

“A Brief History of Rome”

A New Power Rises

The earliest empires had been in the east. Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, India, and Greece were all home to at least one powerful civilization. About 387 BC, a city on the Italian peninsula began acquiring land and building an empire. That city was Rome. For more than one thousand years, Rome controlled the western world.

Rome grew into an empire in part because of how it treated the people it conquered. If a city was defeated by another empire, its citizens were forced from the land if they were lucky, and enslaved if they were not. Initially, the Romans extended the rights of citizenship to the people they conquered. Rome conquered many of its allies by force, but once the new people became citizens, they often joined the Roman army. Rome managed to unify most of the modern nation of Italy by 265 BC.

Rome is an ideal place for a city. It is located along the banks of the Tiber River. The river made it easy to travel to and from the sea. The Tiber is very shallow near Rome. A shallow portion of a river is called a ford. The ford made it easier for people to cross the river. Seven hills surround Rome. The hills make it harder for invaders to approach the city and served as lookout areas for the Romans. Rome is also close to excellent farmland and an abundance of wood and stone. Civilizations have grown and prospered in Rome for thousands of years, which is why Rome is nicknamed "the Eternal City."

Patricians & Plebeians

The patricians were the noble families of Rome. In 509 BC, a group of patricians expelled the Etruscan king and decreed that Rome would be a republic. A republic is a form of government with elected officials. The patricians elected senators to serve their interests. The senate selected two people to serve as Consuls in place of the Etruscan king.

The plebeians were the merchants, farmers, and artisans of Rome. They were allowed to vote, but only Patricians were allowed in the senate. In 471 BC, the plebeians elected a tribune. Ten men represented the plebeians against any political oppression by the consuls or the patricians. By 287 BC, the laws passed by the plebeians were binding for all Romans, including the patricians.

The senate met in the Forum, a marketplace in the valley among the hills that surround Rome. The senators would rule on the military and foreign affairs, but the tribunes protected the rights of the plebeians. When a tribune objected to a law, he would shout "veto." Veto means "I forbid" in Latin, the language of the Romans. If enough tribunes objected, they could stop the law from passing.

The Punic Wars

The Romans depended on the plunder of their army. The Roman Senate had to keep the army busy, or the army might have turned against them. By 265 BC, the army was now big enough to defeat anything it faced. Rome stopped making citizens of the people it conquered. Newly conquered lands became provinces of the Roman Republic.

The Romans fought three wars against Carthage, a city on the north coast of Africa. The wars are known as the Punic Wars because *Puncia* was the Roman name for Carthage. The first war was fought over Sicily, an island controlled by Carthage in the Mediterranean Sea off the southwest coast of the Italian peninsula. In 265 BC, Sicily was richer than any other land in the area and a perfect target for the Roman army. The Romans won the war and forced Carthage to give up Sicily.

A generation after the first war, Rome attacked Carthage a second time, but a young Carthaginian general named Hannibal nearly captured Rome. The Romans expected Carthage to attack from the sea, but Hannibal commanded an army from land Carthage controlled in modern Spain. Hannibal led his army in a daring and difficult journey over the Alps while riding on elephants. Hannibal's army might have defeated the Romans, but Hannibal returned home to

defend his native land when Roman soldiers invaded Africa in 202 BC. The Roman army defeated Hannibal in Africa and won the second Punic War.

Carthage was no longer in a position to hurt Rome after the second Punic War, but in 149 BC, Roman leaders decided to destroy Carthage. A Roman senator named Cato ended every speech with the cry, "Carthage must be destroyed." Rome defeated Carthage after almost three years of war. After a siege in 146 BC, the Romans went from house to house slaughtering the people of Carthage. They sold the remaining citizens into slavery, burned Carthage's harbor, and poured salt on the Carthaginian farmland. The salt made it impossible for crops to grow and ensured that Carthage would never again rival the Eternal City.

Spartacus

Rome needed workers to maintain its wealth. The first conquered people were welcomed as Roman citizens, but after 265 BC, many conquered people were auctioned off as slaves. A great deal of the grandeur of Rome was created by the grueling labor of slaves.

A slave named Spartacus led a revolt against the Romans 73 BC. Spartacus built an army of thousands of soldiers from slaves he and his followers liberated. The slaves resisted the Roman army for more than two years and plundered the Italian countryside.

