**The Rise and Fall of Rome**

**The Beginning of Rome**

At around 1200 BC a group called the Latins settled on a plain in Italy called the Palatine. The Latins built gravel roads to bring salt from the coast and timber from the forests. By 776 BC the settlement on the Palatine became a village with a population of around 1,000 people living in wooden huts. They were mostly farmers. They called their village Rome.

Around 800 BC a new group of people called the Etruscans moved into the hills of northern Italy. By 600 BC the Etruscans controlled all of northern Italy and the village of Rome. The Etruscans were more advanced than the Latins. They had an alphabet, used arches to build stronger bridges, used sewer systems, had military parades and they had polytheistic religions with many human-like gods.

The Etruscan kings ruled Rome for more than 200 years. In 509 BC Roman farmers went to war with the king and freed their town. They set up the Roman Republic, a government where the people choose their own leaders to represent them. The free persons in Rome were called citizens. The citizens of the Roman Republic were divided into two classes. The upper-class of noblemen and their families were called Patricians. These men could hold political, military, or religious offices. The Plebeians were the common people who made up most of the population.

The Romans knew that the Etruscans would try to take Rome back, so the new Republic sent their armies to attack the Etruscans in the rest of the Italian Peninsula. By 275 BC Rome had defeated the Etruscans as well as Greek settlements in Italy and ruled the entire peninsula.

**The Roman Republic Expands**

Now that the Romans controlled the peninsula, they came into contact with other groups of people. The most powerful group was from the city of Carthage. The Carthaginians controlled all of North Africa, most of what is now Spain, and many of the islands in the Mediterranean Sea.

Between the years 241-146 BC Rome and Carthage fought 3 wars. The first war was fought to a draw before the two sides made peace. The second war was the bloodiest of the three and the Carthaginian army, led by General Hannibal, attacked Rome over land from Spain. Hannibal spent 15 years in Italy with his armies. However, he was not able to break through the walls of Rome. Ultimately Rome sent an army to attack Carthage in Africa and this finally forced Hannibal to retreat from Italy and return to Carthage. In 201 Hannibal lost his first battle ever to the Romans at Zama. Carthage agreed to pay a huge sum of money to Rome and give up all its territories.

There were 50 years of peace between the two until in 146 BC Rome decided Carthage was getting too powerful again and attacked them one last time. After defeating the Carthaginians the Romans burned down their city and took all of its people back to Italy as slaves.

That same year, 146 BC, the Greek city-state of Corinth refused to obey a Roman order. The Romans attacked the city and burned it to the ground. Now the Romans added Greece to the lands they controlled.

**The Last Years of the Republic**

All the new lands conquered by the Romans brought great wealth to many in the Republic. Unfortunately, most of that wealth went to the upper class Patricians. Large estates replaced Rome’s small farms and most farmers had to leave and go to the city.

Beginning in 79 BC two new generals fought for the support of the Senate. They were Julius Caesar and Pompey. The Senate ultimately favored Pompey and in 58 BC sent Julius Caesar to a territory in the north called Gaul (France). They expected Julius Caesar to be defeated by the fierce people of Gaul. To their disappointment within seven years Caesar had conquered all of what is today France, Belgium and even invaded England. The Senate ordered Caesar to send his armies home and return to Rome. Instead, Caesar broke Roman law and marched his armies all the way to Rome. Pompey and the Senate fled to Greece but were later defeated by Caesar. He returned to Rome and made the Senate name him dictator, or ruler, for life.

Caesar did a lot of good for the people of Rome. Still, many upper class Romans disliked Caesar for taking power away from the Senate. About 60 men, most of them senators worked out a plan to kill him. As he entered the Senate chambers on March 15, 44 BC, Caesar was stabbed to death.

**Rome Becomes an Empire**

Angered by Caesar’s death, many of the Plebians (common people) turned against the Senate and those that helped kill him. Political power passed from Caesar to a triumvirate (three person agreement) of his closest followers. Mark Antony, Caesar’s closest friend and a general took control of the eastern territories. Octavian, Caesar’s adopted son, took command of Rome’s territories in the west. Lepidus, another one of Caesar’s generals, took control of Africa and all three shared Italy. This worked for a while but predictably the three began to fight.

In the end Octavian won out and controlled all of the Roman territories. Unlike Julius Caesar, Octavian understood that the Romans loved their Republic and did not want a king. He kept the Senate around, but took all the real power for himself. The Senate gave him the title “Augustus,” which means honored. He then took his adopted father’s name and became Caesar Augustus, the first Emperor of Rome.

Augustus brought peace, justice, and unity to the Roman world. This period was called the Pax Romana, or Roman peace. Augustus stopped the expansion of the Empire at places that could easily be defended.

**Later Roman Empire**

The Roman Emperors added themselves to the list of the many God's in the Roman religion. This meant that the Roman people had to worship the Emperors and their actions could not be questioned. Anyone who disagreed risked death. Thousands of Christians and Jews, who's religions are monotheistic, were killed either by execution or in cruel gladitorial games where they were often torn apart by wild animals in front of crowds as big as 50,000 people.

For the most part, Augustus's successors accepted his defensive foreign policies. Trajan was one of the last of Rome's great conquerers. He expanded Rome further to the east than ever before and further north into Britain. However, before he returned to Rome in 117 AD, Trajan died. Between 96 AD and 186 AD, the Five Good Emperors ruled. They helped feed poor children in Italy, and made laws for the good treatment of slaves. After Marcus Aurelius, the last of the Five Good Emperors, died there were 50 years of civil war. There were 26 different emperors during this time and 25 of them died by assassination.

In 284 AD Diocletion became Emperor of Rome. He split the Empire into two parts because it had become too big to rule. He took the richer, eastern part of the Empire for his own and named a separate emperor for the western half. When Diocletion decided to retire the Empire again fell into civil war.

Constantine became Rome's Emperor in 312 AD. He was tired of the corruption in Rome and therefore moved his capital to a city in the east called Byzantium. He renamed the city Constantinople. Constantine later became a Christian and ended the worship of the Roman gods and the Emperor in the Empire.

The Western half of the empire fell into decline and was continually invaded by Germanic barbarians. In 476 AD Rome finally fell and the west was divided into kingdoms ruled by the various Germanic tribes. The Eastern half of the empire became know as the Byzantine Empire and survived until 1453 AD when it was defeated by the Ottoman Turks.