

AD 330 – 1453

Byzantine Empire Timeline

The Byzantine Empire was the eastern half of the Roman Empire, ruled from Constantinople, which carried on Roman law, Greek learning and Orthodox Christianity for more than a thousand years after Rome itself fell.

AD 330 — **Constantinople Becomes the Capital**

Emperor Constantine the Great dedicates Constantinople, the rebuilt Greek city of Byzantium, as the new capital of the Roman Empire.

> **Why it mattered:** *The new capital sat on the crossroads of Europe and Asia and became the heart of the empire for more than 1,100 years.*

395 — **The Empire Splits in Two**

When Emperor Theodosius I dies, the Roman Empire is divided for good between his two sons, one ruling the west from Italy and one ruling the east from Constantinople.

> **Why it mattered:** *The two halves went separate ways: the richer east grew into the Byzantine Empire, while the west grew weaker.*

476 — **The Western Empire Falls**

The Germanic general Odoacer removes Romulus Augustulus, the last emperor in the west, and rules Italy as a king.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Roman Empire lived on only in the east, and Constantinople became the greatest city of the Christian world.*

529–534 — **Justinian's Code**

Emperor Justinian I has his scholars gather and organize centuries of Roman laws into one set of books, later called the Body of Civil Law.

> **Why it mattered:** *Justinian's Code preserved Roman law and became the base of the legal systems of much of Europe and Latin America today.*

Byzantine Empire Timeline *continued*

537 — **Hagia Sophia Is Completed**

After riots destroy the old church in 532, Justinian has the Hagia Sophia rebuilt in under six years with a huge dome that seems to float on a ring of windows.

> **Why it mattered:** *It was the largest church in the world for nearly a thousand years and its design inspired churches and mosques for centuries.*

717–718 — **Arab Siege Fails**

A huge Arab army and fleet besiege Constantinople for a year, but Emperor Leo III's defenders hold the walls and burn enemy ships with Greek fire, a liquid that kept burning on water.

> **Why it mattered:** *The victory stopped the Arab advance into southeastern Europe and kept Constantinople Christian for another 700 years.*

1054 — **The Great Schism**

Leaders of the church in Rome and the church in Constantinople excommunicate each other after years of disputes over the pope's authority and church practices.

> **Why it mattered:** *Christianity split into the Roman Catholic Church in the west and the Eastern Orthodox Church in the east, a division that still exists today.*

1071 — **Battle of Manzikert**

The Seljuk Turks defeat a Byzantine army at Manzikert in eastern Anatolia and capture Emperor Romanos IV.

> **Why it mattered:** *The empire lost most of Anatolia, its main source of soldiers and food, and in 1095 Emperor Alexios I asked the pope for help, which led to the First Crusade.*

1204 — **Crusaders Sack Constantinople**

Soldiers of the Fourth Crusade, who had set out to fight in the Holy Land, attack and loot Constantinople and set up their own Latin Empire there.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Byzantines took their city back in 1261, but the empire never recovered its wealth or strength.*

1453 — **The Fall of Constantinople**

Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II besieges Constantinople with giant cannons; on May 29 his troops break in and the last emperor, Constantine XI, dies fighting.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Byzantine Empire ended after more than a thousand years, and the city became the Ottoman capital, later known as Istanbul.*