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“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”

—Jeremiah 6:16



“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”

—Proverbs 21:1

## INTRODUCTION FOR THE STUDENT

*Understanding the Past Five Centuries* tells the story of modern times from the 1500s to our own time. The seventh-grade book in this series tells about ancient events in the Eastern Hemisphere. This book focuses mainly on more recent events in the Eastern Hemisphere, especially in Europe.

If your background is European, your reading interests might lie more with Europe than with Asia and Africa. However, the cultures of Europeans, Asians, and Africans all made their unique contributions to world history, and they all have their effects on the present time. The zero, for instance, came from the Far East.

After a review of early Christian history, you will study the burning issues of the Reformation and the religious conflicts that resulted from it. You will go on to trace the struggles of cultures, kingdoms, and empires. The constant clash of people's ideas resulted not only in wars and revolutions but also in mission efforts, the writing of great books, the establishment of orphanages, and much more.

This textbook tells of all kinds of people, from emperors to explorers, from philosophers to slaves. It tells of curious mixtures—science and suffering, missionaries and opium merchants, diplomats and promise breakers, democracy and violence, increasing prosperity

and declining morals. It tells of a dynamite maker who promoted peace, of Americans who rescued Russians from starvation, of a lightning war that got stuck, of churches that were licensed by atheists.

You will meet bold, rough individuals who were considered to be giants in their time. But you will also become acquainted with spiritual men and women. Although some of their names receive little or no mention in secular encyclopedias, they made contributions far greater than their reputations.

History explains how things came to be as they are today. Many students of history see little order or reason in events of the past. They wonder what it all means and where the world is headed from here. But we know! Looking back over the strange and stormy past, we can trace a golden thread—the faithfulness of God to His people, and their faithfulness to Him. Surely God will have control in the future as He had in the past.

This book is organized into twenty-eight chapters. Each chapter is divided into a number of smaller sections, and several sets of study exercises are distributed throughout the chapter. Review exercises are found at the end of each chapter, and a test for every two chapters is found in a separate test booklet.

May God bless you as you study diligently for His glory and for your own benefit.

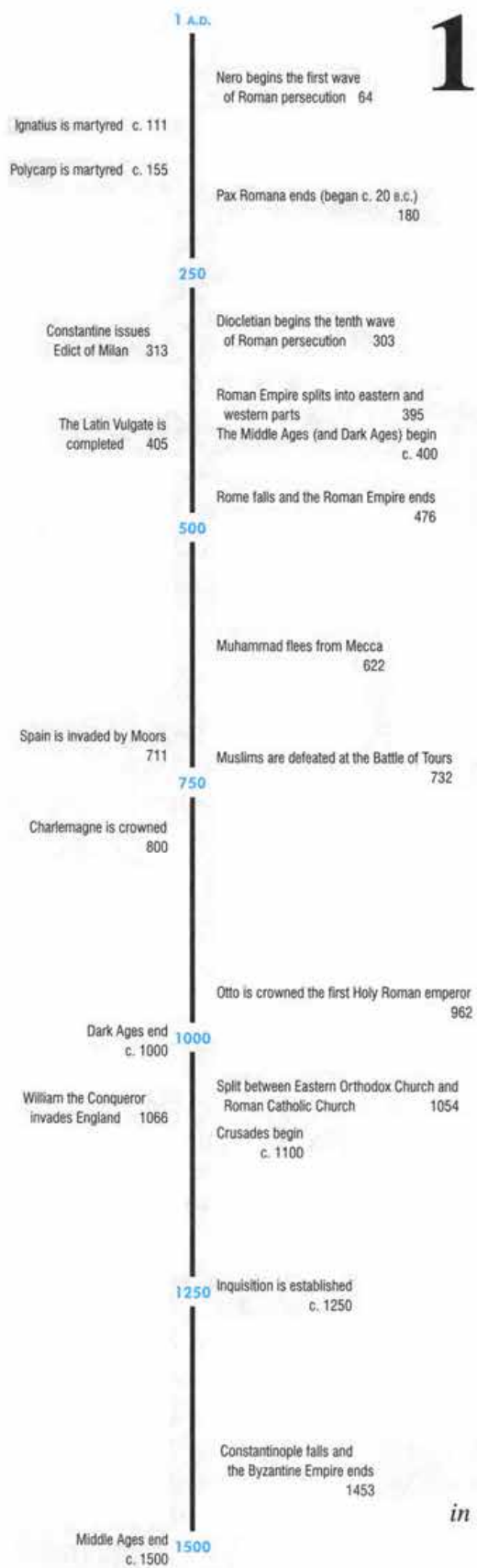
**Front cover:** The Imperial Palace, the home of the Japanese emperor, lies at the heart of Tokyo. Stone walls, moats, and park-like grounds separate the palace from the bustling city around it. Thousands of Japanese pay their respects to the emperor on the two days of the year that the palace is open to the public—January 2 and the emperor's birthday.



