



## Course Learning Outcomes for Unit V

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

2. Analyze the political, cultural, and social contexts out of which the West developed.
  - 2.1 Recall political, cultural, and social contexts that shaped the West.
3. Evaluate the causes and effects of major historical events, including the influence of key individuals, institutions, and ideologies.
  - 3.1 Recall key individuals and their influence on major historical events.

## Reading Assignment

### Chapter 8:

Europe in the Early Middle Ages, 600-1000

### Chapter 9:

State and Church in the High Middle Ages, 1000-1300

## Unit Lesson

### The World After Rome

Unit V discusses the world after Rome. Three distinct civilizations seized control of what had been the Roman Empire within two centuries of its final collapse and dissolution. This includes the Germanic tribes that controlled central and western Europe; the Byzantine Empire, centered on Greek Constantinople in the East; and the Muslim civilizations arising in Arabia.

**The Germanic tribes:** Chaos reigned in the lands of the Western Roman Empire for centuries. Armies rampaged back and forth, bandits pillaged the countryside, and the people knew nothing of peace, or law, or formal education. Many historians described these early centuries as the Dark Ages as little was accomplished in this time.

**The Eastern Roman Empire:** This coalesced into the Byzantine Empire and would survive for another thousand years after the fall of Rome. They gradually shed their Roman influences and developed a society that was mostly Greek in nature. While their emperors claimed to be the legitimate rulers of Rome, the tribes that controlled those regions ignored them. In 527, Justinian came to the throne in Constantinople, intent on revitalizing his own capitol city and reconquering the Mediterranean world. His general, Belisarius, annihilated the Vandals in Northwest Africa and defeated the Ostrogoths in heavy fighting to retake Rome. By the time Justinian died in 565, the Mediterranean empire was partially restored. However, subsequent events would lead to many of the gains slipping away. The Lombards overpowered the Byzantines to take Rome in the seventh century, and Constantinople faced a new threat from the Middle East.

### The Rise of Islam

Out of the swirling dust and lonely caravan routes from the deserts of Arabia, Islam arose. Trade routes had shifted in recent generations, giving the cities of Mecca and Medina (Yathrib, prior to the rise of Islam) in western Arabia a new prominence, though the cities clashed with the nomadic Bedouins in the rural areas.

**Muhammad:** Muhammad was born in 571 and came to lead the new faith of Islam. He was an orphan and later became a respected caravan manager. According to Muslims, he felt spiritually empty and ventured into

the countryside to fast in order to seek divine insights into his spiritual questions. The revelations he emerged with, claiming they were sent from Allah (meaning "God" in Arabic), became the foundation of Islam (meaning "submission to the will of God" in Arabic) and became the heart of the *Qur'an* (also spelled *Koran*, and *Quran*), the Muslim holy book.

## Five Pillars of Islam

Islam has five core tenets, or pillars:

- faith in Allah as the one true God and Muhammad as His Prophet;
- payment of the zakat (2.5% of one's income) to the poor;
- taking the hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca) at least once in one's lifetime if physically and financially able;
- honoring the holy month of Ramadan through fasting; and
- prayers five times daily toward Mecca and observance of Friday as the Sabbath.

Believers who submit to Allah's will receive eternal life in paradise. Islam is a monotheistic faith and the youngest of the world's great religions. Roughly 1.5 billion people practice it around the world, mostly in the Middle East, North Africa, and portions of South Asia. Muslims incorporate portions of Old Testament and New Testament teachings into their faith from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Moses, Abraham, and Jesus are considered prophets, but Muhammad is considered the most important of them.

In 622, Muhammad began preaching his new faith in his home city of Mecca, attacking what he saw as the immoral practices of the city. He was driven out to nearby Yathrib, whose people took him in and immediately became drawn to the new message. The name of the city was changed to Medina (meaning "city of the prophet"). The year 622 thus became Year One in the Muslim calendar with his journey becoming known as the Hegira. By 630, armed with an army of converts, he took Mecca by force. From there, the Muslims seized control of the Arabian peninsula.

After Muhammad's death in 632, his father-in-law, Abu Bakr, became the caliph, or head of the Muslim community. As with many other societies at the time, Muslims did not practice the separation of church and state, and the head of the church was the head of the state.

The Muslims attacked both the Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire, who were in the middle of their own war against one another. In 636, Muslims defeated the Byzantine army at Yarmuk, paving the way for the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem and then relentlessly moving into Syria by 640. Muslims moved westward into Africa, with Egypt falling into Muslim hands in 642. All of Persia fell by 650. By 700, the entire North African coast was in their hands. The Visigoth Kingdom in Iberia disintegrated under their forces by 711. Moving steadily eastward at the same time, Muslim forces reached what is now Indonesia in the 900s.

A major split erupted in the caliphate. Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali, was murdered in 661 while at his capital in Medina. A Muslim general, Muawiya, became caliph and ushered in the age of the Umayyad Dynasty. Muawiya and his followers, the Shiites, moved the capital of the caliphate to Damascus. Followers of Ali, who believed he was the true caliph, became the Sunni sect. It remains a divisive point in the Muslim community to this day.

