Ancient Rome and Early Christianity, 500 B.C.–A.D. 500

Over the course of several centuries, Rome built one of the largest empires the world had ever known. By A.D. 120, the Romans controlled portions of three continents, spreading their civilization across much of the ancient world. The map at the right shows the Roman Empire at its height. Use the map to answer the following questions.

1. About how many miles did the Roman Empire stretch from east to west?

2. Why would the Mediterranean Sea have been important to Rome?

3. What problems might Rome have had in managing such a vast empire?

For more information about ancient Rome and early Christianity . . .

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The life and teachings of Jesus gave rise in the first century A.D. to one of the world’s major religions—Christianity. Jesus appears here in a detail from a Roman mosaic of the fifth century.

The Roman soldier shown here in a sculpture from the second century A.D. was a member of the elite Praetorian Guard, once the emperor’s bodyguard.

509 B.C. Rome becomes a republic.

264 B.C. The First Punic War with Carthage begins.

500 B.C.
The Roman World, 265 B.C. – A.D. 117

- **218 B.C.** In the Second Punic War, Hannibal invades Italy.
- **44 B.C.** Conspirators kill Julius Caesar.
- **A.D. 284** Diocletian, who will divide the Roman Empire, becomes emperor.
- **A.D. 476** Western Roman Empire falls with the ouster of the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus.
You are a senator in ancient Rome. You have listened to hours of heated debate about a powerful leader who wants to be ruler. As you consider whether to support or oppose him, you recall some of the arguments.

“He is a military genius who added vast territory and wealth to Rome.”

“Yes, but he disobeyed orders in his quest for personal glory.”

“He has a great vision for the future of Rome.”

“But he wants absolute power and would override the law to get it.”

Before you decide, you must consider:

What qualities make a good leader?

EXAMINING the ISSUES

- What are the qualities of a good leader?
- Should leaders always be measured by the results they achieve?
- Have the qualities of good leaders changed over time?

As a class, discuss these questions. Based on the qualities you have discussed, think about what you have learned about other leaders in history, such as Alexander the Great and Darius of Persia. What qualities helped them to be successful or caused them to fail?

As you read about Rome, see how the qualities of its leaders helped or hindered its development. See also what happened to its most famous leader—Julius Caesar.
While the great civilization of Greece was in decline, a new civilization to the west was developing and increasing its power. The city of Rome grew from a small village to a mighty empire. It adopted and preserved much of Greek art, philosophy, religion, and drama. And it created a lasting legacy of its own.

The Beginnings of Rome

According to Roman legend, the city was founded in 753 B.C. by Romulus and Remus, twin sons of the god Mars and a Latin princess. The twins were abandoned on the Tiber River as infants and raised by a she-wolf. They decided to build a city near the spot. In reality, Rome developed because of its strategic location and its fertile soil. Rome was built on seven rolling hills at a curve on the Tiber River, near the center of the Italian peninsula. It was midway between the Alps and Italy’s southern tip. Rome also was near the midpoint of the Mediterranean Sea. The historian Livy wrote about the city’s site:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Not without reason did gods and men choose this spot for the site of our city—the [salubrious] hills, the river to bring us produce from the inland regions and sea-borne commerce from abroad, the sea itself, near enough for convenience yet not so near as to bring danger from foreign fleets, our situation in the very heart of Italy—all these advantages make it of all places in the world the best for a city destined to grow great.

Livy, The Early History of Rome

The earliest settlers on the Italian peninsula arrived in prehistoric times. From about 1000 to 500 B.C., three groups inhabited the region and eventually battled for control. They were the Latins, the Greeks, and the Etruscans. The Latins were farmers and shepherds who wandered into Italy across the Alps around 1000 B.C. They settled on either side of the Tiber River in a region they called Latium. They built the original settlement at Rome, a cluster of wooden huts atop one of its seven hills, Palatine Hill. These settlers were the first Romans. (See the map on pages 138–139.)

Between 750 and 600 B.C., Greek settlers established about 50 colonies on the coasts of southern Italy and Sicily. The cities became prosperous and commercially active. They brought all of Italy, including Rome, into closer contact with Greek civilization. The Greeks also taught the Romans how to grow grapes and olives.

The Etruscans were native to northern Italy. They were skilled metalworkers and engineers. The Etruscans strongly influenced the development of Roman civilization. They had a system of writing, and the Romans adopted their alphabet. They also influenced Rome’s architecture, especially the use of the arch.

Romans borrowed religious ideas from both the Greeks and the Etruscans. The Romans adopted Etruscan rituals that they believed helped them to win the favor of the gods. Roman gods even took on the personalities and legends of the Greek gods. Romans, however, gave their gods different names. Thus Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, became Jupiter in Rome, and Hera, the queen of the gods, became Juno.
The Early Republic

Around 600 B.C., an Etruscan became king. However, Rome was not controlled by the Etruscan cities. Under its Etruscan kings, Rome grew from a collection of hilltop villages to a city that covered nearly 500 square miles. Much of Rome was rich agricultural land. Various kings ordered the construction of Rome’s first temples and public buildings. By royal order, the swampy valley below the Palatine Hill was drained, making a public meeting place. Later it became the Forum, the heart of Roman political life.

The last king of Rome was Tarquin the Proud. A harsh tyrant, he was driven from power in 509 B.C. Roman aristocrats, wealthy landowners who resented the Etruscan kings, overthrew him. The Romans declared they would never again be ruled by a king. They swore to put to death anyone who plotted to make himself king.

Having deposed the monarch, the Romans established a new government. They called it a republic, from the Latin phrase res publica, which means “public affairs.” A republic is a form of government in which power rests with citizens who have the right to vote to select their leaders. In Rome, citizenship with voting rights was granted only to free-born male citizens.

Patricians and Plebeians In the early republic, different groups of Romans struggled for power. One group was the patricians, the aristocratic landowners who held most of the power. The other important group was the plebeians, the common farmers, artisans, and merchants who made up the majority of the population.

The patricians inherited their power and social status. They claimed that their ancestry gave them the authority to make laws for Rome and its people. The plebeians were citizens of Rome with the right to vote. They, however, were barred by law from holding most important government positions. In time, the Senate allowed them to form their own assembly and elect representatives called tribunes. Tribunes protected the rights of the plebeians from unfair acts of patrician officials. Eventually, plebeian pressure on the patricians gained them additional political power.

Twelve Tables An important victory for the plebeians was to force the creation of a written law code. With laws unwritten, patrician officials often interpreted the law to suit themselves. In 451 B.C., a group of ten officials began writing down Rome’s laws. The laws were carved on twelve tablets, or tables, and hung in the Forum. They became the basis for later Roman law. The Twelve Tables established the idea that all free citizens, patricians and plebeians, had a right to the protection of the law.

Government Under the Republic In the first century B.C., Roman writers boasted that Rome had achieved a balanced government. What they meant was that their government had taken the best features of a monarchy (government by a king), an aristocracy (government by nobles), and a democracy (government by the people). In place of a king, Rome had two officials called consuls. Like kings, they commanded the army and directed the government. However, their power was limited. First, a consul’s
The same person could not be elected consul again for ten years. Second, one consul could always overrule, or veto, the other's decisions.

The senate was the aristocratic branch of Rome's government. It had both legislative and administrative functions in the republic. By tradition, there were 300 members, chosen from the upper class of Roman society. Later, plebeians were allowed in the senate. Because membership was for life, the senate provided continuity. It also exercised enormous influence over both foreign and domestic policy.

The assemblies were the more democratic side of the government. All citizen-soldiers were members of the Centuriate Assembly. In the early days of the republic, this patrician-controlled assembly appointed the consuls and made laws. It had less power than the senate. An assembly organized by the plebeians, the Tribal Assembly, elected the tribunes and made laws for the common people. Later, it won the right to make laws for the republic.

