Squires, Nick. What Led to the Fall of the Roman Empire. *The Telegraph*. April 8, 2011. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/8438599/What-led-to-the-fall-of-the-Roman-Empire.html>

Scholars point out that it was not a single, dramatic event – the decline of the Empire took place over around 300 years.

Historians have variously dated the final collapse to the sack of Rome in AD410 by the Visigoth king Alaric, the deposing of the last Roman emperor by the German chieftain Odoacer in AD476 and the death of Justinian I, the last Roman emperor to try to reconquer the western half of the empire, in AD565.

The reasons for the fall of the empire include military overreach, invasion by emboldened tribes of Huns and Visigoths from northern and central Europe, inflation, corruption and political incompetence.

…

In 'The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire', Edward Gibbon blamed the adoption of Christianity as the official religion and a decline in civic virtue as the reason for the collapse.

The huge cost of maintaining bridges, roads and aqueducts over such a vast territory has also been identified as a contributing factor, as has the expense of maintaining enough legions to subdue and police the empire.

Increases in taxation were also highly unpopular, while increased trade with India and China, through the Silk Route, may have caused a crippling trade imbalance.

The rising cost of ever more spectacular gladiatorial games, borne by Roman emperors and therefore the state, has also been posited as a theory for the decline.

The once invincible Roman army was weakened by factional fighting and its ranks were diluted by the introduction of large numbers of Germanic tribesmen, other historians have suggested.

Environmental factors may also have played a role, including deforestation, overgrazing and, in North Africa, salinisation of the soil.

Historians point out that whatever the causes were, the eastern, Byzantine part of the empire, centred on Constantinople, survived for nearly 1,000 years after the fall of Rome.

Roman Empire and Colosseum. Causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire. N.d. [**http://www.tribunesandtriumphs.org/roman-empire/causes-for-the-fall-of-the-roman-empire.htm**](http://www.tribunesandtriumphs.org/roman-empire/causes-for-the-fall-of-the-roman-empire.htm)

**Antagonism between the Senate and the Emperor**  
One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Antagonism between the Senate and the Emperor. The Roman Emperor had the legal power to rule Rome’s religious, civil and military affairs with the Senate acting as an advisory body. The emperor had power over life and death. The powerful, spoilt, wealthy Roman Emperors inevitably became corrupt and many lived a debauched, deluded and immoral lifestyle. The Roman Empire saw many examples of antagonism between the Senators and the Emperors. Either the Senators didn't like the Emperor or the Emperors was at odds with the Senators.

**…**

**Political Corruption and the Praetorian Guard**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Political Corruption and the Praetorian Guard. The  power of the [Praetorian Guard](http://www.tribunesandtriumphs.org/roman-army/praetorian-guard.htm), the elite soldiers who made up the bodyguard of the emperor, led to political corruption and grew to such an extent that this massive group of soldiers decided on whether an emperor should be disposed of and who should become the new emperor! …

**Fast expansion of the Empire**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Fast expansion of the Empire. The rapid growth in the lands conquered by the Empire led to the need to defend the borders and territories of Rome. The people of the conquered lands, most of whom were referred to as Barbarians, hated the Romans. Taxes on the non-Romans were high and constantly increased. Frequent rebellions arose.

**Constant Wars and Heavy Military Spending**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Constant Wars and Heavy Military Spending. Constant warfare required heavy military spending. The Roman army became over-stretched and needed more and more soldiers. The barbarians, who had been conquered, and other foreign mercenaries were allowed to join the Roman army.

**Barbarian Knowledge of Roman Military Tactics**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Barbarian Knowledge of Roman Military Tactics. The knowledge that the Barbarians gained of Roman style of warfare and military tactics by serving in the Roman army were eventually turned against the Empire and led to the sack of Rome by the Visigoths led by an ex-army soldier, Alaric.

**Failing Economy and High Inflation**  
One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Failing Economy and high inflation. The Government was constantly threatened by bankruptcy due to the cost of defending the Empire, the failing economics, heavy taxation and high inflation was another Causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire. The majority of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire failed to share in the incredible prosperity of Rome. The amount of gold sent to the orient to pay for luxury goods led to a shortage of gold to make Roman coins. Roman currency was devalued to such an extent that a system of bartering returned to one of the greatest civilisations the world had ever known.

