

Section

2

The Fall of Rome

Guide to Reading



History Social Science Standards

WH6.7 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures during the development of Rome.

WH7.1 Students analyze the causes and effects of the vast expansion and ultimate disintegration of the Roman Empire.

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

In Section 1, you learned about Roman life and achievements when the empire was at its height. Over time, however, the Roman Empire began to have problems, and it gradually grew weaker. Eventually, Rome fell to outside invaders.

Focusing on the Main Ideas

- Poor leadership, a declining economy, and attacks by Germanic tribes weakened the Roman Empire. (page 475)
- Rome finally fell when invaders swept through the empire during the A.D. 400s. (page 479)
- Rome passed on many achievements in government, law, language, and the arts. (page 482)

Locating Places

Constantinople

(KAHN • STAN • tuhn • OH • puhl)

Meeting People

Diocletian (DY • uh • KLEE • shuhn)

Constantine (KAHN • stuhn • TEEN)

Theodosius

(THEE • uh • DOH • shuhs)

Alaric (A • luh • rihk)

Odoacer (OH • duh • WAY • suhr)

Content Vocabulary

inflation (ihn • FLAY • shuhn)

barter (BAHR • tuhr)

reform (rih • FAWRM)

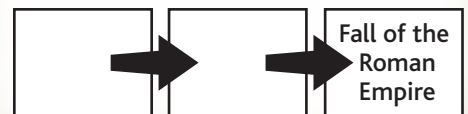
Academic Vocabulary

authority (uh • THAHR • uh • tee)

expand (ihk • SPAND)

Reading Strategy

Sequencing Information Create a diagram to show the events that led up to the fall of the Roman Empire.



Where & When?



A.D. 250

A.D. 284

Diocletian tries to reform empire

A.D. 350

A.D. 395

Roman Empire divided into eastern and western parts

A.D. 450

A.D. 476

Rome's last emperor overthrown



WH7.1.1 Study the early strengths and lasting contributions of Rome (e.g., significance of Roman citizenship; rights under Roman law; Roman art, architecture, engineering, and philosophy; preservation and transmission of Christianity) and its ultimate internal weaknesses (e.g., rise of autonomous military powers within the empire, undermining of citizenship by the growth of corruption and slavery, lack of education, and distribution of news).

The Decline of Rome

Main Idea Poor leadership, a declining economy, and attacks by Germanic tribes weakened the Roman Empire.

Reading Connection What do you do when you face a difficult problem? Do you try to solve it yourself? Do you ask other people for help? Read to learn about the problems the Roman Empire faced and how its leaders responded.

In A.D. 180 Marcus Aurelius died. His son, Commodus (KAH•muh•duhs), became emperor. Commodus was cruel and wasted money. Instead of ruling Rome, Commodus spent much of his time fighting as a gladiator. In A.D. 192 the emperor's bodyguard killed him. Many decades of confusion and conflict followed.

After Commodus, emperors called the Severans ruled Rome. Much of their time was spent putting down revolts and protecting Rome's borders. The Severans stayed in power by paying the army well, but they ignored the growing problems of crime and poverty.

Political and Social Problems When the last Severan ruler died in A.D. 235, Rome's government became very weak. For almost 50 years, army leaders constantly fought each other for the throne. During this time, Rome had 22 different emperors.

Poor leadership was not Rome's only difficulty. Fewer Romans honored the old ideals of duty, courage, and honesty. Many government officials took bribes. As problems

The Decline of Rome



Understanding Charts

Many issues, including a weak government, lack of food, and fewer jobs, led to Rome's decline.

1. According to the flow chart, what occurs after reform fails?
2. **Cause and Effect** What were the final effects of the Roman Empire being split in two?

increased, talented people often refused to serve in government. Many wealthy citizens even stopped paying taxes. Fewer people attended schools, and a large number of the empire's people were now enslaved. Wealthy Romans supported slavery because it was a cheap way to get work done.

