

# 01



## START HERE

The time period that we know as ancient history had come to a close. Christ Jesus had come and fulfilled His divine purpose here on this earth. He had died, resurrected, and ascended back to His place at the right hand of His Father. In the decades after these miraculous and prophecy-fulfilling events, the disciples and followers of Christ spread the good news of the Gospel, and the Early Christian Church was formed. A few centuries later, Rome, the world power that reigned supreme during the time of Christ, was teetering on the brink of destruction. Generations before, the famous Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had dreamed about the rise and fall of the major world kingdoms; his dream depicting history as a giant statue, which was comprised of various types of metals, had thus far come to fruition. The iron legs of the statue depicted an incredibly powerful kingdom that would stand for an extended length of time and leave a lasting influence on future empires. This kingdom, the Roman Empire, would split before it fell. In this chapter, we will look closely at this devastating crash that would set the tone for centuries to come. After the fall of Rome, humankind had stepped into the Middle Ages, which is the time period we will study together in this volume. It spans from the fall of Rome in 476 to the end of the Renaissance in about 1600.

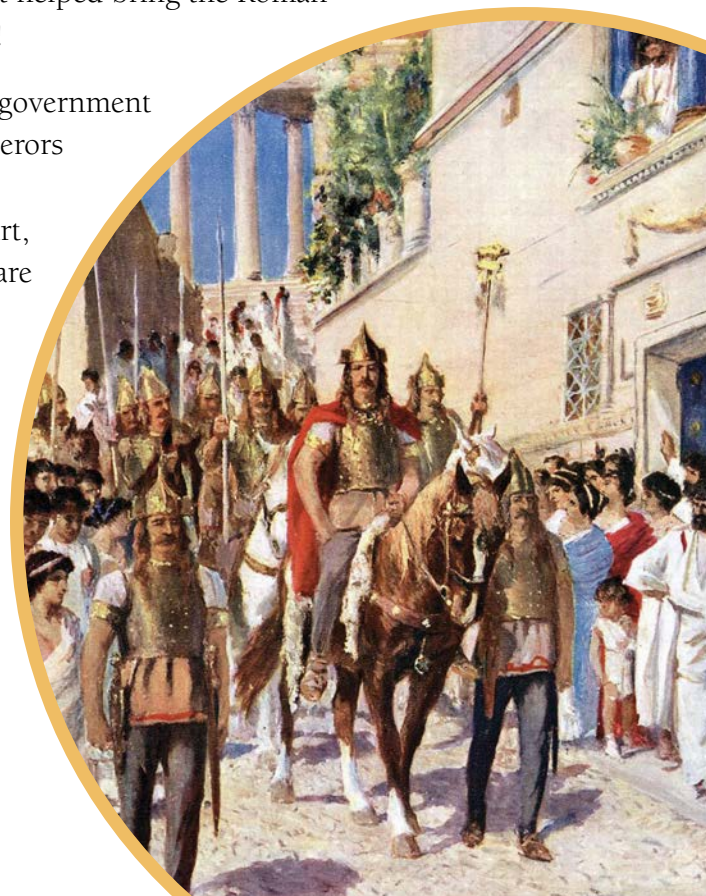
# THE FALL OF ROME

If you have studied ancient history like we did in the first volume of this series, you'll remember that Rome was a mighty empire. It included large portions of the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa and ruled millions of people. In fact, the empire was so big that it was eventually divided between a western half of the empire and an eastern half. The Eastern Roman Empire was ruled from a city in modern-day Turkey called Constantinople. This city was made the capital by an emperor named Constantine in 331. The western half of the Roman empire included the ancient city of Rome, though it was no longer officially the capital. Nevertheless, Rome remained an extremely important city.

Though the Roman Empire was still large, it had an abundance of problems. One problem was its size; it was so big that there really wasn't a good way to protect it. The very size of the empire became its downfall. There were many additional problems plaguing the Roman Empire at this time, however, including diseases the Roman army brought back from other places in the ancient world. These terrible epidemics killed thousands upon thousands of people, therefore weakening the army and the civilian population. Another problem was the Roman army stopped relying on Romans to fill their ranks. They instead began recruiting foreign mercenaries — soldiers who fight for money. These mercenaries were not as loyal to the Roman Empire as Roman armies in the past had been simply because they were not Roman. In fact, many members of the so-called barbarian tribes that helped bring the Roman Empire down had previously served in the Roman military!

