

Ancient Rome:

Fall of the Western Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity

1.What were the main causes of the fall of the Roman Empire?

Ans: The Pax Romana ended after about 200 years. From then on, conditions in the Roman Empire grew worse. By 476 A.D., there was no empire left. Instead, much of Western Europe was a patchwork of Germanic kingdoms. The eastern part of the empire, however, lasted about 1,000 years longer as part of the Byzantine Empire. There are many factors such as military, social, economic, political and Roman dependency on slavery combined, resulted in the fall of the Roman civilization.

The **first** was **political**. The emperors had no written rule about who was to inherit the throne upon an emperor's death. Sometimes, the title was inherited by a son. Sometimes, an emperor adopted an heir to the throne. Between 96 and 180 A.D., all the emperors were adopted. The system worked well until 180 A.D. Marcus Aurelius became emperor in 161 A.D. He was kind, intelligent, and devoted to duty. His son Commodus (kahm' uh duhs), however, was the opposite. He became emperor when Marcus Aurelius died in 180 A.D. He was so cruel and hated that in 192 A.D. he was strangled by the Praetorian Guard, or the emperor's bodyguards. The Praetorian Guard then sold the throne to the highest bidder. This set a terrible example. For nearly 100 years, legion fought legion to put its own emperor on the throne. By 284 A.D., Rome had 37 different emperors. Most were murdered by the army or the Praetorian Guard.

The **second** reason for Rome's downfall was **economic**. To stay in office, an emperor had to keep the soldiers who supported him happy. He did this by giving them high wages. This meant more and more money was needed for the army payroll. As a result, the Romans had to pay higher taxes. In addition to higher taxes, the Romans began to suffer from inflation, or a period of ever-increasing prices. Since there were no new conquests, gold was no longer coming into Rome. Yet, much gold was going out to pay for luxury items. This meant there was less gold to use in coins. As the amount of gold used in coins decreased, money began to lose its value. Prices went up. Many people stopped using money altogether. Instead, they began to barter, or exchange goods without using money.

The **third major reason** Rome fell centered on foreign **enemies**. While the Romans fought each other over politics and money, they left Rome's frontiers open to attack. Germanic hunters and herders from northern and central Europe began to raid Greece and Gaul. Trade and farming in those areas declined. Cities again began to surround themselves with protecting walls.

Another important reason was Roman dependency on slavery. It was estimated that an average wealthy Roman such as Nero owned 400 slaves in his town house alone, and according to one writer, some wealthy people owned from 10,000-20,000 slaves (Tingay and Badcock 128). Grant stated that the Romans were so dependent on the slave labor that even the simplest task such as getting dressed, holding a towel while going to the bath, and cooking were all done by slaves. Because wealthy owners had slaves working on everything, the lower class could not compete with the freed laborers and were forced out of jobs. So they became dependent on the government to take care of them. The wealthy were forced to pay high taxes on slaves and were expected to help the community at the same time, so they started freeing their slaves.

Meanwhile, the "cost of repairing and maintaining public baths, temples became heavy expenditures on the government". The government spent the majority of its money on the lower class. The lower class was given free grain like bread oil wine and free entertainment. The government also spent money on the maintenance of the city. Because the government spent its funds on the lower class, there was not enough money to support military. As a result, no one enlisted in the army wanted to fight which weakened and finally led to the breakdown of the Republic. Rome's dependency on slave labor contributed to the decline of the greatest civilization in the history of mankind.

2.What role did slavery play in the fall of the Empire?

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3.What kind of religion did the Romans follow?

Ans: Religious beliefs of the Romans from ancient times until official acceptance of Christianity in the 4th Century AD. The Romans believed that everything was to secure divine cooperation (teamwork) and benevolence (kindness). Prayer and sacrifice were used to propitiate the gods and were often carried out at temples dedicated to particular divinities (religion) and presided (lead) over by priests. The chief Roman priest head of the state religion was known as the "Pontifex Maximus" notable among the other groups of priests were the augurs who practiced divination to determine whether the gods approved of an action. The earliest Roman gods were:

- **Jupiter** – (Came from the Greek god Zeus.) Jupiter was the king of the gods and god of thunder and lighting. He was the Patron God of Rome.
- **Juno** – (Juno was the equivalent of the Greek goddess Hera.) Juno was Jupiter's wife and queen of the gods. Juno was considered the protector of Rome.
- **Mars** – (Mars came from the Greek god Area.) Mars was the god of war and Jupiter and Juno's son.
- **Neptune** – (Neptune came from the Greek god Poseidon.) He was the god of the sea and brother to Jupiter. He also was the patron of horses. Neptune's weapon was a great trident.

