

SPREADS FOR THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Historical Spreads (Timeline of Main Events):

The Fall of The Roman Republic

According to historians, the history of Rome is divided into several different time periods. You probably already know a lot about the first period. This era was known as “The Roman Republic,” and it began in 753 BCE. Legend says that Romulus and Remus, the twin sons of the god Mars, founded the city of Rome. The Roman Republic, or Ancient Rome, became very powerful. Under their emperors, Roman soldiers conquered lands from Italy to the Iberian Peninsula, France, Greece, and Northern Africa.

In 45 BCE, Julius Caesar became the first dictator in Rome. This marked the end of the Roman Republic. A year later, on the Ides of March, Caesar was famously assassinated by his friend, Marcus Brutus. After that, the empire erupted in civil wars. They fought for nearly 20 years before a man named Octavian won. He declared himself Augustus Caesar, and Rome became a monarchy.

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What was the Roman Empire?

After the fall of the Roman Republic, Ancient Rome entered a new era. This time period is commonly recognized as the “Roman Empire.” The Roman Empire lasted from 27 BCE to 476 AD. The Roman Empire began when the Roman senate officially named Octavian their emperor. Octavian was Julius Caesar’s adopted son, and for 15 years, he had fought Marc Antony and Cleopatra in Egypt for power. In 31 BCE, he finally won the war in the Battle of Actium. He established the First Principate, and became a highly praised ruler.

For the next 200 years, Rome took over thousands of kilometers of territory. This period was known as the *Pax Romana*. By 117 CE, the Roman Empire included all of Northern Africa, including Egypt, the Middle East, as far as modern day Iraq, and all of Western Europe. They even conquered the kingdoms in what is now England!

The Roman Empire is known for its sophisticated culture, religion, and political system. Scholars and leaders contributed greatly to modern art, literature, philosophy, language, architecture, law, and government.

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Suspicion in the Court: The Julio-Claudian Dynasty

Throughout his reign, Augustus Caesar was celebrated as a military commander and politician. He was also a talented administrator, and he changed many aspects of Roman infrastructure. These changes led Rome to its Golden Age, the *Pax Romana*. Throughout his 41-year rule, Augustus adopted his wife’s children by another marriage, as well as a man named Tiberius, his trusted friend. When he died in 14 CE, he passed the throne onto Tiberius.

Until 68 AD, the Roman Empire was led by four men: Tiberius, then Caligula, then Claudius, and then Nero. All of them belonged to the Julio-Claudian lineage. While Tiberius was a good ruler, many Romans did not like him. Caligula was declared insane and assassinated. Claudius was successful in carrying out many of Augustus's plans. During this time, the Roman Empire expanded and public works projects began. However, Nero was not a great leader, and when he died, Rome fell into conflict again.

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The Year of the Four Emperors

In 68 AD, the Roman Senate declared Nero an enemy of the state. He died, and shortly after, four different men tried to claim power. A man named Galba, who was not a member of the Julio-Claudian line, was the first to call himself emperor. In 69 CE, he was forced to choose an heir. Although he chose Lucius Calpurnius Piso, his friend Otho believed he deserved the position. The two began to fight for power. Otho's supporters declared him emperor anyway. Meanwhile, in Lower Germany, a governor named Vitellius gathered an army. He rode toward Rome and defeated both Piso and Otho in battle.

Vitellius was not emperor for long. In fact, a fourth aristocrat and leader, Vespasian, laid his own claim to the title of emperor. When he and his armies reached Rome, they killed Vitellius. The senate named Vespasian emperor. He became the first ruler in the Flavian Dynasty.

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The Flavian Dynasty

The Flavian Dynasty lasted from 69 to 96 CE. Vespasian ruled for ten years, and was followed by his sons, Titus and Domitian. While Flavian Dynasty did not last for very long, Vespasian and his sons made great changes in the Roman Empire. First, Vespasian increased taxes to bring more money to the Empire. This included taxes on things like public urinals and bath houses. He also destroyed the city of Jerusalem in the first Jewish-Roman war. The Jewish people had revolted in 66 CE, but Vespasian's son helped defeat them in battle. Later, Titus and Domitian sent armies to conquer their enemies in England. They did not win the battle, but they got closer to their goal of taking over England.

