Lesson 1:
The Early Middle Ages

Topic 7: Medieval Christian Europe
OBJECTIVES

Summarize ways in which the Byzantine empire flourished after the decline of Rome

Explain the impact of the fall of Rome on Western Europe

Describe how Germanic tribes carved Europe into small kingdoms

Explain how Charlemagne briefly reunited much of Western Europe and what happened to his empire after his death
The Byzantine Empire Thrives

The thousand-year span between the fall of the Roman empire and the Renaissance beginnings of modern history is known as the Middle Ages.

Best remembered today for knights on horseback and towering Gothic cathedrals, this medieval period began with the collapse of the western Roman empire.
The Byzantine Empire Thrives

Constantine and his successors shifted their base to the eastern Mediterranean

Constantine rebuilt the Greek city of Byzantium renamed it after himself—Constantinople

By 330, he made Constantinople the new capital of the empire.
The Byzantine Empire Thrives

From this “New Rome,” roads fanned out to the Balkans, to the Middle East, and to North Africa.

It became known as the **Byzantine Empire**
Constantinople Grows

The center of the empire

The city was located on the shores of the **Bosphorus**, a strait that links the Mediterranean and the Black Sea

Constantinople had an excellent harbor and was guarded on three sides by water
Constantinople Grows

Emperors built a system of land and seawalls

Constantinople commanded key trade routes linking Europe and Asia

The city’s location made it Europe’s busiest marketplace: silks from China, wheat from Egypt, gems from India, spices from Southeast Asia, and furs from Viking lands in the north
Constantinople Grows

At the center of the city emperors and empresses lived in glittering splendor.

Dressed in luxurious silk, they attended chariot races at the Hippodrome Arena.

The spectacle was another reminder of the city’s glorious Roman heritage.
A Blending of Cultures

The empire eventually declined to a small area around Constantinople itself.

Yet it was still in existence nearly 1,000 years after the fall of the western Roman empire.

It promoted a brilliant civilization that blended ancient Greek, Roman, and Christian influences with other traditions of the Mediterranean world.
The Byzantine Empire reached its greatest size under the emperor **Justinian**

Ruled from 527 to 565

Justinian was determined to revive ancient Rome by retaking lands that had been overrun by invaders
Led by General Belisarius, Byzantine armies reconquered North Africa, Italy, and the southern Iberian peninsula. The fighting drained Justinian’s treasury and weakened his defenses in the east. The victories were temporary and Justinian’s successors lost the lands one after the other.
In 532, riots and a fire destroying many buildings.

Justinian launched a program to make Constantinople grander than ever.

His great triumph was rebuilding the church of **Hagia Sophia**.

The interior glowed with colored marble and embroidered silk curtains.
Justinian’s Code

Justinian also reformed law He set up a commission to collect, revise, and organize all the laws of ancient Rome

The result was the Corpus Juris Civilis, or “Body of Civil Law,” popularly known as Justinian’s Code

Justinian’s Code had a legal and political impact far beyond the Byzantine empire

By the 1100s, it had reached Western Europe

Monarchs modeled their laws on its principles, which would slowly, over many centuries, help them to centralize their power
To Justinian, the law was a means to unite the empire. He was an autocrat. Like earlier Roman emperors, he had a large bureaucracy to carry out his orders. He also had power over the Church and was seen as Christ’s co-ruler on Earth.
Justinian's Rule

His control was aided by his wife, Theodora.

A shrewd politician, she served as advisor and co-ruler to Justinian.

She even challenged the emperor's orders and pursued her own policies.
The Economy

Strong central government that exercised strict control over a prosperous economy

Peasants formed the backbone, working the land, paying taxes, and providing soldiers for the military

In the cities of the empire, trade and industry flourished
As coined money disappeared from the Roman empire in the west, the Byzantine empire preserved a healthy money economy.

The *bezant*, the Byzantine gold coin stamped with the emperor’s image, circulated from England to China.
The Military

Built one of the strongest military forces in the world

Soldiers, ships, and sailors protected the empire, and fortifications protected its capital

Relied on a secret weapon called Greek fire

For centuries it was an effective and terrifying weapon of the Byzantine navy
The Decline of the Empire

The Byzantine empire rose and fell, its skilled forces held off attacks by invaders.

The empire withstood successive attacks by Persians, Slavs, Vikings, Huns, Arabs, and Turks.

Served as a buffer for Western Europe by absorbing the brunt of invasions from the east.
Among the fiercest attacks came from the Arab armies that were carrying Islam into the Mediterranean world and beyond. In the 600s and 700s, Arab armies overran the provinces of Egypt and Syria before advancing on Constantinople. The city held out, eventually turning back the attacks.
Changes in Western Europe

The Middle Age 500 to 1350

Refers to the time between the ancient and modern worlds

The **Early Middle Ages**, lasting from about 500 to 1050

The **Late Middle Ages**, lasting from about 1050 to 1350
The Germanic people shifted the focus to the north.

The people of Europe would begin to create a new civilization, building on the legacy of Rome.