Economic and Military Problems During the A.D. 200s, Rome's economy began to fall apart. As government weakened, law and

order broke down. Roads and bridges were destroyed, and trade routes became unsafe. Information could not be sent quickly across the empire, and Rome's army could no longer organize quickly enough to drive out invaders. Roman soldiers and invaders seized crops and destroyed fields. Farmers grew less food, and hunger began to spread.

As the economy worsened, people bought fewer goods. Artisans produced less, and shopkeepers lost money. Many businesses closed, and the number of workers dropped sharply. Many workers had to leave jobs and serve in the military.

Rome also began to suffer from **inflation** (ihn•FLAY•shuhn), or rapidly increasing prices. Inflation happens when money loses its value. How did this happen? The weak economy meant fewer taxes were paid. With less money coming in, the Roman government could not afford to defend its territories and had to find a way to pay its soldiers and officials. One way for the government to get the money it needed was to put less gold in its coins.

By putting less gold in each coin, the government could make extra coins and pay for more things. People soon learned that the coins did not have as much gold in them, and the coins began losing value. Prices went up, and many people stopped using money altogether. They began to **barter** (BAHR•tuhr), or exchange goods without using currency.

Meanwhile, invaders swept into the empire. In the west, Germanic tribes raided Roman farms and towns. In the east, armies from Persia pushed into the empire's territory. As fighting increased, the government could no longer enlist and pay Romans as soldiers. It began using Germanic warriors in the army. However, these Germanic soldiers were not loyal to Rome.

Primary Source

Distrust of Money

As the Roman Empire declined, people stopped trusting the value of money.

"Whereas [because] the public officials have assembled and have accused the bankers of the exchange banks of having closed them because of their unwillingness to accept the divine coin of the emperors, it has become necessary to issue an order to all owners of the banks to open them and to accept and exchange all coin except the absolutely spurious [false] and counterfeit—and not alone to them but to those who engage in business transactions of any kind."



▲ Roman coins

—"Distrust of Imperial Coinage,"
Oxyrhynchus Papyrus, no. 1411, Vol. 2,
A.S. Hunt, trans.



Document-Based Question

What do you think was happening to the economy of the empire as people stopped using the official money?

The Way It Was

What Were Diocletian's Reforms? In A.D. 284 a general named **Diocletian** (DY•uh•KLEE•shuhn) became emperor. To stop the empire's decline, he introduced **reforms** (rih•FAWRMZ), or political changes to make things better. Believing the empire to be too large to rule by himself, Diocletian changed its framework by dividing it into four parts. He named officials to rule these areas but kept **authority** over all.

Diocletian also worked to boost the economy. To slow inflation, he issued rules that set the prices of goods and the wages to be paid to workers. To make sure more goods were produced, he ordered workers to occupy the same jobs until they died. Diocletian's reforms failed. The people ignored the new rules, and Diocletian did not have enough power to enforce them.

Who Was Constantine? In A.D. 305 Diocletian retired from office. After an interval of conflict, another general named **Constantine** (KAHN•stuhn•TEEN) became emperor in A.D. 312. To aid the economy, Constantine issued several orders and passed important legislation. The sons of workers had to follow their fathers' trades, the sons of farmers had to work the land their fathers worked, and the sons of soldiers had to serve in the army.

Constantine's changes did not halt the empire's decline in the west. As a result, Constantine moved the capital from a dying Rome to a new city in the east. He chose the site of the Greek city of Byzantium (buh•ZAN•tee•uhm). There he built a forum, an amphitheater called the Hippodrome, and many palaces. The city became known as **Constantinople** (KAHN•STAN•tuhn•OH•puhl). Today, Constantinople is called Istanbul.

 **Reading Check Explain** How did Diocletian try to reverse the decline of Rome?

Focus on Everyday Life

Slavery in the Roman Empire Public and private slavery were common in Roman society. Public slaves were owned by the state. They took care of important buildings and served government officials. Educated public slaves were used to help organize the governments of conquered areas.