Vespasian also sponsored the building project of a very famous building, called the Flavian Amphitheater. You might know it today as the Roman Colosseum! At the time, the amphitheater was used for gladiatorial contests, Classical plays, battle reenactments, and public executions.

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A Volcano Erupts

In 1748, a group of explorers in Italy came across ancient Roman ruins covered in debris and volcanic ash. Beneath this layer of dust, they found an entire city—including people—that still looked as if it was frozen in time! The buildings and skeletons belonged to a city that was once called Pompeii.

In 79 CE, the nearby volcano, Mount Vesuvius, erupted. Over the course of a day, hot volcanic ash and pumice fell from the sky. Many of the 12,000 residents of Pompeii were able to escape. About 2,000

Pompeiians were buried in the avalanche after the eruption, however. In total, as many as 16,000 died because of Mount Vesuvius.

The discovery of Pompeii nearly 1700 years later had a huge impact on our understanding of Roman civilization. The volcanic ash had preserved everything it covered. Archaeologists found human skeletons, homes, public baths, taverns, squares, marketplaces, and a massive arena in excellent condition for their studies. They even found 2,000-year old fruit and bread in jars that had survived!

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The Empire Expands: Life Under the Five Good Emperors

From 96 to 193 CE, the Roman Empire grew enormously. This period of time is known as the “Five Good Emperors. The emperors did not come from the same dynasty, but were chosen by the previous emperor to rule. They included Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. By this point in time, Senate was no longer a second yet equal branch of the government. Power was centralized, meaning only the emperor and his administration made important decisions.

During this century in their history, the empire succeeded in “Romanizing” the people of Northern Britain, Dacia, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Western Europe. This meant that all of the people under Roman rule were gathered into provinces, or territories. Then, they were then taught to speak the same language and practice the same cultural traditions. This included reading and writing in Latin, learning about Roman art and architecture, and paying high taxes to the government.

The Height of the Roman Empire: 117 CE

Can you imagine a world in which all of Western Europe, Northern Africa, the Middle East, and the United Kingdom belonged to the same empire? In 117 CE, all of this territory did! Many consider this year to be the “height of the Roman Empire.” This is because the empire expanded to its greatest territorial size under Trajan, who ruled from 98-117 CE. It was also considered a time of great peace and stability. The massive Roman army protected its people, and the citizens of the empire prospered across the land. Of course, not everything was perfect. The empire suffered from financial setbacks and barbaric wars during its height. Still, historians believe this year represents one of the Golden Ages of humanity, mainly because of the art, philosophy, language, and technological advancements made during the time.

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The Rise and Defeat of the Severan Dynasty

After Marcus Aurelius died in 169 CE, his son Commodus rose to power. He was a very poor leader, and often abused his power and wealth to pay for his luxurious lifestyle. Three years later, he was assassinated. A man named Pertinax, and then four other emperors all ruled within a year. No one succeeded at maintaining power, until Septimus Severus came around.

Septimus Severus ruled from 193-211 CE and founded the Severan Dynasty. Under his rule and that of Caracalla, his son, Rome continued to wage war on other lands. They fought expensive battles in Britain and Northern Africa, and eventually invaded Mesopotamia to fight the Parthians in the Middle East. These

wars caused extreme financial troubles for the empire. The stability of the previous century was weakened.

After Caracalla died, Julia Maesa, Caracalla's aunt, acted as empress. In 235 CE, the last emperor of the Severan Dynasty was assassinated. The result was chaos, and a period of time known as the Crisis of the Third Century.

Divided in Three: The Crisis of the Third Century

When Alexander Severus died, a military official named Maximus Thrax took power. He ruled for three years. For the 50 years after his assassination, there were over 20 emperors chosen to rule. Each one lasted for no more than three years as emperor.