Despite the disorder and decay the Western Europe was a place of great potential.
Decline

As Rome declined and withdrew these lands suffered severe blows

Waves of invaders swept in, and Roman civilization slowly disappeared

Wars raged constantly

Trade slowed to a trickle, towns emptied, and learning virtually ceased
The Germanic Kingdoms

The Germanic tribes included the Goths, Vandals, Saxons, and Franks

Mostly farmers and herders

They lived in small communities governed by unwritten customs

Their kings were elected leaders, chosen by tribal councils
Germanic Warriors

Warriors swore loyalty to the king in exchange for weapons and a share in the plunder taken from defeated enemies.

Between 400 and 700, these Germanic tribes carved Western Europe into small kingdoms.
The strongest and most successful kingdom was that of the Franks.

486, Clovis, king of the Franks, conquered the former Roman province of Gaul.

Clovis ruled according to Frankish custom but preserved much of the Roman legacy in Gaul.
Clovis took an important step when he converted to Christianity, the religion of his subjects in Gaul. He not only earned their support, but gained a powerful ally in the pope.
Islam swept out of the Middle East across the Mediterranean world as the Germanic tribes took over Europe. Muslims built a huge empire and created a major new civilization. The pope and the Christian kingdoms in Europe watched with alarm as Muslim armies overran Christian lands from Palestine to North Africa and Spain.
Muslims in Europe

When a Muslim army crossed into France, Charles Martel rallied Frankish warriors

At the Battle of Tours in 732, Christian warriors triumphed

To them, the victory was a sign that God was on their side

Muslims advanced no farther into Western Europe, they ruled most of what is now Spain
To European Christians, the Muslim presence in Spain and around the Mediterranean was a source of anxiety and anger.

Even when the Muslim armies were no longer a threat, Christians continued to have a hostile view of the Muslim world.
Charlemagne

The grandson of Charles Martel
Became king of the Franks in 768
He built an empire reaching across what is now France, Germany, and part of Italy
He became known as Charlemagne, or Charles the Great
Expansion of Empire

Spent much of his 46-year reign fighting

Muslims in Spain, Saxons in the north, Avars and Slavs in the east, Lombards in Italy

Loved battle and was a successful conqueror

Reunited much of the old Roman empire in Europe
Emperor of the Romans

In 799, Pope Leo III asked for help against rebellious nobles in Rome, Charlemagne helped out.

On Christmas Day in the year 800, the pope showed his gratitude by placing a crown on Charlemagne’s head and proclaiming him Emperor of the Romans.
Significance

A Christian pope had crowned a Germanic king successor to the Roman emperors.

In doing so, Pope Leo III revived the ideal of a united Christian community, which came to be called Christendom.
Significance

Outraged the eastern Roman emperor in Constantinople, as the Byzantine emperor saw himself as the sole Roman ruler.

Deepened an already growing split between the eastern and western Christian worlds.

Sowed the seeds for a power struggle between later popes and Germanic emperors.
A Unified Christian Empire

Charlemagne set out to control his lands and create a united Christian Europe.

Many of his subjects were pagan.

Worked closely with the Church to spread Christianity to the conquered peoples on the fringes of his empire.

Missionaries won converts among the Saxons and Slavs.
Government

Appointed powerful nobles to rule local regions

He gave them land so they could offer support and supply soldiers for his armies

To keep control of these provincial rulers, he sent out officials called *missi dominici* to check on roads, listen to grievances, and see that justice was done
Aachen

Hoped to make it a "second Rome"

Effort to revive Latin learning included schools and building

Education was seen to strengthen his empire

The need for records and clear reports was essential for government to succeed
Palace Schools

To ensure a supply of educated officials

Scholars there from all over

**Alcuin of York** ran the palace school

Scholars copied ancient manuscripts including the Bible and Latin works of history and science
Charlemagne’s Legacy

He extended Christian civilization into northern Europe

Furthered the blending of Germanic, Roman, and Christian traditions

Set up a system for strong, efficient government

Later medieval rulers looked to his example when they tried to strengthen their own kingdoms
New Invasions Pound Europe

843, Charlemagne’s grandsons drew up the **Treaty of Verdun**, which split the empire into three regions.

The empire was divided just at a time when these lands were faced with new waves of invasions.
Three Sources of Attacks

Between about 700 to about 1000

Western Europe was battered by invaders from other lands

Muslims, Magyars, and Vikings conquered lands across the region
Even after their defeat at Tours in 732, Muslim forces kept up their pressure on Europe.

In the late 800s, they conquered the island of Sicily, which became a thriving center of Muslim culture.

Not until the 900s, when power struggles erupted in the Middle East, did Muslim attacks finally subside.
The Magyars

About 900 the Magyars overran Eastern Europe and attacked the Byzantine empire

They moved on to Germany, parts of France, and Italy

After about 50 years they were turned back and settled in what is today Hungary
At home, they were independent farmers ruled by land-owning chieftains.

Expert sailors and ferocious fighters lived in Scandinavia.

They looted and burned communities along the coasts and rivers of Europe from Ireland to Russia.
The Vikings

The Vikings were not just fierce warriors

They were traders and explorers as well

In their far-ranging voyages, they sailed around the Mediterranean Sea and crossed the Atlantic Ocean
Leif Erikson set up a short-lived Viking colony on the continent of North America in about the year 1000.

Other Vikings opened trade routes that linked northern Europe to Mediterranean lands.

Vikings also settled in England, northern France (Normandy), Ireland, and parts of Russia.