

The Fall of Rome

An **empire** is a large territory in which several groups of people are ruled by a single government or leader. The territory can be several thousands miles away from that leader or government. However, the territory must still follow the laws of that particular government. If a government has enough territories then all the land and people they rule is considered an empire.

One of the greatest empires in world history was the Roman Empire. Rome is a city in the country of Italy which is in the continent of Europe. Even though Rome was just a city it ruled territories that were thousands of miles away. The Roman Empire was powerful for over 500 years, from 27 B.C.E. to 476 C.E. At its height of power in 117 C.E. Rome ruled what is most of the continent of present day Europe, parts of the Middle East or what was called Asia Minor, and most of Northern Africa, including Egypt. The Roman Empire controlled the whole Mediterranean world during this era (*time period*).

The Roman Empire made laws for more than 50 million people. All the people in the empire had to follow Roman laws and use the same language in business and government. That language was Latin.

There was one person that was in charge of the empire. He was called an **emperor**. Rome's first emperor was **Caesar Augustus**. He was made emperor because he ended more than 100 years of civil war. A civil war is when different groups from the same country or empire fight against each other so that one group can have more power. Augustus was also responsible for expanding the empire.

When Augustus died in 14 C.E. many people thought that the Roman Empire would last forever. However, by the year 476 C.E. the empire weakened and it was split into two halves, the western and eastern empires. In 476 C.E., the western half of the empire disintegrated (*broke apart*). But, the Eastern half lasted for another 1000 years.

There was not one single or specific reason for the fall of the western half of the Roman Empire. Instead many historians point to a number of different problems combined that brought about the fall of the Roman Empire. There were 3 main reasons for the fall of Rome which are as follows: **political instability, economic and social problems**, and finally a **weakening of the frontier or border**.

Politics has to do with the laws and leaders of a place. Instability means that something is weak and is likely to fall. Political instability in the Roman Empire meant that the people and methods used to lead were not very strong or reliable.

For centuries the empire was very lucky. The emperors and other leaders of the empire were very smart and extremely good at running a government. However, there was a period when there were several weak and unreliable emperors. Furthermore, the methods that were used to transfer power from one emperor to another were not very good. When an emperor died then different groups within the empire fought each other to have either one of their friends or family members. This meant that the most qualified or best leaders were not chosen as the new emperors. Instead those that had the largest armies, or the most influential friends or family members became the new emperors. Often the **Praetorian Guard**, the emperor's private army, chose the new emperor. They had the best equipped army in the empire. They frequently chose the person who would offer them the largest reward, rather than select the person who was the most qualified.

Two of the most notorious (*famous for being bad*) emperors were Caligula and Nero. They were said to waste huge amounts of money on public work projects, like building statues, stadiums, and palaces. This meant that there were beautiful buildings in the empire but oftentimes many people would go hungry.

For a period of time many emperors were often assassinated as different groups within the empire tried to gain power. Within a one hundred year period there were 37 different emperors. Out of those 37 emperors, 25 were



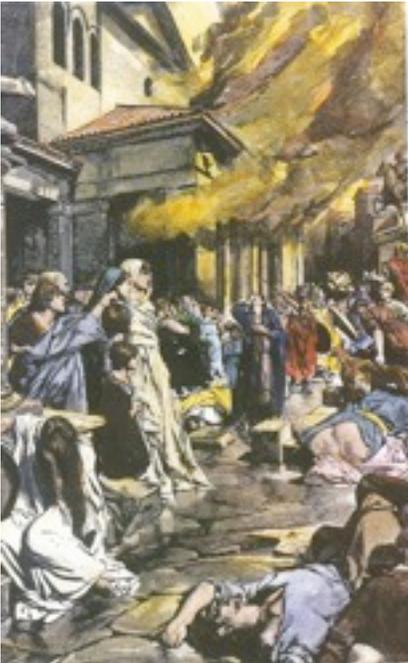
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assassinated (*murdered*). So many different emperors meant that there was not a strong and stable leader to head the great empire for an extended period of time.

Other reasons for the fall of Rome were **economic and social problems**. Economic problems have to do with money and finances. In order for Rome to pay its huge army the empire had to tax all its citizens very heavily. Such high taxes forced many people into poverty (*being poor*). Since there were so many poor people it meant that they could not buy as many goods, so trade or the economy suffered.

