

A Brief History

**From the Decline
of the Western Roman Empire (200)
to the Fall
of the Eastern Roman Empire (1453)**

The Decline of the Roman Empire

- Can't feed its people (use of slaves deterred development of technology that would have helped)
- Low on money (taxes were high and people couldn't pay them)
- Could barely pay army; yet, also had to hire mercenaries to enlarge it who weren't loyal to Rome and weren't disciplined; weaker defense along borders

- Empire too large to control
- Corrupt officials
- Citizens' loyalty declined; less service to empire
- Less education
- Less communication; people less informed about important matters
- Rapid changes in leadership

Responses

- Diocletian took over: better security, food for poor, became absolute ruler (no Senate)
- Diocletian splits empire, took eastern portion (greater wealth, better trade, bigger cities)
- Civil war for control of empire
- Constantine took control of whole empire; moved capital east to Byzantium (well placed for defense and trade) and renamed it Constantinople
- Sons took over and it split empire again

The Western Roman Empire

- Away from trade routes
- Exposed to attack
- Defenses were weak, unmotivated
- Attacks increased, civilians left, attacks increased even more because there were fewer people to defend city
- New groups (Germanics) moved in
- Goths attacked
- Huns attacked

Results

- Roads and public structures fell into disrepair
- Trade and commerce declined
- New peoples (Germanics) without experience in Rome claimed Roman land, further weakening sense of community
- No more Western Roman Empire
- Much scientific and philosophical knowledge of Rome lost

The Eastern Roman Empire (aka, the Byzantine Empire)

- Lasted about 1,000 years longer than Western Roman Empire
- Also fought off invasions (Germanics, Huns)
- Land lost to invaders
- Justinian reconquered lost land, and then some (part of old Western Roman Empire)
- Established new codes of law based on Roman law
- Old Greek traditions blended with Roman ones

What about Christianity in the Roman Empire?

- Practices in the western and eastern halves of the Roman Empire differed
- Leadership differences: In the west, there was no emperor (had moved to Constantinople, remember?) so the Pope took charge. In the East, the emperor had authority over the head of the church (called a patriarch).
- The pope thought he should be in charge of both eastern and western churches, and tried to remove eastern head of the church

- Eastern church refused to recognize the authority of the pope
- The church split in 1054: The western side became known as the Roman Catholic (“universal”) Church. The eastern side became the Eastern Orthodox (“holding established beliefs”) Church.
- Each side had a different view on the relationship between the church and the government of the empire. Pope took control over emperors and kings. Byzantine emperor took control over the patriarch.

The Byzantine Empire Falls

- Lots of continuous threats from invaders
- One of those invaders was from a new religion (Islam) that had developed in the 600s. Weakened the empire.
- Civil wars weakened the empire.
- Attacks by Ottoman Turks and Serbs, who eventually captured Constantinople in 1453.