

# Chapter 15

# Rome's Decline and Legacy

## Before You Read: K-W-L

Considering what you have already learned about Rome will help prepare you to read this chapter. Record the answers to the following questions in your notebook:

- What do you already know about Rome?
- Study the map on these pages. What does it tell you about what has happened in the Roman Empire?
- What do you want to learn about the legacy of Rome?

## Big Ideas About Rome's Decline and Legacy

**Economics** Nomadic peoples often attack settlements to gain the goods that civilizations produce.

Roman armies spent a lot of time fighting people who wanted to enter the empire. Some nomads wanted the protection of the Roman Empire. Others wanted to take over Roman lands. They disrupted trade and took valuable goods.



### Integrated Technology

#### eEdition

- Interactive Maps
- Interactive Visuals
- Starting with a Story



#### INTERNET RESOURCES

Go to **ClassZone.com** for

- WebQuest
- Homework Helper
- Research Links
- Internet Activities
- Quizzes
- Maps
- Test Practice
- Current Events



ATLANTIC  
OCEAN

ROME

WORLD

161

Marcus Aurelius begins his reign. (relief of Marcus Aurelius) ▲



285

Diocletian reorganizes the empire.

324

Constantine reunifies the Roman Empire.

476

Western Roman Empire falls.

200

300

400

220

Han Dynasty collapses.

