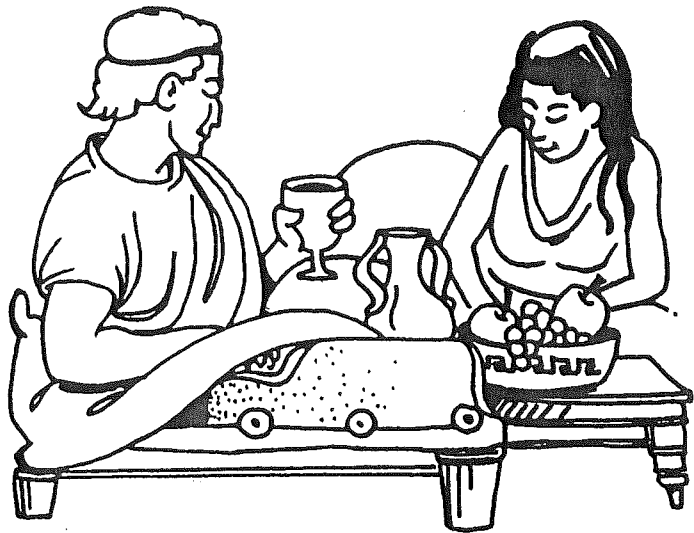


Reasons for the Fall of Rome

It is too simple to say Rome was defeated by the barbarians; it would be more accurate to argue that it was decay within Rome that caused the empire to collapse. By the time of Constantine, the Roman Empire had already lost most of its influence. For administrative purposes, it had been divided into an Eastern and Western Empire, and soon that division became permanent. Constantine created a new capital for himself on the western shore of the Bosphorus Strait. This eastern capital was soon named Constantinople. The Eastern Empire would last a thousand years, but the Western only another 140 years.



The greed and laziness of the upper class may have led to the fall of Rome.

What caused Rome to sink so fast? Historians have argued this for many years, and it is of special concern to major nations who worry about whether they will soon go the way of Rome. These were some reasons:

Social castes were imposed on the people. During the reign of Domitian, it was decreed that the father's occupation would be that of his children. Ambitious people who were poor were stuck and could not work their way up. Lazy people at the top were secure and did not fear losing their status.

Political reasons. Romans ignored their past traditions and concentrated only on the easiest way of governing. They forgot about a Senate that would debate issues and gave the ruler the sole power of authority in all matters. The offices of tribune (who could protect the rights of the poor with a single word, *vefo*, meaning "I forbid") and censor (the defender of morals) were forgotten. It was armies, not politics, that settled political issues.

Military reasons. The army became not only a protector against invaders, but a way to gain and hold power. Around the early emperors was an elite group called the Praetorian Guard. If they became unhappy with the emperor they had vowed to protect, they overthrew him.

Most soldiers were not Roman; in fact, the best soldiers were German. These noncitizens were loyal to their general, and if he wanted to challenge the emperor or some other general for control, they did the fighting.

Immorality. The virtues of hard work and self control that had made Rome strong lost out to greed, laziness, and pleasure.

Romans forgot the past. They did not know or care about the events that had shaped Rome, and they lost any sense of identity and values. They did not see how the past was affecting the present and how their actions were shaping the future.

The Romans forgot the bonds that tied them together as a nation. People were split by class lines between patricians (upper class) and plebeians (lower class), farmers and city dwellers, citizens and noncitizens, army and taxpayers, and between those favoring and those opposing Christianity. It had been said that "the law is the art of the good and the just." Now the law was the tool for greed and corruption that turned the public against their rulers. Groups became so hostile to each other that they could not unite, even against the menace of cruel invaders.

Name _____

Class _____

CHALLENGES

1. Where was Constantinople located?

2. Which lasted longest as center of an empire: Rome or Constantinople?

3. How did Domitian's policy hurt those who were ambitious?

4. What Roman official could stop an action by saying "Veto"?

5. What official had the power to protect morals?

6. What group of soldiers protected the emperors?

7. Who were the best soldiers in the army?

8. What were the upper class called? _____

9. What were the lower class called? _____

10. What subject helps a person understand their identity and values?

11. Why were the divisions between groups harmful to Rome?

Name _____

Class _____

POINTS TO CONSIDER

1. When the emperor moved to Constantinople, how did that affect the importance of the city of Rome?

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2. How might it have helped bring the Romans together if officials like senators, tribunes, and censors had kept their earlier roles?

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3. Of those qualities that hurt Rome, which do you think could be the most dangerous for the ^{Canada} ~~United States~~ in our time? Explain why.

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