

 **POWER BASICS**®

World History I

Robert Taggart

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UNIT 5

Europe in the Middle Ages



LESSON 17: An Empire Divided: The East



GOAL: To identify the people, places, and events involved in the fall of Rome, the split of the Roman Empire, and the growth of the Byzantine Empire

WORDS TO KNOW

Justinian Code

multiple causes

NAMES TO KNOW

Justinian I

Theodora

Theodosius

PLACES TO KNOW

Byzantine Empire

Hagia Sophia

Why Rome Fell

The Roman Empire was the greatest empire the world had ever seen. It stretched across three continents. It lasted for five centuries, from 27 B.C.E. to 476 C.E. It made important contributions in government, philosophy, architecture, and other areas. The influence of Rome is seen throughout the Western world today.

But Rome could not last. Today, we say that Rome fell, or ended. Why did such a great empire fall?

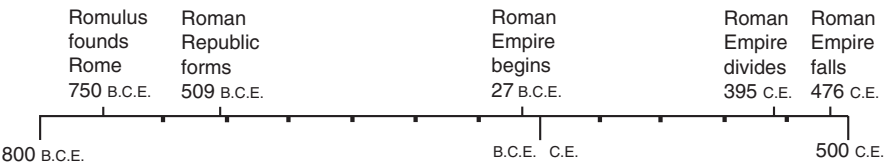
There is no one, single reason why Rome fell. In fact, the fall of Rome is a good lesson in the idea of multiple causes. **Multiple causes** means that more than one condition triggers an event. There were many reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire. For centuries, historians have debated these causes. There is widespread agreement on several of them.

1. Rome fell because it grew **too large**. The Roman Empire was a geographic giant. It stretched across three continents. It included mountains, deserts, seacoasts, and forests. When it was hot in one place in the empire, it was snowing in another. The Romans did make great improvements in transportation and communication. But the vast size of the empire made it difficult for its leaders to keep track of everything that was going on.

2. Rome fell because of a **weak government**. The Romans tried to control a huge empire with a government that had been created to rule a small city-state. Many historians think that the Romans never created a government that was really suited for running such a large empire. Also, selfish leaders often made decisions to benefit themselves and their friends instead of the people and the empire as a whole.
3. Rome fell because of **economic problems**. Rome grew rich at first because it conquered other peoples and took their wealth. When this growth slowed and then stopped, there were no new sources of wealth. The government then imposed heavy taxes, which hurt the economy. There was never enough tax money to pay for everything the Romans wanted. For example, there was not enough money to keep the famous Roman roads repaired. This caused a decline in trade, which further hurt the economy.
4. Rome fell because of **slavery**. The Romans held slaves. In some parts of the empire, there were more slaves than any other class of people. Because there were so many slaves, there were always thousands of people who were unhappy. Often, slaves revolted against their owners.
5. Rome fell because of **social problems**. Over the centuries, the people of Rome seemed to lose their patriotism. They took less and less interest in their government. They cared more for themselves than for their empire. For example, Roman soldiers often deserted their posts just when they were needed the most.
6. Rome fell because of **revolutions**. The Roman Empire included many different peoples. Many of these groups did not want to belong to the empire. Over the centuries, there were many revolts against Roman rule. These revolts took a toll on the government, the military, and the economy.
7. Rome fell because of **invasions**. Toward the end of the empire, tribes of barbarians who lived on the Roman frontier, or border, invaded the empire.