Roman society and the economy were a mess, as well. The government was unstable and extremely corrupt, with many of the emperors only ruling for a matter of years or months before being overthrown and replaced by someone else. For the most part, these emperors were not sincerely concerned with taking care of the people under their control. Instead, they were more interested in how much money they could get from their position. The government had also unwisely overspent its money on wars and other expenses. The people of the empire were heavily taxed to help make up for this, but the result also made the financial gap between the rich and the poor even worse.

1920s illustration of Visigoth King Alaric entering Athens, Greece



Another consequence of the economic problems was that the empire no longer had the money to maintain its infrastructure. In its early history, Rome was justifiably famous for the quality of its roads, which spanned the entire empire. Its later economic difficulties meant there was no longer enough money to maintain these roads, so they fell into disrepair. In years past, Rome's excellent roads had aided trade and the mighty Roman army, but now, its crumbling conditions made it harder to transport goods and soldiers long distances.

Another significant issue was recurring invasions from barbarians. This was the term Romans used for people who were not Roman citizens. If you read Volume 1 in this series, you might remember reading about Attila the Hun, who led his army of barbarians against Rome. Attila was defeated before he could reach Rome, but other barbarians did successfully attack the city of Rome. At the height of the Roman Empire in centuries past, such an attack would have seemed unthinkable, but now, they became a recurring issue. Each time, the city was sacked, which meant that its valuables were looted and taken away.



In 410, a Germanic tribe called the Visigoths sacked the city. Forty-five years later, the city was sacked by another Germanic tribe called the Vandals. Finally, in 476, the city of Rome was sacked by still another Germanic tribe, the Ostrogoths. The fall of Rome is usually dated to this event because Rome fell into

The Visigoth king, Alaric I, leads the first sack of Rome in 410.

Juan de la Corte's depiction of a Roman siege, 1600s



a period of Germanic rule. Other times when Rome was sacked, a Roman emperor remained in charge, but that was no longer true after 476. There was never another Roman emperor ruling the western half of the empire after this point. The once mighty empire had fallen.

As you can probably imagine, the last days of the Western Roman Empire were very difficult for the people who lived there. Even though life was always hard, it was still a great shock when the once-powerful empire collapsed, especially at the hands of barbarians, whom most Romans considered inferior and uncivilized. When the dust settled after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, panic began to set in. The conquering barbarians had excellent sacking skills, but they lacked the ability to set up a functioning replacement government.

There was no longer a central government; therefore, there were no schools or law enforcement officers. No one knew who would lead them, teach them, or protect them. Roman money was no longer issued, and the old Roman coins were worth nothing more than the metal they were made of. Suddenly, even people who had been rich became poor overnight. Can you imagine how frightening and uncertain this would be? It was a very difficult time, and we'll learn more about what happened because of the fall of Rome in the next chapter, but first, we'll check in with the eastern half of the Roman Empire.

### NARRATION BREAK:

Discuss what you learned about the fall of Rome.

19th century Dutch painter Charles Rochussen's scene showing Romans interacting with the Germanic Batavi tribe. The Batavi were barbarian allies of the Romans.



The Eastern Roman Empire had also been subject to the attacks, but they had managed to ward off the barbarians. Even though they lost a large portion of land to the barbarians, and their empire shrank to the area directly surrounding Constantinople, the Eastern Empire survived.

We call this surviving part of the Roman Empire the Byzantine (BIZ-in-teen) Empire. It was called that because Constantinople's ancient name was Byzantium. The Byzantine Empire may have started out small, but it certainly did not stay that

way. Eventually, strong emperors came to the Byzantine throne. These emperors fought and conquered sections of the surrounding area until the Byzantine Empire was soon spreading far beyond Constantinople.

One of the most powerful Byzantine emperors was Justinian. Emperor Justinian was not born into a royal family in 483; in fact, he was not even from a rich, influential family. Justinian grew up as a poor country boy. His parents were farmers, and they worked hard to feed their family. Justinian's mother had a brother named Justin, who was a high-ranking officer in the imperial guard. Uncle Justin knew that his nephew needed an education to have a good future. So, it was that Justinian was taken to Constantinople, where there were many renowned institutions of education. After he finished school, Justinian decided to go into the army. Everyone liked this bright, organized young man. He was helpful to his officers, and he gained respect for his bravery. As you might expect from such a young man, he moved quickly up through the ranks in the army.