In times of crisis, the republic could appoint a dictator—a leader who had absolute power to make laws and command the army. A dictator's power lasted for only six months. Dictators were chosen by the consuls and then elected by the senate.

The Roman Army All citizens who owned land were required to serve in the army. To secure certain public offices, ten years of military service were required. Roman soldiers were organized into large military units called legions. The Roman legion was made up of some 5,000 heavily armed foot soldiers (infantry). A

**Comparing Republican Governments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rome</th>
<th>United States of America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Executive</strong></td>
<td>Two consuls, elected by the assembly for one year—chief executives of the government and commanders-in-chief of the army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legislative</strong></td>
<td>Senate of 300 members, chosen from aristocracy for life—controls foreign and financial policies, advises consuls. Centurionate Assembly, all citizen-soldiers are members for life—selects consuls, makes laws. Tribal Assembly, citizens grouped according to where they live are members for life—elects tribunes and makes laws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Judicial</strong></td>
<td>Praetors, eight judges chosen for one year by Centuriate Assembly—two oversee civil and criminal courts (the others govern provinces).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal Code</strong></td>
<td>Twelve Tables—a list of rules that were the basis of Roman legal system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citizenship</strong></td>
<td>All adult male landowners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts**
1. What similarities do you see in the governments of the Roman Republic and the United States?
2. Which government seems more democratic? Why?

**Vocabulary**

- **veto:** comes from the Latin for "I forbid."
- **legion:** also means a multitude.

**SPOTLIGHT ON**

**Roman Legions**

The legions were the fighting force that spread Rome's power around the Mediterranean. Each legion had a nickname and a flag, called its eagle. Losing the eagle in battle was a disgrace. Legions were self-sufficient and could live off the land. They did their own construction and even built roads and bridges.

Each soldier had armor, a helmet, a shield, a sword, and a dagger. He also carried tools for digging and stakes that became part of a wall around the camp. In addition, each soldier brought a cooking pot, clothing, and any other items he needed.
group of soldiers on horseback (cavalry) supported each legion. Legions were divided into smaller groups of 80 men, each of which was called a century. In battle, the strength of the legion was its flexibility. Each century in a legion could act independently. The military organization and fighting skill of the Roman army were key factors in Rome’s rise to greatness.

**Rome Spreads Its Power**

For hundreds of years after the founding of the republic, Rome sought to expand its territories through conquest and trade.

**Rome Conquers Italy**

Roman power grew slowly but steadily as the legions battled for control of the Italian peninsula. By the fourth century B.C., Rome dominated central Italy. Then it suffered a major defeat. In 390 B.C., the Gauls, a Celtic people from the Po River Valley, north of the Apennines, sacked Rome. However, the Romans quickly recovered and rebuilt the city. They reestablished control by subduing one rival after another. They defeated the Etruscans to the north and the Greek city-states to the south. By 265 B.C., the Romans were masters of all Italy except the Po Valley.

Rome had different laws and treatment for different parts of its conquered territory. The neighboring Latins on the Tiber became full citizens of Rome. In territories farther from Rome, conquered peoples were given all the rights of Roman citizenship except the vote. All other conquered groups fell into a third category, allies of Rome. Rome did not interfere with its allies, as long as they sent troops to the Roman army and did not make treaties of friendship with any other state. The new citizens and allies became partners in Rome’s growth. This lenient policy toward defeated enemies helped Rome to succeed in building a long-lasting empire. For the 250 years after 265 B.C., Roman power spread far beyond Italy.

**Rome’s Commercial Network**

Rome’s location gave it easy access to the riches of the lands ringing the Mediterranean Sea. Roman merchants moved by land and sea. They traded Roman wine and olive oil for a variety of foods, raw materials, and manufactured goods from other lands. However, other large and powerful cities interfered with Roman access to the Mediterranean. The dominant city on the Mediterranean was Carthage, once a colony of Phoenicia. Carthage was located on a peninsula on the North African coast. Eventually Rome and Carthage fought bitterly for control of the Mediterranean.

**War with Carthage**

In 264 B.C., Rome and Carthage went to war. This was the beginning of the long struggle known as the Punic Wars.

Between 264 and 146 B.C., Rome and Carthage fought three wars. The first, for control of Sicily and the western Mediterranean, lasted 23 years (264–241 B.C.). It ended in the defeat of Carthage. Rome took the rich, grain-growing island of Sicily as the chief prize of victory. It thus gained its first province, or administrative unit, overseas. An uneasy peace followed. The Second Punic War began in 218 B.C. The mastermind behind the war was a 29-year-old Carthaginian general named Hannibal. Hannibal was a brilliant military strategist who wanted to avenge Carthage’s earlier defeat.

Hannibal assembled an army of 50,000 infantry, 9,000 cavalry, and 60 elephants with the intent of capturing Rome. To surprise the Romans, he led his army on a long trek from Spain across France and through the Alps. Although he had lost more than half his men and most of his elephants, Hannibal invaded northern Italy. For more than a decade, he marched his forces up and down the Italian peninsula at
will. His soldiers lived off the land. They seized crops and cattle and pillaged farmhouses. Hannibal won his greatest victory at Cannae, in 216 B.C. There his army inflicted enormous losses on the Romans. However, the Romans regrouped and with the aid of many allies stood firm. They prevented Hannibal from capturing Rome.

Finally the Romans found a daring military leader to match Hannibal’s boldness. A general named Scipio (SIHP•ee•oh) devised a plan to attack Carthage. This strategy forced Hannibal to return to defend his native city. In 202 B.C., at Zama near Carthage, the Romans finally defeated Hannibal.

By the time of the Third Punic War (149–146 B.C.), Carthage was no longer a threat to Rome. Yet some Romans remembered the devastation Carthage had brought to Italy and were angered by its return to prosperity. An aged and influential senator named Cato ended all his speeches with the same message: “Carthage must be destroyed.” In 149 B.C., Rome laid siege to Carthage. In 146 B.C., the city was set afire and its 50,000 inhabitants sold into slavery. Its territory was made the new province of Africa.

Rome Controls the Mediterranean Rome’s victories in the Punic Wars gave it domination over the western Mediterranean. The Romans went on to conquer the eastern half. Rome took control of Macedonia, Greece, and parts of Anatolia. By about 70 B.C., Rome’s Mediterranean empire stretched from Anatolia on the east to Spain on the west.
The Roman Empire Brings Change

Chapter 6

SETTING THE STAGE Rome grew rapidly, and growth brought political, economic, and social changes. Some leaders attempted reforms, but the republican government was unable to deal with the problems caused by these changes.

Expansion Creates Problems in the Republic

The Punic Wars and Rome's increasing wealth and expanding empire brought many problems. The most serious was the widening gap between rich and poor.

Rich landowners lived on huge estates called latifundia. Many of these estates had been created by occupying conquered lands and by taking farms left untended by soldiers serving in the army. Romans had made slaves of thousands of captured peoples during the wars. These slaves were made to work on the latifundia. By 100 B.C., slaves formed perhaps one-third of Rome's population.

Small farmers found it difficult to compete with the large estates run by slave labor. Some could not afford to repair the damage caused by Hannibal's invasion. They sold their lands to wealthy landowners. Many of these farmers, a large number of whom were returning soldiers, became homeless and jobless. Most stayed in the countryside and worked as seasonal migrant laborers. Some headed to Rome and other cities looking for work. The landless and unskilled in the cities found few jobs. They joined the ranks of the urban poor, a group that totaled about one-fourth of Roman society.

While wealthy Romans became corrupted by money and luxury, discontent arose among the slaves. Resentment also grew among the poor. Class tensions planted the seeds of the republic's collapse.

