

Revelation - Lesson 10

An Excerpt From *The Fall of Rome: A Reference Guide*

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By the fall of Rome I mean primarily the events of the fifth century when the military and political integrity of the Roman power was smashed in the western provinces and on the Mediterranean Sea, a disaster soon to be followed, though in a more subtle way, by a cultural and economic regression so profound that later generations called the centuries from about 600 to 1000 the Dark Ages. Mediterranean civilization had not been without its strains before, but the political disintegration of the fifth century, the monstrous plagues and earthquakes and wars of the sixth and subsequent centuries, and the economic and further political dislocations of the seventh and eighth centuries guaranteed the trend towards localization and deprivation. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse fared well in these times.

Symbolically the signal dates are 410 when the city of Rome itself was sacked by barbarian hordes for the first time since 390 B.C., and 476 when the last western emperor to reside at Rome was retired by a barbarian general who already held political and military supremacy in Italy, which was now completely detached from its ancient provincial territories in Gaul, Spain, Africa, and Britain, and was harassed from the sea by a Vandal fleet. Other events on both sides of the fifth century either inclined the empire towards, or guaranteed the results of, the disasters of the fifth century; and these come within the scope of the fall of Rome. Examples are the political instability of the third century, the Battle of Adrianople in 378 A.D., and the Gothic wars in sixth century Italy.

During and after the disasters in the west, the remaining eastern provinces, administered from Constantinople, were more fortunate in the short term; but between 500 and 750 these too were transformed by war, pestilence, earthquakes, famines, religious fanaticism, and economic and political upheavals from a plausible continuation of the Roman empire and Roman culture into a small, compact, narrow minded, Greek maritime state completely dominated by its last remaining city of Constantinople, whose population was reduced at one point to under 50,000.



A 15th century depiction of the sack of Rome in 410.

The Sack of Rome occurred on August 24, 410. The city was attacked by the Visigoths, led by Alaric I. The Roman capital had been moved to the Italian city of Ravenna by the young emperor Honorius, after the Visigoths entered Italy. This was the first time in almost 800 years that Rome had fallen to an enemy. The fall of Rome was completed in 476, when the German chieftain Odoacer deposed the last Roman emperor of the West, Romulus Augustulus. The East continued as the Byzantine Empire through the European Middle Ages.

The Battle of Adrianople was fought on August 9, 378, at present Edirne, in European Turkey, resulting in the defeat of a Roman army commanded by the emperor Valens at the hands of the Germanic Visigoths led by Fritigern and augmented by Ostrogothic and other reinforcements. It was a major victory of barbarian horsemen over Roman infantry and marked the beginning of serious Germanic inroads into Roman territory.