**Why Did Rome Fall?**

Rome had quite a run. First a monarchy, then a republic, then an empire—all roads led to Rome for over 1200 years. In the Mediterranean, Rome was in charge. During the Imperial period, Rome had some wonderful emperors. Rome also suffered from a series of bad, corrupt, and just plain crazy emperors. There were lots of reasons why Rome fell.

Problems towards the end of the Empire:

• The empire was too large to govern effectively.

• The army was not what it used to be. There was corruption in the military—dishonest generals and non-Roman soldiers.

• Civil wars broke out between different political groups.

• Emperors were often selected by violence, or by birth, so the head of government was not always a capable leader.

• The increased use of slaves put many Romans out of work.

• The rich became lazy and showed little interest in trying to solve Roman problems.

• The poor were overtaxed and overworked. They were very unhappy.

• Prices increased, trade decreased.

• The population was shrinking due to starvation and disease. That made it difficult to manage farms and government effectively.

• The Empire starting shrinking. The Huns, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Saxons, and other barbarian tribes overran the empire.

The Western Roman Empire: By 400 CE, the Western Roman Empire was pretty much over. The Romans had spent too much money and time on war and not nearly enough maintaining roads and outposts. The wonderful Roman roads had fallen into ruins. The outposts were constantly under attack from barbarian tribes. Romans in the outpost regions were starving. Everything stopped. Without the roads and outposts, trade goods, supplies, and food were not delivered back to Rome. Rome was greatly weakened.

There were five main barbarian tribes in Europe that each wanted to conquer the Roman Empire. These tribes were the Huns, Franks, Vandals, Saxons, and Visigoths. Any of these barbarian tribes might have been the group that finally brought Rome down. They were all attacking various pieces of the Western Roman Empire. People were starving. Forts and strongholds along the road were destroyed. There were few cities in the outlying regions of the empire, but those that existed were attacked and destroyed. The tribes did not want anything Roman left over. In 476 CE, the Visigoths attacked and sacked Rome. Rome fell.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, many things disappeared. The common people did not understand Roman law. They did not understand Roman government. The advancing barbarians did not understand these things either. Like the roads, Roman law and government fell into disuse. But two important Roman legacies continued—the Latin language, which was read and spoken in the church, and the Catholic faith, which was the faith of most of the common people in Europe.

**Questions:**

1. Name two reasons Rome fell.

2. What two important legacies survived the fall?

3. What was the major religion in Western Europe during this time period?