325

King Ezana rules African kingdom of Aksum. (pillar from Aksum) ►





# The Division of the Roman Empire, A.D. 395

INTERACTIVE



**527**  
Justinian comes to power in the Byzantine Empire.  
◀ (mosaic of Justinian)

**1054**  
Christian church splits into two branches.

**1453**  
Byzantine Empire falls to the Turks.

**630**  
Muhammad unifies the people of the Arabian peninsula.



**900s**  
Mayan civilization declines.  
◀ (Mayan pyramid)



**1279**  
Kublai Khan conquers China.  
◀ (painting of Kublai Khan)

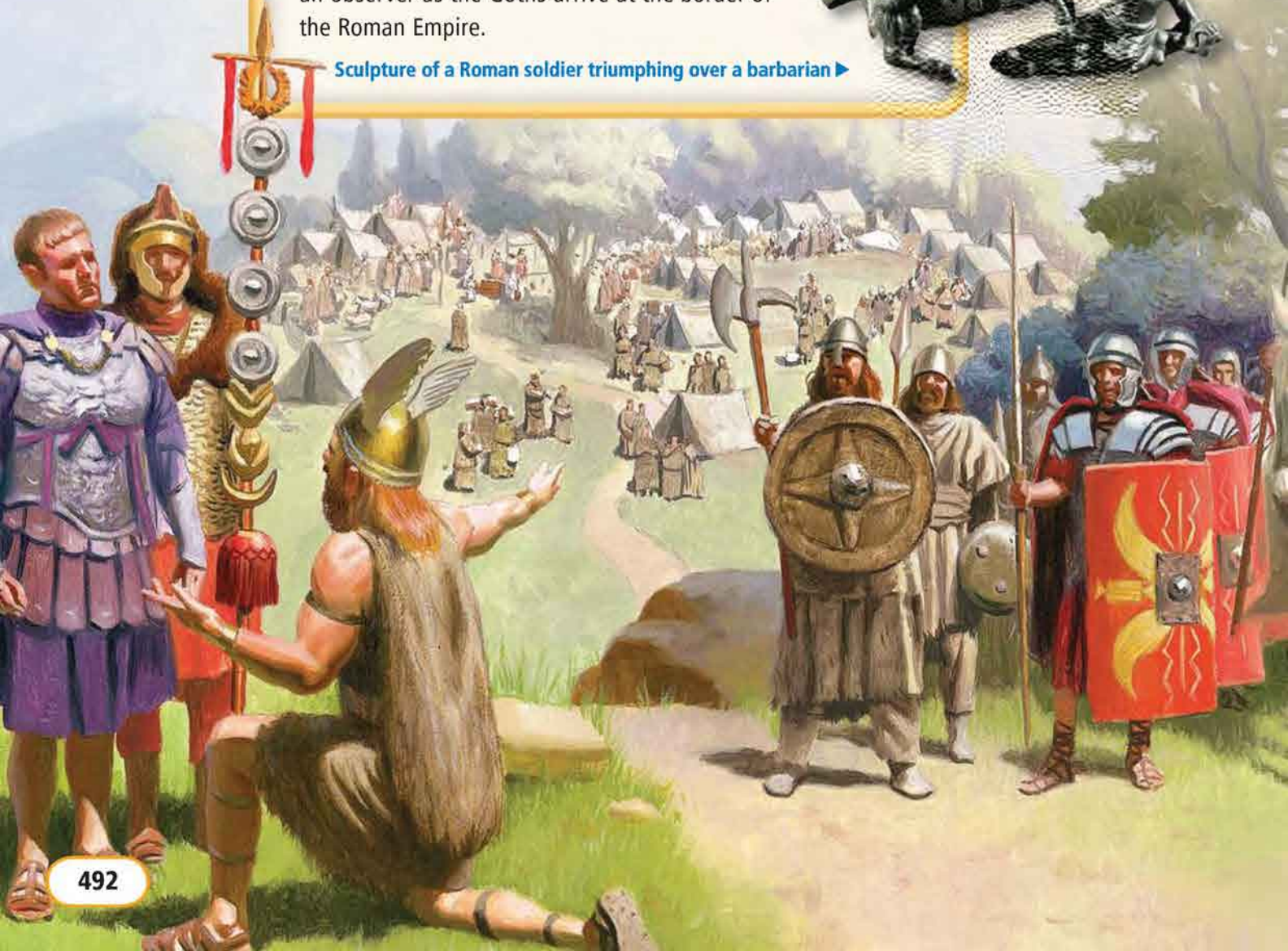


# THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOTHS

**Background:** The Goths were Germanic peoples who lived north and east of the Western Roman Empire. In A.D. 375, a fierce Asian people called the Huns began to invade the Goths' territory. The Huns killed hundreds of people and burned villages and fields. Fearing for their lives, some Goths fled to the Western Roman Empire. There, they asked the Romans for protection. Imagine that you are an observer as the Goths arrive at the border of the Roman Empire.



Sculpture of a Roman soldier triumphing over a barbarian ►





**F**ear of the Huns caused the western Goths to ask the Romans for protection. The Romans agreed to let the Goths cross the river into their empire. First, however, the Romans said the Goths must give up their weapons. But Goth warriors believed they had no honor without weapons. So they paid the Romans money or did favors for them in order to keep their weapons.

The river crossing was hard. The water was high and flowed swiftly. The floodwaters swept many people to their deaths.

Then the Goths entered a camp guarded by Roman soldiers. The governors of the region were supposed to feed the people. Instead, the Roman soldiers sold the people food—disgusting stuff that no Roman would eat. For example, some meat came from animals that died of disease. In exchange, the Romans took everything of value the Goths had.

Now the Romans are also buying Goth children and making them their slaves. Many Goth parents believe slavery is better than starvation. But they are bitter about making such a cruel choice.

Anger is growing. One Goth says, “We told the Romans that if they helped us, we would accept their religion and fight their enemies. As soon as we have nothing left to offer, they will starve us.”

Some people propose going to the governors and explaining the Goths’ suffering. “Maybe they will make the soldiers treat us better,” one argues.

Others mutter about getting revenge. “We are men of honor. We still have weapons, and we can fight the Romans.”

**Should the Goths fight back or seek a peaceful solution?**

## Reading & Writing

- 1. READING: Main Ideas** What is the main idea of this story? How do you think it might be related to the main idea of this chapter?
- 2. WRITING: Persuasion** Write the outline for a speech in which you try to persuade the Goths whether to fight back or to seek peace. Be sure to give reasons supporting your decision. If possible, deliver your speech to the class.



## MAIN IDEAS

- 1 **Culture** A series of problems—including food shortages, wars, and political conflicts—weakened the Roman Empire.
- 2 **Government** Because the empire was so huge, Diocletian divided it into eastern and western regions to make governing more efficient.
- 3 **Government** Emperor Constantine reunited the eastern and western empires and tried to restore the Roman Empire to greatness.

## TAKING NOTES

**Reading Skill: Understanding Cause and Effect**

Finding causes and effects will help you understand patterns in history. Look for the effect of each event listed in the chart below. Record them on a chart of your own.

Causes	Effects
Food shortages, wars, and political conflicts occur.	
Diocletian splits the empire.	
Constantine unites the empire.	



Skillbuilder Handbook, page R26



▲ **Emperor Trajan's Column**  
The surface of this 130-foot column is carved with scenes of Trajan's wars against outsiders.

**Words to Know**

Understanding the following words will help you read this lesson:

**loyalty** faithful support (page 496)

*Soldiers' loyalty to their military leaders might weaken if they are treated poorly or not paid.*

**orderly** free from violence (page 496)

*A good emperor will maintain an orderly society by providing for his subjects and protecting them.*

**consult** to go to for advice (page 497)

*Some leaders find they can govern more effectively if they consult with advisers.*

**portion** a part of a whole (page 498)

*The portion of the empire he received from his father did not satisfy his desire for more wealth and power.*



# An Empire in Decline

## TERMS & NAMES

mercenary

Diocletian

absolute ruler

**Build on What You Know** Did you ever have a problem you thought you could solve, then realized you could not find the right solution for it? In this lesson you will learn that the Roman Empire began to develop difficult problems for which there seemed to be no obvious solutions.