**The Abbasid Dynasty:** This emerged in 750 with Abu Al-Abbas seizing control of the caliphate and moving the capital to a new, more central city on the trade routes near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Mesopotamia. From Baghdad, the Abbasids ruled until their fall in 1258.

The Muslim advance faltered. Though they inflicted intense attacks on the Byzantine Empire by land and sea, a relative balance began to emerge for the next few centuries. In 732, Charles Martel repelled the Muslim invasion of France at the battle of Tours.

## The Crusades

By the late eleventh century, Emperor Alexius I, grew increasingly concerned about the relentless attacks on Byzantine territory in Asia Minor by the Muslims. The stalemate between the two powers was faltering, and he reached out to the west for help. The Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church had split in the mid-eleventh century over doctrinal and political issues. Pope Urban II, however, was happy to lend

assistance and called on all Christians in Central and Western Europe to launch a crusade to retake the Holy Lands for Christianity. Three years later, by 1098, a Crusader army, mostly French, marched through Constantinople and seized Antioch. Within a year, they seized Jerusalem in intense fighting that left tens of thousands dead.

At the end of the First Crusade, Christian forces organized the lands into four Crusader States:

- the Kingdom of Jerusalem (modern-day Israel and the areas along the Jordan River),
- the County of Tripoli (southern Lebanon),
- the County of Edessa (what is now northern Syria), and
- the Principality of Antioch (which included central and northern Lebanon).

For the next two centuries, Christian and Muslim forces fought bitterly for control of the region in a contest of faiths and civilizations that would have profound consequences for both.

Muslim forces rebounded and attacked the Crusader states, taking Edessa in 1144. One church leader, St. Bernard of Clairveaux, demanded that Christians rise up for the Second Crusade as a result. The two-year war, from 1147 to 1149, which featured armies mostly from the Holy Roman Empire (Germany) and France, was inconclusive.

Toward the end of the twelfth century, Saladin, a capable and charismatic new figure, arose among the Muslims, who unified the armies and charged at the heart of the Crusader States. In 1187, Saladin led his forces in the reconquest of Jerusalem. In 1189, the Third Crusade was in full swing as armies from France and Germany arrived as well as armies under Richard I (also called “the Lionheart”) from England. However, the Crusader armies from Europe remained bogged down on the coast, unable to move inland from their coastal strongholds. After three years of inconclusive fighting, Richard the Lionheart negotiated a peace treaty with Saladin, allowing Christian pilgrims to enter Jerusalem.

Frustrated at the steady losses by Christian forces, Pope Innocent III called for the Fourth Crusade in 1193 but was unable to attract much interest. In 1203, Venetians, looking to get rid of their largest trading competitor, the Byzantine Empire, convinced the assembling Crusader army to attack Constantinople instead. By 1204, the city was in Crusader hands, and as a result, decades of civil war gripped Constantinople before the severely weakened Byzantine army was able to dislodge the Crusader forces in 1261. The Crusades, which were initially meant to help the struggling Byzantine Empire, resulted in its destruction. Byzantine control was reduced to mostly the areas around Constantinople until it was overrun in 1453.

In the twelfth century, Europe was in the midst of a religious frenzy. Steadily, more Europeans were traveling across the continent to tour tombs of saints of the church, even travelling into the Holy Lands. Several popes initiated reforms to stem abuses within the church as well as to stamp out heresy.

Jews became particular targets in many communities and were expelled from England and France. In other areas, they were pushed into ghettos, segregated neighborhoods where only they could live. Many moved into eastern Europe in pursuit of any form of relief from their persecution in western Europe.

The time period also saw persecution of other sects. The Albigensian Crusade, beginning in 1208 at the behest of Pope Innocent III, targeted a Christian sect in France that had broken away from the Roman Catholic Church. The Albigensians were strict pacifists who rejected worldly goods, the priesthood, the sacrament of baptism, and the Old Testament. Such opposition to the church enraged secular and ecclesiastical leaders alike. French forces swarmed through Albigensian villages, maiming, torturing, and killing tens of thousands of people before the attacks stopped in 1228.

The Children’s Crusade is the bizarre and tragic story of two children who led thousands of others away from their homes, never to be seen again. In 1212, a French shepherd named Stephen, just a child himself, claimed to have received a vision that he was to retake the Holy Lands for Christianity. He so convinced other children that 30,000 joined him on a trek to the ports of Marseilles in southern France to seek ships to take them. The crews willing to take them, however, sailed to North Africa and forced them into slavery instead.

Some 20,000 joined Nicholas of Cologne, a ten-year-old boy, when he claimed a similar vision and led his followers to Italy. Many of the children could not cross the Alps and dispersed, aimlessly wandering the countryside, while others managed to reach the bustling trading ports of Italy where ships refused

them passage. Few of any of these children ever returned home. Later crusades between 1219 and 1270 were unable to reclaim any portion of the Holy Lands for the Christians for long. When the port of Acre was seized by Muslim forces in 1291, this effectively ended the Crusades.

## Suggested Reading

The following textbook is optional. It has additional readings that correspond with the topics covered in the course textbook, and you may find these sources interesting. You will not be tested on any information from this textbook:

McKay, J. P., Crowston, C. H., Weisner-Hanks, M. E., & Perry, J. (2014). *Sources for western society: From antiquity to the enlightenment* (3rd ed., Vol. 1). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.