**Unemployment of the Working Classes**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Unemployment of the Working Classes. Cheap slave labor resulted in the unemployment of the Plebs in Rome who became dependent on hand-outs from the state. …

**The 'Mob' and the cost of the Gladiatorial Games**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the 'Mob' and the cost of the Gladiatorial Games. If the thousands of unemployed Romans became bored this led to civil unrest and rioting in the streets. The 'Mob' needed to be amused - spectacular gladiatorial games had to be provided. The cost of the gladiatorial games was born by the Emperors, and therefore the state, and corrupt politicians who sponsored the games to curry favor and support with the 'Mob'. The cost of the gladiatorial games eventually came to one third of the total income of the Roman Empire.

**…**

**Slave Labor**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Slave Labor. The number of slaves increased dramatically during the first 2 centuries of the Roman Empire. The Roman's [sic] dependency on slave labor led not only to the decline in morals, values and ethics but also to the stagnation of any new technology to produce goods more efficiently. Romans could rely on the slave manpower for all their needs but this reliance inhibited technological change and growth. The treatment of slaves led to rebellion and several Servile (Slave) Wars, the most famous being the revolt led by the gladiator slave, Spartacus. In the later centuries of the Empire and the advent of Christianity the attitudes towards slaves changed. With manumission (the act of freeing a slave) the number of slaves declined together with the manpower that Rome was dependent upon.

**Natural Disasters**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire were the Natural Disasters. During the time of the Roman Empire there were not only foreign wars, civil wars, street fights, fires and revolts there were also natural disasters such as plagues, famines and earthquakes. As in all periods and societies the people looked for someone to blame and different religions to turn to.

**Christianity**One of the main causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was Christianity. Life and the future seemed hopeless for the millions of people who were ruled by Rome where an early death was almost inevitable. Christianity taught the belief in an afterlife which gave hope and courage to the desperate. Eventually [a] Roman Emperor…  proclaimed himself a Christian and issued an edict promising the Christians his favor and protection. Attitudes in the Roman Empire changed from being antagonistic to becoming pacifistic.

**Barbarian Invasion**The last of the causes for the Fall of the Roman Empire was the Barbarian Invasion. Rome had fierce foreign enemies. There were great Barbarian armies consisting of warriors such as the Visigoths, Huns and the Vandals. The final death blow to the Roman Empire was inflicted by these Barbarians. The city of Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410 and by the Vandals in 455 signalling the disintegration of Roman authority and the Fall of the Roman Empire.

Sources: Burgan, Michael. Empire of Ancient Rome. New York: Facts on File, 2005; \*Markel, Rita J. The

Fall of the Roman Empire. Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2008.

p. 47 A**narchy (disorder and chaos) caused by:**

* huge borders hard to defend – can’t build up a big enough army
* nearly surrounded by enemies: Goths, Germanic tribes, Sassanids in Iran
* p. 48 inflation (increasing cost of goods) caused by debasing of coinage (e.g., less silver in a coin gave it less value) caused prices to rise 700%
* \*p. 38 by the 200s CE half of imperial expenses were spent on the army and on bribing Germanic tribes not to invade
* soldiers tied to the region – they were often married to local (non-Roman women) and felt closer to their region than Rome
* soldiers tried to promote their general to emperor

**p. 49 Third Century Reforms**

* Tetrarchy = (rule of four)- two co-emperors in east and west each had their own junior emperor to help run the military
* \* P. 61 an emperor increased the size of the army by one third, largely in the now expanded frontiers and filled it in by using non-Romans
* \* p 63 he also raised taxes which made it harder for ordinary Romans
* Despite the tetrarchy the main emperor still dominated and the system didn’t do well under his followers

**p. 50 Rise of Christianity**

* First Christian emperor in 300s CE
* p. 51 this same emperor hired more Germans to serve in Roman army
* built a new capital in the eastern city of Byzantium; it became more dominant than Rome
* p. 52 later Theodosius established Christianity as the empire’s official religion
* \* p. 65 Christianity was popular because it offered the hope of an afterlife to suffering ordinary people (were not happy about being persecuted or worshipping emperors)

**Civil and Foreign Wars**

* The government focused on the east, so less money was spent on the west and western cities declined in population as more people moved to rural estates
* p. 53 the Senate got larger and larger and was mostly self-interested and wealthy
* p. 54 Germans were so powerful that they had the most influence over emperors
* p. 55 Germans were feeling threatened by a rising group from the east, the Huns
* p. 57 by the 450s the emperor only controlled the Italian peninsula, parts of Gaul and Spain in the west
* 476: German troops in the Roman army declared their chieftain, Odovacer, their king and he asked the eastern emperor to approve him as western emperor