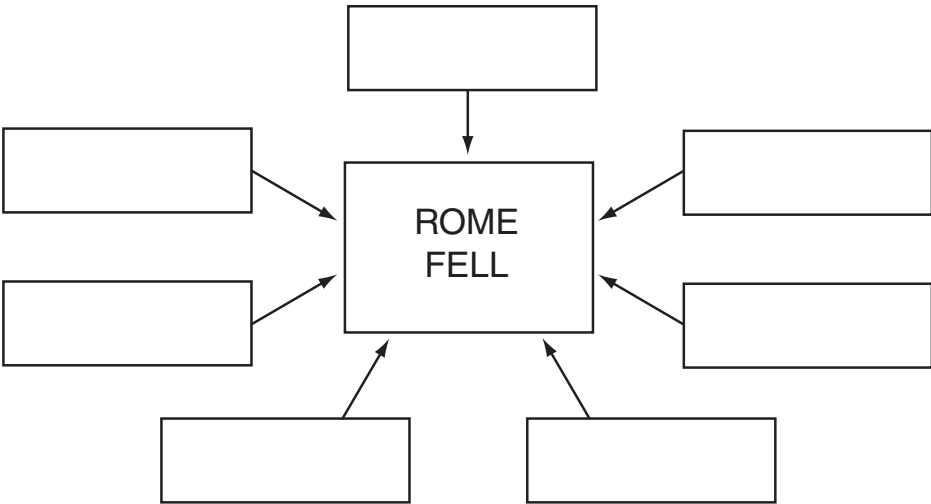
As you can see, there were many reasons for the fall of Rome. Remember that all of these causes developed slowly, over centuries. But toward the end of the empire, all of these conditions were going on at the same time.

The traditional date given for the fall of Rome is 476 C.E. This was the year a barbarian commander overthrew the last emperor in Rome. By then, all of the multiple causes had taken their toll. The fall of Rome did not happen in just one day or one year. The Roman Empire, which took centuries to build, took hundreds of years to disintegrate.



PRACTICE 127: Why Rome Fell

Fill in each of the following empty boxes with a reason for the fall of Rome.



Dividing the Empire

In 476 C.E., enemies of Rome finally overran the great city. But before this happened, the Roman Empire was already in trouble. There were serious problems in the government and with the economy. Romans were losing confidence in their empire.

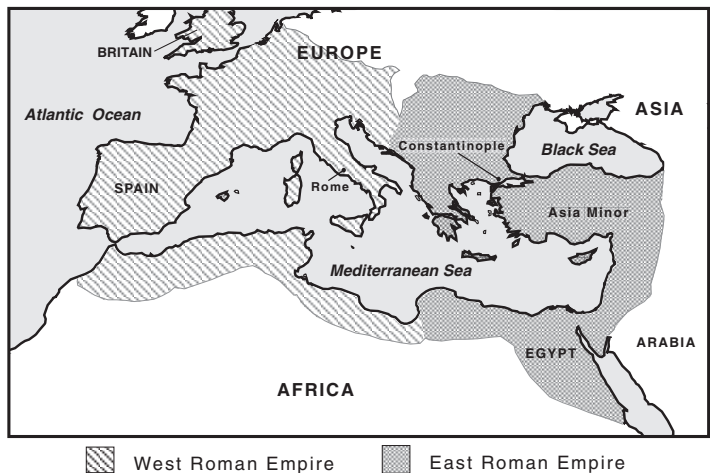
By the 200s C.E., the Roman Empire was on the verge of collapse. During this period, there were twenty different emperors in 50 years. The army was not defending the frontier well. Increasing taxes were taking a heavy toll on the economy. Roads were falling to ruin. And inflation was making most of the people very poor.

All of the signs pointed to the collapse of the Roman Empire. In fact, the empire might well have collapsed in the 200s C.E. except for two important emperors: Diocletian and Constantine. They are two of the most famous rulers in history.

Diocletian was born poor. But he was talented and determined. He rose to become a general in the army. His success made him very popular. With the support of the army, he became emperor in 284 C.E.

Diocletian realized that the Roman Empire was simply too big for one person to rule. His solution was to divide the Roman Empire into two. This division was not an official division. In other words, the Roman Empire was still one in name. But for all practical purposes, it became the Roman Empires. Diocletian appointed a co-emperor to rule the western part of the empire. Diocletian ruled the eastern half of the empire.

Although Diocletian shared his power, he was still in charge. A powerful ruler, he fought against invaders and restored law and order to the empire. Diocletian's system of having two emperors worked well for about 50 years. But soon a rivalry grew between the two halves of Rome. The rivalry erupted in a civil war. Diocletian retired in 305 C.E.