Old arched bridge across the Tiber River in Rome. After the Roman Empire fell, Rome continued to hold great influence over much of Europe as the center of Roman Catholicism.

# 1

## From Christ to the Crusades



THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

THE DECAY OF CHRISTIANITY

THE DECLINE OF ROME

DARK AGES IN WESTERN EUROPE

THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

THE PERSECUTED CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

THE MUSLIM WORLD

BEGINNING OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

*“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.”*

*Ephesians 5:8*

## FROM CHRIST TO THE CRUSADES

You probably know about chain reactions. One of the simplest can be illustrated by dominoes set up in a row. If you knock over the first one, each domino in turn pushes over the next.

Some of the most complex chain reactions are the events of history. Discoveries lead to explorations, which lead to increased trade, which leads to intense competition, which leads to wars, which lead to inventions, which lead to more discoveries.

To understand recent times, we must have some knowledge of previous times. The seventh grade book in this series gives a view of early world history; therefore, this chapter will review only a few of the main events since the time of Christ. Chapter 2 introduces what historians call modern times, and the following chapters focus in more detail on the last several centuries. Even in chapters that deal with modern centuries, this text occasionally reviews the more distant past to help you remember important names, dates, and events.

### The Spread of Christianity

About fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead, the church was born on the day of Pentecost. With the sound as of a rushing mighty wind, the Holy Spirit filled Christ's band of believers who were waiting at Jerusalem. As people heard the effects of the Holy Spirit's arrival, a crowd gathered around the believers and heard them proclaim God's wonderful works. Many in the awestruck crowd repented, and they too received the Holy Spirit. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).

Persecution from unbelieving Jews soon followed, but it only scattered the Christians like firebrands in a strong wind. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every



Stoning of Stephen. Persecution of Christians began with this incident, and it scattered the Christians from Jerusalem to many other places.

where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The Good News went to Europe with Paul and to Africa with an Ethiopian eunuch; and according to tradition, Thomas carried it to India. Within the lifetime of the apostles, the Gospel had spread to much of the known world.

The Roman world was ready for Christ's coming. Christianity offered answers for troubled minds that were dissatisfied with the old Roman religion and that had been stirred by the questions of Greek philosophers. It offered hope for the thousands of slaves in the empire. Its message of salvation through Christ could be spread rapidly by missionaries, for the Roman Empire had well-built roads and reasonable security in this time of Roman peace, called *Pax Romana* (paks' rō·mä'·nä). No wonder Galatians 4:4 says that Jesus was born "when the fulness of the time was come."

The Christians emphasized love, yet to many people they must have seemed strangely intolerant. They refused to consider their faith to be just one among many equal religions. They would not compromise in accepting heathen rites and beliefs. They preached that men must repent, turn away from vain



**Reminders of the Roman Empire.** *Left:* Built in the first century A.D., this Roman aqueduct still brings water to the city of Segovia, Spain, from a river 10 miles (16 km) away. Only about 900 feet (274 m) of the aqueduct is above the ground; the rest consists of underground water conduits. This photograph shows some of the 148 arches needed to span uneven terrain so that water can flow by gravity. *Right:* The Colosseum at Rome. This huge amphitheater was built around A.D. 80, and its outer shell still stands today. During the Roman persecutions, thousands of Christians were killed here for public entertainment.

idols, and serve the living God. Christians knew that only one religion can bring God and man together. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

The Christians’ loyalty to Christ brought them into conflict with unbelievers. Roman officials thought they were disloyal to their rulers, many of whom were both religious and political leaders. Christians were seen as a political threat to the empire.

**Political** means “pertaining to the policies, goals, or affairs of a government.” Any Roman could have known—had he studied Christian teachings—that true Christians do not compete in this realm. The Christians honored government leaders and obeyed their commands except when they violated God’s Word. The apostle Paul himself had written, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1).

However, many rulers did not know or care about the true nature of Christianity. Ten major Roman persecutions struck the Christians during their first three hundred years. The first one, under Nero (37–68), is the one most people remember best. It lasted from

A.D. 64 to 68. The final persecution, beginning in the reign of Diocletian (245–313), was the worst. This persecution lasted from A.D. 303 to 312.