It just so happened that there was a lovely young woman named Theodora who lived in Constantinople. Theodora had grown up in a family who owned a circus. From a very young age, Theodora worked with the animals in the circus. She led a wild and ungodly life, but when she grew up, Theodora became a Christian. She decided to move to Constantinople to live a quiet, useful life.

Valentine Cameron's  
19th century painting of  
Empress Theodora



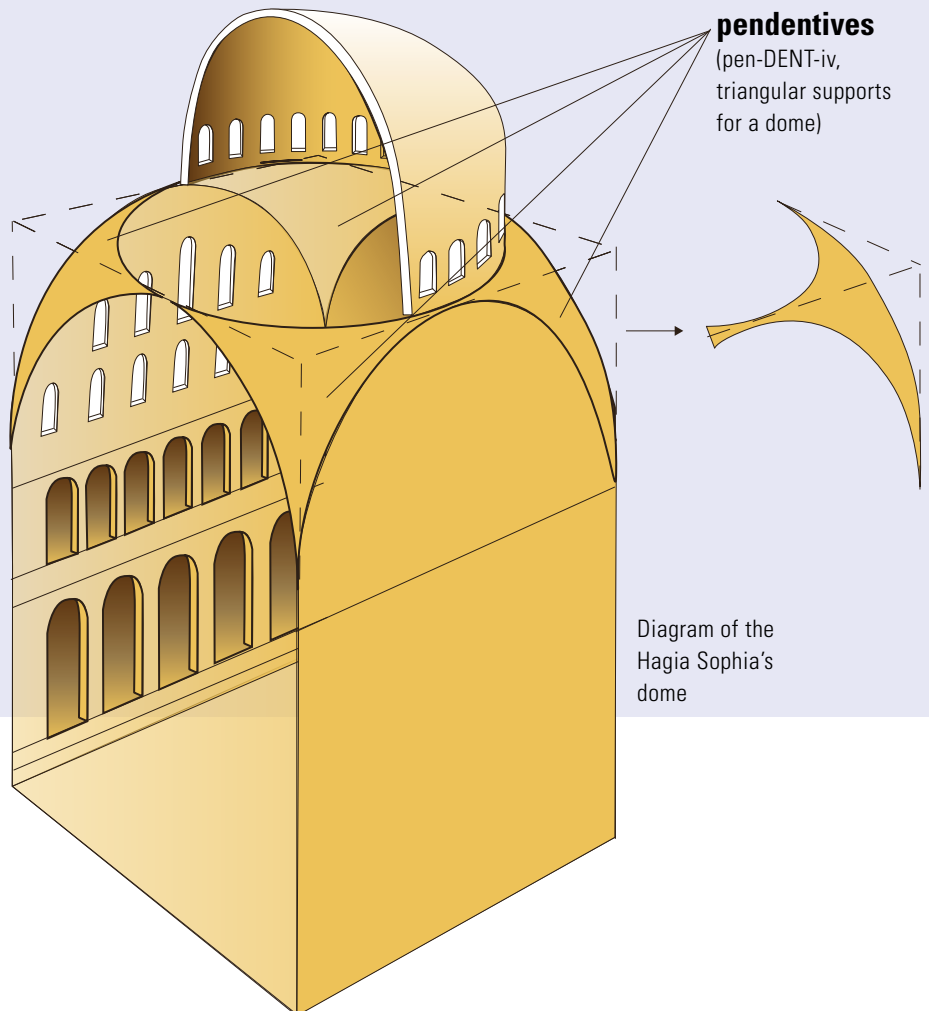
## CONNECT

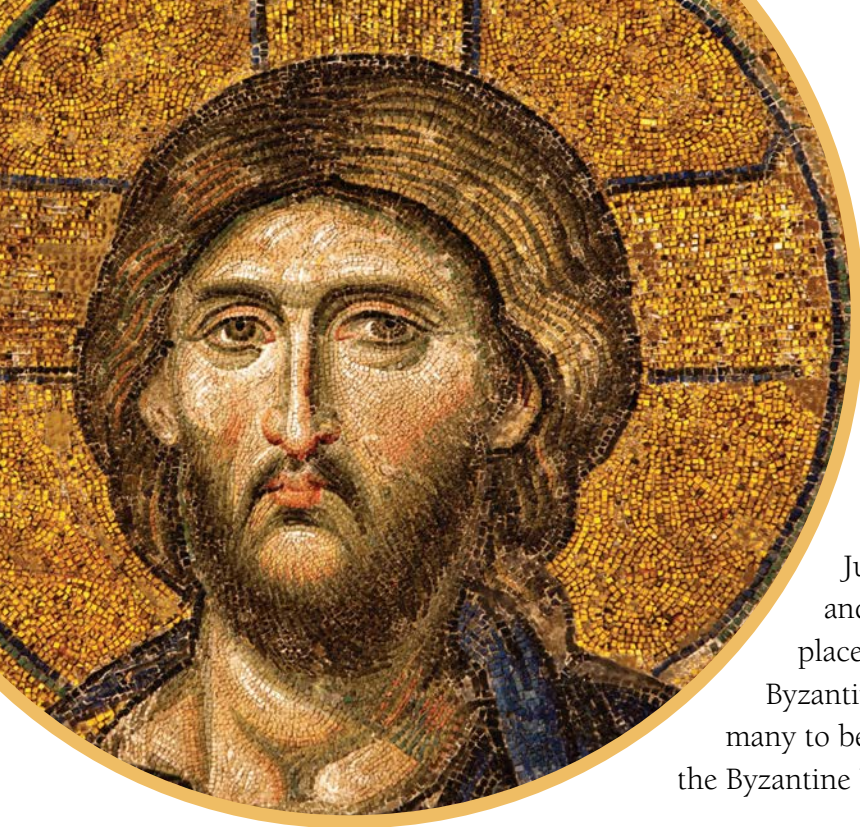
If you were to travel to the beautiful Old City part of modern-day Istanbul, you would be visiting the city once called Constantinople.

There are many awe-inspiring aspects of this city, with one of the most obvious being the architecture. The structures of Constantinople that were built in the early years of the Byzantine Empire are varied in style. Many of them have a flavor of the Roman style of building, while others are more reminiscent of other nearby civilizations of Asia Minor, which were uninfluenced by Roman architecture.

You and I are quite accustomed to the style of buildings popular in our time and country. Much of the architecture we are exposed to is only a couple of centuries old at the most, and although there are many different styles of houses and buildings in our cities or neighborhoods, they all have somewhat similar lines and layouts. This is not the case with the buildings of the Byzantine Empire! Their mix of traditional Roman or Greek-influenced architecture with more interesting and individual styles creates a unique skyline. One of the most amazing architectural examples is the Hagia Sophia. This gorgeous cathedral was built during the 6th century, while Justinian I was emperor, for Eastern Orthodox Christians to worship in, and it is still considered the most important Byzantine architectural structure. Byzantine cathedrals like the Hagia Sophia were specifically designed to be ornate and magnificent because Eastern Christians believed that was one way to honor God.

If we were to walk into this fabulous architectural wonder, we would be awestruck. The building's architects were also well known for their mechanical skills and mathematical knowledge (Brooks 2009). These ingenious architects designed the cathedral to combine a long, rectangular central building with a huge 32-meter (nearly 105 feet) dome roof. Study the illustration to see how they supported a circular dome roof over a rectangular building.





Byzantine mosaic  
of Jesus in the  
Hagia Sophia

One day, Justinian, who was at this time a soldier in the army, rode through the streets of Constantinople. He saw Theodora standing by the side of the road. He was enthralled by her beauty and asked about her. No one knew who she was, so Justinian searched and searched until he found out where her home was. When he had finally found her, Justinian asked her to marry him.

Justinian's uncle eventually became the emperor, and when he died, Justinian became ruler in his place. Theodora then became the empress of the Byzantine Empire. Empress Theodora is thought by many to be the most powerful woman in the history of the Byzantine Empire.

After he became emperor, Justinian did not like the fact that his empire was so small, so he decided to do something about it. After building up his army, he set out to conquer the lands that used to belong to the empire but had been lost. This increased the size of the empire, and soon, the Byzantine Empire was the leading power in the world. He also increased taxes, though, and that made many people unhappy.