The Republic Collapses

Two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus (GRAK-us), attempted to help Rome's poor. As tribunes, they proposed reforms. The reforms included limiting the size of estates and giving land to the poor. Tiberius spoke eloquently about the plight of the landless former soldiers:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The savage beasts have their . . . dens . . . , but the men who bear arms and expose their lives for the safety of their country, enjoy . . . nothing more in it but the air and light . . . and wander from place to place with their wives and children.

TIBERIUS GRACCHUS quoted in Plutarch, The Lives of Noble Greeks and Romans

The brothers were strongly opposed by senators who felt threatened by their ideas. Both met violent deaths—Tiberius in 133 B.C. and Gaius in 121 B.C. A period of civil war, or conflict between groups within the same country, followed their deaths.

TERMS & NAMES

- civil war
- Julius Caesar
- triumvirate
- absolute ruler
- Augustus
- Pax Romana
- gladiator

MAIN IDEA

The creation of the Roman Empire transformed Roman government, society, economy, and culture.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The Roman Empire has served throughout history as a model of political organization and control.
Changes in the character of the army had led to the rise of politically powerful military leaders. Generals began recruiting soldiers from the landless poor by promising them land. These soldiers fought for pay and owed allegiance only to their commander. They replaced the citizen-soldiers whose loyalty had been to the republic. It now was possible for a politician supported by his own troops to take over by force.

Two such generals were Gaius Marius and Lucius Cornelius Sulla. During 88–82 B.C., their supporters fought a bloody civil war. The war ended with Sulla being named dictator. Rivalries between generals continued to threaten the republic. Eventually an ambitious and daring leader, Julius Caesar (SEE•zuhr), emerged to bring order to Rome.

Julius Caesar Takes Control In 60 B.C., Julius Caesar joined forces with Crassus, a wealthy Roman, and Pompey, a popular general. With their help, Caesar was elected consul in 59 B.C. For the next ten years, these men dominated Rome as a triumvirate, a group of three rulers.

Caesar was a strong leader and a genius at military strategy. Abiding by tradition, he served only one year as consul. He then appointed himself governor of Gaul (now France). During 58–50 B.C., Caesar led his legions in a grueling but successful campaign to conquer all of Gaul. Because he shared fully in the hardships of war, he won his men’s loyalty and devotion. Here he speaks of rallying his troops in battle:

**A VOICE FROM THE PAST**

I had no shield with me but I snatched one from a soldier in the rear ranks and went forward to the front line. Once there, I called to all the centurions by name and shouted encouragement to the rest of the men. . . . My arrival gave the troops fresh hope. . . .

JULIUS CAESAR, Commentaries

The reports of Caesar’s successes in Gaul made him very popular with the people of Rome. Pompey, who had become his political rival, feared Caesar’s ambitions. In 50 B.C., the senate, at Pompey’s urgings, ordered Caesar to disband his legions and return home.

Caesar’s next move led to civil war. He defied the senate’s order. On the night of January 10, 49 B.C., he took his army across the Rubicon River in Italy, the southern limit of the area he commanded. He marched his army swiftly toward Rome, and Pompey fled. Caesar’s troops defeated Pompey’s armies in Greece, Asia, Spain, and Egypt. In 46 B.C., Caesar returned to Rome, where he had the support of the army and the masses. That same year, the senate appointed him dictator; in 44 B.C., he was named dictator for life.

**Caesar’s Reforms** Caesar governed as an absolute ruler, one who has total power. He made sweeping changes. He granted Roman citizenship to many people in the provinces. He expanded the senate, adding friends and supporters from Italy and the provinces. Caesar helped the poor by creating jobs, especially through the construction of new public buildings. He started colonies where the landless could own land and increased pay for soldiers.

Many nobles and senators were troubled by Caesar’s growing power, success, and popularity. Some feared losing their influence. Others considered him a tyrant. A number of important senators, led by Marcus Brutus and Gaius Cassius, plotted his assassination. On March 15, 44 B.C., they stabbed him to death in the senate chamber.

**Beginning of the Empire** After Caesar’s death, civil war broke out again and destroyed what was left of the Roman Republic. Three of Caesar’s supporters banded
together to crush the assassins. Caesar’s 18-year-old grandson and adopted son Octavian (ahk-TAY•vee•uhn) joined with an experienced general named Mark Antony and a powerful politician named Lepidus. In 43 B.C., they took control of Rome and ruled for ten years as the Second Triumvirate. Among those killed in the Triumvirate’s purge of Caesar’s enemies was Cicero, a defender of the republic in the senate.

The Second Triumvirate ended in jealousy and violence. Octavian forced Lepidus to retire. He and Mark Antony then became rivals. While leading troops against Rome’s enemies in Anatolia, Mark Antony met Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. He fell in love with her and followed her to Egypt. Octavian accused Antony of plotting to rule Rome from Egypt, and another civil war erupted. Octavian defeated the combined forces of Antony and Cleopatra at the naval battle of Actium in 31 B.C. Later, Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide.

Octavian claimed he would restore the republic, and, in fact, did retain some of its forms and traditions. The senate, for example, continued to meet, and Octavian consulted it on important matters. However, Octavian became the unchallenged ruler of Rome. Eventually he accepted the title of Augustus (aw•GUHS•tuhs), or “exalted one.” He also kept the title imperator, or “supreme military commander,” a term from which emperor is derived. Rome was now an empire ruled by one man.

A Vast and Powerful Empire

Rome was at the peak of its power from the beginning of Augustus’ rule in 27 B.C. to A.D. 180. For 207 years, peace reigned throughout the empire, except for some fighting with tribes along the borders. This period of peace and prosperity is known as the Pax Romana—“Roman peace.”

During this time, the Roman Empire included more than 3 million square miles. Its population numbered between 60 and 80 million people. About 1 million people lived in the city of Rome itself.

An Economy Based on Agriculture and Trade  Agriculture was the most important industry in the empire. All else depended on it. About 90 percent of the people were engaged in farming. Most Romans survived on the produce from their local area. Additional foodstuffs (when needed) and luxury items for the rich were obtained through trade. In Augustus’ time, a silver coin called a denarius was in use throughout the empire. Having common coinage made trade between different parts of the empire much easier.

Rome had a vast trading network. Ships from the east traveled the Mediterranean protected by the Roman navy. Cities such as Corinth in Greece, Ephesus in Anatolia, and Antioch on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean grew wealthy. Rome also traded with China and India. A complex network of roads linked the empire to such far-flung places as Persia and southern Russia. These roads were originally built by the Roman army for military purposes. The most important of the roads were the Silk Roads, named for the overland routes on which silk from China came through Asia to the Romans. Other luxury goods traveled along the same routes. Trade also brought Roman ways to the provinces and beyond.
Managing a Huge Empire  The borders of the Roman Empire measured some 10,000 miles. By the second century A.D., the empire reached from Spain to Mesopotamia, from North Africa to Britain. Included in its provinces were people of many languages, cultures, and customs.

The Roman army drew upon the men of the provinces as auxiliary, or support, forces. They were not citizens of Rome. But they learned Roman customs and became citizens when they were discharged from military service. In this way, the army also spread the Roman way of life to the provinces and Roman rights to non-Romans.

A Sound Government  Augustus was Rome’s ablest emperor. He stabilized the frontier, glorified Rome with splendid public buildings, and created a system of government that survived for centuries. He set up a civil service. That is, he paid workers to manage the affairs of government, such as the grain supply, tax collection, and the postal system. Although the senate still functioned, civil servants drawn from plebeians and even former slaves actually administered the empire.