The Roman Empire: East and West

Constantine came to power the next year, 306 C.E. Constantine is famous for protecting Christianity in Rome. He said that once, while leading his army into battle, he saw a vision: a blazing cross in the sky. With the cross appeared the words *Hoc Signo Vinctes*. The words mean “By this sign you shall conquer.” When he saw this vision, Constantine swore his allegiance to Christianity and the Christian God. He won the battle. From that time on, he always protected Christians. This helped Christianity to grow quickly throughout the empire.

Constantine is also famous for the founding of the city Constantinople, which means “city of Constantine.” It was the new capital of the empire, and it centered power in the eastern part of the empire. Constantinople still exists, although under a different name. Today, it is the city of Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey.

TIP



Often, you can help yourself remember events by using word tricks. In other words, think about how related words are similar or different. For example, a word trick that will help you easily remember that Constantine founded Constantinople is to remember how similar the names are. Alexander and Alexandria is another example of this kind of word trick.

Like Diocletian, Constantine was a strong emperor. He was so powerful, in fact, that in 324 C.E., he became the sole emperor. Rome was once again under the leadership of one man. Even after Constantine’s death, in 337 C.E., Rome remained stable for 50 years.

But the forces of decline, which you read about earlier, were taking their toll. **Theodosius**, the emperor who followed Constantine, was the last emperor to lead a single Rome. When he died, in 395 C.E., the empire was split between his two sons. There were now officially two Roman Empires—the East Roman Empire and the West Roman Empire. They ended up having very different histories.

■ PRACTICE 128: Dividing the Empire

Decide if each statement below is true (T) or false (F). Write the correct letter on the line before each statement.

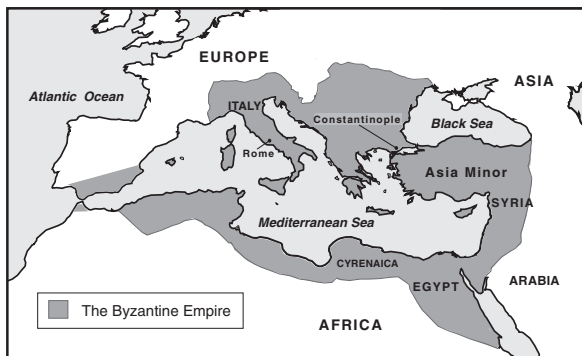
- ____ 1. By 200 C.E., the Roman Empire was rich and thriving.
- ____ 2. It was Diocletian who first divided the Roman Empire.
- ____ 3. Diocletian is famous for being the protector of Christianity in Rome.
- ____ 4. After Theodosius died, the Roman Empire was split into two empires.

The Byzantine Empire

By 400 C.E., there were two Roman Empires, East and West. The West, which was struggling with problems ranging from inflation to invasion, grew weaker and weaker. Meanwhile, the East grew stronger and stronger. It had better armies and a stronger government than the West. But the key reason for its strength was its wealth. Most of the trade and wealth of the Roman Empire was centered in the East.

Over time, the East Roman Empire developed into the **Byzantine Empire**. It was called this because its capital, Constantinople, was built on the site of the old Greek city Byzantium. The Byzantine Empire lasted about 1,000 years, from 395 C.E. to 1453 C.E. Remember this: The people of the Byzantine Empire still called themselves Romans. This will help you remember that the Byzantine Empire preserved, or kept alive, many of the great advances of Roman civilization.

The Byzantine Empire is important for several



The Byzantine Empire in the 500s

reasons. The Byzantines protected Europe from invasions by the Arabs and others. They preserved Greek and Roman philosophy, literature, and ideas about government. Above all else, they became the link between the great achievements of the ancient world and those of modern Europe.

The Byzantine Empire reached its greatest size in the 500s. It covered much the same area as the Roman Empire. It stretched across North Africa, southern Europe, and the eastern Mediterranean.