Meanwhile, in the north and east, two leaders decided to respond to the chaos and instability in Rome. In 260 CE, Postumus, a regional governor, declared himself ruler over the "Gallic Empire." This included Gaul, Britannia, Hispania, and Germania (or modern day France, England, Spain, and Germany). In the east, Queen Zenobia of Palmyra made herself ruler of the territory between Syria and Egypt. For many years, these "break-away empires" were accepted as natural due to the chaos in and around the capital.

In 272 CE, a commander named Aurelian marched his troops east in order to take back the territory Zenobia had been controlling herself. He defeated her in battle, as well as all of the cities under her reign. Then he marched north and unified the breakaway empire with Rome.

Diocletian Comes to Power: Establishment of Eastern & Western Rome

About 12 years after Aurelian reunited the Roman Empire, a man named Diocletian became emperor. He quickly realized that the empire was too big to be governed by one person or administration. In 286 CE, he chose a colleague named Maximian to rule over the western half of the empire from Milan. Meanwhile, Diocletian went east to Nicomedia, or modern-day Turkey. The emperor believed that he and Maximian were both sons of gods, and they had been chosen to rule by divine will.

Six years later, Diocletian chose two more leaders and divided the empire into fourths. Galerius and Constantius I Chlorus became the third and fourth masters of the Roman Empire. They helped defeat domestic revolts and restore order to the land. Under Diocletian, the Senate's powers were also reduced further. Most elected officials became administrators over specific departments, or what we now call "bureaucrats."

In the last two years of Diocletian's rule, many of his soldiers and officials began to systematically persecute Christians. This meant that they were hunted and harmed or killed for practicing their faith. As many as 3,500 Christians were executed during this time.

Constantine Rules: A Christian Empire

In 305 CE, Constantine's father, Constantius, became the Roman Emperor in the West. For the decade after, his son fought against the rebellious sons of previous leaders in various civil wars. Then, in 312 CE, Constantine became emperor himself. He became known as Constantine the Great. He was a religious man, but unlike the emperors before him, he practiced Christianity.

For many years, Constantine allowed other leaders to govern the eastern half of the Roman Empire. In 324 CE, however, he changed his mind. He fought Licinius, the then-emperor of the East, and defeated him. He united the empire once again and renamed the city of Byzantium "Constantinople."

Constantine's leadership style and religious legacy left a lasting mark on the world. After his rule, much of the Western and Eastern world converted to Christianity. Both the Holy Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire can trace their roots back directly to this 4th century emperor.

The Edict of Milan

Constantine became emperor after he defeated his brother-in-law, Maxentius, in battle. Constantine fought this war largely for religious reasons. After assuming power over the Roman Empire, he decided to meet with the ruler in the East, Licinius. They discussed the religious freedoms of both the Christians and traditional polytheists throughout the empire. As a result of this meeting, in 313, both Constantine and Licinius signed a document known as the Edict of Milan. This law allowed Roman citizens to worship the Christian god or Roman gods freely, without fear of violent persecution.

The Edict of Milan also allowed Christians to erect churches for worship. Constantine himself sponsored the construction of two large basilicas. He also gave money and power to the bishops in Carthage, Spain, and Rome.

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The First Bible: The Council of Nicaea

In 325 CE, Constantine ordered the Council of Nicaea to form as a response to Arianism. Arianism was a popular belief at the time, claiming that Jesus Christ was an ordinary man and not a divine being. Constantine ordered the clergymen of the Christian Church to come together and discuss this matter. He wanted them to determine whether or not Jesus had been the Son of God. The council members sorted through all religious Christian writings, and decided which ones had been "divinely inspired," or had come from God. In the end, they decided that Jesus had been the Son of God. These texts became some of the fundamental books in the Christian Bible.

The Council of Nicaea later inspired the Nicene Creed. The belief that Jesus was divine created controversy among many Christians in the region.

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Theodosius I Becomes Emperor & Outlaws Pagan Worship

After the death of Constantine the Great in 337 CE, several emperors ruled in both the West and East. Although Constantine had united them during his rule, there was often one leader appointed in each half of the Roman Empire. From 364-392 CE, the Valentinian Dynasty controlled the empire. Then, in 379 CE, a Spanish military commander named Theodosius was appointed emperor of the East. He ruled over the East until 392 CE, when he also became the emperor of the West. He was the last emperor to rule over both the Eastern and Western spheres of the empire.