After Augustus died in A.D. 14, the senate chose his adopted son Tiberius as his successor. During the Pax Romana, some of Rome’s emperors were able and intelligent. Some were cruel. Two, Caligula and Nero, were either insane or unstable. Yet the system of government set up by Augustus proved to be stable. This was due mainly to the effectiveness of the civil service in carrying out day-to-day operations.

The Emperors and Succession  Rome’s peace and prosperity depended upon the orderly transfer of power. Because Rome had no written law for selecting a new emperor, a crisis or a civil war was always a possibility when an emperor died. The succession problem was temporarily solved by the leaders known as the Five Good Emperors. Beginning with Nerva in A.D. 96, each of them adopted as his heir a
respected leader who had the support of both the army and the people to be the next emperor. The reign of Marcus Aurelius, the last of the five, ended in A.D. 180. His death marked the beginning of the empire’s decline and the end of the *Pax Romana*.

**Life in Imperial Rome**

Merchants, soldiers, slaves, foreigners, and philosophers all shared the crowded, noisy streets of Rome. However, most people in the Roman Empire did not live in the cities and towns. They lived in the countryside and worked on farms. For all Romans, life changed as Rome moved from republic to empire.

**Men and Women** Throughout its history, Rome emphasized the values of discipline, strength, and loyalty. A person with these qualities was said to have the important virtue of *gravitas*. The Romans were a practical people. They honored strength more than beauty, power more than grace, and usefulness more than elegance.

At the heart of Roman society was the family. By law and custom, the eldest man, known as the paterfamilias, or “father of the family,” had power to rule the household. He controlled all property and had authority over all family members. He could disown newborn children, banish family members, or even sell them into slavery.

By the time of the empire’s establishment, Roman women, both rich and poor, had become nearly the social equals of men. Upper-class women ran the household and were given authority and respect. They had more personal freedom than the women of Greece and than most women would have until the 19th century. Roman women could own property and testify in court. However, they could not vote. Officially they were expected to remain in the background. But they frequently attended the public baths (where most Romans went to bathe), plays, festivals, and games. Lower-class women could work at such jobs as spinners, weavers, shopkeepers, midwives, entertainers, and waitresses.

**Children and Education** Romans favored boy children over girls. Boys would become citizens with the right to vote and would carry on family traditions. Girls were not even given their own names. Daughters received the feminine form of the father’s name, with “the elder” or “the younger” or a number added, such as Octavia II.

Few children went to school. Those who did were usually boys from noble or wealthy families. Their schooling continued until they officially became adults at 16. Girls from these families most
often were educated at home and were prepared for marriage and motherhood. They were usually married at the age of 12 to 15, to much older husbands.

Poor children, whether they lived in the city or on a farm, had to work. They did not go to school and generally remained illiterate.

**Slaves and Captivity** Slavery was a significant part of Roman life. It was widespread and important to the economy. The Romans made more use of slaves than any previous civilization. Numbers of slaves may have reached as high as one-third of the population.

Most slaves were conquered peoples brought back by victorious Roman armies and included men, women, and children. Children born to slaves also became slaves. Slaves could be bought and sold. According to Roman law, slaves were the property of their owner. They could be punished, rewarded, set free, or put to death as their master saw fit. Slaves worked both in the city and on the farm. Many were treated cruelly and worked at hard labor all day long. Some—strong, healthy males—were forced to become **gladiators**, or professional fighters, who fought to the death in public contests. Other slaves, particularly those who worked in wealthy households, were better treated.

Occasionally, slaves would rebel. None of the slave revolts succeeded. More than a million slaves lost their lives attempting to gain their freedom.

**Gods and Goddesses** The earliest Romans worshipped powerful spirits or divine forces, called *numina*, that they thought resided in everything around them. Closely related to these spirits were the Lares (LAIR-eez), who were the guardian spirits of each family. After the Romans came into contact with Etruscans and Greeks, they began to think of these powerful spirits as having humanlike forms and individual personalities. They were given Roman names. Romans honored these powerful gods and goddesses through various rituals, hoping to gain favor and avoid misfortune.

In Rome, government and religion were linked. The deities were symbols of the state. Romans were expected to honor them not only in private rituals at shrines in their homes but also in public worship ceremonies conducted by priests in temples. Among the most important Roman gods and goddesses were Jupiter, father of the gods; Juno, his wife, who supposedly watched over women; and Minerva, goddess of wisdom and of the arts and crafts. During the empire, worship of the emperor also became part of the official religion of Rome.

By A.D. 100, many Romans had become interested in the religions of Asia. These religions had practices and beliefs that were more personal and emotional than the somber rituals connected with Rome’s deities.

**“Bread and Circuses”—Food and Entertainment** By the time of the empire, wealth and social status had made huge differences in how people lived. Classes had little in common. The rich lived extravagantly. They spent large sums of money on homes, gardens, slaves, and luxuries. They gave banquets that lasted for many hours and included foods that were rare and costly, such as boiled ostrich and parrot-tongue pie.
However, most people in Rome barely had the necessities of life. During the time of the empire, much of the city's population was unemployed. The government supported these people with daily rations of grain. In the shadow of Rome's great temples and public buildings, poor people crowded into rickety, sprawling tenements. Fire was a constant danger.

To distract and control the masses of Romans, the government provided free games, races, mock battles, and gladiator contests. By A.D. 250, there were 150 holidays a year. On these days of celebration, the Colosseum, a huge arena that could hold 50,000, would fill with the rich and the poor alike. The spectacles they watched combined bravery and cruelty, honor and violence. In the animal shows, wild creatures brought from distant lands, such as tigers, lions, and bears, fought to the death. In other contests, gladiators engaged in combat with animals or with each other, often until one of them was killed.

The **Pax Romana** had brought 200 years of peace and prosperity to Rome. During this time, a new religion called Christianity developed and began to spread throughout the empire.

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**CONNECT to TODAY**

**Charioteers—Professional Athletes**

Professional athletes are well-known personalities in the United States. In addition to the large salaries paid by their teams, athletes earn extra money endorsing products from athletic shoes to fast food. Some athletes even become actors; a few have become politicians.

Charioteers were popular athletes in ancient Rome. They were usually slaves or freed slaves. They raced for one of four “factions” (something like a modern team)—the whites, greens, reds, or blues. They competed for large cash prizes. When a charioteer won a big race, his portrait would appear on walls all over the city.

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**1. TERMS & NAMES**

- civil war
- Julius Caesar
- triumvirate
- absolute ruler
- Augustus
- Pax Romana
- gladiator

---

**2. TAKING NOTES**

Make a bulleted chart like the one below, showing how Rome changed during the Pax Romana.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in Rome</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which changes do you consider negative? Why?

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**3. ANALYZING CAUSES**

What role did Julius Caesar play in the decline of the republic and the rise of the empire?

**THINK ABOUT**

- the problems facing the republic
- how Caesar helped restore order
- Caesar's defiance of the senate
- Caesar's rule as dictator

---

**4. THEME ACTIVITY**

**Empire Building**

Role-play a discussion in the Roman Forum, in which various members of society comment on conditions in the Roman Empire during the Pax Romana. Participants might include a senator, a civil servant, a slave, a merchant, and a landless and jobless former soldier. Working in small teams, one for each participant, focus on the changes that have come with the rise of the empire.
The Rise of Christianity

SETTING THE STAGE  The worship of Roman gods was impersonal, practiced without a great deal of emotion. Priests used sacred rites to intercede on behalf of worshippers. A new religion called Christianity, born as a movement within Judaism, emphasized the personal relationship between God and people. It attracted many Romans.