The Roman councils sent an army of 40,000 soldiers to defeat the slave revolt. Spartacus was killed in battle, but six thousand of his soldiers were taken prisoner and crucified. Crucifixion is a form of execution where the prisoner is nailed to a cross and left to die a slow, painful death. Crosses stretched for miles along the Apian Way, one of Rome's most traveled roadways. They served as a gruesome reminder of the strength and the brutality of the Roman army.

Julius Caesar

Rome was a huge and very rich empire after the second Punic War, but the Senate did a poor job of running the republic. The senate was designed to govern a city, not a growing empire. The senators often took bribes or were not careful about how they voted in the forum. Many Romans wanted a strong leader, and the ambitious Julius Caesar was an obvious choice.

Caesar sought the office of consul in 60 BC. He had recently returned from Spain where he served a year as governor. The two consuls at the time were Crassus and Pompey, the leaders of the war against the slave revolt. Rather than become involved in a struggle, Caesar convinced Crassus, Pompey, and the Roman Senate to name him a third consul. This coalition of three equal rulers later became known as the First Triumvirate.

When Caesar's year-long term as consul ended, he used his influence to get himself appointed governor of Gaul. Gaul was a territory northwest of the Italian peninsula. He led an army that captured most of Western Europe. Caesar's successes on the battlefield made him the most popular man in Rome.

In 49 BC, the Senate ordered Caesar to return to Rome, but to leave his army behind. Caesar feared that his opponents would destroy him, so he ignored the order and marched his army back to Rome. Caesar's orders clearly told him not to bring his army across the Rubicon River. When he marched the army across the river, he knew he faced an important decision. Caesar knew that if he obeyed the senate and disbanded his army, his career would be over; but if he marched his troops across the river, the Senate would order Pompey and his army to retaliate. Today when people say they are "crossing the Rubicon," they refer to a very significant decision that cannot be undone.

Caesar's army seized control of Italy while Pompey and his army fled to Greece. Caesar hunted Pompey and defeated his army. Pompey then escaped to Egypt with Caesar in pursuit. When Caesar arrived in Egypt, the ten-year-old king of Egypt, Ptolemy XIII, presented Caesar with Pompey's decapitated head.

The Roman people admired Caesar as a war hero and a strong leader. In 46 BC, they elected him dictator of Rome. A dictator is a ruler with complete control. In that time, dictators were temporary rulers elected in times of crisis, but

Caesar was elected because of his popularity. The last Roman dictator had been elected almost 150 years earlier, at the end of the second Punic War.

Caesar used his power to make many changes in Rome, often without approval from the Senate. He instituted the Julian calendar of 365¼ days. Caesar's calendar is closely related to the calendar we use today. The month of July is named in honor of Caesar. One year after his election as dictator, the Roman people elected Caesar "dictator for life." The Roman senators were outraged at Caesar's power and popularity. On March 15, 44 BC, Caesar was met by a mob of sixty senators who stabbed the dictator to death.

Cleopatra

Julius Caesar found himself in the middle of a family feud when he arrived in Egypt in 47 BC. King Ptolemy XII willed his throne to his ten-year-old son, Ptolemy XIII, and his eighteen-year-old daughter, Cleopatra. The brother and sister were to rule Egypt as husband and wife, but Ptolemy XIII forced his sister from the throne in an attempt to seize total power.

Cleopatra saw an opportunity to return to power when she learned Caesar was in Egypt. She arranged to have herself smuggled into Caesar's suite by wrapping herself in an ornamental carpet. Caesar unraveled his gift to find the former queen. The sly Cleopatra impressed Caesar. His army defeated the people who had removed Cleopatra from power. Ptolemy XIII drowned in the Nile River while try to escape Caesar's army.

The 54-year-old Caesar began a love affair with the much younger Cleopatra, who gave birth to Caesar's only son, Caesarion. While Caesar was popular with the Roman people, Cleopatra was looked upon with suspicion because she was a foreigner.

A year after Caesar's murder, the Senate selected Octavian, Lepidus and Marc Antony to lead the republic in the Second Triumvirate. Octavian was Caesar's teenage grandnephew. Caesar's will stipulated that Octavian would become his adopted son. Marc Antony and Lepidus were generals in Caesar's army. Octavian wanted complete control of Rome. When Lepidus retired, Octavian's only rival was Marc Antony.

