

HIST 101 Western Civilization I  
Regent University

## Week 4: The Romans

### Section 1: The Rise of Rome

Historians divide Roman history into three broad categories: the kingdom of Rome (beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC), the period of the Republic (beginning in 509 BC) and the period of the Empire (beginning in 27 BC).

Rome began as a small city-state on the western side of central Italy in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. In a transformation of epic proportions, Rome became the center of an enormous imperial state that encompassed the Mediterranean basin and included parts of continental Europe, Britain, North Africa, and the Middle East.

#### The Kingdom of Rome

The ancestors of the Romans were the Latins, who took their name from the small plain of Latium ("flat land"). The Romans were aware that their Latin ancestors had lived in Latium for a long time before they established the city of Rome, but they knew little about them.



Homer's epics—the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—provided the classical world with its assumed history. So the Roman looked to Homer to supply them with a past. Because the Romans were not Greeks, they sought an ancestor from the *Iliad*'s other major nation, Troy.

According to the Romans, the Trojan prince Aeneas escaped Troy's fall and eventually made his way to the plain of Latium and married the daughter of the native King Latinus. Thirteen generations of their children reigned over Latium until Rome's founders, the twins Romulus and Remus, were born to a Latin princess and Mars, the Latin's god of war. Romulus founded the city and it bore his name—Rome.

The traditional date of Rome's founding is 753 BC. Archeological evidence confirms the existence of several primitive villages on the hills next to the Tiber River around that time. It was the first spot inland from the coast (about 20 miles) where the Tiber narrowed enough to

be easily bridged so it made a smart location for settlement.

Between 753 and 509 BC kings are said to have ruled Rome in tandem with an aristocratic council called the Senate. Senate is derived from the Latin *Senex*, which means elder. Little is known of this period of Roman history. We do know that Rome made significant progress under the leadership of its later kings. The Romans drained the swampy lowland that separated the hills on which they lived. They built the

largest temple in Italy. Archeological evidence suggests that they enjoyed a rising standard of living.

At the same time, we know that relations between the kings and the senate were strained. Ultimately, the Senators decided to dispense with kings and govern the city themselves. The exact details of this revolution are a mix of history and legend (legend says it had to do with the Roman king raping a woman). We do not know what happened for certain except that the revolution took place around 509 BC and the Roman Republic was founded.

## Section 2: The Roman Republic

The traditional date for the start of the Roman Republic is 509 BC when the landowning aristocrats--*patricians*—(many who served as Senators) overthrew the king. These patricians fought for power with the commoners, or *Plebeians*. This is known as the **Struggle of Orders**. Although it took time, as well as internal fighting between these two groups, the Roman Republic would eventually be a mixed form of government, meaning that power was shared among various groups.

Romans understood the various political experiments of the Greek City States. Romans hoped to avoid the problems of these various forms of government by mixing them. They did this by dividing the government up into **monarchial**, aristocratic (**oligarchical**) and **democratic** elements.

Consuls were the monarchial element, the Senators were the oligarchical element and the Assembly was the democratic element. The Consuls were leading citizens of Rome. The Senators also were drawn from the aristocratic families. The Assembly, however, was made up of common citizens.

Roman System - Based on Balance of Interests

Monarchical	Aristocratic	Democratic
2 Consuls + other magistrates	Senate	Assembly of Tribes  Tribune
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directed government and army</li> <li>Acted as judges</li> <li>Could issue edicts</li> <li>Acted as chief priest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Controlled state budget</li> <li>Could pass laws</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approved/rejected laws</li> <li>Decided on War</li> <li>Tribune could veto actions of magistrate</li> <li>Acted as final court</li> </ul>
Basis of power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>possess imperium, the right to rule</li> <li>need for leadership</li> </ul>	Basis of power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>members were richest men in Rome.</li> </ul>	Basis of power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provided most of the soldiers</li> </ul>
Limits on power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>one year term</li> <li>each could veto</li> </ul>	Limits on power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>could not control army</li> </ul>	Limits on power: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Could not suggest laws</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• often paid as clients by the elite</li> </ul>
Chart by Paul Halsall		

The republic's complex organization was designed to prevent any single person or group from acquiring enough power to re-establish the monarchy. All elected magistrates served terms of only one year, and they were forbidden to seek immediate reelection. The duties of the chief executive were shared by two consuls—the expectation being that each would keep the other in check. The consul's authority over soldiers in the field (their *imperium*) was absolute, but their power in the city of Rome was limited. To prevent them from seizing control of Rome, their armies were strictly forbidden to cross the *pomerium*, the city's sacred boundary. If the Senate wished to honor a general, it showed its trust by suspending this rule and granting him a "triumph" (permission to parade his men through the city).

### Section 3: The Roman Family

The Roman Republic was not a democracy. Indeed, politics in Rome was a game for the wealthy, political families. At the heart of Roman politics was the family.

A Roman *familia* (family) included not only immediate blood kin but all the dependents of a household—including slaves. The male head of a *familia*, the **paterfamilias**, had absolute authority over all its members. His sons never outgrew his power, and he could (early on in Roman history), if he wished, order their execution.

What family you belonged to had a great deal to do with political power and privileges. Family was such an important determiner of status that each Roman male needed three names to indicate the place he occupied in the social order. His first name was one of a few common names used only by close friends. His second identified his *gens*, the great clan to which his paternal ancestors belonged. His third name indicated his birth family.

#### Patronage System

A complex patronage system developed in the Roman Republic. The wealthy families still tended to hold power. The poorer citizens needed the support and protection of those who were richer and more powerful. For this reason, patron-client relationships were common in Rome.

A plebian-client (commoner) sought protection from a patrician patron (aristocrat). In return, the plebian gave the patrician both military and political support when it was needed. Clients gave their patron's political strength. They voted as he commanded or risked losing his support. A patrician, therefore, had influence in the Plebian Assembly through his clients.

No poor man could marshal enough votes to be elected to an important office. He also could not afford to serve because the Republic's magistrates were not paid. Office holders funded the costs of their position from their private fortunes.

Political power in the Roman Republic took years to attain. An individual spent a long time building a client base, developing their political clout, and forming political alliances. A man who wanted a major office had to spend years pursuing it.