For many people unemployment was also a problem. Many people were out of work. The wealthy families in the empire used slave labor to work on their large estates. So there were not many paying jobs available. Furthermore, the small farmers could not afford to have slaves or hire other people. So they could not compete with the large estate owners. The small farmers were forced to sell their land and move to the cities to look for work. However, there was not enough work for everyone. Some people turned to crime to feed themselves and their families. The cities and the roads of the empire were often very dangerous places because so many people were desperate for money, food, and work.

There were also other social problems in the empire at the same time. There was corruption (*dishonesty*) among the leaders of the empire. Often people in positions of power stole from the empire or took bribes to show favoritism to individual people instead of serving all the people of the empire. Such corruption meant that many people were ashamed to be part of the empire. This shame led to a decline in the sense of loyalty that people had



towards the empire. For centuries many people were very proud to consider themselves part of the empire. However, the introduction of the social problems of corruption, crime, and unemployment meant that people did not take pride in being a Roman citizen.

Another problem that led to fall of the empire was the weakening of the empire's frontiers or borders. The huge size of the empire made it very difficult to defend. It sometimes took weeks for leaders in Rome to communicate with the generals that were defending the borders. By the 300's C.E.'s the Non - Roman tribes north of the Danube River, known as the Germanic tribes, were invading and stealing food and other goods from the empire.

In 330 C.E. the emperor Constantine took a step that changed the future of Roman Empire forever. He moved the capital of the empire from the Italian city of Rome to the city of Byzantium which was 850 miles east and not in danger of invasion from the Germanic tribes. He renamed the city the city New Rome. It was later called Constantinople, after the emperor Constantine. Today that city it is known as Istanbul and is located in the country of Turkey.

After Constantine's reign (*time in power*) was over, power in the empire was usually divided between 2 different emperors one in the west and one in the east.

Rome remained the capital of the western half of the empire and Constantinople was the capital of the eastern empire.

The emperors in Rome constantly found themselves threatened by invading Germanic tribes. Finally, in 410 C.E. one of these tribes attacked and looted (*stole from*) Rome. In 476, the last emperor of Rome was driven from his throne. After the fall of the western half of the Roman Empire, Europe split into several small kingdoms that were ruled by different tribes.

In the East the empire continued for another 1000 years. Today we call the eastern empire the Byzantine Empire. However, after Rome fell it did not mean that the greatness of Roman civilization ended. The influence of the Roman Empire lived on through medieval and modern times. There are many institutions and ideas that we have in our society today that were started in the Roman Empire. Things like our modern government, architecture, art, language, law, and philosophy were all started or improved by the Romans. If it was not for the influence of the Roman Empire our modern society as we know it would be very different than it is today.

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(Answer all questions in complete sentences)

NAME:

1. What is an *empire*?
2. What country and continent is the city of Rome located in?
3. Between which 2 dates was Rome a powerful empire?
4. Which three regions (*areas*) did the Roman Empire control at its height of power?
5. How many people did the Roman Empire control at its height of power?
6. Who was the first emperor of Rome?
7. According to the reading, why was the first emperor chosen to be in charge of the empire?
8. What is a *civil war*?
9. According to the reading, what were 3 reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire?
10. What did *political instability* in the Roman Empire mean?
11. How did the Romans choose their new emperors?
12. Why was this method a bad way to choose the new emperors?
13. What were the *Praetorian Guards*?
14. What does *notorious* mean?
15. What did the 2 bad emperors spend money on?

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16. Why was this bad for the people in the empire?
17. What does *assassinate* mean?
18. Why were so many different emperors bad for the Empire?
19. Rome had a huge army. Why was this bad for the people who were not in the army?
20. What does *poverty* mean?
21. Why is it bad for the economy if there are too many poor people?
22. Why did people turn to crime in the Roman Empire?
23. Why were people in the Roman Empire ashamed to be citizens?
24. Why were the borders of the empire difficult to defend?
25. Who invaded and stole from the Roman Empire?
26. What did the emperor Constantine do that change the future of the Roman Empire?
27. What is the city of Byzantium known as today?
28. When did the *western half* of the empire end?
29. How long did the Eastern empire last after the fall of the Western empire?
30. What 6 things in modern society were influenced by Roman culture?