## Weakness in the Empire

### 1 ESSENTIAL QUESTION What problems weakened Rome?

After the death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180, a series of problems began to weaken the empire. These economic and political problems were difficult to solve.

**Economic Problems** The empire could no longer feed its many people. Some farmland had been destroyed by warfare. But the biggest problem was improving farm production. With many slaves to do the work, plantation owners chose not to develop more-productive farming technology. As a result, the land wore out and harvests did not increase. Food shortages caused unrest.

The empire was running low on money. Taxes were high, so many people did not pay them. Without tax money, the government could not pay the army or buy needed services.

### Primary Source Handbook

See the excerpt from the *Annals*, page R59.

**Hadrian's Wall**  
Hadrian's Wall marked the geographic border of the Roman Empire on the island of Britain. Like the Great Wall of China, this wall was supposed to help keep out invaders. ▼





**Military Problems** Rome was constantly at war with nomadic peoples in the north and northeast, as well as with the people who lived along its eastern borders. The empire needed larger armies to respond to so many threats, so it hired foreign mercenaries. A **mercenary** is a soldier for hire.

Mercenaries often had no loyalty to the empire. They pledged their allegiance to an individual military leader. Having armies that were loyal to only one man created independent military powers within the empire. In addition, mercenaries were not as disciplined as Roman soldiers. This lack of discipline made the army less effective. The result was a weakened defense along the empire's borders.

#### Vocabulary Strategy

The word *mercenary* can have **multiple meanings**. It has come to refer to anyone who, like the Roman mercenaries, does something only to get money.

**Political and Social Problems** The sheer physical size of the Roman Empire made it hard to govern. Government officials found it was not easy to obtain news about affairs in some regions of the empire. This made it more difficult to know where problems were developing. Also, many government officials were corrupt, seeking only to enrich themselves. These political problems destroyed a sense of citizenship. Many Romans no longer felt a sense of duty to the empire. Many chose to get rich in business rather than serve in the government.

Other aspects of Roman society also suffered. The cost of education increased, so poor Romans found it harder to become educated. In addition, distributing news across the large empire became more difficult. People grew less informed about civic matters.

The Tetrarchs This statue recognizes four emperors who ruled at the same time. ▼

**REVIEW** What problems weakened the Roman Empire?

## Diocletian Divides the Empire

**2 ESSENTIAL QUESTION** What steps did Diocletian take to solve the empire's problems?

A rapidly changing series of emperors also weakened the government. During a 49-year period (from A.D. 235 to 284), Rome had 20 emperors. Some of them were military leaders who used their armies to seize control. With emperors changing so often, the Roman people had little sense of orderly rule.





**Diocletian Restores Order** In A.D. 284, the emperor **Diocletian** (DY•uh•KLEE•shunn) took power. He changed the way the army operated by permanently placing troops at the empire's borders. He also introduced economic reforms, including keeping prices low on goods such as bread, to help feed the poor.

During his reign, Diocletian no longer bothered to consult with the Senate. He issued laws on his own. Diocletian was an **absolute ruler**, one who has total power.

**Splitting the Empire** Diocletian soon realized that he could not effectively govern the huge empire. In A.D. 285, he reorganized it in two, taking the eastern portion for himself. He chose this area for its greater wealth and trade, and its magnificent cities. He appointed Maximian to rule the Western Empire. The two men ruled for 20 years.

In A.D. 306 a civil war broke out over control of the empire. Four military commanders—including Constantine—fought for control of the two halves of the empire.

**REVIEW** Why did civil war break out in the Roman Empire?

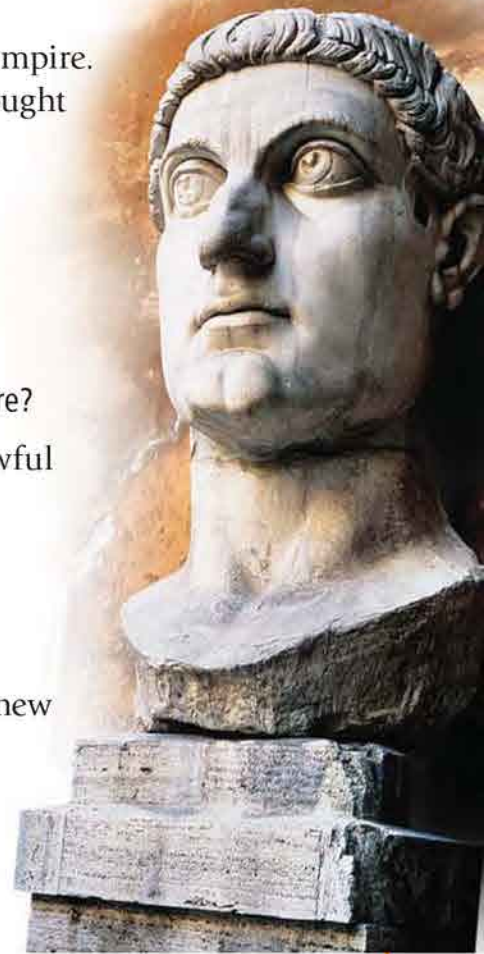
## Constantine Continues Reform

**3 ESSENTIAL QUESTION** How did Constantine change the empire?

In Chapter 14, you learned that Constantine made it lawful to be a Christian. Now you will learn how he became emperor and reunited the Roman Empire.

