

Reasons for the Fall of the Roman Empire

Barbarian Tribes Destroy the Roman Empire

- **Germanic Teutonic Tribes Exert Pressure(1st-4th centuries A.D.)**

Germanic tribes – primitive, warlike peoples – lived in central and eastern Europe. They were attracted to the Roman Empire by its fertile land, great wealth and advanced civilization.

Early efforts to to enter the Empire were thwarted by Roman troops. Later, Rome permitted some Germanic peoples to settle within its borders and enlisted Germanic soldiers in its armies.

The Huns Invade Europe (4th-5th centuries A.D.)

- The Huns, savage invaders from central Asia, terrorized Europe, causing many Germanic tribes to flee into the Roman Empire.

Attila the Hun

Ravaged the empire until turned back by a combined Roman-Germanic force.

Nevertheless, the Huns had weakened Rome militarily.

The Germanic Tribes End the Roman Empire (4th and 5th centuries A.D.)

Full scale German migrations into Roman territory could not be stemmed by the enfeebled Roman government. Gradually, the Germanic tribes established kingdoms within the Empire: the Visigoths in Spain, the Ostrogoths in Italy, the Vandals in North Africa, the Franks in Gaul and the Angles and Saxons in Britain.

Why could the Germanic tribes crush Rome, so long the master of the Mediterranean world?
The answer lies not in Germanic strength but in Roman weakness.

By the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., the Roman Empire had declined because of the following **internal conditions**.

Political

- The dictatorial government was frequently inefficient and corrupt and did not command the peoples loyalty.
- The vast Empire, having relatively primitive transportation and communication, could not be governed efficiently from one central city.
- Rivalry over succession to the throne often resulted in destructive civil wars.

Economic

- Small farmers had abandoned their lands, and many had become workers on large estates. No longer independent, they lost the incentive to improve farming methods or to increase production.
- The self sufficiency of the large estates hampered trade and curtailed industry, thus causing an economic decline.
- Heavy, often unjust taxation burdened the people and destroyed their ambition to work and progress.
- The widespread use of slaves in industry and agriculture caused great unemployment among the plebeians.

Social

- People were interested mainly in luxury and survival. The early Roman ideals of patriotism, service and morality had almost vanished.
- Sharp class distinctions existed. The upper classes were wealthy and educated; the lower classes were poor and ignorant.
- Cities – previously centers of culture and industry – declined as people fled to the rural regions.

Military

- The Roman armies included many Germanic mercenaries of uncertain loyalty.
- The armies, considering themselves masters of the state, not its servants, often chose the emperors and determined government policy.
- The military was over-extended, continuously fighting invaders on numerous fronts.