The Fall of the Roman Empire

BEFORE YOU READ
In the last section, you read about the spread of Christianity.
In this section, you will learn how the Roman Empire collapsed.

AS YOU READ
Use the time line below to take notes on the fall of the empire.

A Century of Crisis (page 173)
What problems did Rome face?

Rome entered a period of decline after the reign of Marcus Aurelius ended in 180 A.D. Rome suffered economic problems. Trade slowed as raiders threatened ships and caravans on sea and land. The economy suffered from inflation, a drastic drop in the value of money and a rise in prices. Food supplies also dropped as tired soil, warfare, and high taxes cut the amount of grain and other foods produced on farms.

The empire also had military problems. German tribes caused trouble on the frontiers. Persians defeated the Romans in A.D. 260 and captured the emperor. Roman soldiers could no longer be counted on. Instead, mercenaries—soldiers who fight for money—had to be hired. At the same time, Roman generals fought one another for control of the empire.

Emperors Attempt Reform (pages 174–175)
What changes did the emperors make?

Diocletian took the throne as emperor in 284. He passed many new laws to try to fix the economy. He tried to restore the status of the emperor by naming...
himself a son of the chief Roman god. He even divided the empire into eastern and western halves to make it easier to govern.

Constantine continued many of these changes. He became emperor of both halves of the empire in 324. A few years later, Constantine moved the capital of the empire to a new city in northwestern Turkey where Europe and Asia meet. The city was Byzantium. It was given a new name—Constantinople, the city of Constantine.

2. Who was Constantine?

The Western Empire Crumbles
(pages 175–176)

Who overran Rome?

Reforms delayed the end of the Roman Empire but could not prevent its fall. The eastern part of the empire remained strong and unified. But troubles continued in the west. Germanic tribes moved into the empire. They were trying to escape from the Huns, fierce nomadic people from central Asia, who were moving into their land.

The Roman armies in the west collapsed. German armies twice entered Rome itself. In 408 Visigoths led by their king, Alaric, put the city under siege. In 444, the Huns united under a powerful chieftain named Attila. Attila and his armies terrorized both halves of the empire.

The invasions continued after Attila’s death. The Germans had arrived for good. By 476 German peoples controlled many areas of Europe. That year a German general removed the last western Roman emperor from the throne.

3. What role did Attila play in the collapse of Rome?

Skillbuilder

1. What was the immediate cause of the fall of the Roman Empire?

2. Which of the social factors do you think was most important? Why?