### Section 4: Roman Expansion

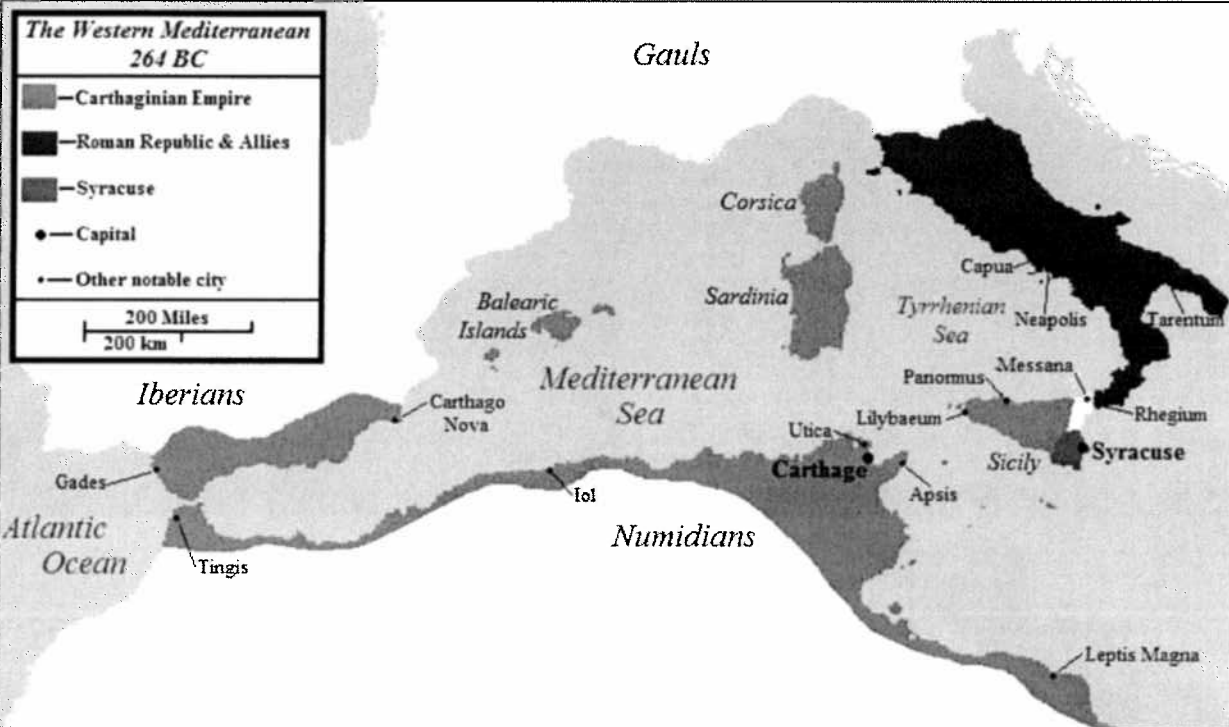
During the Republic, the Romans launched their imperial enterprise, a process which took more than 500 years. The rise of Rome as a world power was a slow process that developed in stages. It began in the 490's BC (while Greece was in its golden era) with Roman control over its Latin neighbors in central Italy. Over the next several hundred years, Rome encompassed most of the Italian peninsula.

Roman Expansion occurred in three stages: uniting the Italian Peninsula, wars with Carthage, and conquest of the Hellenistic/Greek States.

**Stage 1:**

**Italy  
Peninsula**

In 507 BC, Rome was just one city-state although it was the principal city-state in Latium. Rome



formed a treaty with the other city-states in Latium, known as the Latin League; however, Rome was the strongest city-state in the League. As the principal city state in the Latin League, Rome was able to use soldiers from other city-states for its own imperial agenda.

From roughly 300 BC to 146 BC, Rome continued to expand its power throughout Italy, both north and south. By 146 BC Latin was considered the primary language of the Italian Peninsula and there was increasing pressure to adopt the language.

By the 200 BC's, Roman expansion throughout Italy was almost complete. It had become one of the major states in the whole of the Mediterranean world. Expansion brought Rome into conflict with another leading Mediterranean state based in North Africa—Carthage.

**Stage 2: Carthage**

The Carthaginians had borrowed heavily from the Greek and Phoenician (modern day Lebanon) world. Carthaginian power was based on its trade network in the Mediterranean Sea. Carthage had close relations with the Italian Peninsula, particularly as a trading partner. In the first year of the Roman Republic (507 BC), Carthage made a formal treaty with Rome and some of its neighbors. The two sides agreed to establish friendly relations. But growing Roman influence in the Mediterranean was seen as a threat by Carthage to its own power and ability to conduct commercial trade. Conflict developed between these two empires.

Relations broke down by 264 BC with the **First Punic War**. Punic was the Latin word for the Carthaginian people. The war erupted over control of Sicily. Sicily was under the Carthaginian control but Rome saw it as part of their realm. Rome was the victor in the contest, which humiliated Carthage. Rome took over Sicily, which would be its first overseas colonies.

The acquisition of Sicily would bring significant changes to Roman foreign policy. Rome did not want to

pay to maintain Sicily. So they turned the province over to a Roman general and told him to raise the funds from the Sicilians themselves. The general did so by looting, taxing, etc. This general returned to Rome much wealthier than when he had left. And in Rome, wealth could mean power because of the patronage system. So becoming a provincial governor gave a person advantages in the game of Roman politics. Many individuals took note of this policy and saw military leadership and war as a way to increase military, political and financial power.

The **Second Punic War** broke out in 218 BC, when Hannibal, a Carthaginian commander, launched a surprise attack on Italy. Eventually, Rome defeated Carthage again. Carthaginian power was confined to North Africa. Its power in the Mediterranean was declining. Rome was on the rise.

The **Third Punic War** came in 146 BC when Rome launched an attack on Carthage for invading a Roman ally in North Africa. Carthage was utterly defeated and the city was destroyed. Roman citizens were sent to the area to resettle it.

### **Stage 3: Hellenistic Empires**

Roman intervention into Greek affairs began benignly. Rome, as a leading power, was asked to help settle disputes between various Greek kingdoms. Increasingly, Roman influence took on a sharper, more imperialistic, edge. With time, the Hellenistic kingdoms became client states to Rome.

Roman power over Greek cities was not always welcome. Citizens in the Greek city of Corinth jeered Roman representatives who had been sent to city to settle problems. In response, in the same year of the Third Punic War, the Romans destroyed Corinth. For this reason, 146 BC marks an important date in Roman expansion. In that year, Roman armies destroyed both Carthage and Corinth. Conquest over both Greek and Carthaginian power was complete. By that time, Rome has solidified its power over the Italian Peninsula. There was no doubt that Rome was now the ruler of the Mediterranean world.