Jews Come Under Roman Rule
Roman power spread to Judea, the home of the Jews, around 63 B.C. At first the Jewish kingdom remained independent, at least in name. Jewish kings ruled as representatives of Rome. Some Jews allied with the Romans and accepted their plans to “Romanize” Jerusalem. The ruler Herod, for example, was a Romanized Jew. His loyalties were divided between Rome and the Jewish people, but he ruled with an iron hand and angered many Jews. When he died, the Jews began a revolt against Roman influence that lasted for ten years. Rome finally took control of the Jewish kingdom and made it the province of Judea in A.D. 6.

In an attempt to restore order in Judea, the Romans gave control of religious matters and local affairs to the Jewish court called the Sanhedrin. Jews were divided into two major factions. One group, called the Zealots, wanted to rid their homeland of the Romans. Another group believed that the Messiah, or savior, was soon to appear. According to biblical tradition, God had promised that the Messiah would restore the kingdom of the Jews.

The Life and Teachings of Jesus
Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea. The date is uncertain but is thought to have been around 6 to 4 B.C. Jesus was both a Jew and a Roman subject. He was raised in the village of Nazareth in northern Palestine. Jesus was baptized by the prophet known as John the Baptist. As a young man, he took up the trade of carpentry.

Jesus’ Message  At the age of 30 Jesus began his public ministry. For the next three years, he preached, taught, did good works, and reportedly performed miracles. His teachings contained many ideas from Jewish tradition, such as monotheism, or belief in only one god, and the principles of the Ten Commandments. Jesus emphasized God’s personal relationship to each human being. He stressed the importance of people’s love for God, their neighbors, their enemies, and even themselves. He also taught that God would end wickedness in the world and would establish an eternal kingdom after death for people who sincerely repented their sins.

Jesus gathered about himself twelve special disciples, or pupils. Historical records of the time mention very little about Jesus. The main source of information about Jesus’ life and teachings are the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament of the Bible. Some of the Gospels are thought to have been written by one or more of Jesus’ disciples, who later came to be called apostles.
As Jesus preached from town to town, his fame grew. He attracted large crowds, and many people were touched by his message. Many believed him to be the long-awaited Messiah, the son of God. Because Jesus ignored wealth and status, his message had special appeal to the poor. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth,” he said. His words, as related in the Gospels, are simple and direct:

**THE BIBLE**

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone hits you on the cheek, let him hit the other one too; if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you for something, and when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back. Do for others just what you want them to do for you.


**Jesus’ Death** Jesus’ growing popularity concerned both Roman and Jewish leaders. When Jesus visited Jerusalem about A.D. 29, enthusiastic crowds greeted him as the Messiah, or king. The chief priests of the Jews denied that Jesus was the Messiah. They said his teachings were blasphemy, or contempt for God. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate thought that Jesus, whom the Romans mockingly called “King of the Jews,” challenged the authority of Rome. Pilate arrested Jesus and sentenced him to be crucified, or nailed to a large wooden cross to die.

After Jesus’ death, his body was placed in a tomb. According to the Gospels, three days later his body was gone, and a living Jesus began appearing to his followers. Then one day it was said that he ascended into heaven. The apostles were more than ever convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. It was from this belief that Jesus came to be referred to as Jesus Christ. **Christos** is a Greek word meaning “messiah” or “savior.” The name Christianity was derived from “Christ.”

The followers of Jesus were strengthened by their conviction that he had triumphed over death. Led by **Peter**, the first apostle, they spread the teachings of Jesus throughout Palestine and Syria. The cross on which he had been crucified became a symbol for their beliefs.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY**

A. Hypothesizing

Why did the followers of Jesus think he was the Messiah?
Christians Spreads Through the Empire

Jesus’ teachings did not contradict Jewish law, and his first followers were Jews. Soon, however, these followers began to create a new religion based on his messages. Despite political and religious opposition, the new religion of Christianity spread slowly but steadily throughout the Roman Empire.

**Paul’s Mission** One man, the apostle Paul, had enormous influence on Christianity’s development. Paul was a Jew whose Hebrew name was Saul. He had never met Jesus and at first was an enemy of Christianity. While traveling to Damascus in Syria, he reportedly had a vision of Christ. He then began using his Roman name, Paul, and spent the rest of his life spreading and interpreting Christ’s teachings.

The *Pax Romana*, which made travel and the exchange of ideas fairly safe, provided the ideal conditions for Christianity to spread. The excellent Roman road system made passage by land easy, and common languages—Latin and Greek—allowed the message to be easily understood. Paul was able to travel freely from city to city around the eastern Mediterranean to preach. He wrote influential letters, called Epistles, to groups of believers. In his teaching, Paul stressed that Jesus was the son of God who died for people’s sins. He also declared that Christianity should welcome all converts, Jew or Gentile (non-Jew). He said: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” It was this universality that enabled Christianity to become more than just a local religion.

**Jewish Rebellion** During the early years of Christianity, much Roman attention was focused on the land of Jesus’ birth and on the Jews. In A.D. 66, a band of Zealots rebelled against Rome. In A.D. 70, the Romans stormed Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple complex. All that remained was a western portion of the wall, which today is the holiest Jewish shrine. The Jewish fortress near Masada held out until A.D. 73. About a half million Jews were killed in the course of this rebellion.

The Jews made another attempt to break free of the Romans in A.D. 132. Another half-million Jews died in three years of fighting. Although the Jewish religion survived, the Jewish political state ceased to exist for more than 1,800 years. Most Jews were driven from their homeland into exile. This dispersal of the Jews is called the Diaspora.

**Persecution of the Christians** Christians also posed a problem for Roman rulers because Christians refused to worship Roman gods. This refusal was seen as opposition to Roman rule. Some Roman rulers also used Christians as scapegoats for political and economic troubles. In A.D. 64, for example, when the emperor Nero was blamed for a disastrous fire in Rome, he said Christians were responsible and ordered them to be persecuted. Both the apostles Peter and Paul were put to death in Rome some time after A.D. 60.

The emperors who followed Nero in the first century did not continue the persecutions. Later, however, as the *Pax Romana* began to crumble, the Romans exiled, imprisoned, or executed Christians for refusing to worship Roman gods. Thousands were crucified, burned, or killed by wild animals in the circus arenas. Other Christians and even some non-Christians regarded persecuted Christians as martyrs. Martyrs were people willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of a belief or a cause. Despite persecution, Christianity became a powerful religious force. By the late third century A.D., there were millions of Christians in the Roman Empire. Missionaries spread the faith throughout the empire and beyond.
A World Religion

The widespread appeal of Christianity was the result of a variety of reasons.
Christianity grew because it:
• embraced all people—men and women; slaves, the poor, and nobles.
• gave hope to the powerless.
• appealed to those who were repelled by the extravagances of imperial Rome.
• offered a personal relationship with a loving God.
• promised eternal life after death.

Early Christian Church

Christians soon began to give their religion a structure, much as the Roman Empire had a hierarchy. At the local level, a priest led each small group of Christians. A bishop, who was also a priest, supervised several local churches. The apostle Peter had traveled to Rome from Jerusalem and became the first bishop there. According to tradition, Jesus referred to Peter as the “rock” on which the Christian Church would be built. As a result, all priests and bishops traced their authority to him.

Eventually, every major city had its own bishop. However, later bishops of Rome claimed to be the heirs of Peter. These bishops said that Peter was the first pope, the father or head of the Christian Church. They said that whoever was bishop of Rome was also the leader of the whole Church. Also, as Rome was the capital of the empire, it seemed the logical choice to be the center of the Church.

Constantine Accepts Christianity

A critical moment in Christianity occurred in A.D. 312, when the Roman emperor Constantine was fighting three rivals for his title. He had marched to the Tiber River at Rome to battle his chief rival. On the day before the battle at Milvian Bridge, Constantine prayed for divine help. He reported that he then...
saw a cross of light in the heavens bearing the inscription, “In this sign, conquer.” Constantine ordered artisans to put the Christian symbol on his soldier’s shields. Constantine and his troops were victorious in battle. He gave credit for his success to the help of the Christian God.

