

## Module 5: Ancient Rome


### Topic 6 Content: The Decline of the Western Roman Empire

#### Introduction

#### The Decline of the Western Roman Empire

- Geography
- Economy
- Military and Defense
- Public Morals
- Government

#### Introduction



Click on each of the tabs to learn more about the factors that led to the decline of the Western Roman Empire.

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#### Geography



The Roman Empire in 117 AD, at its greatest extent. The map shows the empire's reach from Britain in the northwest to the Persian Gulf in the east, and from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the south. Major regions like Gaul, Hispania, Italia, Aegyptus, and others are labeled.

The fall of the Western Roman Empire was an inevitable effect of its large size. The Roman Empire included Britain, Gaul (modern-day France), Spain, the Italian Balkan peninsulas, and north Africa. It included the entire Mediterranean basin, and extended as far east as Anatolia. Because of its size, the Roman Empire was difficult to defend, and allowed outside forces like the Persians and Germanic barbarians to easily invade.

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#### Economy

Constantine the Great.



The Roman Empire was prosperous during the *Pax Romana*. Rome conquered lands which led to an influx of precious metals and resources to support its growing population. Over time, the cost of expansion outweighed the benefits. In an attempt to adjust to its increasing economic problems, the government began producing coins made with less precious metal (silver). This devaluing of the Roman currency forced prices up, and caused inflation. Economic problems drove many Romans into poverty, and when epidemic diseases entered Rome, an already struggling population was further challenged.

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#### Military and Defense



As the Roman Empire grew larger and became more difficult to defend, the government was forced to hire foreign soldiers. While these foreign soldiers were willing to accept less pay than the Roman soldiers, they were not as loyal to Rome. This further weakened the discipline within the military, and threatened the strength and survival of the empire. Lacking a strong military, the Roman Empire was more vulnerable to foreign invaders from the Persians and Germanic barbarians.

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#### Public Morals

Having witnessed years of imperial excess by the government and the civil conflict among the wealthy leaders, the Roman public began to experience moral decay. As foreigners brought different customs into the Roman Empire, the people of Rome abandoned many of their traditions. For example, the importance of family, which at one time was a core value among Romans, eventually decreased in importance.



*Image: Portrait of a Roman family*

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*Image: Portrait of a Roman family*

# Module 5: Ancient Rome

## Topic 6 Content: The Decline of the Western Roman Empire

### Government

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### Government

Emperor	Reign	Cause of Death
Maximus	235-38	Assassination
Gordian I & II (co-rulers)	238	Suicide, killed in battle
Gordian Papyrus	238	Assassination
Gordian II	238-44	Possible assassination
Phlip the Arab	244-49	Killed in battle
Diocian	284-311	Killed in battle
Hostilian	251	Possible plague
Gallien	251-61	Assassination
Aurelianus	253	Assassination
Valerian & Gallienus	253-68	Died as slave of Persians, assassination
Claudius Gothicus	268-70	Plague
Quintillus	270	Assassination or suicide
Aurelianus	270-75	Assassination
Trajanus	275-84	Possible assassination
Florentinus	276	Assassination
Probus	276-82	Assassination
Caraus	282-83	Assassination
Numerian	283-84	Possible assassination
Caesius	283-85	Killed in battle

The Roman Empire was unable to assemble a stable government for an extended period of time. The accompanying chart supports the notion that problems existed in the Roman government as emperors did not rule for long periods of time, and many were assassinated. The political instability brought much discontent throughout the Roman Empire, and led to civil conflicts. While Rome did enjoy a brief period of stability during the rule of Diocletian (284-305) and Constantine (306-337), later emperors would inconsistently enforce their policies. Ultimately, in 476 A.D. (C.E.), Rome ceased to have an emperor and collapsed.

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