### **Continued Expansion:**

Roman expansion continued beyond the Mediterranean world. Additional territories were added piecemeal. There was no systematic plan to the process. Romans often justified adding more land as a defensive measure; however, each addition created new vulnerabilities, which demanded more conquests.

The growth of empire represented military, political and financial opportunity for some people. Poor soldiers hoped for land or wealth that might lift their families out of poverty. The well-to-do or well-connected built massive estates on newly acquired land and sometimes achieved high political office.

The wealth of ancient civilizations such as Greece and Egypt were too tempting for Rome. The resources and food supplies of the less developed western regions such as Spain or Gaul (part of present-day France) also beckoned. There was no shortage of motivation for the creation of the Roman Empire.

The relentless expansion of empire raised a profound question for Rome: could republican government and values survive the acquisition of a huge empire?

## **Section 5: The Problems of Empire**

The transition from city-state to empire created problems and pressures for the republican government.

In the Republic, Roman governors were expected to meditate between Rome and its subject peoples.

This sometimes brought increased stability to a region. Honesty was expected from governors and their staff. However, as the empire grew, governors often failed to regulate their own behavior. Roman governors, officials and businessmen saw the conquered provinces as a way to get rich quick. Politics in Rome was an expensive game to play. Politicians needed to recoup election expenses and the provinces became a way of gaining these funds.

Many Roman officials abused their positions. The tax system especially became increasingly corrupt. The New Testament provides a look at the hate that many subject people had of tax collectors in the Roman provinces. Rome's ruling elite showed little concern for their conquered subjects. Corruption became increasingly rampant. The Roman poet Horace wrote "this perverted greed" and "lack of principle" had caused "impious slaughter...domestic fury...and lawless license." Historian E. Badian argues: "No administration in history has ever devoted itself so whole-heartedly to fleecing its subjects for the private benefit of its ruling class as Rome of the last age of the Republic" (Badian, 87).

The immense wealth brought to Rome from its conquests gave the upper classes a taste for luxury. They built elaborate homes, wore fancy clothes, gained more slaves and held lavish banquets. Many moralists argued that the Roman people were losing their traditional values.

The established Roman administration was unable to govern such a large empire. The older balance of power between the people and the senate diminished. Rotation of office eroded. Elites increasingly competed with each other for power because of the wealth that could be found in political office. Riches from Roman conquests empowered a small group of military leaders who recruited their own troops. Every Roman politician who hoped to remain in power or gain power had to get a military command because through military action a person became wealthy and who had vast clients—soldiers—underneath them. That meant that politicians needed wars. Roman leaders began to look for lands to conquer as a means to the ultimate conquest: political power within Rome itself. This led to civil wars between the leading Roman families competing for power.

## Section 6: Julius Caesar and Civil War



Between 57-52 BC, Julius Caesar, a leading general from one of the most powerful Roman families, led a campaign in Gaul. Gaul was the first Roman province remote from the Mediterranean or Black Sea. This marked an important northward shift northward in the Roman Empire.

Just as important as this shift towards the north was the popularity, power and prestige that the conquest of Gaul brought Julius Caesar. Many Senators in Rome feared Caesar's growing power. They feared that Caesar's conquest of Gaul and his growing popularity would provide him an opportunity to seize control of the Roman state. They were right to worry.

In early 49 BC Caesar led his army across the Rubicon. This river marked the boundary of Italy. As a way to protect the balance of power in the

Roman Republic, Roman law stated that no general could command troops in Italy proper. Roman historian Suetonius claims Julius Caesar said as he crossed the river: *Alea iacta est*—"the die is cast".

This phrase, still in use today, means that one has passed the point of no return.

The Senate condemned Julius Caesar's action. Pompey, a general in the east, stood with the Senate in condemning Caesar's actions as illegal. Civil war broke out but Caesar defeated his enemies in 48 BC.

In 46 BC, Caesar returned to Rome, where he no longer had rivals. He believed republican institutions no longer operated effectively. He believed only strong leadership could keep Rome from destroying itself.

How would this new political reality work? The senate appointed Caesar *dictator* for ten years. Two years later, they appointed him *dictator* for life. The office of *dictator* allowed the holder of the title greater powers than any other magistrate in Rome. The office was only used in cases of extreme emergency and was meant to be temporary. Clearly, Julius Caesar did not intend for his power to be temporary.

Many aristocrats in the Senate saw this as the beginning of a monarchy, repugnant to Roman republican traditions. On the Ides of March (March 15), 44 BC, Julius Caesar was assassinated by a group of senators. They argued that Caesar was a tyrant and could legitimately be killed. Not everyone agreed with this view. Some saw Caesar as a hero who had Rome's best interest in mind. Others viewed him as a tyrant destroying the republican traditions of Rome. William Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*, has served as the lens through which many of us consider this time in history. The name "Brutus" has become synonymous with betrayal. After he is stabbed and realizes that his friend Brutus is one of the assassins, Caesar cries, "Et tu, Brute! Then fall, Caesar!"; the Latin phrase means, "You, too, Brutus!"



The death of Caesar led to another civil war between two leading figures: Antony and Octavian. Antony was a friend and distant relative of Julius Caesar. Octavian was Caesar's nephew. Octavian ultimately prevailed—becoming the first emperor of the Roman Empire—**Caesar Octavian Augustus**. He ruled from 27 BC to AD 14.

## Section 7: Caesar Octavian Augustus and the Roman Empire



Julius Caesar's nephew, Octavian, became Rome's *imperator* (emperor). This was an ancient republican term for a victorious general, not a monarch. Octavian was very careful to avoid titles that implied he was a monarch.

Octavian preferred to use a civilian title that the grateful Romans had lavished on him to recognize his record of public service: *princeps civitatis* (first of citizens). Octavian also used the name *Augustus*—meaning "the revered one." The name was granted to him by the Roman Senate.

All of these titles were rooted in republicanism but they, like his family name Caesar, soon came to signify regal authority; indeed, we derive words such as Tsar or Kaiser from Caesar.

A monarchy, which set one man above all the others, promised more stability, but Romans equated monarchy with servitude/slavery. Despite the fact that the republic was dead, Romans still clung to republican ideals. After the era of civil wars, Rome's immediate need for a leader strong enough to restore order bought Octavian a period of grace to solidify his power. BUT he had to tread carefully in respect to Rome's republican past.