All but one of the apostles died as martyrs. Other noted church leaders followed the same path to death. Ignatius ([ig·nā’·shəs], 67?–111?) gave his dying testimony to crowds in the Roman amphitheater. The venerable Polycarp (69?–155?) told his persecutors, “I have now served my Lord Christ Jesus eighty-six years, and He has never done me any harm. How can I deny my King?”

Most of the early Christians suffered in some way even if they were not killed. In Rome, where many martyrs gave their lives, some persecuted Christians escaped by hiding in catacombs.

### **The Decay of Christianity**

Then came a dramatic change. During a lull in persecution, Constantine (285?–337) became emperor. After supposedly seeing a vision of a cross in the sky, Constantine had his soldiers paint crosses on their shields. He said that this sign gave him his victories. Under Constantine, Christianity became legal and even favored. The Edict of Milan (mi·lan’)

in 313 declared toleration for all religions. Later the emperor Theodosius (346?–395) actually abolished paganism and established Christianity as the state religion.

The storm of persecution was finally over, but this kind of sunshine meant disaster for the church. Christ calls His people to be separate from the world and live holy lives (2 Corinthians 6:14–18). In contrast, Constantine and other Roman emperors tried to unite the church and the world, thus bringing into the church hundreds of people who were only nominal Christians. Instead of growing like a healthy organism, the church swelled like a cancerous body.

By this time, certain heathen ideas and philosophies had also entered the church. From surrounding religions, the church had accepted priesthood, vestments, temple-like places of worship, and elaborate ceremonies. This may have appealed to the people and stirred religious feelings within them, but it failed to bring them to true repentance and reconciliation with God. In his sermon to the Greek philosophers at Athens, the apostle Paul denounced such substitutes of true worship. “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s



Altar in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The church was originally built around A.D. 330. It is shared today by the Greek Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Armenian Orthodox Church.

hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:24, 25).

Yet the Holy Spirit’s fire had not gone out in every heart. Some men opposed the course that the established Catholic Church was taking. (*Catholic* means “universal.” At that time it referred to the main body of Christianity.) These dissenters were labeled heretics, and their beliefs were called heresy because they differed from established (Catholic) doctrine. Some people accused of heresy did hold false doctrines, but others were faithful servants of God. They refused to let neglected Bible truths die completely from public thought.

Augustine (354–430), a prominent religious leader of that time, had a far-reaching influence on the course of Catholicism. Some of his teachings were Scriptural, but others contributed to the downward spiral of the established church. Augustine believed in judgment after death and in a place of eternal punishment for the wicked, but he taught that people who were not very wicked would receive only temporary punishment after death. He also believed that the church and the state should work together, and that it was right to force unbelievers into the Christian church.

### Study Exercises

1. What was the source of power that helped the early church to spread?
2. How did persecution help the church?
3. What is important about the year A.D. 313?
4. What happens when the government brings people into the Christian church?

### The Decline of Rome

The two centuries of Pax Romana ended about A.D. 180. During the 200s, the Roman



Harbor at Istanbul, a city at a strategic site on the Bosphorus Strait. Istanbul was originally called Byzantium. Constantine made the city his capital and changed its name to Constantinople. Later the Muslims renamed the city Istanbul.

Empire was repeatedly attacked by German invaders from northern Europe whom the Romans called barbarians. They were fleeing before even fiercer barbarians, the Huns from Asia.

In A.D. 330, Constantine established his capital at what is now Istanbul (is'·tan·bōōl'), Turkey, though it was called Constantinople for over a thousand years. He probably foresaw advantages for trade and defense in this location.

When the emperor Theodosius died in A.D. 395, the empire was split between his two sons, as he had arranged. The eastern part, with its capital at Constantinople, would last for another millennium. The western part, with its capital at Rome, would end within a century.

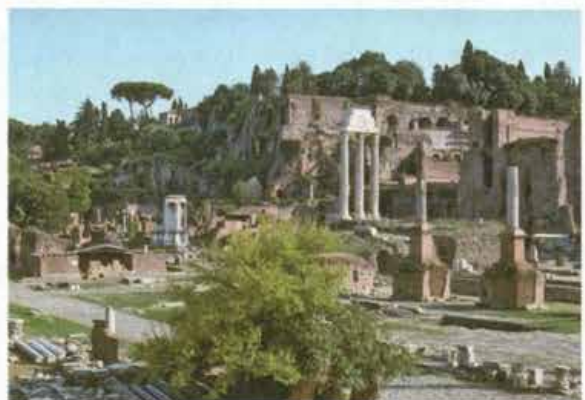
Many historians have tried to explain why the western part of the Roman Empire collapsed. One important reason was the character of the Romans themselves. In general, laziness and selfishness prevailed. Many rich people indulged in luxury and pleasure while slaves did their work. They often evaded paying taxes. Large numbers of poor people were content to let the government give them free grain and entertain

them at circuses. Those who did work were taxed heavily, and often they had to be forced to continue their occupation.

