

**CHAPTER 6** Section 4 (pages 158–162)

# The Decline of the Roman Empire

**TERMS AND NAMES**

**inflation** Large drop in the value of money and rise in the prices of goods

**mercenary** Foreign soldiers who fought for money

**Diocletian** Strong-willed army leader and Roman emperor

**Constantinople** New name for Byzantium under Constantine

**Alaric** Visigoth king

**Attila** Powerful chieftain of Huns

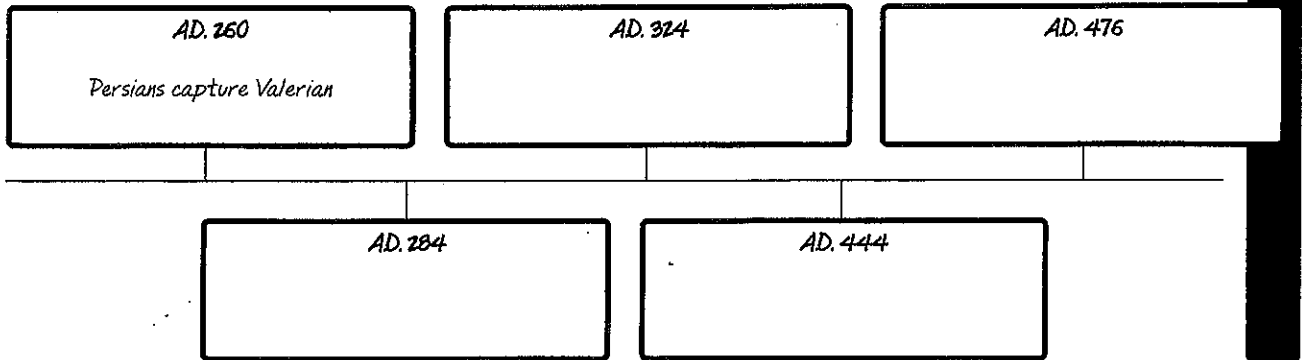
**BEFORE YOU READ**

In the last section, you read about the spread of Christianity.

In this section, you will learn how the Roman empire collapsed.

**AS YOU READ**

Use the time line below to take notes on the fall of the empire.



**A Century of Crisis** (pages 158–159)

*What problems did Rome face?*

Rome entered a period of decline after the reign of Marcus Aurelius ended in 180 A.D. Rome suffered economic problems. Trade slowed as raiders threatened ships and *caravans* on sea and land. The economy suffered from **inflation**—a drastic drop in the value of money and a rise in prices. Food supplies also dropped as tired soil, warfare, and high taxes cut the amount of grain and other foods produced on farms.

The empire also had military problems. German tribes caused trouble on the frontiers. Persians defeated the Romans in A.D. 260 and captured the emperor. Roman soldiers could no longer be counted on. Instead, **mercenaries**—soldiers

who fight for money—had to be hired. At the same time, Roman generals fought one another for control of the empire.

**1. What economic problems did Rome face?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Emperors Attempt Reform**

(pages 159–160)

*What changes did the emperors make?*

**Diocletian** took the throne as emperor in 284. He passed many new laws to try to fix the economy. He tried to restore the status of the emperor by naming

himself a son of the chief Roman god. He even divided the empire into eastern and western halves to make it easier to govern.

Many of these changes were continued by Constantine. He became emperor of both halves of the empire in 324. A few years later, Constantine moved the capital of the empire to a new city in northwestern Turkey where Europe and Asia meet. The city was *Byzantium*. Now it was given a new name—**Constantinople**, the city of Constantine.

**2. Who was Constantine?**

---



---

**Invaders Overrun the Western Empire** (pages 160–162)

**Who overran Rome?**

Reforms delayed the end of the Roman empire but could not prevent its fall. The eastern part of the

empire remained strong and unified. But troubles continued in the west. Germanic tribes moved into the empire. They were trying to escape from the *Huns*—fierce nomadic people from central Asia—who were moving into their land.

The Roman armies in the west collapsed. German armies twice entered Rome itself. In 408 Visigoths led by their king, **Alaric**, put the city under siege. In 444, the Huns united under a powerful chieftain named **Attila**. Attila and his armies terrorized both halves of the empire.

The invasions continued after Attila's death. The Germans had arrived for good. By 476 German peoples controlled many areas of Europe. That year a German general removed the last western Roman emperor from the throne.

**3. What role did Attila play in the collapse of Rome?**

---



---

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

**Contributing Factors**

**Political**

- Political office seen as burden, not reward
- Military interference in politics
- Civil war and unrest
- Division of empire
- Moving of capital to Byzantium

**Social**

- Decline in interest in public affairs
- Low confidence in empire
- Disloyalty, lack of patriotism, corruption
- Contrast between rich and poor

**Economic**

- Poor harvests
- Disruption of trade
- No more war plunder
- Gold and silver drain
- Inflation
- Crushing tax burden
- Widening gap between rich and poor and increasingly impoverished Western empire

**Military**

- Threat from northern European tribes
- Low funds for defense
- Problems recruiting Roman citizens; recruiting of non-Romans
- Decline of patriotism and loyalty among soldiers

**Immediate Causes**

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

**FALL OF ROMAN EMPIRE**

**Skillbuilder**

**1. What were the four immediate causes of the fall of Rome?**

**2. Which of the social factors do you think was most important? Why?**