Theodosius was a very religious man, and he supported the Nicene Creed. In 380 CE, he ordered that all Catholic Christians must also follow the decision of the creed. Then, in 392 CE, there was an uprising in Italy. Pagan aristocrats and senate members tried to take over Rome. Theodosius gathered his troops and rode from Constantinople to Rome, where he defeated the pagan cult members and political rebels. This military campaign was exhausting for Theodosius. By 395 CE, he had fallen very ill, and in the end of January, the emperor died.

The Gothic Wars

Throughout the 3rd and 4th centuries, the Roman Empire handled a lot of internal conflicts. However, this period also marked a time of great conflict with their enemies to the north in Germany, the Goths. From 376-382 CE, Emperor Valens fought the Gothic Wars. The most important battle took place in Adrianople, where the Romans lost. Nearly 30,000 Roman soldiers died there. Many historians claim that this lost battle was the first in a chain of events that would eventually lead to the collapse of the Roman Empire.

However, tensions between the Goths and Romans had actually begun more than a century before. Since about 230 CE, the Goths had been fleeing from their enemies to the north, the Huns. They were refugees, and sought safety in the Roman Empire. In 238 CE, the Roman Emperor Maximinus Thrax agreed to feed them and provide them with land in exchange for their armies. But soon, Roman political corruption ruined the relationship between the Goths and the Romans. The Gothic refugees were mistreated, starved, and eventually, they wanted revenge. In 249 CE, they began to wage war on the Roman Empire, and the fighting continued for the next 300 years.

The Fall of the Roman Empire

For centuries, the Roman Empire had been fighting with the barbarian Goths. The long war had weakened the empire's army and finances. In 410 CE, the Visigoth King Alaric sacked and pillaged the city of Rome. Then, another barbaric group called the Vandals attacked Rome in 455 CE.

Meanwhile, there was a shortage of slaves and money within the empire. Taxes were too high, and the Roman army had expanded less and less over the last two centuries. Finally, the division between the East and West weakened the empire as a whole. Cultural differences between the Greek-speaking East and the Latin-speaking West made it difficult to remain unified. The rise of Christianity caused further decline in Roman traditions and values. The corruption of the government and its leaders was one of the final straws for the empire.

Germanic King Odoacer Defeats The Romans

In 476 CE, a Roman soldier named Odoacer staged a revolt. Odoacer was Germanic by blood, and some historians claim he was the son of one of Atilla the Hun's most trusted advisors.

Odoacer was unhappy with the leadership decisions of a Roman commander named Orestes, whose son was the emperor. Odoacer and other Roman soldiers believed they should have been rewarded land in Italy for their efforts in battle. Orestes denied them the land. As a result, Odoacer encouraged his fellow soldiers to overthrow Emperor Romulus Augustulus. He succeeded, and declared himself king. From this day forward, the Roman senate accepted him as ruler. The Roman Empire in the West was dissolved. The powers of the empire were transferred east, and Odoacer became the most powerful man in Italy.

476 CE is known as the year when the Roman Empire fell. Although their decline had been coming for a long time, this last defeat was the end of the Roman West. After this date, the Byzantine Empire in the East held the most power. The Holy Roman Empire also developed out of the Roman Empire in the West.

Inventions of the Roman Empire

The Roman Empire is known for forever changing Western thought and traditions. The Romans had highly sophisticated political and infrastructural systems. Their religion, philosophy, and contributions to art were also incredibly important for the development of the Western world. They even created social welfare programs to take care of Roman citizens!

But did you know that they also invented indoor plumbing, the Western calendar, aqueducts, cement, air conditioning, and even newspapers? They used to carve block letters in large stone tablets every day with current events and messages from the government. The Romans built underground drainage pipes to run clean water from springs to city centers. They constructed bath houses, colosseums, and architectural marvels by designing load-carrying arches as well. Many systems of organization and engineering that we use today come from the Romans. Still, imagine reading the daily news every day from a stone tablet!