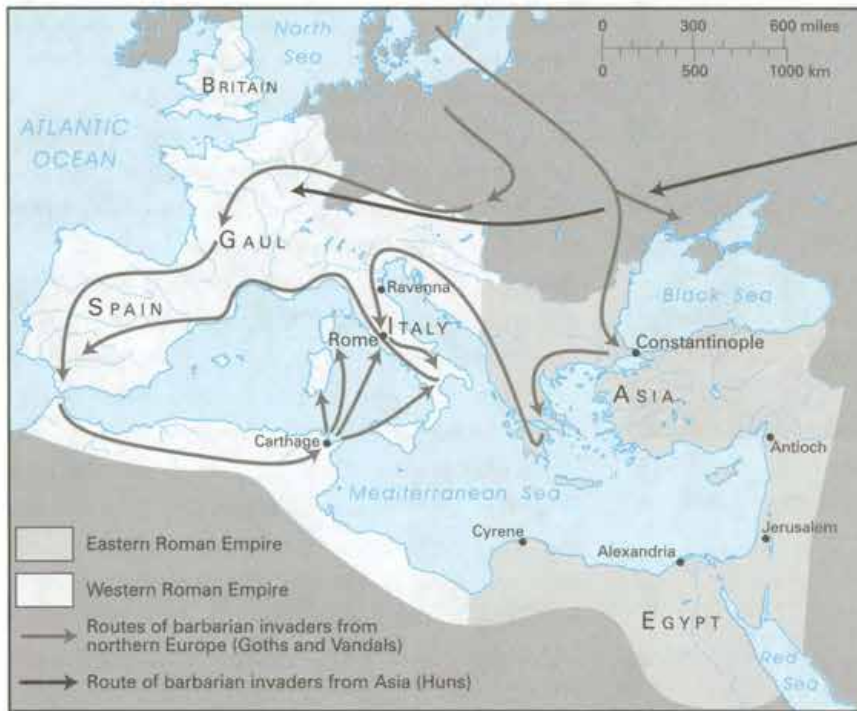
A high regard for fairness and a respect for law and order were sadly lacking. Divorce, adultery, immorality, and abortion were practiced freely. Government officials tended to be corrupt, wasteful, and inefficient. The army struggled within itself, general against general and legion against legion. Roman boundaries fell back as enemies pushed into Britain, Gaul, Spain, and northern Africa.

Since many of the evils in the Roman Empire were present from the beginning, one may wonder why God allowed it to continue as long as He did. To us it might seem as if the empire was ripe for judgment long before it fell. But as already noted, God used the Roman Empire to fulfill some of His purposes. The Bible tells us that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Daniel 4:17). When God sets up and brings down nations, His timing is always perfect.

It is hard to say exactly when the Roman Empire fell. Barbarians sacked the capital repeatedly, but its final gasp came in A.D. 476 when German invaders overthrew the last Roman emperor.



These ruins are the remains of the large forum in Rome. A forum was a centrally located public gathering place.



The Roman Empire  
About A.D. 400

### Dark Ages in Western Europe

Before the final fall of the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, or *medieval* times, began. The Middle Ages have that name because they span the time between ancient times and modern times, or approximately from 400 to 1500. Some historians speak of the first part of the Middle Ages (from the 400s to the 1000s) as the *Dark Ages*. During this time, few people could read and there was little trade or industry in Europe. People had to be self-sufficient, making what they needed for themselves. In some ways this was an advantage, but it was mostly a disadvantage because the people had no access to new ideas or to the high-quality goods that they could have had by trading.

With no central government, the people looked to men strong enough to rule their local territories. Naturally, some leaders had more armed men at their command than others did, and therefore they could control larger areas. Over the years, the *feudal system* of social order came into being. The king of a country claimed all the land, at least in theory. He

would grant large sections of land to the most powerful lords in the country, who gave him their allegiance in return. These lords granted sections of their land to less powerful lords in return for their loyalty.

At the bottom of this power pyramid were the knights, each holding claim to one small portion of land. They had serfs who farmed



This medieval sketch shows German lords paying homage to their king (Otto II or Otto III).