



## Why did Mussolini invade Abyssinia?

On 2 October 1935, Emperor Haile Selassie stood outside his palace in Addis Ababa and addressed the people of Abyssinia. He warned them that the time had come to fight - 100,000 Italian troops had invaded Northern Abyssinia that morning.

The Italians had been planning an invasion for some time. A year earlier Mussolini had sent a memo to his generals calling for "the Total conquest of Abyssinia". The excuse for the attack came in an incident during December 1934 between Italian and Abyssinian troops at the Wal-Wal oasis on the border between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland. Mussolini demanded an apology. He also prepared his army.

Events both inside and outside Italy convinced Mussolini that this action was the right one. Italy, like many other countries in the early 1930s, had economic problems. Mussolini's economic policies did not fix the situation. A war might unite the Italian people behind their leader and make them forget their domestic problems. Plus Abyssinia's resources could be used to benefit the Italian economy.

Rome had once led an empire that dominated the world. But that was long ago and now other European powers had empires (Britain, France) or wanted them. Hitler came to power in 1933, begun to rearm Germany and looked to re-unite Germany with Austria. Mussolini looked for a way to show Italy's strength to the rest of Europe.

Italy had tried and failed to conquer Abyssinia in 1896. Italians also felt that they didn't get their fair share of territory after World War I when the Treaty of Versailles (1919) made peace and decided who would rule Germany's former colonies. The invasion of Abyssinia would make up for these disappointments. Abyssinia and the territories Italy already held in East Africa would join together to make a new Italian empire in the region. Abyssinia had the support of the League of Nations, but did not have an army to match the Italians.



# HEROES & VILLAINS

Mussolini & Abyssinia > Why invade Abyssinia?

Examine these sources to find out more:



**Map showing the Roman Empire, c. 200 A.D.**



**Photo of Italian slogan: "Believe, Obey, Fight"**



**Mussolini's speech on economic problems, 1932**



**Map of European colonies in East Africa, c.1935**



**Mussolini's plans to change WWI peace terms, 1932**