For eight years, Octavian served as consul but this was risky. It looked too much like monarchy. So in 27 BC, he secured his position by threatening to give up power. There was no risk that the Senate would accept this offer because they knew without Octavian, Rome would disintegrate into chaos. So instead, they thanked him for his service to the republic by granting him the title—*Augustus* and prevailed on him to continue as consul. In this way, Augustus was able to retain power but appear to pay allegiance to Rome's republican traditions.

Augustus was very careful to avoid anything that smacked of monarchy. His home was a typical upper class residence—not a kingly palace. He wore ordinary civilian dress and claimed that his togas were home-spun by his wife and daughter. He wandered the streets, entered into the fray of elections, solicited votes for candidates he backed, took part in debates and treated his senatorial colleagues as equals.

Augustus's stated affection for republican tradition was not entirely insincere. He did share power with the Senate and other magistrates. BUT he was in effect, the ruler of Rome. In fact, he introduced the practice of emperor worship in the eastern provinces, where the people were used to the idea of a divine or semi-divine ruler. In the west, which did not practice emperor worship, Augustus and his successors, were deified (thought to become gods) once they died. Over time, an imperial cult with ceremonies, processions, temples, statues and rituals developed throughout the empire.

### **Augustinian Reforms**

Augustus brought order out of chaos. He truly believed that he was saving Rome from destruction. He believed that the state should promote the good life by protecting its citizens and fighting barbarism.

Augustus engaged in extensive public building activity in Rome in his own name and members of his family. Aqueducts and water mains were built throughout Rome, bringing water into Roman homes. New temples were built and older religious sites and monuments were restored. He organized a police and fire force. He improved roads throughout the Italian Peninsula.

Caesar Augustus's main reforms focused on the military. He was eager to shrink the army. One reason was fiscal. Rome had an army twice as large as they could afford. A second reason was political. Augustus was eager to prevent the outbreak of more civil wars and challenges to his own authority. A smaller army meant fewer generals. Fewer generals meant fewer threats to Augustus's own power. Augustus retired about 300,000 men from the army, cutting the number of legions by over half.

Augustus then posted the remaining legions along the frontiers of the empire limiting generals' opportunities to interfere in politics in Rome. Elite troops of about 4500 men, the Praetorian Guard, were created to protect the city of Rome and Italy. This army was professionalized, meaning they were state employees no longer dependent on their generals for pay and retirement benefits. This took away some of the incentive for troops to follow a general into a power play.

To back up these legions, Augustus created auxiliaries, companies of men recruited from the provinces. Auxiliaries were less well paid than legionnaires, but a term of honorable service earned citizenship for

the veteran of an auxiliary unit and qualified his sons to join the legions. Reform of the military therefore provided entry into Roman society for provincials, and created closer ties between Rome and its outlying territories.

We also find that military reforms helped to consolidate the empire. Roads were built for the purpose of moving armies. This created a vast road network linking Rome with its outer territories. Military outposts along these roads became cities. These cities in turn assumed responsibility for administering the districts in which they were located and helped to spread the Latin language and culture, particularly in the western parts of the Empire.

Augustus instituted standardized governments in these places and reduced corruption by establishing fixed rates of taxation and by appointing state officials to collect and audit taxes (although we know from the New Testament, tax collector corruption was still a reality).

The Roman Empire became a kind of federation of city-states. Each of its urban centers operated within parameters set by the central administration but each also accommodated local customs. Indeed, while Romanization spread widely, in many places this classical civilization was only a thin veneer over native cultures that outlasted the empire.

## Section 8: Romanitas

Augustus inaugurated Rome's golden age—the *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace). For the next two hundred years, there was relative peace and prosperity throughout the empire.

Augustus, like many Romans, believed that Italy had been able to build the empire because of the unique strength and virtues of the Roman people—their *Romanitas*.

### Virgil's Aeneid:

One poet who agreed with Augustus that the Roman people had been destined for greatness was Virgil. Between 29 and 19 BC, Virgil worked on an epic poem, the *Aeneid*. The *Aeneid* tells the legend of Aeneas, a survivor of the fall of Troy. Aeneas is on a mission to establish a new home—a new Troy—for the survivors. He eventually lands in Italy where the Trojans defeat the Latins. Virgil focuses on national glory. He expresses Roman virtues—patriotism, devotion to the family, duty to the state and a strong sense of religion.

Click [here](#) to read an excerpt of the *Aeneid*.

The *Aeneid* was instantly recognized as a classic. The poem was immediately adopted as part of the school curriculum. Virgil came to be taught throughout the Latin-speaking parts of the Empire. Virgil and Homer were regarded as the greatest poets of antiquity. Dante, author of the *Divine Comedy*, calls Virgil "our greatest poet".

### The Glory of Rome

Other public figures agreed with Virgil. Publius Aelius Aristides, a wealthy landowner whose family had become Roman citizens, praised the glory of Rome.

Click [here](#) to read Aristides's speech glorifying the *Pax Romana*.

Increasingly, Romans began to emphasize the need to preserve Italy's traditions and cultural dominance. Horace, the greatest Roman poet during his lifetime, wrote about the glories and virtues of Rome; however, he also warned Romans that they must remain true to traditional Roman values in order to retain their empire.

Click [here](#) to read some of the "Odes" of Horace.

Not everyone saw the imperial period as wholly glorious. Tacitus, the greatest of Roman historians, was sympathetic to republican institutions. He believed emperors were needed in order to maintain stability within the empire but this did not mean that all emperors were good. In his *Histories*, he does not always paint a pretty picture of the emperors. He shows that emperors could often be power hungry and certainly had many faults.

Click [here](#) to read an excerpt of Tacitus's *Histories*.

**Test your understanding of the materials by taking this brief self-assessment:**

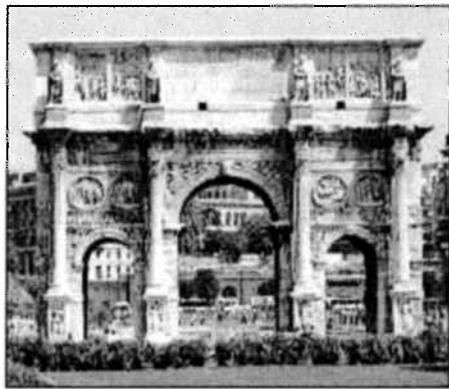
Quiz Group



## Section 9: Greco-Roman Culture

While many Romans at the height of the empire believed the Roman people had unique cultures, Roman culture also rapidly adopted Greek culture, creating a hybrid-Greco-Roman culture that would dominate the west.