Justinian also worked to remove corruption from the government. One of his most famous achievements was the Code of Justinian. Shortly after becoming emperor, Justinian ordered the laws of the empire to be written down. This would be a good way to make sure everyone living in the empire knew what the laws were. In the process, the laws were also updated and revised. This was a huge undertaking that required several years to complete. Even though many of the laws were not new at all, the result of this project became known as the Code of Justinian. For centuries afterward, these laws (known as Roman law) formed the foundation of the legal system of most European kingdoms. Even modern American law is still influenced by Roman law and, by extension, the Code of Justinian.

Things did not always work out smoothly, however. Chariot racing was very popular in Constantinople, and the fans could be unruly, to say the least. When some of them got in trouble, their friends became angry and started a terrible uprising in the city. The uprising was called the Nika Riots and was so bad that it almost forced Justinian to flee Constantinople; however, Theodora convinced him to stay.

There was so much wealth in the Byzantine culture that the glory that was Rome paled in comparison. The Byzantine children attended school to learn from the philosophers of the day. They were taught by strict professors, who oversaw the educational process with a watchful eye. The architectural glory in the city of

Constantinople was astounding; there were beautiful palaces, schools, and churches in abundance. Homes were emblazoned with mosaics made of precious stones, gold, and colorful glass.

As we will learn more about in the next chapter, both the Western and Eastern Roman Empires eventually became Christian. The most famous and beautiful church in Constantinople was called the Hagia Sophia (HAZSH-ee-uh so-FEE-uh). This church was actually a great cathedral, with huge, open spaces, beautiful windows, intricate mosaics, and huge domes. Indeed, it is considered an architectural wonder of the world.

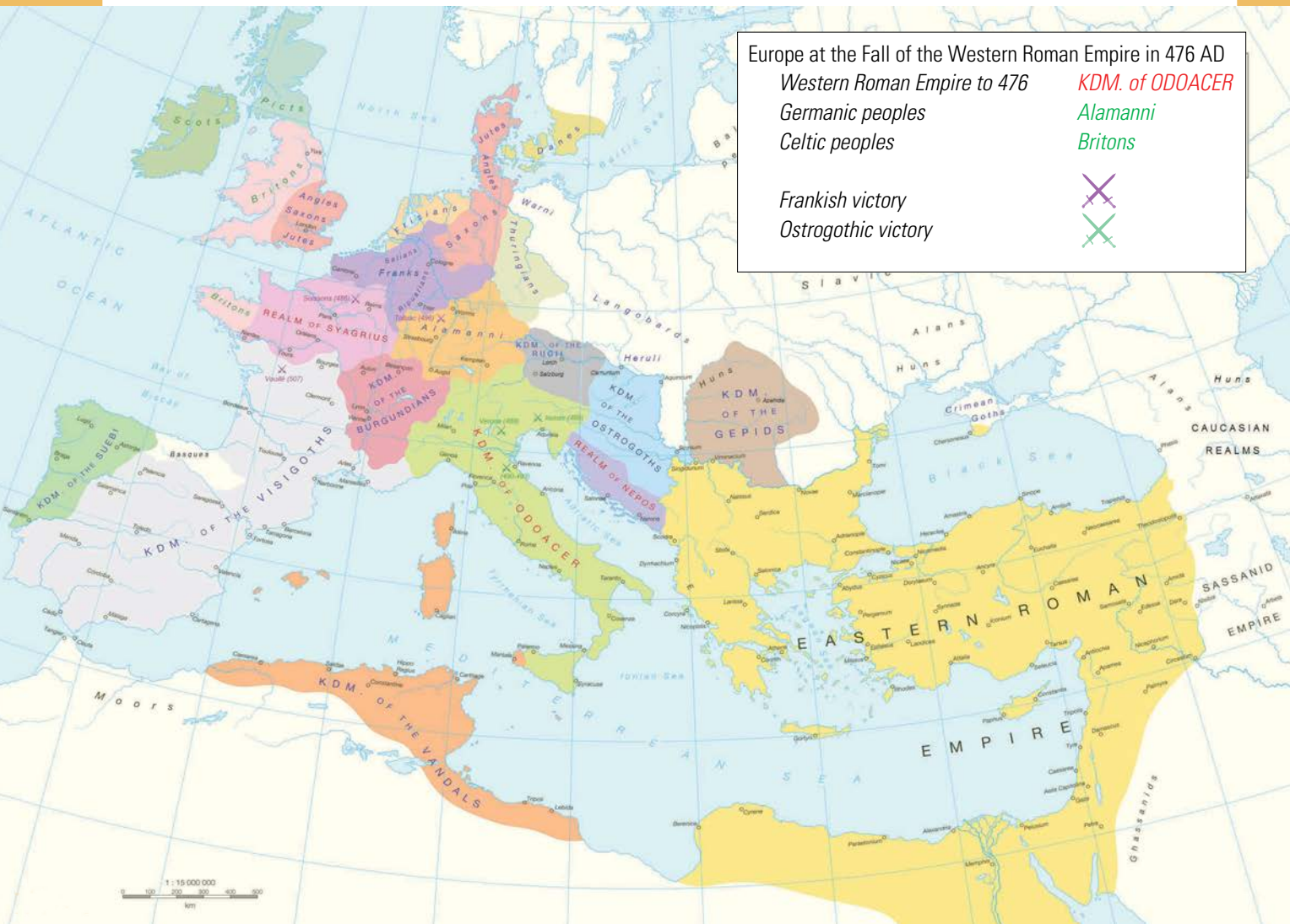
### NARRATION BREAK:

