

31. BIG CHANGES: THE MIGRATION OF NATIONS 300 AD-700 AD

The Romans had been the most powerful people on earth for many centuries. Their brave soldiers had conquered almost the entire known world. Those conquered nations helped make the Romans still mightier and wealthier than they already were.

In those days, Rome was the capital city of the world. It was full of beautiful temples and palaces. The Romans lived in sumptuous luxury and prosperity—countless slaves from the conquered countries served in their houses.

Various nations lived on the borders of that mighty Roman empire. They were the Germanic tribes. They were not wealthy and did not live in luxury and excess. Those poor people led an impoverished existence in their dense forests. We can easily understand that they sometimes became jealous when they saw the Romans' luxury and wealth.

At times, powerful Germanic nations had attempted to invade the Roman empire and rob

their immense treasures. However, up till now, they had not been successful. In bloody wars, the mighty Roman legions repulsed them every time. The poor Germanic warriors could not overcome the Romans with axes and clubs. Scorning death, they flung themselves at the enemy, but the Romans were not only better armed but were also better trained. Those Germanic tribes were no cowards!

Many years passed, and the Roman Empire gradually weakened. Many internal quarrels and divisions caused this. And a kingdom divided against itself cannot last. Besides, all the wealth and luxury made many of them lazy. And then?

THE MIGRATION BEGINS

Look, there they go. Endless lines of people — men, women, old and young- are on the move. They are leaving their homes or farms where they have lived all their lives. They leave the villages or the cities where they were born. They even leave their native country. Go! Go! Their eyes are full of



They leave the villages or cities where they were born...<https://geschiedeniskids.jouwweb.nl/>

But who are those people who leave everything behind and flee so fearfully? Why do they travel so quickly into an unknown future? What's going on?

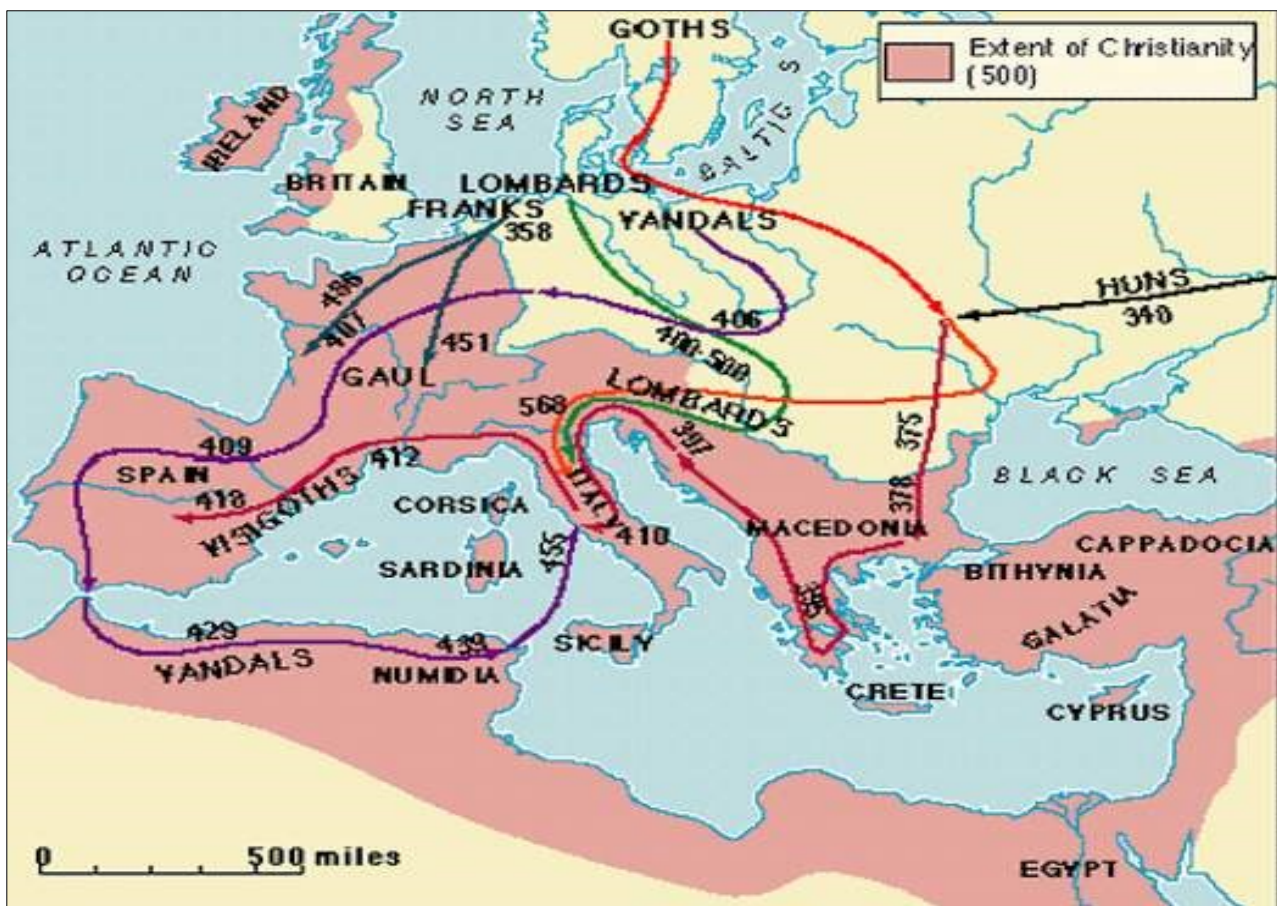
About the year 400 AD, enormous changes took place in Europe. I will only give you a brief outline. It is quite complicated, but I must tell you something about it.