### Architecture



Romans followed Greeks more closely in some fields than others. In architecture, they built on Greek ideas and made contributions of their own. They appreciated Greek emphasis on symmetrical designs but Roman buildings were often much larger and complex. They added curves—arches and domes—to the linear elements. The Romans invented concrete and used it to construct new kinds of imposing but graceful structures.

### Engineering

Related to architecture was Rome's unique gift for engineering. They created roads across difficult terrain that lasted centuries. They tunneled through mountains. They created complex systems of aqueducts in order to supply Roman cities with



water.

## Literature

In terms of literature, the Romans built on Greek writing. Most of the early Roman literature was composed in Greek rather than Latin. At about the same time that Romans were discovering Greek literature, they were introduced to Greek philosophy. Athens dispatched a number of its prominent teachers to Rome as ambassadors.

## Philosophy

Despite their fondness for Greek culture, Romans were wary of philosophies that undermined Roman values. Traditional Roman values included: resoluteness, simplicity in manners and a willingness to sacrifice personal interests for the good of Rome.

The traditional values of Roman culture disposed the Romans to reject philosophies that flirted with atheism and religions that undercut moral rigor.

Traditional Roman culture emphasized moral virtue as a major strength of Roman culture. In 186 BC, the Senate had outlawed the worship of Dionysus because the cult was associated with excess. In 173 BC it had banished Epicurean philosophers for teaching what it regarded as self-indulgent quietism.

The Romans did, however, adopt the humanist outlook of the Greeks. They believed that human intelligence was of highest importance. Because republican politicians had to solicit support from voters and sway the thinking of popular assemblies, they were attracted to the study of rhetoric, the art of persuasive speaking pioneered by Greek philosophers.

The Greek philosophy that most appealed to the Romans was Stoicism. In fact, Rome produced well-known Stoic philosophers. Stoics provided a rationale for the traditional Roman virtues of duty and self-discipline. Its doctrine of natural law, which applies universally to all humanity, also fit with Roman ideals of a large empire, where all people had the same duty.

The Romans also inherited the Greek love for public spectacles. The Greek and Roman religious calendars were full of festivals which were celebrated with games. While the Greeks had a passion for athletic competitions, the Romans loved to witness the shedding of animal and human blood.

## Gladiatorial Games

In the Roman Republic, politicians had tried to bribe voters and gain popularity by hosting lavish games. Augustus and later emperors continued this tradition. Augustus funded both grain distribution and games for the Roman masses. This has been encapsulated in the famous phrase "bread and circus," as a way to placate the masses. Augustus staged gladiatorial games involving 10,000 men and 35,000 animals. Later emperors even outdid Augustus.

Exotic animals from around the known world were imported at great expense in order to kill them. Slaves, criminals and captives were frequently placed in gladiatorial games. Some Romans, especially Stoics, hated the games but the masses loved them. It was politically unwise to criticize what the masses loved. For this reason, Roman politicians supported the games.

## Section 10: The Pax Romana

By the time that Augustus died, the growing collection of Roman provinces had become a single empire. For almost 200 years, the provinces were generally at peace and emperors helped to ensure reasonably effective safeguards in Rome against excesses by Roman officials in the provinces.

After Augustus, politics in Rome was marked by the growing power of the emperor. There was no widespread popular support to return to the republican system. The Senate did not seek to restore

republicanism because they feared political chaos and civil war. So the imperial bureaucracy grew larger.

### **Julio-Claudian Dynasty**

The first four emperors who succeeded Augustus were related to him or his wife. They constitute the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which ruled from AD 14 to AD 68. This dynasty ended with the suicide of Emperor Nero, who had grown tyrannical and lost the confidence of the Roman people.

### **Flavian Dynasty**

After a brief civil war, the Flavian Dynasty (69 AD-96 AD) was established by Vespasian and included his sons Titus and Domitian.

### **Nerva-Antonine Dynasty**

In 96 AD, after the assassination of Domitian, a Roman Senator—Nerva—became Emperor. Nerva established an important policy, which brought greater stability to the empire. Nerva adopted a son with proven ability as a leader. This adopted son was then made the heir of the throne. In this way, competent rulers would remain on the throne rather than a hereditary heir who may not have been a capable ruler.

From the succession of Nerva in 96 AD to the death of Marcus Aurelius in AD 180, the Roman Empire reached its height of prosperity and power. This era is known as the period of "the Five Good Emperors".

Nerva	96 AD-98 AD
Trajan	98 AD-117 AD
Hadrian	117 AD-138 AD
Antoninus Pius	138 AD-161 AD
Marcus Aurelius	161 AD-180 AD

The Romans saw the Pax Romana as the fulfillment of Rome's mission and destiny—the creation of a world state that provided, peace, civilization, security. The Romans built close to 53,000 miles of roads throughout the empire. They cleared forests, built and improved harbors, they brought irrigation to dry areas and drained wet areas. Their water systems helped bring clean water to areas. Roman peace stimulated trade because roads were safe and navigable. They brought Greco-Roman culture to previously untouched areas such as North Africa, Britain, South Germany.

By creating a stable, single political community, the Romans did not face the same problem as the Greek city states –constant warfare between the city-states. Romans also did not divide the world into Roman and non-Roman as the Greeks had done (Greek versus non-Greek). Certainly, Romans viewed people outside the Roman Empire as barbarians but Roman citizenship could be expanded. People could come under Roman rule and become Roman citizens, partaking in the greatness of Roman civilization.

### **Roman Law**

Roman law brought order and stability. The earliest written laws in Rome developed during the republican period.

*The Twelve Tablets* established for Rome a written law code that would be applied to all citizens. These were written laws that served as the legal foundation of the Roman Republic. They were inscribed on twelve tablets and posted in the Roman Forum (a public square in Rome) for all Romans to read.

Over the centuries, civil laws expanded by statutes enacted by the assembly as well as precedents set by judicial magistrates. To this Roman tradition, Romans added elements from the legal tradition of the

Greeks and other conquered people. Stoicism and its emphasis on universal standards based on natural law also shaped the Roman legal system. Romans argued the law should be uniform, universal and should be able to be understood by all rational people.

