

Lesson 2 The Fall of the Roman Empire

MAIN IDEAS

Economics The Western Roman Empire was much weaker than the more prosperous Eastern Roman Empire.

Geography Invading groups of Germanic peoples overran the already weakened Western Empire.

Government Invading Germanic peoples raided Rome and overthrew the last Roman emperor, ending the Western Empire.

The Two Roman Empires

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why did the Western Empire weaken?

Wealthy East

- Eastern Roman Empire much stronger than Western Roman Empire
- Constantinople traded with Asia, Africa, Europe
 - Eastern Empire had more wealth as a result of trade
- Eastern cities were larger, better fortified
 - Black Sea was natural barrier against invasions

Weaker West

- Western Empire cities, far from trade routes, were smaller, poorer
- Cities exposed to attack from invaders along northern border
 - defense forces were often poorly paid, so less willing to risk lives

Invaders Raid Cities

- Invaders attacked cities, kidnapped people to sell as slaves
 - as attacks increased, cities' inhabitants often left to seek safety
 - less populated cities were even more vulnerable to attack

REVIEW QUESTION

In what ways was the Western Empire weaker than the Eastern Empire?

Invading Peoples

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What groups moved into the Roman Empire?

The Germanic Peoples

- Defense on north, northeast borders of Roman Empire weakened
- Towns, cities attacked by **nomads**—people who move from place to place
- Nomadic groups known as Germanic peoples, named for their languages
- Romans felt Germanic people, or anyone outside empire, were **barbarians**
 - Greek word for people who speak a language other than Greek
- Despite Roman contempt, Germanic peoples had complex culture
 - were skilled metalworkers and fond of jewelry
 - some groups had elected assemblies
 - military organizations were headed by war chiefs
- Germanic peoples were loyal, especially to chieftains

The German Migrations

- Nomads moved when food ran out or when driven out of an area
- Groups of well-armed nomads threatened groups on Roman border
 - border nomads driven into Roman Empire by stronger nomadic groups
- Huns were important group of Central Asian nomads
 - pushed people into Roman, Chinese empires between A.D. 370 and 500
 - moved into Germanic border lands, drove peoples into Roman territory

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did the Germanic peoples move into Roman territory?

The Fall of Rome

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the Western Roman Empire end?

Invaders Gain Ground

- Corrupt government, uncaring citizens, social breakdown hurt empire
- Goths **plundered** Rome in 410—looted city, took things by force
- Germanic peoples invaded what is now France, Spain, northern Africa
- Huns united under Attila in 445, entered Eastern Empire
 - attacked 70 Eastern Empire cities, then moved into Western Empire

The Aftermath of Rome's Fall

- Western Roman Empire fell in A.D. 476, when last emperor was removed
- Life in Western Europe changed after fall
 - roads, public structures fell into disrepair
 - trade, commerce declined
 - Germanic kingdoms claimed former Roman lands
 - Roman Catholic Church became unifying, powerful force

REVIEW QUESTION

What caused the continued weakening of the Western Empire?

Lesson Summary

- The Western Roman Empire was less wealthy and harder to protect from invaders than the East.
- Germanic invaders further weakened the empire.
- In A.D. 476, the Western Roman Empire ceased to exist.

Why It Matters Now . . .

The decline and fall of empires is a repeating pattern of world history. Even large empires eventually break into smaller pieces.