A big and powerful Asian army invaded Russia. They were the *Huns*. They were brilliant horseback riders. But they were rough and cruel. Wherever those Huns came, they destroyed everything. They always left a horrible trail of blood and fire behind them. Those Huns didn't spare anyone. Young and old, rich and poor, no one was safe. They knew no pity.

The Huns were a pagan, uncivilised, brutal nation. They ate their food raw, including meat. When they killed an animal, they put the raw, bloody pieces of flesh under their saddle and sat on it. After a while, the saddle bouncing while riding tenderised the meat. Then they put their strong teeth into it and devoured it raw.

Now those Huns invade Russia. But other nations were already living there. Too many to mention. Heroically, the people tried to stop those intruders, but the Huns defeated them. It is not surprising that those left alive fled in mortal fear from those ruffians who spared nothing! To save their lives, they left their homes and farms behind.

But these fleeing people came to other inhabited areas. So, one group collided with the next. War erupted everywhere. Destruction was everywhere. All of Europe was on the move. All of Europe was on fire. It was a terrible time. Only



Barbarian invasions. W.W.Norton

God knows the grief and misery that the people suffered.

That movement among the nations has received the appropriate name of 'Migration of Nations'. Entire nations shifted.

Eventually, those terrified, fleeing human masses collided with the Roman empire. The Roman legions, who had to guard and defend the border, could no longer hold them back. The volume of the masses pushed them back inexorably.

Almost all countries ended up with other nations living in them. For instance, before the migration, the Frisians, the Cananefates, the Batavians, and other Germanic tribes lived in the Netherlands. After the migration, the Frisians, the Franks, and the Saxons lived there. Only the Frisians could defend their land successfully and stay where they were. It was like that everywhere. But it got even worse.

ATTILA THE HUN

For a while, the Huns lived near the Black Sea in Russia. But around 450, the Huns got a new king, Attila. He recruited a large, powerful army. Some

writers say this army numbered more than half a million soldiers. With that enormous army, he marched west. No one could resist that mighty army. King Attila dealt well with the nations who willingly subjected themselves to his rule. But those who opposed him were severely punished.

Attila quickly advanced with hundreds of thousands of brave soldiers. They were like an irresistible tidal wave. Oh, are those cruel, unmerciful Huns going to conquer and destroy everything? In 451, Attila had already arrived at the French border. At that time, France was called Gaul.

In their mortal fear, the Roman legions in France made an alliance with the Visigoths, the Germanic tribe who lived there.



Attila the Hun. Wikipedia



Army of Attila the Hun. <https://www.worldhistory.org/>

Together they will try to stop the Huns.
The Roman legions and the Germanic armies unite
into one army. Together they will try to beat back
that tidal wave. It will be a life-and-death struggle.