In the next year, A.D. 313, Constantine announced an end to the persecution of Christians. In the Edict of Milan, he declared Christianity to be one of the religions approved by the emperor. The edict granted “both to the Christians and to all men freedom to follow the religion that they choose.” Christianity continued to gain strength. In 380, the emperor Theodosius made it the empire’s official religion.

**Discord and Harmony** As Christianity grew, disagreements about beliefs developed among its followers. Church leaders called any belief that appeared to contradict the basic teachings a **heresy**. Dispute over beliefs became intense. In an attempt to end conflicts, Church leaders sought to set a single, official standard of belief. These beliefs were compiled in the New Testament, which contained the four Gospels, the Epistles of Paul, and other documents. In A.D. 325, Constantine decided to end the disputes and the disorder they caused. He called Church leaders to Nicaea in Anatolia. There they wrote the Nicene Creed, which defined the basic beliefs of the Church.

**The Fathers of the Church** Also influential in defining Church teachings were several early writers and scholars who have been called the Fathers of the Church. One of the most important was Augustine, who became bishop of the city of Hippo in North Africa in 396. Augustine taught that while humans needed the grace of God to be saved, God was merciful and gave his grace freely.

One of Augustine’s most famous books is *The City of God*. It was written after Rome was plundered in the fifth century. Augustine wrote that the fate of cities such as Rome was not important because the heavenly city, the city of God, could never be destroyed:

**A VOICE FROM THE PAST**

The one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God’s will. . . . By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other is doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil.

**ST. AUGUSTINE, The City of God**

Christianity increased in both power and wealth despite the empire’s growing internal and external problems.
The Decline of the Roman Empire

Chapter 6

SETTING THE STAGE  In the third century A.D., Rome faced many problems. They came both from within the empire and from outside. Drastic economic, military, and political reforms would be needed to hold off collapse.

A Century of Crisis  Historians generally agree that the Roman Empire began its decline at the end of the reign of the last of the Five Good Emperors, Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180). The rulers that followed in the next century had little or no idea of how to deal with the problems facing the empire. Most, like Aurelius’ son Commodus, were brutal and incompetent. They left the empire greatly weakened.

Rome’s Economy Declines  During the Pax Romana, bustling trade flowed over routes patrolled by Roman legions and ships. Rome’s treasuries were enriched by gold and silver taken from conquered territories. Most important of all, the empire’s farms grew enough grain to feed the population of the cities. During the third century A.D., all three sources of prosperity evaporated.

Hostile tribes outside the boundaries of the empire and pirates on the Mediterranean Sea disrupted trade. Frequent wars were costly. The wealthy spent money on luxury goods from China, India, and Arabia. This spending drained the empire of gold and silver. Since the empire’s expansion had come to an end, there were no new sources of precious metals.

Desperate to pay its mounting expenses, including the rising cost of defense, the government raised taxes. It also started minting coins that contained less and less silver. It hoped to create more money with the same amount of precious metal. However, the economy soon suffered from inflation, a drastic drop in the value of money coupled with a rise in prices.

Agriculture faced equally serious problems. Harvests in Italy and western Europe became increasingly meager because overworked soil had lost its fertility. Farmland was destroyed by warfare. The higher taxes imposed by the government caused many poor farmers to abandon their lands. The use of cheap slave labor had discouraged improvements in technology. Serious food shortages resulted for all these reasons. Eventually, disease spread and the population declined.

Rome Faces Military Upheaval  The empire’s economic crisis was worsened by its growing military troubles. Throughout the third century, Germanic tribes repeatedly overwhelmed the Roman legions guarding the northern frontiers. At the same time, Persia threatened Roman territory in Syria and Anatolia.
called all invaders “barbarians,” a term that they used to refer to non-Romans.) Rome’s most humiliating defeat occurred in A.D. 260, when the Persians captured the emperor Valerian.

In the army, discipline and loyalty had collapsed. Soldiers gave their loyalty not to Rome but to their commanders, who fought among themselves for the throne. To defend against the increasing threats to the empire, the government began to recruit mercenaries, foreign soldiers who fought for money. While mercenaries would accept lower pay than Romans, they felt little sense of loyalty to the empire.

**Roman Politics Decay** Loyalty was in fact a key problem, perhaps the most serious of all. In the past, Romans cared so deeply about their republic that they willingly sacrificed their lives for it. Conditions in the later centuries of the empire caused citizens to lose their sense of patriotism. They became indifferent to the empire’s fate.

Romans had once considered holding political office to be an honor. It was also an opportunity to gain wealth. By the 200s, however, local officials usually lost money because they were required to pay for the costly public circuses and baths out of their own pockets. Few people chose to serve the government under those conditions.

Only the armies remained actively interested in politics. In a 50-year period (A.D. 235–284), armies in the provinces and in Rome proclaimed 50 generals to be emperors of Rome. Of these “barracks emperors,” 26 briefly won the approval of the Roman senate; 25 died violently.

**Emperors Attempt Reform** Remarkably, the empire survived intact for another 200 years. Its life was prolonged by reforming emperors and by its division into two parts: eastern and western.

**Diocletian Reforms the Empire** In A.D. 284, Diocletian, a strong-willed army leader, became the new emperor. With amazing boldness, he restored order in the empire and increased its strength. To accomplish this, he governed as an absolute ruler and severely limited personal freedoms.

Diocletian doubled the size of the Roman armies, drafting prisoners of war and hiring German mercenaries. He attempted to control inflation by setting fixed prices for goods. He also ordered farmers to remain on their lands and other workers to stay in their jobs for life. To restore the prestige of the office of emperor, Diocletian claimed descent from the ancient Roman gods. He viewed Christianity as a threat and passed decrees to persecute the Christians.

Diocletian believed that the empire had grown too large and too complex for one ruler. In his most significant reform, he divided the empire into the Greek-speaking East (Greece, Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt) and the Latin-speaking West (Italy, Gaul, Britannia, and Spain). He took the eastern half for himself and appointed a co-ruler for the West, General Maximian. Each emperor also selected an assistant, who was to be his successor. While Diocletian shared authority, he kept overall control. His half of the empire, the East, included most of the empire’s great cities and trade centers and was far wealthier than the West.

Diocletian’s reforms slowed the decline of the empire. The borders became safe again, and the emperor’s prestige was restored. Because of ill health, Diocletian took the extraordinary step of retiring in A.D. 305.

However, his plans for orderly succession failed. Civil war broke out immediately. By 311, four rivals were competing for power.
Among them was an ambitious young commander named Constantine, the same Constantine who would later end the persecution of Christians.

**Constantine Moves the Capital**  Constantine gained control of the western part of the empire in A.D. 312 and continued many of the social and economic policies of Diocletian. In 324 Constantine also secured control of the East, thus restoring the concept of a single ruler.

In A.D. 330, Constantine took a step that would have great consequence for the empire. He moved the capital from Rome to the Greek city of Byzantium (bih-ZAN-shee-uhm), in what is now Turkey. The new capital stood on the Bosporus Strait, strategically located for trade and defense purposes on a crossroads between West and East.

With Byzantium as its capital, the center of power in the empire shifted from Rome to the East. Soon the new capital was protected by massive walls and filled with imperial buildings modeled after those in Rome. The city was given a new name—**Constantinople** (KAHN-stan-tuhn-uh-puhl), city of Constantine. After Constantine’s death, the empire would again be divided. The East would survive; the West would fall.

**Invaders Overrun the Western Empire**

The decline of the Western Roman Empire took place over many years. Its final collapse was the result of worsening internal problems, the separation of the Western Empire from the wealthier Eastern part, and outside invasions.

