

## Chapter 15: Rome's Decline and Legacy

# Lesson 1 An Empire in Decline

### MAIN IDEAS

**Culture** A series of problems—including food shortages, wars, and political conflicts—weakened the Roman Empire.

**Government** Because the empire was so huge, Diocletian divided it into eastern and western regions to make governing more efficient.

**Government** Emperor Constantine reunited the eastern and western empires and tried to restore the Roman Empire to greatness.

---

## Weakness in the Empire

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** What problems weakened Rome?

### Economic Problems

- Problems followed death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180
- Empire couldn't feed everyone and food shortages caused unrest
  - warfare destroyed some farmland
  - plantations used slaves instead of finding new farming technology
  - land wore out, became unproductive; harvests decreased
- People didn't pay taxes, so empire couldn't pay for army, services

### Military Problems

- Rome at constant war in north, northeast, on eastern borders
  - hired foreign **mercenaries**—soldiers for hire
- Mercenaries often loyal to individual leaders instead of empire
  - this created independent military powers in empire
- Mercenaries were not as disciplined as Roman soldiers
  - resulted in less effective army, weakened defense along border

## **Political and Social Problems**

- Empire's size made it hard to govern
  - difficult to get news from regions, to see problems developing
- Corrupt, greedy government officials destroyed sense of citizenship
  - many Romans no longer felt a duty to empire, chose to get rich
- Education costs increased, so poor Romans often went uneducated
- People were less informed about civic matters

### **REVIEW QUESTION**

What problems weakened the Roman Empire?

---

# Diocletian Divides the Empire

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

## Diocletian Restores Order

- Rapidly changing series of emperors weakened government
  - 37 emperors from A.D. 235 to 284, some of them military leaders
  - no sense of orderly rule
- **Diocletian** took power as the emperor in 284
  - put permanent troops on borders, made economic reforms
  - didn't consult with Senate; was an **absolute ruler** with total power

## Splitting the Empire

- Diocletian knew he couldn't effectively govern the huge empire
  - split it in two in A.D. 285, ruled wealthy eastern half himself
- Appointed Maximian to rule Western Empire
  - the two men ruled two halves of empire for 20 years
- Civil war broke out in 306 over control of entire empire
  - four commanders, including Constantine, fought for control

## REVIEW QUESTION

Why did civil war break out in the Roman Empire?

---

# Constantine Continues Reform

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

## A Single Emperor

- Constantine was western military commander
  - fought to control Italy during civil war
- Became emperor of western half of empire in A.D. 312
  - controlled eastern half by 324
- Empire was reunited under a single emperor

## A New Capital

- Constantine moved capital from Rome to Greek city of Byzantium
  - expanded, beautified city which was well-placed for defense, trade
  - renamed city Constantinople; today it is Istanbul, Turkey

## Final Division

- Constantine hoped three sons would rule parts of empire after him
- Constantius II, Constantine II, Constans I competed, created unrest
- Conflict permanently divided empire into east and west again in 395

## REVIEW QUESTION

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.