Private slaves were owned by individuals. They were often forced to work long hours and could be sold at any time. Wealthy Romans had hundreds or even thousands of enslaved people. Most enslaved people worked on farms.

Most enslaved people were men. This was probably because their work required great strength. Some enslaved men also became gladiators. Enslaved women made clothing and cooked for their owner's family.



▼ Roman slaves at work

Connecting to the Past

1. What was the main difference between public and private enslavement?
2. Which jobs were probably considered the most desirable by enslaved people?



CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

c. A.D. 280–337

First Christian Roman Emperor

Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to become a Christian, although he was not baptized until near his death in A.D. 337. He first came to believe in Christianity many years earlier, when he was a military leader. Constantine believed he had seen a flaming cross in the sky inscribed with these words: "By this sign thou shall conquer." The next day his army was victorious in an important battle. He believed that the cross was a call to the Christian God.

During his reign, Constantine granted new opportunities to Christians and helped advance the power of the early Catholic Church. At the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, he encouraged discussion about the acceptance of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). He also boosted the political positions and power of bishops within the Roman government.

Even though Constantine had many political and religious successes, his life was filled with controversy and tragedy. Constantine married a woman named Fausta. His eldest son from a previous marriage was named Crispus. Fausta accused Crispus of crimes and claimed that he was planning to seize the throne.

Constantine was so shocked that he had his son killed. Constantine later discovered that Fausta had lied because she wanted her own son to be in line for the throne. He then had Fausta killed.



▲ Constantine



▲ Modern-day Constantinople

Then and Now

Constantine believed freedom of religion was important for the success of his empire and made sure that Christians could no longer be persecuted. What part of the U.S. Constitution protects freedom of religion?



WH7.1.1 Study the early strengths and lasting contributions of Rome (e.g., significance of Roman citizenship; rights under Roman law; Roman art, architecture, engineering, and philosophy; preservation and transmission of Christianity) and its ultimate internal weaknesses (e.g., rise of autonomous military powers within the empire, undermining of citizenship by the growth of corruption and slavery, lack of education, and distribution of news). **WH7.1.2** Discuss the geographic borders of the empire at its height and the factors that threatened its territorial cohesion.

Rome Falls

Main Idea Rome finally fell when invaders swept through the empire during the A.D. 400s.

Reading Connection How would you feel if a favorite place—a shop, park, or recreation center—was closed after being open for many years? Read to learn how the Romans had to face an even greater loss when their city and empire fell.

Both Diocletian and Constantine failed to save the Roman Empire. When Constantine died in A.D. 337, fighting broke out again. A new emperor called **Theodosius** (THEE • uh • DOH • shuhs) finally gained control and ended the fighting.

Ruling the empire proved to be difficult. Theodosius decided to divide the empire after his death. In A.D. 395, the Roman Empire split into two separate empires. One was the Western Roman Empire, with its capital at Rome. The other was the Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital at Constantinople.

Rome Is Invaded As Rome declined, it was no longer able to hold back the Germanic tribes on its borders. Many different Germanic groups existed—Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Angles, and Saxons. They came from the forests and marshes of northern Europe.

These Germanic groups were in search of warmer climates and better grazing land for their cattle. They also were drawn by Rome's wealth and culture. In addition, many were fleeing the Huns, fierce warriors from Mongolia in Asia.

In the late A.D. 300s, the Huns entered Eastern Europe and defeated the Ostrogoths (AHS • truh • GAHTHS). The Visigoths, fearing for their own welfare, asked the Eastern Roman emperor for protection. He let them settle

Primary Source

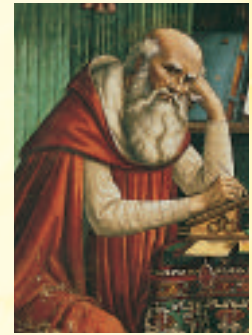
Rome Is Attacked

In this excerpt from one of his letters, the Christian leader Jerome describes attacks on the Roman provinces.