Since the days of Julius Caesar, Germanic peoples had gathered on the northern borders of the Empire. Some groups settled into a peaceful farming life. Eventually they adopted Roman ways, such as speaking Latin and becoming Christians. Other groups remained nomads. From A.D. 376 to 476, huge numbers of Germans poured

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**Multiple Causes: Fall of the Western Roman Empire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Political</strong></th>
<th><strong>Social</strong></th>
<th><strong>Economic</strong></th>
<th><strong>Military</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Political office seen as burden, not reward</td>
<td>- Decline in interest in public affairs</td>
<td>- Poor harvests</td>
<td>- Threat from northern European tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Military interference in politics</td>
<td>- Low confidence in empire</td>
<td>- Disruption of trade</td>
<td>- Low funds for defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Civil war and unrest</td>
<td>- Disloyalty, lack of patriotism, corruption</td>
<td>- No more war plunder</td>
<td>- Problems recruiting Roman citizens; recruiting of non-Romans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Division of empire</td>
<td>- Contrast between rich and poor</td>
<td>- Gold and silver drain</td>
<td>- Decline of patriotism and loyalty among soldiers</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Moving of capital to Byzantium</td>
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<td>- Inflation</td>
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**Immediate Causes**

- Pressure from Huns
- Invasion by Germanic tribes and by Huns
- Sack of Rome
- Conquest by invaders

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**SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts**

1. Could changes in any contributing factors have reversed the decline of the empire?
2. Which contributing factors—political, economic, or military—were the most significant in the fall of the Western Roman Empire?
into Roman territory—Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Angles, Saxons, Burgundians, Alemanni, and Vandals. Gradually, they overwhelmed the structures of Roman society. Finally, they drove the last Roman emperor from the throne.

**The Huns Move West** The main reason for the Germanic invasions of the Empire was the movement into Europe of the Huns. The Huns were fierce Mongol nomads from central Asia. They began invading the frontier regions of the Rhine and Danube rivers around A.D. 370, destroying all in their path. The pressure from the Huns forced other groups to move as well—into the Roman Empire.

The following description from a fourth-century Roman historian shows how intensely the Huns were feared and scorned:

**A VOICE FROM THE PAST**

The nation of the Huns... surpasses all other barbarians in wildness of life... And though [the Huns] do just bear the likeness of men (of a very ugly pattern), they are so little advanced in civilization that they... feed upon the... half-raw flesh of any sort of animal... When attacked... they fill the air with varied and discordant cries... they fight in no regular order of battle, but by being extremely swift and sudden in their movements, they disperse... spread havoc over vast plains, and... pillage the camp of their enemy almost before he has become aware of their approach.

*AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, The Chronicle of Events (Rerum gestarum libri)*

**Germanic Invasions** Germanic people near the Rhine River—Franks, Burgundians, and Vandals—fled the invading Huns and entered Roman lands. When the Rhine River froze in the winter of 406, Vandal warriors and their families swarmed across the ice. They kept moving through the Roman provinces of Gaul, Spain, and North Africa. The Western Empire was unable to field an army to stop them. From Carthage, the Vandals raided some Mediterranean islands and Italy.

By the early fifth century, the city of Rome itself was vulnerable to attack. More than 600 years had passed since a foreign army, that of Hannibal, had threatened...
Rome. Then in 408 Visigoths, led by their king, Alaric (AL•ur•ihk), marched across the Alps toward Rome. After putting the city under siege, hordes of Germans stormed Rome in 410 and plundered it for three days.

Attila the Hun  Meanwhile, the Huns, who were indirectly responsible for the Germanic assault on the Empire, became a direct threat. In 444 they united for the first time under a powerful chieftain named Attila (AT•uhl•uh). With his 100,000 soldiers, Attila terrorized both halves of the empire. In the East, his armies attacked and plundered 70 cities. (They failed, however, to scale the high walls of Constantinople.)

The Huns then swept into the West. In A.D. 452, Attila’s forces advanced against Rome, but they were weakened by famine and disease. As a result, Pope Leo I was able to negotiate their withdrawal. Although the Huns were no longer a threat to the empire after Attila’s death in 453, the Germanic invasions continued. In 455 Vandals, under Gaiseric, sacked Rome, leaving it in chaos. Famine struck, and its population eventually dropped from about one million to 20,000.

Rome’s Last Emperor  The Roman emperor in the West had become practically powerless. Germanic tribes now fought one another for possession of the Western provinces. Spain belonged to the Visigoths, North Africa to the Vandals. Gaul was overrun by competing tribes—Franks, Burgundians, and Visigoths. Britannia was invaded by Angles and Saxons. Italy was falling victim to raids by the Ostrogoths.

The last Roman emperor was a 14-year-old boy named Romulus Augustulus. In 476 he was deposed by a German general named Odoacer (oh •doh•AY•sur) and sent into exile. After that, no emperor even pretended to rule Rome and its western provinces. Roman power in the western half of the Empire had disappeared.

The eastern half of the Empire, which came to be called the Byzantine Empire, not only survived but flourished. It preserved the great heritage of Greek and Roman culture for another 1,000 years. (See Chapter 11.) The Byzantine emperors ruled from Constantinople and saw themselves as heirs to the power of Augustus Caesar. The empire endured until 1453, when it fell to the Ottoman Turks.

Even though Rome’s political power in the West ended, its cultural influence, through its ideas, customs, and institutions, continued to be deeply embedded in Western civilization.
The Fall of the Roman Empire

Since the fifth century, historians and others have argued over the empire’s fall. They have attributed it to a variety of causes, coming both from within and outside the empire. The following excerpts are examples of the differing opinions.

**Historical Commentary**

Edward Gibbon

In the 1780s Gibbon published *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In this passage, Gibbon explains that a major cause of the collapse was that the empire was simply just too large.

The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and, as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight. The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and instead of inquiring why the Roman Empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long.

**Historical Commentary**

Arther Ferrill

In his book *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1986), Arther Ferrill argues that the fall of Rome was a military collapse.

In fact the Roman Empire of the West did fall. Not every aspect of the life of Roman subjects was changed by that, but the fall of Rome as a political entity was one of the major events of the history of Western man. It will simply not do to call that fall a myth or to ignore its historical significance merely by focusing on those aspects of Roman life that survived the fall in one form or another. At the opening of the fifth century a massive army, perhaps more than 200,000 strong, stood at the service of the Western emperor and his generals. The destruction of Roman military power in the fifth century was the obvious cause of the collapse of Roman government in the West.

**Historical Commentary**

Finley Hooper

In this passage from his *Roman Realities* (1967), Hooper argues against the idea of a “fall.”

The year was 476. For those who demand to know the date Rome fell, that is it. Others will realize that the fall of Rome was not an event but a process. Or, to put it another way, there was no fall at all—ancient Roman civilization simply became something else, which is called medieval. [It evolved into another civilization, the civilization of the Middle Ages.]

**Eyewitness Account**

St. Jerome

This early Church leader did not live to see the empire’s end, but he vividly describes his feelings after a major event in Rome’s decline—the attack and plunder of the city by Visigoths in 410. He said:

“It is the end of the world … Words fail me. My sobs break in … The city which took captive the whole world has itself been captured.”
SETTING THE STAGE  Romans borrowed and adapted cultural elements freely, especially from the Greek and Hellenistic cultures. Rome created a great civilization, whose art and architecture, language and literature, engineering, and law became its legacy to the world.

The Legacy of Greco-Roman Civilization

Under the Roman Empire, hundreds of territories were knitted into a single state. Each Roman province and city was governed in the same way. The Romans were proud of their ability to rule, but they acknowledged Greek leadership in the fields of art, architecture, literature, and philosophy.