Talk about what you read about the Byzantine Empire.



There was a great controversy among the Christians of the Byzantine Empire over whether or not to use icons (depictions of saints and religious figures that are revered). Some—called iconoclasts (eye-con-uh-CLASTS)—saw the practice was not Scriptural and destroyed the icons. This is one of many disputes over doctrine and practice that affected the Christian church during the Middle Ages.





After the Western Roman Empire collapsed, barbarian kingdoms rose in many parts of Europe. The barbarians had migrated there from Eastern Europe. “Barbarian” was the term the Romans used to describe anyone who was not a Roman citizen. The people they were describing as barbarians did not call themselves barbarians. They instead considered themselves a member of their individual tribe. For instance, members of the Visigoth tribes would think of themselves as Visigoths, not as barbarians. It is also important to remember that even though the Romans looked down on the barbarians for their different customs, many of these barbarians adopted Roman customs. In fact, within a couple of centuries, most of the formerly pagan barbarians had become Christians! We will be learning about several of these kingdoms that rose after the fall of Rome throughout this book, including the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes, the Franks, the Vandals, and the Visigoths.

MAPS

**ANALYZE** How much of Western Europe was under the control of the barbarian kingdoms? (Hint: Only the Eastern Roman Empire on the map is not barbarian.)

**CONNECT** Based on what you read in this chapter, why did the Eastern Roman Empire not collapse when the Western one did?

If you were with me in the first volume of this series, you will remember how we learned about the Early Christian Church — the brave men and women who were either eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ or had heard the Gospel from another early follower of the faith and placed their trust in Christ. The Early Church faced incredible persecution from the outside and turmoil from within. Those who did not understand them or outright hated them for this new religion sought to hurt or kill them, and there were also those who attacked it from within by wanting to change the Gospel to what they wanted it to be. God knew that the Early Church needed strong leaders to help guide them through these difficult times. These Early Church leaders have become known in history as the Church Fathers.



One of these Church leaders, Polycarp, who lived about a century after Christ, taught that every believer should protect the Apostles' teachings. This reminds me of the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Timothy 1:5–7: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline" (NIV). We each have the duty to guard the gift of the Gospel. Polycarp endured much persecution in his life, which ended in martyrdom (Jones 2009, 28–29) when he was burned at the stake.

Another Early Church leader who made a deep impact on the medieval church was Augustine in the late 300s and early 400s. Augustine is a wonderful example of how God uses His redeeming love to chase people down. As a young man, Augustine's mother prayed faithfully for her son to turn from the rather wild and sinful life he was so attracted to. God brought the wayward Augustine to His heart and taught Him the power of forgiveness. Augustine founded a monastery, became the bishop of Hippo, and became known in history as a brilliant theologian.



Polycarp



Saint Augustine by Philippe de Champaigne