"Who would believe that Rome, victor over all the world, would fall, that she would be to her people both the womb and the tomb. . . .

Where we cannot help we mourn and mingle with theirs our tears. . . . There is not an hour, not even a moment, when we are not occupied with crowds of refugees, when the peace of the monastery is not invaded by a horde of guests so that we shall either have to shut the gates or neglect the Scriptures for which the gates were opened."

—Jerome, "News of the Attacks"



▲ Saint Jerome



Document-Based Question

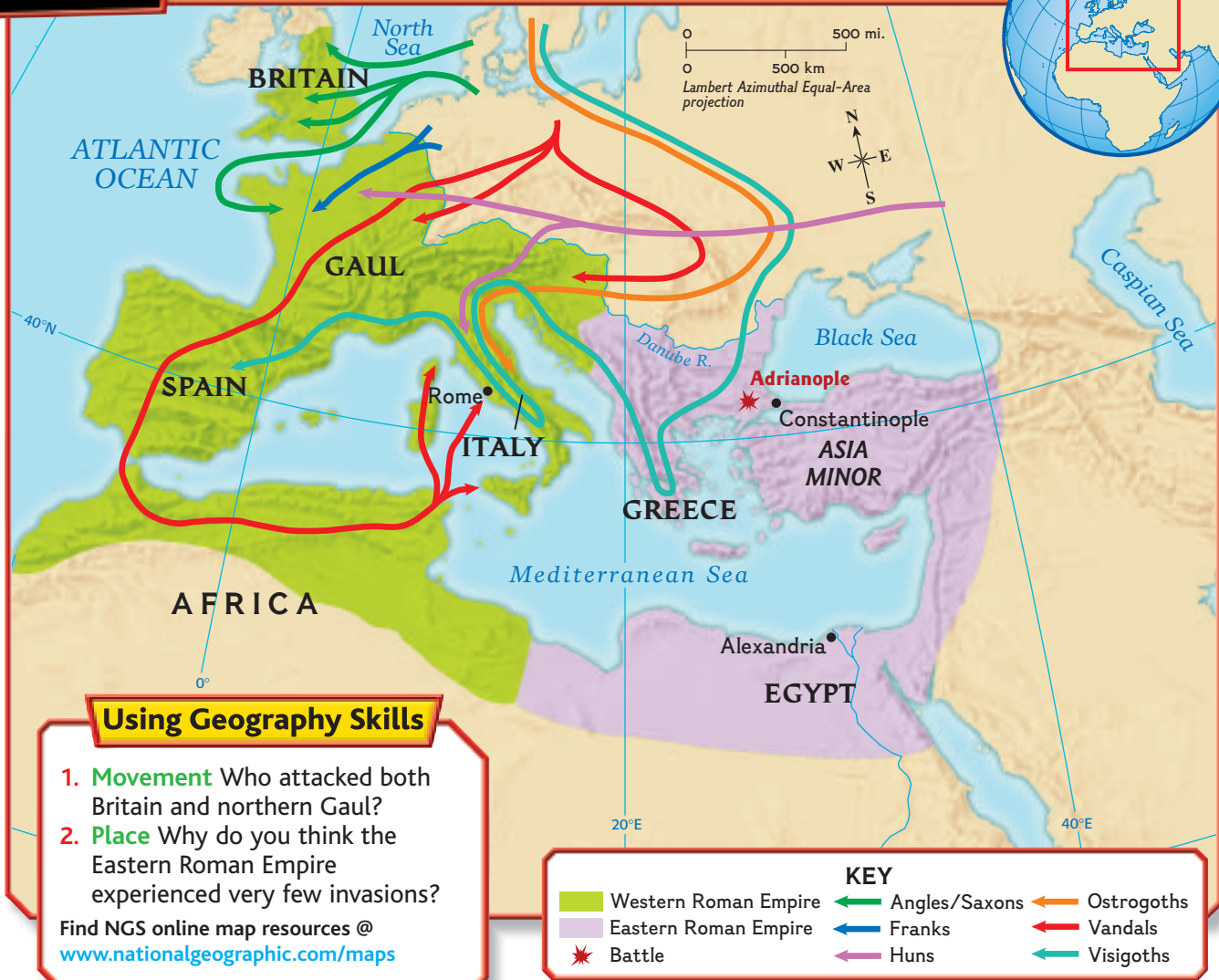
Does Jerome think the gates of the monastery should be shut? Explain.