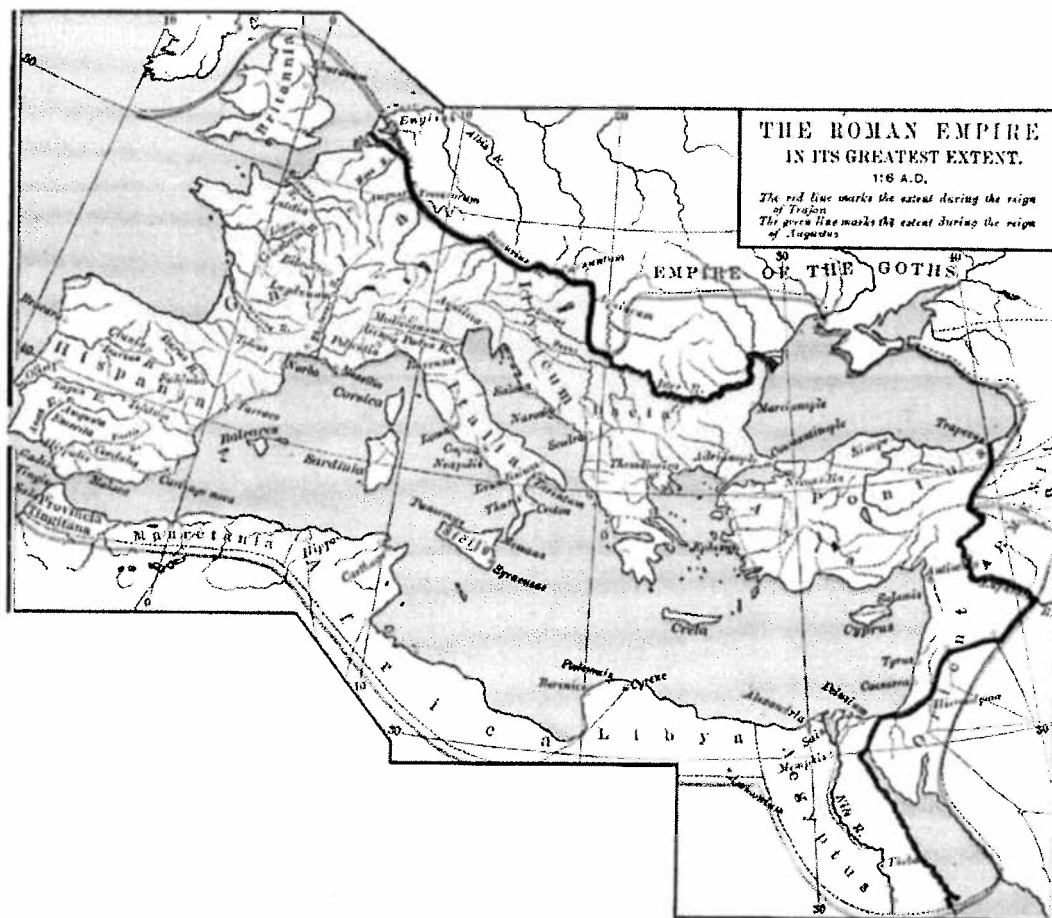
The great Roman writer and thinker Cicero argued, "True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchangeable and everlasting...And there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times," (*De Republica*, Cicero).

**Test your understanding of the materials by taking this brief self-assessment:**

Quiz Group



## Section 11: Roman Expansion and Rule



Roman expansion had more or less come to halt by the reign of Hadrian (117-138).

From the late first to the fourth century (300's), with a few exceptions, the Roman provinces saw remarkably few internal revolts. Rome enjoyed extraordinary success and stability. The Roman Empire was not, on the whole, governed by Romans. In any given

year, the central government sent out about 160 officials for a population of 50 million. The most important officials were the 40 some provincial governors appointed by the Senate or the emperor, each of whom held the office for between one and five years.

The Roman world was a world of cities. In the whole of the Roman Empire, there were thousands of cities although a specific number is difficult to determine. The local civic elite were responsible for the

collection of taxes, urban and rural police duties, road-building and maintenance, food and water supply. Cities already existed in the east such as in Greece and the present-day Middle East. In the west, there were far fewer towns. These, the Romans often created from scratch.

The size of provincial cities varied widely. The average Roman city would probably be counted in the tens of thousands. There were exceptions Alexandria had more than half a million. The population of Rome itself would have been a little over one million.

Throughout the Roman Empire, particularly within the cities, the lives and cultures of the local people were significantly changed. This was especially true of the western part of the empire. Language, religious practices, drinking habits and naming practices took on Roman characteristics. This process is generally referred to as **Romanization** (becoming Roman). The political dominance of Rome made Roman things fashionable. People wanted to be and look Roman. In this way, people often willingly assimilate in a process that might be referred to as "**self-Romanization**" rather than forced.

The eastern parts of the Roman Empire did not become "Romanized" to the extent that the western provinces did. The west became thoroughly Romanized. In the east, the dominant culture was Greek culture.

It is helpful to think of Europe in the first 3 centuries AD as being divided into three distinct regions.

1. *Core Empire*: The "core empire" was the innermost region of the empire. These were the provinces administered directly by Roman officials. The inhabitants paid taxes directly to Rome and were subject to direct Roman authority.
2. *Inner Periphery*: The second zone lay just beyond the core. It was territory subject to Roman rule but was not under direct Roman administration. These territories were most often controlled by client kings or native allies. This territory was still subject to Rome; in fact, the Roman Emperor often influenced the succession of these kings. However, they were not under direct Roman rule or administrators. It was the second zone that was heavily militarized. In the second region is where the army's impact was felt the most. For example, some 60,000 Roman soldiers were stationed in Britain in the 200 AD's for a population of around 4 million. This is one soldier for every 65 civilians.
3. *Outer Tribes*: The third region was where tribal people lived and who were not subject to Roman rule. It was these tribal people that soldiers stationed in the second zone defended against.

## Roman Citizenship

Gradually, the empire granted citizenship to various individuals, families, or whole communities for their service to the empire or because they had become thoroughly Romanized.

In 212 AD, Roman citizenship was bestowed on almost all free people of the empire. Citizenship offered several advantages to people. They could now hold office, they could serve in the legions (Roman military units), and more.

## The Jewish People

Romanization certainly did not erase other identities, such as being Greek, Egyptian or a citizen of a particular city. This was particularly true of the Jewish people.

One subject people tried repeatedly to throw off Roman yolk—the Jews. In AD 66, the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem rose up in revolt and massacred the city's Roman garrison. After a long siege, Jerusalem fell to the Romans in September 70 AD. The Great Temple, the center of the Jewish religion, was destroyed.