Entertainment in the Roman Empire

The Romans may have expanded because of their military prowess and organization, but they also loved to have fun! Whether they were attending circuses, fairs, gladiator fights, chariot races, or plays, the Romans were always busy.

The Flavian Amphitheater, or the Colosseum, was one of the most expensive and complex building projects in the history of the empire. The amphitheater could seat up to 50,000 people, and it was constructed just for entertainment purposes. People gathered there almost every week to watch slaves fight lions or trained gladiators fight each other.

Chariot races took place in the Roman Hippodrome, or the Circus Maximus. The horses and their chariots would wheel around the center 7 times at a scarily fast pace!

Romans also loved to relax in the public baths and spas. They were heated with warm water running through pipes in the walls, and were open all day to Roman citizens.

Finally, Romans loved the theater. Audiences flocked to see tragedies and comedies acted out on stage. Actors wore masks and different colored togas to represent their characters. The art of playwriting was very important during the height of the empire!

Roman Society and Class System

Roman social classes were strictly divided. Membership to one class or another was very rigid. The most powerful member of society was the emperor, followed by the patrician class. The Patricians, or wealthy landowners and nobles, came next. Then, there were senators, or members of the government. Equestrians made up the next level of the social pyramid. They were landowners who were also businessmen. The working class was known as the Plebeians. These people were usually artisans, bakers, fishermen, or craftsmen. There was also a large proportion of freed slaves who worked for a living in Roman society. Many of them bought their freedom or were set free. The lowest class level in society

was made up of slaves. They were often captured from conquered territories and forced to work as handmaids and servants in wealthy households. Other slaves were forced to construct buildings like the Colosseum, or temples to honor the gods.

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Slavery in the Roman Empire

Many prisoners of war were forced into slavery after Roman armies took control of new lands. But some of them were luckier than others. For those who were sold into households, they were typically treated “well.” These slaves were provided with a lot of food, a nice place to sleep, and never beaten. Romans believed that treating slaves well would make them more willing to work. Some slaves were even educated and trained to become teachers themselves. They taught philosophy, language, history, and math to their masters’ children and neighbors. Oftentimes, slave masters let their slaves buy their freedom after a certain number of years.

Other slaves were worked extremely hard, and lived under terrible conditions. They were ordered to build cities, temples, and impressive architectural feats. These slaves worked all day and often all night, and did not have much to eat. Many died of being overworked.

Finally, the most unfortunate slaves were trained to be gladiators. They were captured and made to practice the art of swordsmanship. Then, slave masters forced them to fight each other or wild animals. They were not allowed out of their cells, but had heated floors, baths, and an infirmary in between fights.

Roman Soldiers, War & Legions

The Roman Empire succeeded primarily because of the strength of its army. The Roman army was made up of hundreds of thousands of men that trained every day. They could walk 20 miles a day with full armor and weapons if necessary. Their armor included a gladius, or sword, a scutum, or shield, two pila, or arrows, and a backpack with tools for building bridges, roads, and camps. These men were grouped into legions, which had 4,000 to 6,000 men in each one. Legions were divided into centuries, or groups of 80.

The best soldiers were legionaries, and they had to serve in the army for 25 years. If they survived, they were promised a certain amount of land for farming.

When at war, some soldiers had to run ahead and build bridges and roads so the other troops could march toward their destination. After battles, the survivors had to return to the site and bury their dead.

Children in the Roman Empire

In the Roman Empire, children were raised to follow in their parents’ footsteps. Children of plebeian families were taught the same trade as their parents. They learned to become craftsmen, artists, or even prepared to become soldiers. In upper class families, young boys were sent to school at the age of 12. They were taught Greek and Latin, History, History, and Maths. They also learned oratory skills and studied philosophy and politics, so they could become senators and politicians in the future.

Girls were not sent to school, but rather, learned to take care of the household. Children might have played with dolls, kitchenware, or balloons made from animal bladders. They also had marbles, hoops, and balls.

