

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 139, 500 to 1500 summary

Dark ages, Middle ages, Renaissance, many western Christian historians define the general period from around 500 to around 1500 with these titles more specifically the fall of Rome's western empire in 476 followed by the Dark ages which in some areas lasted until the 1300's. The Middle ages begin when King Charlemagne of the Franks is crowned first Holy Roman Emperor of the West by Pope Leo III in 800, also known as the Western Christian Medieval period. The event that marks the end of this period is when the Last Crusader city (Acre) falls to the Mamelukes in 1291. The late middle ages or Renaissance begins with Dante's writings known as the Divine Comedy written between 1307–1314. This period comes to a close with a number of key events such as the discovery of the Americas by the west in 1492 by Christopher Columbus and the beginning of the Reformation in 1517. Some carry the time of the renaissance to 1700.

We spent the last two sessions on the crusades which take place right in the middle of this 1000-year period. Now let's take a little time on this window to see some of the major world history events taking place primarily in the western Christian World.

Dark Ages: After the fall of Rome as is the case in any fall of a society decades or even centuries of chaos, disease and war tend to leave less written history than the times before and after ergo the title dark ages. The first big blow to civilization was the devastation of some 40% of Europe's population due to a plague in 541 & 542. Another reason it is often called the dark ages is various Germanic peoples conquered the former Roman Empire in the West (including Europe and North Africa), shoving aside ancient Roman traditions in favor of their own. The negative view of the so-called "Dark Ages" became popular largely because most of the written records of the time (including St. Jerome and St. Patrick in the fifth century, Gregory of Tours in the sixth and Bede in the eighth) had a strong Rome-centric bias. A good read on the History Channels website is "6 Reasons the Dark Ages Weren't So Dark"

The Middle Ages: AKA Early Medieval period in the Christian west circa 800-1300. As the church climbed in the leadership vacuum of in the west during the dark ages this led to quite a disagreement on who the actual pope was. The Western Schism or Papal Schism as it is called was a split within the Catholic Church which lasted from 1378 to 1417. Three men simultaneously claimed to be the true pope. Driven by politics rather than any theological disagreement, one in southern France and two in Rome. the schism was ended by the Council of Constance (1414–1418). For a good read on this I suggest Christianity Today's article titled "1378 The Great Papal Schism". As we call these ages Dark and middle I like to point out again that many great advances came to pass in the human condition, it is just that as progressive moderns we often look down our noses at the past not realizing that just because they lacked some of our technologies and suffered plagues, war and strife, does not mean they were not as intelligent if not more intelligent than we are today.

Renaissance: or Late Medieval period in the Christian west circa 1300-1700. Is regarded by most historians as the cultural bridge between the Middle Ages and modern history. It started as a cultural movement Florence Italy in the Late Medieval period and later spread to the rest of Europe, marking the beginning of the Early Modern Age. It was a time when all forms of art, architecture, Humanism, Science, Music, Religion began grow and flourish in many cultures. Leading to the age of enlightenment beginning in the 1600's. but we will save the enlightenment for another lesson. I think we will kick things off next month with the Reformation in 1517.

Till then
In Christ Pastor Portier