

Part II – The So-Called Middle Ages
Unit II – Roman Decline and the Rise of Two Abrahamic Faiths

Our ancestors all began as hunter-gatherers, foraging for food and chasing down animals to provide enough fuel for them to live. Then, a revolution in agriculture—the cultivation and storage of grains, as well as the domestication of animals—promoted a population boom and the pretext for sedentary life. Major civilizations flourished: the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Chinese, the Greeks, and of course, the Romans. All of them eventually faced problems bigger than they could handle, and they declined, but often their knowledge and achievements were passed on to other cultures and civilizations. In this unit, we’ll discover what allowed these great civilizations to flourish, what caused them to fall, and what took their place after one civilization—Ancient Rome—fell to pieces and ushered in what later became known as the Middle Ages.

Fundamental Themes

The evolution and acquisition of power
The role(s) of religion in politics and government

Topics of Study

I. Ancient Rome – Why factors contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire?

Internal Factors

External Factors

II. The Rise of Christianity – How did Christianity spread so rapidly? How did it change Europe?

Jesus, Paul, and Constantine

Monks and Monasteries

St. Benedict and Gregory the Great

III. Europe After the Decline of Rome – What changes took place in Europe after the Rome fell apart? What characterized the new governments in Europe? How did they adapt to meet new challenges?

Changes in Western Europe

Germanic and Barbarian Cultures

IV. The Franks – What distinguished the Franks from their Roman predecessors? How did they adapt to meet the challenges of the time?

Clovis, Conversion by Command, and
the Merovingian Kings

Charles Martel, the Battle of Tours, and the
Carolingian Kings

V. The Rise of Islam – How does this new religious tradition “negotiate” and navigate its interactions at home and abroad?

Origins

Spread and Expansion

Further Reading

Patterns of Interaction, Chapter 6, “Ancient Rome and Early Christianity,” pp. 155-183; other excerpted secondary and primary sources

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Below is a tentatively complete list of key names, places, events, ideas, concepts:

Names

Jesus of Nazareth	Germanic Tribes (Franks, Huns, Vandals, Visigoths)
Paul and the Twelve Apostles	Muhammad
Charlemagne and the Carolingian Dynasty	Shias Sunnis

Events

Battle at Milvian Bridge, 312 AD	Edict of Milan, 313 AD
The Sack of Rome, 476AD	Battle of Tours, 732 AD
The “Splits” of the Roman Empire	

Ideas and Concepts

Polytheism and Monotheism	Five Pillars
“Conversion by the Sword”/“Baptism by the Sword” (or “...by Command”)	Hijra Sharia