

Section 3

# **THE FALL OF ROME**

# From Good Rule to Bad

- Marcus Aurelius' son, Commodus, took power in 180 AD
- MA knew his son wasn't a good person, hoped he would change over time
- Let others disgrace the Senate, he never listened to them either
- Bribed the army to support him
- Loved gladiator games- became one himself
  - Assassinated New Year's Eve of 192 AD

# The Empire Crumbles

- Weak, Corrupt Rulers
  - Most emperors after Commodus were generals, not politicians
  - Stole \$\$ from treasury, made themselves rich and paid soldiers
  - Economy became weak, Senate lost power
  - 180-284 AD- 29 emperors- violent overthrows and assassinations

# The Empire Crumbles

- A Mercenary Army
  - No longer Roman soldiers- now mercenaries (foreign soldiers who serve for pay)
  - Often switched sides if it benefited them financially
- The Size of the Empire
  - Constantly under attack- too big
  - Areas regained their independence- the empire shrank

# The Empire Crumbles

- Serious Economic Problems
  - Gov't raised taxes to pay for itself and the army
  - People suffered unemployment
  - Food was scarce-price went up
  - Gov't minted more coins- inflation (an economic situation where more \$\$ circulates but has less value)
- Efforts to Stop the Decline
  - Diocletian tried to fix it- enlarged army, built new forts, and DIVIDED the empire into east and west- appointed a co-emperor to rule the west

# Constantine and Christianity

- Freedom of Religion
  - Constantine's victory at the Battle of Milvian Bridge made him emperor of the west, Licinius his co-emperor
  - Allowed all people to worship freely
- Another Christian Victory
  - 324- Constantine defeated Licinius and took control of the whole empire
  - Licinius had continued to allow persecution of Christians- Constantine saw his victory as proof that the Christian God was using him

# Constantine and Christianity

- Building a Faith
  - Council of Nicea- meeting with Church leaders to keep the religion from splitting into east and west
  - Constantine had many churches built- Jerusalem, Church of St. Peter in Rome, etc

# Constantine and Christianity

- A New Capital
  - 330- moved Roman's eastern capital to Byzantium (modern day Turkey)- expanded and filled with riches
  - Constantine renamed it "New Rome"- later known as Constantinople (now Istanbul)



# Invasions and Collapse

- Northern Germanic tribes swept in and overwhelmed the empire
- Romans used to call them barbarians and could easily defeat them
- 410- Visigoths captured and looted Rome
- 455- Vandals conquered Rome
- Last Roman emperor- Romulus Augustulus- 14 years old
  - 476- German General took power- sent emperor to work on a farm
- Eastern Rome continued to prosper for another 1000 years