



The Fall of the Roman Empire

In 27 B.C., Octavian became the unchallenged ruler of Rome. Although the Senate continued to meet, Rome was no longer a republic. Octavian took the title of Augustus, or “exalted one,” and became Rome’s first emperor. The Roman Empire, which covered more than 3 million square miles, was now ruled by one man. For about 200 years, the Roman Empire enjoyed a time of peace. However, it was difficult to manage such a large area.



Constantine gained control of the Roman Empire in 324 A.D. He moved the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to the Greek city of Byzantium. Constantine renamed the city Constantinople. The eastern part of the Roman Empire grew stronger because Constantinople and other eastern cities were on trade routes. The economic gains from the trade of spices and other items from the far east guaranteed wealth and stability. The western part of the Roman Empire became weaker because of constant invasions. In 395, Rome split into two sections: the Eastern Empire and the Western Empire. The East would survive, but the West would fall.

The fall of the Western Roman Empire happened over many years. Although there were many complicated reasons, the main problem was constant invasions by Germanic tribes. Germanic people had been living on the northern borders of the Roman Empire for years. From 376 until 476, many Germans moved into Roman territory. Some of these Germanic groups were the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Franks, and Vandals.

Germanic tribes fought each other for control of the Western provinces of the Roman Empire. The city of Rome was captured and looted by the Visigoths in 410. This attack seriously weakened the Western Empire. In 476, Odoacer, a German warrior, removed the Roman emperor from power and sent him into exile. This completed the fall of Rome. After Romulus Augustulus was dethroned, Roman power in the western half of the empire disappeared. The Western Empire broke into separate states that were ruled by many different German tribes.

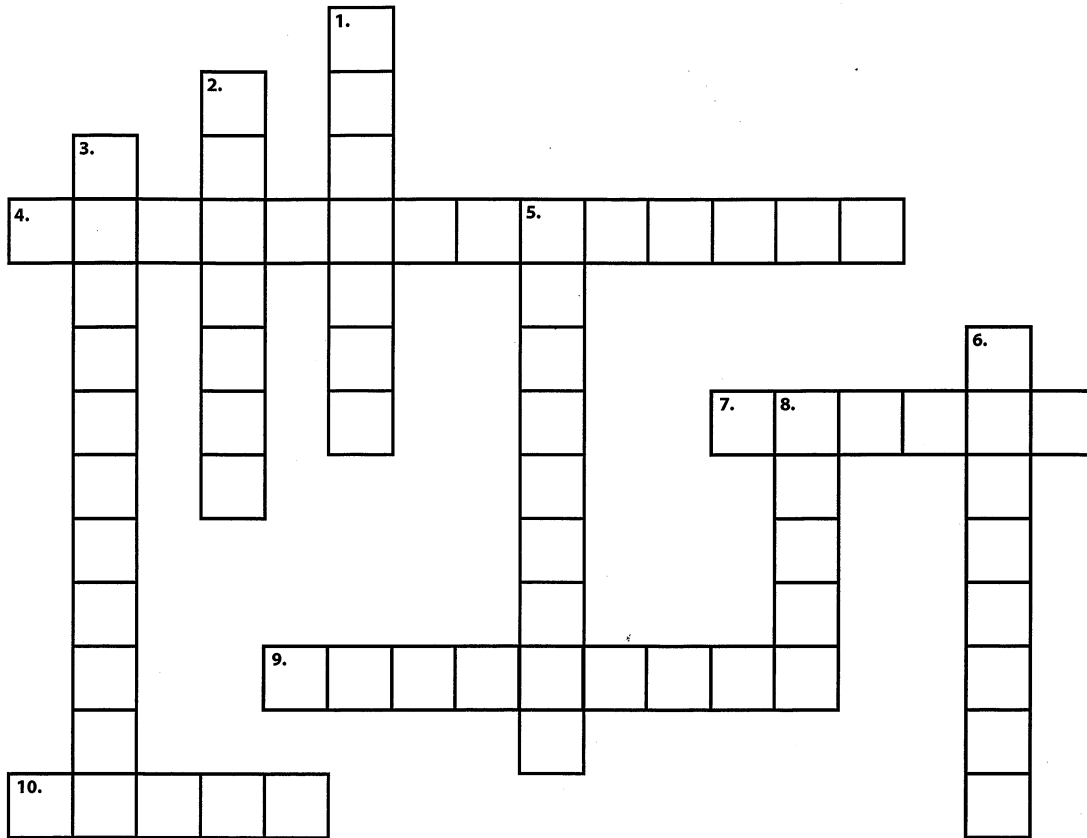
The richer and stronger Eastern Empire became known as the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine emperors ruled from Constantinople. This empire lasted until 1453, when it was taken over by the Ottoman Turks. Even though the Western Empire’s political power ended, its ideas, customs, and institutions lived on. Its cultural influence continues in Western civilization today.



