

Lesson 2 Decline and Fall of the Empire

MAIN IDEAS

Culture A series of internal problems weakened the Roman Empire.

Government Under the leadership of two strong emperors, the struggling empire underwent significant changes.

Government Foreign groups invaded Rome and conquered the western half of the empire.

Internal Weaknesses Threaten Rome

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What internal problems weakened the Roman Empire?

Economic and Social Difficulties

- Empire stopped expanding in second century; ended new revenue sources
- Government raised taxes to pay growing expenses; hurt many citizens
- Education and distribution of news across the empire declined

Decline in Agriculture

- Much farmland destroyed by warfare and overuse; led to weak harvests
- War captives used as slave labor; discouraged improvements in farming

Military and Political Problems

- Once-powerful Roman army became less disciplined and loyal
 - soldiers pledged allegiance to military leaders, not Roman Empire
- Roman politics grew more corrupt; more politicians sought riches
 - citizens lost pride in government and their sense of civic duty

REVIEW QUESTION

How did military and political problems weaken the empire?

Rome Divides into East and West

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What changes did Rome undergo?

Power Shifts East

- Diocletian became emperor in 284
 - restored order with iron-fisted rule
 - divided empire into east and west to make it easier to govern
- **Constantine**—emperor after Diocletian; also made sweeping changes
- Diocletian ended attacks on Christians in 313; helped Christianity grow
 - moved capital from Rome to Greek city of Byzantium in 330
 - city became Constantinople; signaled rise of Eastern Empire

REVIEW QUESTION

What key changes did Constantine make to Rome?

Fall of the Roman Empire

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What brought about the fall of Rome?

Invasion and Conquest

- Germanic peoples from Europe and Asia pushed into Roman lands
 - some sought new land and wealth
 - others were fleeing invading Huns
- Germanic tribes took Rome in 476; marked fall of Western Roman Empire

End of the Empire

- **Clovis**—leader of the Franks—conquered remaining Roman land in Gaul
 - Frankish kingdom would grow large and powerful
- Eastern half of Roman Empire became Byzantine Empire; kept thriving

REVIEW QUESTION

What significant event occurred in 476?

Lesson Summary

- Internal problems weakened the Roman Empire.
- Two emperors brought key reforms to Rome.
- Foreign invaders conquered the Western Empire.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Lands once ruled by Rome still use many Roman institutions.