From Republic to Empire

34.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, you learned how Rome became a republic. In this chapter, you'll discover how the republic grew into a mighty empire that ruled the entire Mediterranean world.

The expansion of Roman power took place over about 500 years, from 509 B.C.E. to 14 C.E. At the start of this period, Rome was a tiny republic in central Italy. Five hundred years later, it was a thriving center of a vast empire. At its height, the Roman Empire included most of Europe together with North Africa, Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor.

The growth in Rome's power happened gradually, and it came at a price. Romans had to fight countless wars to defend their growing territory and to conquer new lands. Along the way, Rome itself changed. Romans had once been proud to be governed by elected leaders. Their heroes were men who had helped to preserve the republic. By 14 C.E., the republic was just a memory. Power was in the hands of a single supreme ruler, the emperor. Romans even worshiped the emperor as a god.

In this chapter, you'll see how this dramatic change occurred. You'll trace the gradual expansion of Roman power. You'll also explore the costs of this expansion, both for Romans and for the people they conquered.
34.2 From Republic to Empire:
An Overview

The growth of Rome from a republic to an empire took place over 500 years. The story can be divided into four major periods.

**The First Period of Expansion** The first period began in 509 B.C.E. when the Romans drove the last Etruscan king out of power. At that time, Rome became a republic.

The Romans wanted to protect their borders and to gain more land. This led to a series of wars. During the next 245 years, the Romans fought one enemy after another. They conquered their Latin neighbors in central Italy. They also defeated their old masters, the Etruscans.

Wisely, the Romans eventually made allies, or friends, of their former enemies. By 264 B.C.E., Rome and its allies controlled all of Italy.

**The Second Period of Expansion** Rome's growth threatened another great power, the city of Carthage in North Africa. During the second period of expansion, from 264 to 146 B.C.E., Rome and Carthage fought three major wars. Through these wars, Rome gained control of North Africa, much of Spain, and the island of Sicily. Roman armies also conquered Macedonia and Greece.
The Third Period of Expansion  During the third period of expansion, from 145 to 44 B.C.E., Rome came to rule the entire Mediterranean world. In the east, Rome took control of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. In the west, a general named Julius Caesar conquered much of Gaul (modern-day France).

Proud Romans now called the Mediterranean “our sea.” But the republic was in trouble. Civil wars divided the city. Roman generals were becoming dictators. They set their armies against the power of the Senate. Caesar himself ruled as a dictator before he was murdered in 44 B.C.E.

The men who killed Caesar thought they were saving the power of the Senate. However, several more years of civil war followed. Then Caesar’s grandnephew, Octavian, seized power. The Senate named him Augustus, or “honored one.” Rome was now an empire governed by one supreme ruler.

The Fourth Period of Expansion  The fourth period of expansion began with the start of the empire. It lasted until 14 C.E. The first emperor, Augustus, added a great deal of new territory by pushing the borders of the empire all the way to natural boundaries, like rivers, to make it easier to defend. Later emperors added more territory. At its height, the Roman Empire stretched from the island of Britain in the west to the Black Sea in the east.

Each period of expansion involved cost and sacrifice. The next four sections give more details about each period of expansion. As you read, ask yourself what Romans of the time might have thought about these events.