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Crossword Puzzle

Write the best answer in each blank, and complete the crossword puzzle.



ACROSS

- The capital of the Roman Empire was moved to the Greek city of Byzantium, which was renamed _____.
- After Romulus Augustulus was dethroned, the Western Empire broke into separate _____ that were ruled by many different German tribes.
- The Eastern Empire became known as the _____ Empire.
- The Roman Empire enjoyed a time of _____ for about 200 years.

DOWN

- The German warrior _____ removed Romulus Augustulus from power.
- Even though the Western Empire's political power ended, its _____ lived on.
- The _____ covered more than 3 million square miles.
- The Western Empire grew weak because of constant _____.
- The Western Empire fell because of invasions by _____ tribes.
- The Eastern Empire was strong because of _____.



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Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer, and write the letter in the box.

1. _____ was Rome's first emperor.

- A. Constantine
- B. Romulus Augustulus
- C. Odoacer
- D. Octavian

2. Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire to _____.

- A. Athens
- B. Rome
- C. Byzantium
- D. Amsterdam

3. In 395, the Roman Empire broke into _____ sections.

- A. two
- B. three
- C. four
- D. five

4. The city of Rome was captured and looted by the _____.

- A. Ostrogoths
- B. Visigoths
- C. Vandals
- D. Franks

5. The Eastern Empire became known as _____.

- A. the Byzantine Empire
- B. the Asian Empire
- C. the German Empire
- D. the Great Roman Empire



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Chart – Causes of the Fall of the Western Roman Empire

Use the chart to answer the following questions. Write the answers in complete sentences.

Contributing Factors			
Political	Social	Economic	Military
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • military too involved in politics • civil war • moving the capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of patriotism • big difference between rich and poor • citizens not happy with empire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bad harvests • inflation • gap between rich and poor • gap in wealth between poorer Western Empire and richer Eastern Empire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • threats from invaders • low funds for defense • problems recruiting soldiers • lack of patriotism and loyalty in soldiers
Immediate Causes			
• invasions by Germanic tribes		• capture and looting of Rome	

1. What were the immediate causes of the fall of the Western Roman Empire?

2. What were the social contributing factors to the decline of the Western Roman Empire?

3. Do you think the fall of the Western Roman Empire could have been avoided? Explain your answer.



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Extension Activities

Choose one of the following activities to complete. Write the answer in complete sentences.

1. Constantine was not the only person to change the name of Constantinople. What is the name of the city today? Who changed the name? Look in your textbook, on the Internet, or at the library to find out.

2. Romans lost confidence in their empire. How do you think a lack of patriotism and loyalty from citizens might lead to the fall of an empire? Explain your answer.

3. One of the Germanic tribes that struggled to take over Roman lands was the Vandals. We got the English word "vandalize" from the name of this Germanic tribe. What does "vandalize" mean? What do you think the Vandals did to get this meaning attached to their name?



Quiz: The Fall of the Roman Empire

True/False

Decide if each statement is true or false, and write "true" or "false" in the blank.

- _____ 1. The Roman Empire split into two sections.
- _____ 2. The capital was moved to Constantinople and renamed Byzantium.
- _____ 3. At one time, the Roman Empire covered more than 3 million square miles.
- _____ 4. The Eastern Roman Empire fell because of invasions by Germanic tribes.
- _____ 5. The Eastern Roman Empire became known as the Byzantine Empire.

Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer, and write the letter in the box.

6. _____ removed Romulus Augustulus from power.

A. Odoacer
B. Constantine
C. Octavian
D. Julius Caesar

7. The _____ Roman Empire grew weak because of constant invasions.

A. Northern
B. Southern
C. Eastern
D. Western

Short Answer

Answer the following question in complete sentences.

8. Why was the Eastern Roman Empire able to stay strong?