Marc Antony led the Roman army in Egypt, where he met and fell in love with Cleopatra. Antony and Cleopatra hoped to oust Octavian and rule together, but Octavian used the relationship between Antony and the unpopular Cleopatra to his advantage. He told the Roman people that Cleopatra had cast a spell on Antony. Octavian argued that Antony was willing to give away the Roman world to a foreign woman. The Roman people supported Octavian when he declared war on Antony and Cleopatra.

Octavian's forces defeated Antony and Cleopatra's ships in the Battle of Actium on the Mediterranean Sea in 31 BC. Antony and Cleopatra managed to escape the encounter and returned to Egypt, but when Octavian's army approached, Marc Antony committed suicide. When Cleopatra learned of Antony's death, she realized she would soon no longer be Queen. According to legend, Cleopatra wrapped an asp around her arm. The asp was a venomous snake that was the symbol for the Egyptian royalty. The asp's bite ended Cleopatra's life.

Caesar Augustus

With the death of Marc Antony in 31 BC, Octavian became the sole ruler of Rome. Octavian took measures to earn the loyalty of the Roman army. He encouraged the soldiers to retire from the army by providing them with land. Once the soldiers retired, Octavian did not have to be concerned with the army turning on him. Further, Octavian knew he could count on the soldiers' support if he was challenged by the Senate.

Octavian restored peace and order to Rome. He made sure the lands throughout the empire were well run and taxes were fair. Octavian built massive roads and bridges, government buildings, and huge public baths. He said, "I left Rome a city of marble, though I found it a city of bricks." The Roman people awarded Octavian with the title

Augustus, which means, "respected one." Many Romans deified Augustus after his death. This means they worshipped him as a god.

Augustus ruled Rome for 41 years, though he did not call himself an emperor. He was careful to not meet the same fate as his great granduncle. Augustus was very respectful to the senators, but the Senate knew he controlled the army and could do as he pleased.

The Roman army was so strong that it protected citizens from attacks from the tribes who lived beyond the empire. The powerful, professionally trained forces were divided into large units called legions. Each legion would have as many as 6,000 soldiers. The two hundred year period that began with the rule of Caesar Augustus was known as the *Pax Romana*, or the "Peace of Rome."

Later Emperors

Augustus had complete power in Rome, but he showed great respect for the senate. Later emperors made no secret of their power. The Senate still existed, but senators had little control over the affairs of the empire. Some of the emperors who followed Augustus ruled wisely. Others were foolish and cruel.

Nero was perhaps the most notorious emperor in Roman history. Nero became emperor when his mother conspired to kill his stepfather. Once Nero came to power, he ordered his mother's execution. He also killed two wives and a stepbrother. Nero ruled the empire by day, but at night he prowled the streets of Rome assaulting women.

He believed himself to be the greatest artist in the empire. Never before had a Roman Emperor appeared on a stage. Many Roman nobles considered his performances outrageous, but no one would risk torture or death by criticizing him. In 67 AD, Nero toured Greece. He participated in many games and contests, always finishing first. As Nero devoted himself to his artistic pursuits, he lost power. In 68 AD, Nero faced a revolt from his soldiers. His guard claimed Nero lamented, "What an artist the world is losing," then stabbed himself in the neck.

The Roman Empire reached its greatest size in 117 AD under the emperor Trajan. The empire extended from Britain and Spain, across France, southern Germany, and the Balkan Mountains. The empire also included North Africa, and stretched as far east as the Caspian Sea. The Romans claimed all of the land surrounding the enormous Mediterranean Sea, which they called "a Roman lake."

In 121 AD, the emperor Hadrian built a wall across northern England to keep out invaders from Scotland. The Romans called the Scots "barbarians," possibly because their Celtic language reminded the Romans of the sounds made by sheep. In time, the Romans called all of the people they felt were uncultured "barbarians." Barbarian warriors from Germany would later lead to the end of the Western Roman Empire.

Roman Technology

The Romans used great public projects to make the city the most advanced of the ancient world, and to create the largest empire of the era. Many of the roads, bridges and aqueducts of ancient Rome are still used today.

The Romans built many roads throughout their empire. The roads made it easier to travel and trade with faraway provinces. It also made it easier to collect taxes. Roman roads were straight and followed an exact design. The expression, "All Roads Lead to Rome" refers to the fact that Rome was the center of modern civilization.