just inside the empire's border. In return they promised to be loyal to Rome.

Before long, trouble broke out between the Visigoths and Romans. The empire forced the Visigoths to buy food at very high prices. The Romans also kidnapped and enslaved many Visigoths.

Finally, the Visigoths rebelled against the Romans. In A.D. 378 they defeated Roman legions at the Battle of Adrianople (AY • dree • uh • NOH • puh). After that defeat, Rome was forced to surrender land to the Visigoths inside Roman territory.

Germanic Invasions of Rome c. A.D. 200–500



The Germanic tribes now knew that Rome was not capable of defending itself. More and more Germanic warriors crossed the borders in search of land. In the winter of A.D. 406, the Rhine River in Western Europe froze. Germanic groups crossed the frozen river and entered Gaul, which is today France. The Romans were too weak to force them back across the border.

In A.D. 410 the Visigoth leader **Alaric** (A•luh•rihk) and his soldiers captured Rome. They burned records and looted the

treasury. Rome's capture shocked the empire's people. It was the first time Rome had been conquered in 800 years.

Another Germanic group known as the Vandals overran Spain and northern Africa. They enslaved some Roman landowners and drove others away. Then the Vandals sailed to Italy. In A.D. 455 they entered Rome. They spent 12 days stripping buildings of everything valuable and burning them. From these attacks came the English word *vandalism*, which means "the willful destruction of property."



▲ An image showing the Visigoths invading Rome. **What leader did the Visigoths overthrow to take control of Rome?**

Rome Falls By the mid-A.D. 400s, several Germanic leaders held high posts in Rome's government and army. In A.D. 476 a Germanic general named **Odoacer** (OH•duh•WAY•suhr) took control, overthrowing the western emperor, a 14-year-old boy named Romulus Augustulus (RAHM•yuh•luhs aw•GUHS•chah•luhs). After Romulus Augustulus, no emperor ever again ruled from Rome. Historians often use this event to mark the end of the Western Roman Empire.

Odoacer controlled Rome for almost 15 years. Then a group of Visigoths seized the city and killed Odoacer. They set up a kingdom in Italy under their leader, Theodoric (thee•AH•duh•rihk). Elsewhere in Europe, other Germanic kingdoms arose. For example, in the Roman province of Gaul, a

Germanic people called the Franks took power in A.D. 486. About 10 years later, Clovis, the Frankish king, converted to Christianity and became a Catholic. Before long, nearly all of the Franks became Catholic, helping to spread Christianity in Europe.

By A.D. 550, the Western Roman Empire had faded away. Many Roman beliefs and practices remained in use, however. For example, Europe's new Germanic rulers adopted the Latin language, Roman laws, and Christianity. Despite the Western Roman Empire's fall to Germanic invaders, the Eastern Roman Empire prospered. It became known as the Byzantine Empire and lasted nearly 1,000 more years.

✓ **Reading Check Identify** Which event usually marks the fall of the Western Roman Empire?



WH6.7.8 Discuss the legacies of Roman art and architecture, technology and science, literature, language, and law.

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The Legacy of Rome

Main Idea Rome passed on many achievements in government, law, language, and the arts.