Children got married and were expected to become adults much sooner than nowadays. Sometimes, boys were married as soon as 14 years old, and girls at 12.

Religion in the Roman Empire

For many centuries, Romans almost exclusively worshipped pagan gods. At first, they were animistic, which meant that they believed in the existence of spirits all around them in nature. Later, they adopted some of the Greek gods. These included more human-like gods who had domain over one aspect of life, like war, the sky and thunder, the sun, love, the sea, the hunt, and the underworld. Their main gods were Jupiter, his wife Juno, and Minerva, although they believed in many more.

Each city adopted a “patron god,” and they built temples to honor him or her. The emperor was always the chief priest of the Roman religion, but other priests were elected for the region as well. Roman worshippers held many festivals, rituals, and ceremonies to pay homage to the deities that protected and helped them.

By the 3rd century CE, many polytheistic Romans had converted to Christianity. At first, the religion was criticized and its members were persecuted. Later, the belief in Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and God became the foundation of the Holy Roman Empire.

1. The Fall of Ancient Rome & The Death of Julius Caesar (27 BCE)
2. 31 BCE: What Was the Roman Empire
 - a. Octavian becomes Augustus Caesar after winning the Battle of Actium
 - b. Beginning of the First Principate
3. 14-68 CE: Suspicion in the Court: The Julio-Claudian Dynasty
 - a. Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero
4. 69 CE: The Year of the Four Emperors
 - a. Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian
5. 69-96 CE: The Flavian Dynasty
 - a. Vespasian, Titus, Domitian
 - b. The Flavian Amphitheater (Roman Coliseum)
6. 79 CE: A Volcano Erupts
 - a. Eruption of Mount Vesuvius & Burial of Pompeii and Herculaneum
7. 96-193 CE: The Empire Expands: Life Under The Five Good Emperors
 - a. Nerva-Antonin Dynasty
 - b. Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antonius Pius, Marcus Aurelius
 - c. 192 CE: Commodus strangled
 - d. 193: Pertinax Assassinated
8. 117 CE: The Height of the Roman Empire
9. 193-235: How Much Land is Too Much Land?: The Severan Dynasty
 - a. Defeat of the Parthians (but wars resulted in financial instability)
 - b. Caracalla assassinated
 - c. Alexander Severus assassinated
10. 235-284: Divided in Three: The Crisis of the Third Century

- a. Empire had grown too vast, was separated into three regions
- 11. 285-305 CE: Diocletian Comes To Power: Establishment of Eastern & Western Rome
 - a. Establishes the tetrarchy, splits Roman Empire again
 - b. Successors must be chosen from the outset of individual rule
- 12. 305-337 CE: Constantine Rules: A Christian Empire
 - a. 312: Constantine of the East defeats Maxentius of the West
 - b. Unites the kingdoms under his rule
- 13. 317 CE: The Edict of Milan
 - a. Mandated religious tolerance
- 14. 325 CE: The First Bible: First Council of Nicea
 - a. To decide on texts that would become the bible
- 15. 379-395 CE: Theodosius I Becomes Emperor & Outlaws Pagan Worship
- 16. 376-382 CE: Romans Fight the Gothic Wars
- 17. 476 CE: Germanic King Odoacer Defeats The Romans
 - a. After several battles, Romulus Augustulus is defeated, marking the beginning of the Fall of the Roman Empire

Other Spreads (Daily Life etc):

- 18. Inventions in the Roman Empire
 - a. Aqueducts, roads, buildings, indoor plumbing, the Western calendar
- 19. Entertainment in the Roman Empire
 - a. Circuses, theaters, spas, chariot races
- 20. Roman Society & Class System
 - a. Patricians, plebeians, slaves
- 21. Slavery in the Roman Empire
 - a. Gladiators
 - b. Philosophers & Teacher slaves
 - c. Manual labor slaves
- 22. Roman Soldiers, War & Legions
- 23. Children in the Roman Empire
 - a. School, games, life in different classes
- 24. Religion in the Roman Empire**
 - a. Emperors & Deities
 - b. Pagan Worship
 - c. Rise of Christianity

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