

The Fall of Rome

As the *Roman Republic* grew larger and more populated, the task of maintaining order and stability became increasingly difficult. Tensions rose and civil war broke out. Eventually, a powerful general named *Julius Caesar* gained control. Fearing he would be made king, a group of senators assassinated him. A bloody power struggle broke out, and *Octavian*, the adopted son of Julius Caesar emerged as the winner. Octavian had all the senators involved in the conspiracy to assassinate Julius Caesar, killed. He became the first emperor of the *Roman Empire*, taking the name - *Augustus Caesar*.



Augustus died in A.D. 14, but his rule began an almost 200 year period of peace and prosperity known as the *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace. It was a time of great growth for Rome as the empire reached its greatest size and influence. Tied together by 50,000 miles of roads and stretching from modern-day Spain in the west to Mesopotamia in the east - from Britain in the north to the Sahara Desert in the south, between 60 and 100 million people lived under Roman rule.

Late in the second century, however, the empire stopped expanding. The end of new conquests meant an end to new sources of wealth. Officials grew desperate to pay the empire's ever growing expenses, including the building of public works, and the rising cost of maintaining its large army. Roman officials raised taxes to cover the expenses. This caused hardships for many ordinary Romans.

Other aspects of Roman society suffered as well. For example, many poor Romans found it harder to become educated - as the cost of education grew out of reach. In addition, *the immense size of the empire* made the distribution of news difficult. As a result, people grew less informed about civic matters.

A decline in agriculture also weakened the empire. Throughout Italy and Western Europe, the soil had become difficult to farm due to constant warfare and overuse. As a result, harvests became increasingly weak. The empire would have to look elsewhere for grain, and that would cost more money.

The use of *slave labor* added to the problem. Like other societies throughout history, the Romans practiced slavery. In the cities, the use of slaves took jobs away from ordinary Romans, and *unemployment rose*. On the farms, the use of slave labor discouraged improvements in technology that might have improved farming. As Roman agriculture suffered, disease and hunger spread and the population declined. The use of slave labor enabled the rich to get richer and forced many ordinary Romans out of jobs and into poverty.

conspiracy: an agreement by a group to do something wrong

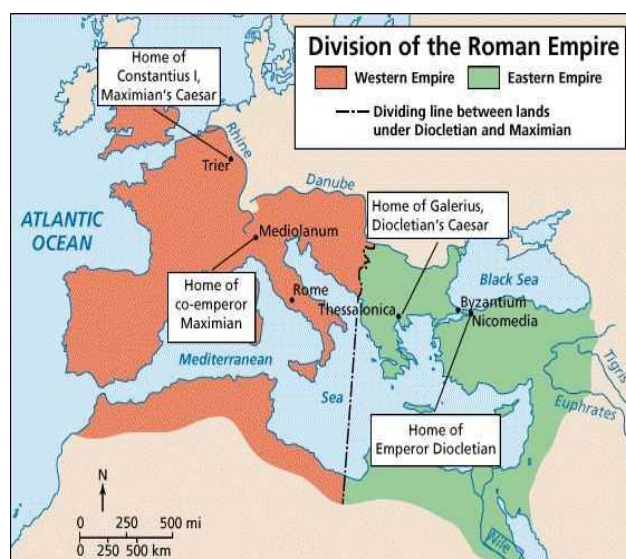
civic: citizens' responsibility to their city, state, or nation

immense: very large

poverty: being very poor

Meanwhile, Rome's once powerful *military* began showing signs of trouble. Over time, Roman soldiers in general became less disciplined and loyal. They pledged their loyalty not to Rome, but to individual military leaders. *Civil wars* broke out among generals who had differing ideas about how the empire should be run. Constant civil wars disrupted farming and trade. As a result of the population decline, the Roman military was forced to allow men who lived outside Rome's borders to join the Roman Army. *As good as these foreign soldiers were, they had little loyalty to Rome* - they fought because they were paid. Feelings of loyalty eventually declined among average citizens as well. In the past, Romans eagerly engaged in civic duties and public affairs. However, as Rome's central government grew weaker, *Roman politics grew increasingly corrupt*. Politicians became more interested in their own financial gain than in public service. As a result, many citizens lost their sense of pride in the government. They no longer showed a willingness to sacrifice for the good of Rome.

Despite these difficulties, the Roman Empire continued on for another 200 years. This was due, in part, to two emperors - Diocletian and Constantine. *Diocletian* saw that the empire was too large for one emperor to govern effectively. He *divided it into two* and ruled with a co-emperor named Maximian. This provided only a temporary fix however. When Diocletian died, Maximian was not strong enough to hold onto power and civil war broke out for control of the divided empire.



Constantine eventually took control and stabilized the empire. He *allowed Christians to finally worship freely*, and with Roman protection, Christianity grew into a powerful institution. He also moved the capital of the empire to the ancient Greek city of Byzantium. He rebuilt and enlarged it, and then named it *Constantinople*, or the "City of Constantine."

In addition to internal difficulties, however, the Romans faced another major problem. In the late 300s, foreign groups, which the Romans called *barbarians*, began pushing into Roman lands. A small trickle of "invaders" eventually turned into a flood, overwhelming Rome's ability to keep them out. By the end of the 5th century, the western part of the Roman Empire had collapsed under the weight of its own internal problems and the external problem of these invasions. The eastern part of the empire, however, would survive for another 1,000 years and later become known as the *Byzantine Empire*.

corrupt: dishonest, more interested in financial gain than public service

political: related to the government or public affairs of a nation

trickle: a small flow

factions: conflicting groups