The Byzantine Empire was a Christian empire. Its first emperors were Christian, and its official religion was Christianity. As the empire spread, so did Christianity. Missionaries converted the new members of the empire. In fact, the growth of Christianity under the Byzantines is one of the main reasons why Christianity is the most widespread religion today. The Eastern Orthodox Church, with its millions of members, is a direct descendant of the Christian Church of the Byzantine Empire.

Christianity played a large part in Byzantine art, music, and architecture. The Byzantines produced wonderful works, which are still celebrated today. They greatly influenced the religious art of later peoples. One of the most famous buildings in the world is the **Hagia Sophia**, a magnificent church built in Constantinople. It is in the shape of a cross, and it has a huge, beautiful dome. People still visit it today.



The Hagia Sophia

■ PRACTICE 129: The Byzantine Empire

Circle the letter of the correct answer to each of the following questions.

1. Which of the following is NOT a reason why the East Roman Empire was stronger than the West Roman Empire?
 - a. It had better armies.
 - b. It was never invaded.
 - c. It had a stronger government.
 - d. It was the center of wealth and trade.

2. How long did the Byzantine Empire last?
 - a. about 1,000 years
 - b. about 500 years
 - c. about 100 years
 - d. about 10,000 years

3. What parts of Byzantine life did Christianity influence?
 - a. art
 - b. music
 - c. architecture
 - d. all of the above

Justinian and Theodora

The greatest emperor of the Byzantine Empire was **Justinian I**, who ruled from 527 to 565. Few other rulers in history accomplished as much as Justinian did.

Justinian wanted the Byzantine Empire to be as great and as grand as the old Roman Empire. He began a series of wars to recapture what had been the West Roman Empire. Many victories against the Vandals and Goths expanded the empire. Justinian was careful to secure the territory that he captured. Trade flourished, and the empire grew in wealth. Justinian was so successful that he brought the empire to its height.

Justinian also did much to promote Christianity during this period. Although many religions were practiced in the Byzantine Empire, Justinian wanted to organize his empire under the one faith.

Justinian was also a great builder. Under his direction, many wonderful structures were built. Many, including the Hagia Sophia, still stand. Justinian built monasteries to promote Christianity. He also built harbors, fortresses, and other public buildings.

Perhaps Justinian's most important accomplishment was his creation of the **Justinian Code**. The Justinian Code was an organized collection of laws. Justinian directed ten of the wisest men in the empire to collect and organize the most important laws of old Rome. These laws were assembled

into one document. Along with the laws were explanations of the legal ideas that supported them and cases to help explain them. The Justinian Code preserved Rome's great legal contribution. But the code also had greater effects. It served as the basis for the laws in many countries. In fact, many of the laws that we live under today are related in some form to those of the Justinian Code.

Justinian could not have accomplished all that he did without his wife, **Theodora**. Their marriage is one of the great love stories of all times. Theodora was a poor peasant. Her father trained bears in a traveling circus. As a girl, Theodora became an actress, a profession that many people looked down on. Despite laws that prohibited high officials from marrying people of her class, Justinian married Theodora.

As the empress, Theodora became very powerful, co-ruling with Justinian. She wrote to foreign leaders, met with foreign diplomats, and built hospitals and churches. She also saw to it that women in the empire were treated well. At her insistence, Justinian changed the law so that husbands could not beat their wives. She made sure that wives could get a divorce if they wanted to. She also saw to it that laws keeping women from owning property were changed. Before Theodora, widows were forced to give up their children. Theodora made sure that that law was changed, too.

Once, when rebels threatened to overthrow him, Justinian wanted to flee. Theodora insisted that they stay and fight. They won and, thus, were able to continue to make the many contributions that they had started. Theodora died of cancer in 548. Justinian was devastated, and he made no more lasting accomplishments.

■ THINK ABOUT IT



You have just read some fascinating facts about Theodora. She accomplished many things. You probably noticed that most of her accomplishments had to do with helping women. Based on this fact, what can you guess about how women were treated in the Byzantine Empire before Theodora became powerful? Write your answer on a separate sheet of paper.