By the second century B.C., Romans had conquered Greece and had come to greatly admire Greek culture. Educated Romans learned the Greek language. As Horace, a Roman poet said, “Greece, once overcome, overcame her wild conqueror.” The mixing of elements of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture produced a new culture, called Greco-Roman culture. This is also often called classical civilization.

Roman artists, philosophers, and writers did not merely copy their Greek and Hellenistic models. They adapted them for their own purposes and created a style of their own. Roman art and literature came to convey the Roman ideals of strength, permanence, solidity.

Roman Fine Arts  Romans learned the art of sculpture from the Greeks. However, while the Greeks were known for the beauty and idealization of their sculpture, Roman sculptors created realistic portraits in stone. Much Roman art was practical in purpose, intended for public education.

The reign of Augustus was a period of great artistic achievement. At that time the Romans further developed a type of sculpture called bas-relief. In bas-relief, or low-relief, images project from a flat background. Roman sculptors used bas-relief to tell stories and to represent crowds of people, soldiers in battle, and landscapes. (See Trajan’s Column on page 169.)

Roman artists were particularly skilled in creating mosaics. Mosaics were pictures or designs made by setting small pieces of stone, glass, or tile onto a surface. Most Roman villas, the country houses of the wealthy, had at least one colored mosaic.

TERMS & NAMES
- Greco-Roman culture
- Pompeii
- Virgil
- Tacitus
- aqueduct

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
A. Summarizing
What were the origins of Greco-Roman culture?
Romans also excelled at the art of painting. Most wealthy Romans had bright, large murals, called frescoes, painted directly on their walls. Few have survived. The best examples of Roman painting are found in the Roman town of Pompeii, and date from as early as the second century B.C. In A.D. 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted, covering Pompeii in a thick layer of ash and killing about 2,000. The ash acted to preserve many buildings and works of art.

**Learning and Literature** Romans borrowed much of their philosophy from the Greeks. Stoicism, the philosophy of the Greek teacher Zeno, was especially influential. Stoicism encouraged virtue, duty, moderation, and endurance. One of the most noted Stoics was the emperor Marcus Aurelius. His steadfastness is shown in his *Meditations*: “In the midst of it all, you must take your stand, good-temperedly and without disdain.”

In literature, as in philosophy, the Romans found inspiration in the works of the Greeks. Writers used Roman themes and ideas while following Greek forms and models.

The poet Virgil spent ten years writing the most famous work of Latin literature, the *Aeneid* (ih-NEE-id), the epic of the legendary Aeneas. Virgil modeled the *Aeneid*, written in praise of Rome and Roman virtues, after the Greek epics of Homer. Here he speaks of government as being Rome’s most important contribution to civilization:

*A VOICE FROM THE PAST* ...

Romans, never forget that government is your medium! Be this your art:—to practice men in habit of peace, Generosity to the conquered, and firmness against aggressors.  

*VIRGIL, Aeneid*

While Virgil’s writing carries all the weight and seriousness of the Roman character, the poet Ovid wrote light, witty poetry for enjoyment. In the *Amores*, Ovid relates that he can only compose when he is in love: “When I was from Cupid’s passions free, my Muse was mute and wrote no elegy.”

The Romans also wrote excellent prose, especially history. Livy compiled a multi-volume history of Rome from its origins to 9 B.C. He used legends freely, creating more of a national myth of Rome than a true history. Tacitus (TAS-ih-tuhs), another Roman historian, is notable among ancient historians because he presented the facts accurately. He also was concerned about the Romans’ lack of morality. In his *Annals* and *Histories*, he wrote about the good and bad of imperial Rome.

**Roman Achievements**

The presence of Rome is still felt daily in the languages, the institutions, and the thought of the Western world.

**Latin, the Language of Rome** Latin remained the language of learning in the West long after the fall of Rome. It was the official language of the Roman Catholic Church into the 20th century.

Latin was adopted by different peoples and developed into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian. These languages are called Romance languages because of their common Roman heritage. Latin also influenced other languages. For example, more than half the words in English have a basis in Latin.

**Architecture, Engineering, and Technology** Visitors from all over the empire marveled at the architecture of Rome. The arch, the dome, and concrete were combined to build spectacular structures, such as the Colosseum.
The Colosseum

The Colosseum was one of the greatest feats of Roman engineering and a model for the ages. The name comes from the Latin word *colossus*, meaning “gigantic.” Its construction was started by the Emperor Vespasian and was completed by his sons, emperors Titus and Domitian. For centuries after its opening in A.D. 80, excited spectators, both rich and poor, cheered a variety of free, bloody spectacles presented for their entertainment. Gladiator fought gladiator to the death. Wild animals were hunted and slaughtered. Christians were devoured by lions. The poor sat in the higher seats, the rich and powerful closer to the action.

**Facts About the Colosseum**
- **Built**—A.D. 72–81
- **Capacity**—45,000–50,000
- **Materials**—stone and concrete
- **Size**—157 feet high, 620 feet long
- **Arena**—287 feet long, 180 feet wide

**Connect to History**

**Drawing Conclusions**
What do the kind of spectacles the Romans watched tell us about them as a people and their leaders?

**Connect to Today**

**Comparing**
The Colosseum has been the model for sports stadiums worldwide. How is the design of modern stadiums patterned after that of the Colosseum? What are the similarities?
Arches also supported bridges and aqueducts. **Aqueducts** were designed by Roman engineers to bring water into cities and towns. When the water channel spanned a river or ravine, the aqueduct was lifted high up on arches.

Because Roman architectural forms were so practical, they have remained popular. Thomas Jefferson began a Roman revival in the United States in the 18th century. Many large public buildings, such as the U.S. Capitol and numerous state capitols, include Roman features.

Roman roads were also technological marvels. The army built a vast network of roads constructed of stone, concrete, and sand that connected Rome to all parts of the empire. Many lasted into the Middle Ages; some are still used.

**Roman System of Law**  Rome’s most lasting and widespread contribution was its law. Early Roman law dealt mostly with the rights of Roman citizens. As the empire grew, however, the Romans came to believe that laws should be fair and apply equally to all people, rich and poor. Slowly, judges began to recognize certain standards of justice. These standards were influenced largely by the teachings of Stoic philosophers and were based on common sense and practical ideas. Some of the most important principles of Roman law were:

- All persons had the right to equal treatment under the law.
- A person was considered innocent until proven guilty.
- The burden of proof rested with the accuser rather than the accused.
- A person should be punished only for actions, not thoughts.
- Any law that seemed unreasonable or grossly unfair could be set aside.

The principles of Roman law endured to form the basis of legal systems in many European countries and of places influenced by Europe, including the United States.

**Rome’s Enduring Influence**  By preserving and adding to Greek civilization, Rome strengthened the Western cultural tradition. The world would be a very different place had Rome not existed. Historian R. H. Barrow has stated that Rome never fell because it turned into something even greater—an idea—and achieved immortality.

Around the same time that Rome was developing its enduring culture, different but equally complex empires were growing in India and China, as you will see in Chapter 7.

**Section Assessment**

1. TERMS & NAMES
   - Greco-Roman culture
   - Pompeii
   - Virgil
   - Tacitus
   - aqueduct

2. TAKING NOTES
   Using a chart like the one below, list the accomplishments of Roman culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fine Arts</th>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

   Choose one and write a few paragraphs on its importance.

3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS
   Which principle of law do you think has been Rome’s greatest contribution to modern legal systems?

   **THINK ABOUT**
   - equality before the law
   - innocent until proven guilty
   - unfair laws could be set aside

4. ANALYZING THEMES
   **Power and Authority**  Why do you think the Greek philosophy of Stoicism was so appealing to Romans?

   **THINK ABOUT**
   - Stoic philosophy
   - the Roman citizen-soldier
   - Roman law