A second Revolt in Judea occurred in 132. By 135, the Jews were defeated and Judea was laid to waste by the Romans. The Romans saw the problem not as a Judean problem but a Jewish one.

This was confirmed by a Jewish revolt outside of Judea in Egypt and Cyprus in 116-117 AD. As

punishment, no Jew was allowed on the island of Cyprus.

The fundamental problem was the refusal of the Jewish people to religiously assimilate to Roman ways. Other groups, such as the Celts in Gaul, had adopted the Roman gods. This acceptance by non-Roman people was often half-hearted. They generally mixed older religious practices with Roman names and gods. The Roman world was a world of religious pluralism.

The strict monotheism of the Jewish people was incompatible with the Roman polytheistic and pluralistic system. The practice of the Mosaic Law prevented Jews from assimilating with Gentiles and made them stand out as a distinct people. There was also the Jewish belief that God had given them the land of Palestine as part of the covenant. To submit to Roman rule, according to many Jews, was a violation of the covenant.

Assimilation was also a key problem for another group—Christians. This would be the fundamental problem with Christians in the Roman Empire.

**Test your understanding of the materials by taking this brief self-assessment:**

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## Section 12: Christianity and the Roman Empire

It is very difficult to determine the size of the Christian population in the Roman Empire from the death and resurrection of Christ until 300 AD. The size of the Christian community varied significantly from one region or city to another. Overall, the Christian community would have been a small minority of the total population into the 200's AD.

The Christian community made steady growth however. According to Rodney Stark in *The Rise of Christianity*, this was based on a variety of factors.

1. **Exclusive Commitment and Missionary Zeal:** Christianity demanded exclusive commitment. Pagan religions were not exclusive. The Greco-Roman world was pluralistic; it was fragmented; it was socially disorganized. Christianity provided community. It provided organization. It provided purpose. This appealed to many Roman citizens. This sense of purpose and the dictates of Scripture also gave Christian a missionary zeal. Christians focused on demonstrating Christian love and preaching the Gospel to their neighbors.
2. **Christian Charity:** Christian values of love and charity were translated into social service. Emperor Julian noted that "Christians devoted themselves to philanthropy" and he urged pagan priests to compete with the Christians in this service. When disasters, such as epidemic disease—which were common in the Roman Empire—hit, Christians demonstrated Christian charity. They looked out for one another and this resulted in substantially higher rates of survival. So that meant in the aftermath of epidemics, Christians made up a larger percentage of the population. Some may have seen their survival rates as miraculous. Christians often took care of non-Christians during epidemics when others had abandoned them. Christians demonstrated charity in other ways as well. In the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, the church in Rome supported 154 priests and some 1500 widows, orphans and destitute people.
3. **Women:** There is strong evidence to suggest that there were more conversions among Roman women than men. Women were often the first in their families to become Christians where it spread to other members of the family. Overall, women enjoyed far higher status within the Christian sub-culture than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large. Romans had high rates of female infanticide (they killed female children). Christians prohibited infanticide for any child.

Roman culture had strong double standard concerning sexual matters, expecting women to remain chaste while men were allowed to engage in licentious behaviors. Christians denied any double standard in sexual matters. Roman women were pressured to always be under the guardianship of a male, often resulting in pressure to marry. The Christians highly respected widowhood and remarriage, if anything, was mildly discouraged. This allowed Christian women the choice to remarry or not. If you were a rich widow, you kept your property. If you were a poor widow, you were taken care of by the church. For all these reasons, Roman women were attracted to Christianity. We are unsure how often these Christian women converted their husbands or family members, but there is strong evidence to suggest that Christianity did spread in this way.

4. **Fertility and Family:** We know that while the Roman world worked hard at expanding its population, and families were encouraged to have three or more children but according to the Roman historian Tacitus, "childlessness prevailed." The growth rates were lower than hoped. Roman fertility was low for a variety of reasons: marriage was held in low esteem. Prostitution and homosexuality were very common in Roman culture, neither of which promoted the growth of families. Infanticide was also very common. Abortion was also commonly practiced by Romans. Birth control was also practiced throughout the empire. In contrast, Christians held marriage in high esteem. Their fertility rates remained quite high. They prohibited abortion and infanticide. For all these reason, the Christian community grew.
5. **Martyrdom:** While their exclusive commitment to Christ was appealing to many Romans, it was also the strangest and most offensive aspect of Christianity to its pagan neighbors (it still is to this day). The Christian faith was an exclusive monotheism and it was antagonistic to all other supernatural powers. Christian denial of other gods caused them to be tagged as "atheist" and was one reason behind the empire's intermittent persecution of Christians. This was especially true of the cult of emperors. By the first century AD, Romans began to regard their deceased emperors as gods and established a religious cult to bolster the authority of living emperors. It was the refusal of early Christians to take part in this cult that provoked their periodic persecution by Roman authorities who saw them as lacking dedication to Rome. Facing martyrdom with courage provided Christians with another opportunity to impress their neighbors. Eusebius, the early church historian, argued that the bravery and steadfastness of the martyrs was proof of Christian virtue and that it impressed many pagans deeply.

Click [here](#) to read an early account of a Christian Martyr.

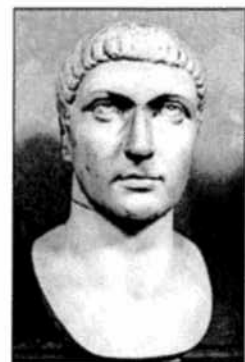
Due to persecution by Roman authorities, Christians did not always view the Roman Empire as highly as others such as Virgil. The Book of Revelation paints a bleak picture of the Roman Empire.

Click [here](#) to read the Apostle John's description of Rome.

## Section 13: Constantine the Great

There was an estimated 5-7.5 million Christians in the Roman Empire by the reign of Constantine the Great in 300 AD. That was about 10% of the total population. This was a significant faction of the society since Rome was pluralistic with many different religious groups. So while Christianity was still a minority within the empire at the time of Constantine's reign, it was a growing minority with increasing influence.

One of the most significant events in the history of Christianity was the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. The story recorded by early church historians is that Constantine had a dream (or vision) of a heavenly symbol in the sky. This symbol, according to most sources, was the **Chi Rho**, an early Christian symbol. Chi Rho was the first two Greek letters in the name Christ.



Constantine claims that he was instructed by a voice to place this sign on the shields of his soldiers. The voice commanded him: "In this sign, conquer." Constantine did as he was instructed. That day he was

victorious over his enemies at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312 AD).