Roman engineers brought water into the city by building pipelines called aqueducts. Nine aqueducts provided the Roman people with 38 million gallons of water every day. Parts of the Roman aqueduct system still supply water to fountains in Rome.

The Romans built many amphitheaters, or huge stadiums. People would gather in amphitheaters to watch shows with clowns, jugglers, and acrobats. Some of Roman entertainment was very cruel. People would watch fights between wild animals and Gladiators. Gladiators were usually slaves or criminals who fought with swords against animals or each other. A skillful gladiator might win his freedom by defeating an opponent. More often, the gladiators lost their lives.

The largest amphitheater, the Colosseum, seated about 45,000 people. Only a portion of the Colosseum remains standing today. Earthquakes have destroyed some of the structure. Also, engineers used some of the stone from the Colosseum to build later Roman buildings. Some of the stone used to build St. Peter's Basilica, the church where the Pope resides, came from the Colosseum.

Perhaps the greatest Roman engineering achievement was the sewer. Rome is in a valley among seven hills. There is nowhere for dirty water to go. The sewer system made it possible for it to become the largest city in the world. Rome was the first city to house more than one million people. The population declined after the fall of Rome, but today, it is home to more than six million people.

The Legacy of Roman Government

The Roman government was considered "bicameral" because it had two houses. The upper house consisted of the patricians in the senate, while the lower house was composed of plebeian tribunes.

The Constitution of the United States organized the Congress in the same manner. Two senators represent each state. The Senate advises the President and confirms his appointments. Originally, the state governments chose the senators. About one hundred years ago, a group of Americans called "progressives" demanded that the people be allowed to vote directly for their senators. Voters amended the Constitution in 1913 to allow the direct election of senators. The people have always elected members to the lower house of Congress, the House of Representatives.

The Roman model of government is used in many nations. Canada's legislative bodies are the Senate and the House of Commons. The Prime Minister, the head of Canada's government, appoints members of the Canadian Senate. Great Britain has a similar bicameral legislature, but the upper house in Britain is called the House of Lords.

Latin

Latin was the language of the Roman Empire. Originally spoken only in the city of Rome, Latin became the official language of business and government as the empire expanded to most of Western Europe. Many people living in Roman provinces spoke local languages. In time, the languages blended with Latin to form what we now call Romance languages. Romance refers to the fact that the languages originated in Rome. Romance languages include Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Romanian.

Most Europeans speak Romance, Germanic, or Slavic languages. Germanic languages are spoken primarily in northern Europe, including the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom. Slavic languages are spoken in Eastern Europe, primarily in Poland, Russia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Serbia.

Many people in Western Europe spoke Celtic languages before the expansion of the Roman Empire. Few people speak Celtic languages today, though the influence of the Celtic people lives on in stories and myths. Leprechauns, Halloween, and the Blarney Stone are remnants of Celtic culture. English became the language of the British Isles when the British made Ireland, Scotland and Wales part of the United Kingdom. In Ireland and Wales, students are encouraged to study the traditional Celtic languages, but most speak English.

Christianity

Most of the people who lived near Jerusalem were Jewish. The Romans were pagans, but they allowed the Jews to practice their faith and did not force them worship Roman gods. About AD 30, a holy man named Jesus began to attract a following in the Roman province of Judea. Judea is part of the modern nation of Israel. His followers came to believe that Jesus was the son of the God of the Jews and that he performed miracles. The followers of Jesus angered Roman authorities because they refused to follow either Jewish or Roman laws. The authorities arrested and crucified Jesus. Three days after his execution, Jesus' followers said they saw him risen from the dead.

The followers of Jesus called him Christ. Christ is a Greek word that means "chosen one," because they believed he was chosen by God to be his messenger. In time the followers of Jesus became known as Christians. The Christians taught that people's sins would be forgiven if they became Christian. This message was not successful with many Jews, but many pagans responded to the idea of Christian salvation.

Many fervent believers carried the message of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire. One of the most successful was a Greek-speaking Jew named Paul of Tarsus, known to Christians as Saint Paul. As a young man, he helped to persecute Christians, but one day he had a vision in which he believed Jesus spoke to him from heaven. Paul spent the rest of his life thinking and writing about Christianity and winning new converts to the faith. Through the persistence of Paul and other Christian missionaries, small Christian communities developed throughout the Roman Empire.

