.



His wife **Theodora** was also a competent ruler: she created laws to help women and children, as well as working to stop government corruption.

Justinian and Theodora's reign is known as the **Golden Age** of the Byzantine Empire.



The Byzantine Empire was a Christian empire, as shown through its religious art and many churches.

However, as time passed, people began to have different ideas about how to interpret Christian teachings. The east and west developed separate views about the faith.

Differences between the two groups of Christians came to a head in 1054 when Pope Leo IX, head of the church in Rome, **excommunicated** the Patriarch of Constantinople, head of the church in the east.

This is known as the **Great Schism**. It led to the formation of two distinct Christian Churches: the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Church.



Why do you think this was important?

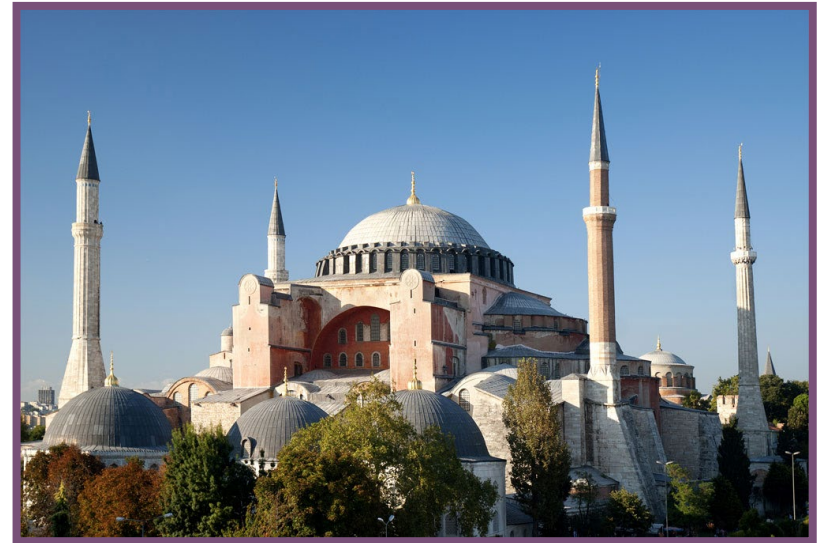


The end of the Byzantine Empire



In 1453, almost 900 years after Justinian's death, Constantinople was conquered by the **Ottoman Turks**. Islam had been founded in 632 by the Prophet Muhammad, and the Ottomans were Muslim.

The **Hagia Sophia** still stands in modern Istanbul. It was originally a Christian church, but the Ottomans converted it into a mosque. It is now a museum.



After this time, Constantinople was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire and the Byzantine Empire came to an end.

What influence did the Byzantine Empire leave in eastern Europe?



Keywords