Reading Connection Did you know that the words *doctor*, *animal*, *circus*, and *family* come from Latin, the Roman language? Read to discover other things we have borrowed from the Romans.

A legacy is something that someone leaves to future generations of people. The Romans left a large legacy. Our world

would be very different if the Romans had never existed. Many words in the English language and many of our ideas about government come from the Romans. The same is true for our code of laws and our knowledge about building. Roman rule also allowed the Christian religion to spread.

Roman Ideas and Government Today

Roman ideas about law, as first written in the Twelve Tables, are with us today. We, like the Romans, believe that all people are equal under the law. We expect our judges to

Linking Past & Present

Roman and Modern Architecture

PAST Early Romans borrowed architectural ideas from the Greeks, but they also developed their own style. Roman designs often included vaults, columns, domes, and arches. New architectural ideas meant that buildings could be constructed in new ways. Because of concrete and a new design, Roman theaters did not have to be built on natural slopes to have tiered seating.

▼ The Rotunda at the University of Virginia



▲ The Pantheon in Rome

PRESENT Columns, domes, and arches still appear in many modern buildings. Banks, homes, and government buildings often use a Roman style. *What Roman architectural styles do you see in your neighborhood?*

decide cases fairly, and we consider a person innocent until proven guilty.

Roman ideas about government and citizenship are also important in many countries today. For example, like the early Romans, Americans believe that a republic made up of equal citizens is the best form of government. We also believe that a republic works best if citizens do their duty, participate in government, and work to make their society better.

Roman Influence on Culture Today we use the Latin alphabet, **expanded** from 22 to 26 letters. Latin shaped the languages of Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and Romania. Many English words also come from Latin. Scientists, doctors, and lawyers still use Latin phrases. Every known species of plant and animal has a Latin name. Today, we also still

read the works of Romans such as Virgil, Horace, Livy, Cicero, Suetonius, and Tacitus.

Ancient Rome also left a lasting mark on architecture. We still use concrete for construction, and Roman architectural styles are still seen in public buildings today. When you visit Washington, D.C., or the capital city of most states, you will see capitol buildings with domes and arches inspired by Roman architecture.

Christianity As you probably know, Christianity is one of the major religions in the world today. Christianity began in the Roman Empire. When Rome's government adopted Christianity in the A.D. 300s, it helped the new religion to grow and spread.

 **Reading Check** **Compare** Which aspects of Rome are reflected in present-day cultures?

Section 2 Review

History online

Study Central Need help with the fall of Rome? Visit ca.hss.glencoe.com and click on Study Central.

Reading Summary

Review the **Main Ideas**

- A series of weak emperors, invasions by outsiders, disease, and a number of other factors led to a greatly weakened Roman Empire.
- Numerous invasions by Germanic peoples led to the fall of Rome in A.D. 476.
- Roman ideas about government and Roman architecture are just some of the legacies of ancient Rome.

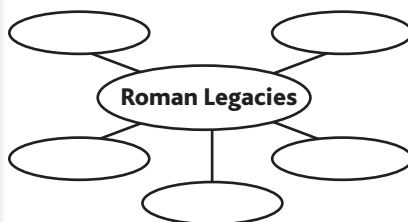
What Did You Learn?

1. What social problems helped cause the empire's decline?
2. Why did the Roman government use Germanic warriors in its army?

Critical Thinking

3. Summarizing Information

Draw a diagram like the one below. Fill in details about Rome's legacy. **CA 6RC2.4**



4. **Cause and Effect** What caused Rome's economy to weaken? How did inflation affect Rome? **CA HI6.**
5. **Describe** Who were the Visigoths, and why are they important? **CA HI2.**
6. **The Big Ideas** What is the influence of Rome's language and architecture today? **CA 6RC2.3**
7. **Persuasive Writing** Write an essay explaining what you think is the main reason for the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, and what might have been done to prevent it. **CA 6WS1.1; 6WA2.5**