The first Christians believed that Jesus would quickly return to earth, so there was no need to create any written records of his life. After about thirty years, Christians began to see a need to write down an account of the life and wisdom of Jesus. About fifty years after Jesus died, Christians combined the stories of the life and wisdom of Jesus into four books known as Gospels. Gospel means "good news." The holy book of Christianity is known as the Bible and has two parts. The Old Testament consists of the sacred writings of the Jewish people and was written long before the time of Jesus. The New Testament of the Bible includes the Gospels, along with letters written by Paul and other Christian writers. The Bible has been translated into more than 1,500 languages and has been read by more people than any other book.

At first the Romans did not mind that Christians did not worship their gods. The Empire was prosperous and there were not many Christians. Within the next two hundred years, barbarian warriors attacked the empire. Many Romans suggested that bad times were coming to the empire because a growing group of Christians did not worship the Roman gods.

Roman emperors became increasingly intolerant of Christianity. In 202 AD, Emperor Septimius Severus banned any Roman citizen from converting to Christianity or Judaism. Those who disobeyed the emperor were often tortured by soldiers or wild animals at sporting events. Despite the persecutions, Christianity continued to grow.

Constantine ended persecution of Christians when he seized power in 306 AD. Four years later, he made Christianity legal. A legend says that on the eve of a battle, Constantine saw a Christian symbol in the sky with words that translate to "By this sign you shall conquer." Constantine never established Christianity as the official religion of the empire, but he did encourage its growth. He ordered that Christianity be a legal and tolerated religion.

Constantine supported the church, but he continued to worship Roman gods. In 337 AD, Constantine was dying. Only then did he call for a bishop so that he could be baptized into the church. Fifty years after Constantine's death, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Christianity spread through the Roman Empire

Christianity grew from a little known, persecuted group to the principal religious faith of the Roman Empire. These factors contributed to the spread of Christianity:

- Christianity appealed to the poor because it promised a better life after people died.
- Poor and mistreated people were attracted to a faith that taught that all people were equal.
- The founder of Christianity was an actual person whose life could be easily understood.
- Missionaries spread the faith to distant lands.

- Many Christians were persecuted, but the faith and courage of the mistreated Christians inspired loyalty in Roman citizens.

Constantinople and the Fall of Rome

Constantine decided to move his government to a place that was safe from foreign invasion. Rome was under attack from barbarian invaders north of the Italian peninsula. In 330 AD, Constantine moved to a city called Byzantium in modern Turkey. Constantine renamed the city "Constantinople," which means "city of Constantine."

Roman civilization survived for centuries in Constantine's eastern empire, long after the actual city of Rome and the empire's western provinces fell to invaders. Historians refer to this as the Byzantine Empire. It included modern Greece, Yugoslavia, and Turkey. The Byzantine Empire lasted until 1453, when it fell to Turkish warriors. The warriors brought their faith in Islam to Constantinople, and converted the many churches to mosques. Constantinople is now known as Istanbul, Turkey.

While the empire continued in the east, the city of Rome was under attack. In 410 AD, illiterate warriors known as Visigoths overran the city. In 476 AD, a Visigoth warrior named Odoacer made himself emperor of Rome. The "Eternal City" of Rome continued to exist, but the empire dissolved into many small kingdoms. Western Europe fell into a period of war and disease known as the "Dark Ages." Then, after about 1000 years, the region experienced a "rebirth" known as the Renaissance. The people of the Renaissance referred to the era of the Greeks and the Romans as "the classical age," a term we still use today.

The Roman Empire is gone, but not forgotten. Roman art, architecture, government, and religion are still a part of western civilization. Roman literature, law, and language have been studied and adopted by many cultures. For nearly seventeen centuries, the Romans set the standard for future generations to follow.

Constantine Favored the Christian Church

- Constantine gave a great deal of wealth to the Christians, especially for building churches.
- He excused Christian priests from serving as city councilmen.
- Many Roman laws were revised to reflect Christian standards. Sunday was declared a holiday as "the day of the sun" so that the day would be observed by pagans as well as Christians.

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D. Spartacus

Who was Spartacus? What did he do? Why would some people say the Roman army was brutal?

E. Julius Caesar

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Why did Christianity appeal to the poor?

M. Constantinople and the Fall of Rome

Who was invading Rome from the north?

What do historians call the empire of Constantine's eastern empire?

What happened in 410 AD?

What is the period of war and disease known as in Western Europe?