**A Single Emperor** Constantine was a western Roman military commander who fought to gain control of Italy during the civil war. In A.D. 312, he entered Rome as the new emperor of the empire's western half. By A.D. 324, he had taken control of the Eastern Empire as well. The empire was reunited and Constantine became the sole emperor.

**A New Capital** In a bold move, Constantine shifted the empire's capital from Rome to Byzantium. Byzantium was an ancient Greek city located in what is now Turkey. At a crossroads between east and west, the city was well placed for defense and trade. Constantine enlarged and beautified his new capital, which he renamed Constantinople. Today the city is called Istanbul.



▲ Bust of Constantine  
Constantine was an important emperor who reunited the Roman Empire.



**Final Division** Constantine planned to have each of his three sons rule a portion of the empire after his death. His plan was unwise, for Constantius II, Constantine II, and Constans I created unrest by competing with one another. A period of conflict followed. In 395, the empire was permanently divided into east and west again.

**REVIEW** How did Constantine strengthen the Roman Empire?

### Lesson Summary

- The Roman Empire declined because of a combination of economic, military, and political reasons.
- Diocletian reorganized the empire to increase efficiency in government.
- Constantine unified the empire and moved its capital to Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople.

### Why It Matters Now . . .

The mistakes made by the Roman emperors remind us that to retain power and control, rulers must successfully deal with many different problems.

## 1 Lesson Review

### Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of  
mercenary      Diocletian      absolute ruler

### Using Your Notes

**Understanding Cause and Effect** Use your completed chart to answer the following question:

2. How do the causes and effects illustrate the decline of the empire?

Causes	Effects
Food shortages, wars, and political conflicts occur.	
Diocletian splits the empire.	
Constantine unites the empire.	



**Homework Helper**  
ClassZone.com

### Main Ideas

3. Why was the empire in trouble economically?  
4. What reforms did Diocletian introduce to solve the empire's problems?  
5. What did Constantine do to try to restore the empire to greatness?

### Critical Thinking

6. **Understanding Causes** How did constantly changing emperors affect the strength of the Roman Empire?  
7. **Making Inferences** Of the problems listed in this lesson, which one was most difficult for the ordinary Roman?

### Activity

**Making a Collage** Study the problems faced by the Roman Empire that were explained in this lesson. Then create a collage showing those problems.



# Hold a Debate

**Goal:** To debate the historical issue “What was the most serious problem in the late Roman Empire?”

## Prepare

- 1 Form a small group with three or four other students. Assign roles such as reader, note taker, and presenter.
- 2 Reread pages 495–496. Take notes about the problems that the empire faced.
- 3 Read the quotations on this page. They offer different opinions about the problems faced by the empire.

## Do the Activity

- 1 As a team, discuss the problems the quotations describe. Also, discuss other problems explained in this lesson.
- 2 Decide which problem was the most serious. Which was hardest for the empire to solve? List your reasons for your choice.
- 3 Hold a class debate. One student from each team should give a short speech explaining why the problem the team chose was the most serious. Finally, the class should discuss the various problems and reach a group decision.

## Follow-Up

How would you respond to a person who said Rome fell because of barbarian invasions? Explain.

## Extension

**Doing Additional Research** Use books or the Internet to research other problems of the empire. Write a paragraph summarizing what you have learned.

### Materials & Supplies

- note cards
- pens or pencils
- books on Roman history

from *The Book of the Ancient Romans*  
by **Dorothy Mills**

Perhaps the greatest danger of all to Rome . . . was the change in . . . the old Roman ideal of discipline and duty, of self-control and self-restraint. . . . By the second century A.D. there was practically none of it left.

from *The Ancient World: Rome*  
by **Sean Sheehan and Pat Levy**

So much time was spent [by soldiers and governors] fighting over who would be emperor that little attention was paid to the far reaches of the empire.

from *Ancient Rome* by **Judith Simpson**

By the third century A.D., the army was stretched too far and taxes were raised to cover the Empire's costs. Farmers who could not afford the taxes abandoned their farms, and cities suffered as the economy slumped and their markets declined.

from *History of the World: The Roman Empire* by **Don Nardo**

[After 192] Rome needed several good, strong emperors. . . . Instead, a long series of ambitious, weak, brutal, or inept [lacking skill] rulers occupied the throne.