In 451, those two mighty armies clashed near the
city of Chalons-sur-Marne. (Now known as
Chalons-en-Champagne.) The Roman and
Germanic armies were on one side; the Huns,
under the command of their brave king Attila,
were on the other. The fighting was terrible.
Thousands and thousands were killed. With
death-defying bravery, the Huns, seated on their
fast horses, galloped forward, but the Roman and
Germanic soldiers stood rock-firm. The Huns
attacked again and again, but the new allies
repulsed them every time.

Who shall win; who shall lose this battle?
So much depended on the outcome of this
struggle.

And?

Oh, thankfully, when evening fell, the Huns
withdrew. The Roman and Germanic armies had
resisted the tidal wave of Huns. Their triumphant
shouts of victory echoed across the blood-
drenched battlefield. Through all this, too, runs
the golden thread of God's rule. He used Attila as
a scourge for Europe, but here the Almighty
spoke:

"This far and no further!"

God had decreed a different outcome than Attila
for these western countries.

Now that Attila could not advance west or north,
he and his army turned south. He marched over
the Alps and invaded Italy, and soon after, he
reached the gates of Rome. The wealthy Romans
trembled in their beautiful homes. Who would
have ever thought *that* would happen?

Oh, if Attila enters Rome with his savage hordes,
they shall rob all their treasures. Perhaps they
may be killed or carried away as slaves. The
beautiful city of Rome will go up in flames! A
paralysing fear takes hold of the inhabitants of
Rome. Will nobody help them? Can no one deliver
them?

Will the Roman empire, including God's church,
be wiped off the map?

BRAVE BISHOP LEO

Look, the gates of Rome open, and a small group
of men walk out of the city straight to the camp of
the Huns. They want to visit Attila, the pagan king
of the Huns, and speak to him. How do they dare?
Aren't they afraid that Attila will kill them?

Those men are not heavily armed and dressed in
full armour. They are not carrying any weapons at
all. Who are those brave men who dare to risk
visiting cruel Attila?

Is it the Roman emperor with his courtiers?
Or some Roman officers who will try to mediate?
Oh, no, *they* don't dare!
Are they some wealthy Roman citizens?
No way, *they* don't dare at all!
But who are they, then?

Calmly they walk toward the camp of Attila as if
there is no danger. They are only wearing simple
white garments.

This act is indeed very courageous!



*Pope Leo I. (440-461 AD) painting by Francisco
Herrera the Younger*

They are the bishop of Rome with some assistants. That bishop's name is *Leo*. With his supporters, this brave man will try to save the city of Rome from total destruction. They will also try to keep the church of Rome from destruction.

Surprised, the Huns watch those men approach. They immediately bring those strangers to their king, the mighty Attila! Soon bishop Leo and his companions stand before the brutal, barbaric ruler. No, they do not tremble. Nor do they fearfully fall on their knees before him. Quietly and calmly, Leo tells Attila why he came. He urgently asks the king of the Huns to spare the city of Rome. Then they wait in suspense for the answer of the powerful ruler. It has become breathlessly quiet. What will Attila decide? Is the proud king of the Huns impressed by their simplicity? Does he quietly admire their courage?

We do not know, but he listens kindly to them and gives a favourable answer to their friendly request. He will spare Rome and not permit his soldiers to plunder the city. But he demands that Rome must pay a large sum of money. Well, that's not a problem. The Romans will happily part with some gold and silver for that purpose. They pay the required amount, and Attila raises the siege and leaves when he receives the ransom. Rome is safe!



Pope Leo persuades Attila to withdraw from Rome. AKG images

Is it any wonder that the people of Rome held their brave bishop in great awe and respect? Is it any wonder that Leo now had more influence than ever? These events contributed to making the bishop of Rome even more powerful. They also helped the people to accept the bishop of Rome as the pope.

These events resulted in Rome's bishop becoming the most influential bishop of the whole church. Attila did not live long after he withdrew from Rome. He died in 453, only two years later. His people buried him with great respect. It is noteworthy that after Attila's death, we hear no more about the Huns. It seems that after their brave king died, they fell apart. Eventually, they disappeared entirely from history. But if we think that rest has come to Italy, we are greatly mistaken.