- **Mercury** – (Mercury was the equivalent of the Greek god Hermes.) He was the god of trade.
- **Diana** – (Diana was taken from the Greek goddess Artemis.) She was goddess of the hunt, archery, and animals. Her symbols included the moon, the snake, and the bow and arrow.
- **Minerva** – (Minerva comes from the Greek goddess Athena.) She was the goddess of wisdom.
- **Venus** – (Venus was the equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite.) She was the god of love and beauty.

Many other deities were borrowed from Greek religion or associated with Greek gods, and the stories woven into Roman mythology were often taken directly from Greek mythology. Domestic shrines were devoted to divine (please) ancestors or protectors, the Lares and Penates. Dead Roman emperors were also raised to the status of divinities and were regarded with veneration and gratitude.

4.Examine the legacy of the Roman Empire.

Ans: The civilization of Ancient Rome had a lasting legacy on world history. Not only did Ancient Rome cover a vast amount of land at its peak, but it also existed for almost 1000 years. The legacy of Ancient Rome is still felt today in western culture in areas such as law, technology, engineering, architecture and religion.

- ★ **Law:** Roman law had a significant influence over the modern-day laws of many countries. Legal ideas like trial by jury, civil rights, contracts, personal property, legal wills, and corporations all were influenced by Roman law and the Roman way of looking at things.
- ★ **Technology**
- ★ **Engineering**
- ★ **Architecture**
- ★ **Religion**

New Styles of Architecture: Greek architecture influenced Roman builders. Roman builders were excellent engineers. They found new ways to improve the structure of buildings. Roman developments in building construction made it possible to build larger, taller buildings. Many modern buildings borrow Roman elements of design and structure. The dome of the U.S. Capitol building is a well-known example.

New Building Materials: The Romans developed a form of concrete that was both light and strong. They poured the mixture into hollow walls or over curved forms to create strong vaults. Concrete is a common building material today.

Aqueducts: The Romans built aqueducts to bring water to cities. An aqueduct is a waterway made by people. Aqueducts brought water to public fountains, where people collected water for their homes. Aqueducts also supplied water to public toilets and bathhouses. Eleven major aqueducts brought water to the city of Rome. The longest stretched for 57 miles. Aqueducts can still be found in France and Spain, lands that were once part of the Roman Empire.

Roads: The Romans are especially famous for the quality of their roads. In 312 B.C., Romans built the first of many roads. Many Roman roads were built so that soldiers could move quickly to places in the empire where they were needed. The road system also increased trade because merchants and traders could move their goods more easily. Although the road system helped hold the Roman Empire together, it also made it easier for its enemies to invade.

Christianity: The Roman Empire played a major role in the spread of Christianity. Rome was the home of the Catholic Church which would hold great influence over Europe for the next thousand years. The Roman Catholic Church became the powerful organization in Western Europe. The

Eastern Orthodox Church, which was the official religion of the Byzantine Empire, also spread Christianity. With both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches spreading Christianity, most of Europe and some parts of western Asia became Christian. Today, Christianity is the largest religion in the world.

5.How did Christianity spread within the Roman Empire?

Ans: The spread of Christianity was made a lot easier by the efficiency of the Roman Empire, but its principles were sometimes misunderstood and membership of the sect could be dangerous.

Although Jesus had died, his message had not. The message of Christianity was spread around the Roman Empire by St. Paul who founded Christian churches in Asia Minor and Greece. Eventually, he took his teachings to Rome itself. Like Jesus, Paul spoke to people in their homes. But he went beyond Jesus, who had only preached (spoken) to Jews. Paul believed his message should also be taken to gentiles – the non-Jews.

The early converts to Christianity in Ancient Rome faced many difficulties. The first converts were usually the poor and slaves as they had a great deal to gain from the Christians being successful. If they were caught, they faced death for failing to worship the emperor. It was not uncommon for emperors to turn the people against the Christians when Rome was faced with difficulties. In AD 64, the Great Fire of Rome took place which lasted for six days and seven nights. It destroyed or damaged 10 of Rome's 14 districts and many homes, shops and temples. Nero offered to house the homeless, but it was too late. A rumor had spread of Nero's behavior during the fire: although he hadn't fiddled while Rome burned, he had been singing. So, the Emperor Nero tried to divert attention away from his own failings by providing an easy scapegoat: the Christians. The Emperor Nero blamed the Christians and the people turned on them. Nero arrested and tortured all the Christians in Rome, before executing them with lavish publicity. Some were crucified, some were thrown to wild animals and others were burned alive as living torches.

The dangers faced by the Christians in Rome meant that they had to meet in secret. They usually used underground tombs as these were literally out of sight. Rome had a large number of poor people within its population and Christianity continued to grow.

In AD 313, the Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal and for the first time, they were allowed to openly worship. Churches were quickly built not just in Rome but throughout the empire.

6.Narrate the growth of Christianity after the fall of Roman Empire.

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