There is a great deal of debate about the sincerity of Constantine's acceptance of Christianity. He certainly hoped Christianity would act as glue to hold together the empire's very diverse population in a weakening imperial state; nevertheless, he also showed a genuine interest in the theological debates during his reign. What we can say for sure is that Constantine did not receive baptism until his death bed.

Constantine issued his famous **Edict of Milan** in 313 which granted toleration for the practice of Christianity in the empire. Constantine and his successors thus provided Christians with newfound security and opportunities. Indeed, some Christians saw the glory of Rome and the Glory of the Kingdom of God as intertwined.

Click **here** to read an excerpt from the earliest church historian Eusebius. How does his portrayal of Rome differ from the Apostle John's?

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## Section 14: Christianity after Constantine

After Constantine, Christianity continued to grow in strength but it was not yet the official religion of the empire. Traditional cults continued to be practiced into the fourth century (300's). In a few places, the traditional cults continued into the fifth century (400's).

From 312 onward, imperial patronage was put behind Christianity and not paganism. Pressure was put on senators to convert to Christianity. Imperial legislation gradually defined more and more aspects of pagan religious rituals as illegal.

Emperors after Constantine were all Christians with the exception of Julian (360-363)—a committed pagan who promoted the traditional cults. Eventually, there was a shift from Christianity being tolerated, to Christianity being favored, to Christianity being the official state religion. Constantine himself was responsible for only a few destructions of traditional temples. By the Emperor Theodosius (reigned 370-395 AD), there was an enforced ban on all polytheistic ritual sacrifices and Theodosius ordered pagan temples closed.

Christians by contrast received patronage for their buildings, official approval for their doctrines, suppression of their rivals, prestige from imperial recognition, and during the late fourth century, the proclamation of Christianity as the official state religion. During the 400's, more temples were destroyed or converted into churches. Christians could be responsible for serious acts of violence against pagan cults; however, other Christians attempted to find common ground by combining the Classical and Christian.

Christian festivals began to take over from the traditional ones. From 321 onward, Sunday held the status of "holiday." The Easter period became increasingly celebrated throughout the empire when courts were officially closed for Easter celebrations. In the 300's, December 25<sup>th</sup> was chosen as the birth date of Christ. This was coordinated to replace a pagan holiday worshipping the sun on December 25<sup>th</sup>. In this way, Christian officials hoped to combat the pagan holiday.

## Monasticism

Monasticism began in the eastern portion of the Roman Empire but it would eventually be embraced by western Christians. Monasticism initially began as a solitary endeavor. A monastic was an individual who deliberately separated himself or herself from normal life to devote himself or



herself to prayer and religious devotion. By the fourth century, thousands of Christians had decided to pursue some form of monastic life in the desert, forest or mountains. Eventually, communal monasticism emerged where monks pursued the devoted life together in community.

Benedict of Nursia was the most significant influence on western monasticism. His *Rule* for monks became the most influential document for the western monastic tradition. The *Rule* was written for Benedict's own monastery at Monte Casino near Naples.

In the *Rule*, Benedict instructs moderation rather than the extreme asceticism of some monks. The *Rule* encouraged three principle activities. First, the work of God, including worship seven times a day. These seven times of prayer and worship can still be found in church practices today such as *vespers*, *Matins* and *Compline*. Second, monks were to engage in spiritual reading of the Bible. They also spent time copying manuscripts and other intellectual pursuits. Third, monks were required to engage in manual labor for seven to eight hours a day.

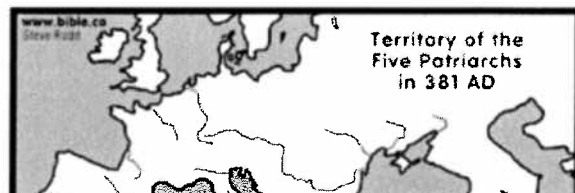
Click [here](#) to read an excerpt from Benedict's Rule.

Monastic life was never fully withdrawn from society. Monasteries established schools, orphanages, ministered to the local poor and sick and also engaged in commercial trade. Towns often grew up around monasteries, making them less isolated.

## Church Structure

As Christianity spread within the Roman Empire and beyond, it developed a hierarchical organization, with patriarchs, bishops, and priests.

Certain cities emerged as the seat of patriarchs—the highest ranking officials in the Christian Church.



Five ancient cities emerged as the first major seats of Christianity: Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople. The Bishop of Rome, later called the *Pope* (father) claimed primacy over the other Patriarchs. This was based on the fact that Peter and Paul were both martyred in Rome and the fact that it served as the capital of the Roman Empire.

Underneath these Patriarchs were Bishops of particular cities or regions. Underneath these Bishops were priests of individual churches.

### **Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, on Rome**

It was one of these bishops who had the difficult task of explaining the relationship between Rome and Christianity when the Roman Empire began to decline. When Rome came under serious attack in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of equating the kingdom of God and the Roman Empire became problematic.

In 410, Visigoths sacked Rome—an utter disaster for the Roman Empire. Non-Christians blamed the tragedy on Christianity arguing that Christians had refused to make sacrifices to the ancient gods. Even Christians were disconcerted. Where was their kingdom of God on earth that many believed the Roman Empire would usher into existence?

The person who would respond to these questions was Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in North Africa. Augustine had been born in North Africa where he had exhibited a keen intellect as a child. He was able to attend school in Carthage where he studied rhetoric—the art of verbal persuasion. Despite doing well in his chosen profession, Augustine still struggled to find meaning in his life. Eventually, he turned to Christianity. He left his position as teacher to the imperial family and became a priest. He was ultimately made Bishop at Hippo.

In response to the disintegration of Rome, Augustine wrote one of the greatest Christian works of all time, *City of God*. Plato had written *The Republic* in response to problems he saw in Athens. In his work, Plato expressed hope that an ideal state could exist if based on rational principles. Augustine differed from Plato. He believed that the worldly city could never be the central concern of the Christian. The ideal cannot be realized on earth, only in heaven. The collapse of Rome should not distress Christians because Christianity did not belong to the earthly realm but rather to the spiritual. Christians were citizens of the *City of God* but they only sojourned in the *City of Man*.

Click **here** to read some of Augustine's *City of God*. He responds to Rome (indeed, any earthly empire) differently than other writers before him.

## **Next Steps:**

After completing all the readings for this week, proceed to the *Commentary* section of this course (if needed) and then engage in the dialogue under *Conversation*.

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