THE VANDALS

In the last part of chapter 25, we read that the Vandals crossed from Spain to North Africa and conquered that region. The Vandals conquered the large city of Carthage, and Hippo, where the well-known church father Augustine was bishop. They made a terrible mess in North Africa. The conquering Vandals advanced even further, and in the year 455, they had penetrated Italy and laid siege to Rome. Rome was being threatened for the second time by savage and cruel people. Rome trembled a second time, for destruction seemed imminent. But Pope Leo, who visited King Attila four years ago, now goes to the camp of the Vandals. He tried to get the Vandals to raise the siege and depart. Leo succeeded with the Huns but failed with the Vandals. The king of the Vandals promised he would not massacre and destroy Rome, but for fourteen successive days, the Vandals plundered Rome.

Those ruffians robbed almost all of Rome's treasures and carried them away. Rome still had the temple treasure from Jerusalem in safekeeping. Titus had taken this treasure from the temple during Jerusalem's destruction and brought it to Rome. The Vandals robbed Rome of that temple treasure and took it as booty. Although Pope Leo's attempt to save Rome was



*Carthage falls to the Vandals. October 24, 439 AD.
Coins Community*

only partly successful, the people still honoured him, and his influence increased again. The Roman empire was split into a west and east empire for a long time. An emperor ruled over each section.

The emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire lived in Constantinople.
The emperor of the Western Roman Empire lived in Rome.

In 476, twenty years after the Vandals came, the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire was deposed, and that empire ceased to exist. Later, we will hear more about the Eastern Roman Empire. That Eastern Roman empire continued for almost another thousand years.

Now a terrible time began for Italy. Time and again, strange nations invaded Italy. They had to wage bloody and devastating wars. Those poor people must have suffered so much grief and sorrow.

No pen can describe that.

Those times were so rough and cruel.

It seemed as if God's church in Italy would drown in a sea of blood and fire. God's church shook on its foundations in Italy and all over Europe.



Painting by Karl Bryullov entitled 'Genseric Sacking Rome' 455. (Genseric was the king of the Vandals). In the upper right part of the painting, a menorah carried by the Vandals from the imperial palace in Rome is visible, which in turn was looted by the Romans from the Jerusalem Temple when they destroyed it in 70 A.D.

THE LOMBARDS

It got even worse when the Lombards invaded Italy. Those brutes spared no one. They showed no pity at all. Those Lombards levelled churches and monasteries with the ground. They killed many bishops. They changed many beautiful buildings, where the congregations gathered to listen to the preaching of God's Word, into smoking heaps of rubble.

God's judgments rested heavily on the seriously declining church. In those days, there was great apostasy everywhere. Countless monks living in the monasteries to *escape* the temptations of sin spent their days in the *worst* sins. Thousands of them gave themselves to drunkenness and adultery.

Will *everything* be destroyed?

It wouldn't be surprising if it were!

God's church had strayed from the pure doctrine. They had believed the lie.

God's terrible judgments came down on the church.

But be destroyed? Perish? Be swept off the face of the earth?

No, that is impossible! God is stronger than the powers of hell. *God* rules, and He maintains His church. However deep the church had sunk in superstition and error, God still had His people in it, and those people were the cork on which the church floated.



Lombards arrive in Italy. The archaeology news network

QUESTIONS

1. List two reasons why the Roman Empire became weak.
2. Identify the Huns. How would you describe them?
3. What is meant by the migration of nations?
4. Identify Attila.
5. Where did Attila meet the combined Roman and Germanic armies?
6. What was the result?
7. What does the author mean when he says that God used Attila as a scourge for Europe?
8. What was Attila's intention as he approached Rome? Who pleaded that Attila spare Rome?
9. What were the conditions of peace?
10. How did this event add to the honour of the pope?
11. What grave mistake did the people make in this case?
12. Which group of people threatened Rome after the Hun invasion?
13. Which conditions of peace did Pope Leo agree on with the Vandals?
14. Explain the division of the Roman empire.
15. What finally happened to the Western Roman Empire?
16. State the results of the Lombard invasion.
17. Why did these judgments come on the church?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Locate one text in the Bible that proves the danger of slackness or laziness. The book of Proverbs would be helpful for this question.
2. Compare our nation today with Rome in its state of decline. Do you see any striking similarities or differences?
3. Find one Bible text to prove that God will never forsake His church.
4. Choose one of the following Biblical nations or cities and show how its sins brought the judgments of God upon them: Sodom, Samaria, Jerusalem, Babylon.