

Church History
Lesson 18 - The Situation in the West After the Fall of Rome

1. Introduction - A Crumbling Empire

- 1.1. In the last session we looked at a number of Christological controversies which embroiled the church, and consequently the Empire, up until the council of Chalcedon in 451.
- 1.2. As we saw, these controversies involved both the East and the West, but there were of far greater concern in the East than in the West, and the majority of bishops attending the various councils were overwhelmingly from the East.
- 1.3. Although there were a number of reasons for this, one of the major reasons was the rapidly changing situation in the West. After Rome was sacked for the first time in 410 AD, it sent shockwaves through the whole empire, but especially in the West. Although the Eastern part of the Empire continued in one form or another for over 1,000 years more, the situation in the West was far different.
- 1.4. Today we will take a brief look at what happened in the West after the first sacking of Rome in 410, and see how this affected life and the church in the West for the next 300 years or so.

2. The Barbarian Invasions

- 2.1. The events that most affected life and the church in the West were a series of invasions by “barbarian” tribes.
- 2.2. Obviously the first major invasion was when Alaric and his band of Visigoths, who invaded Italy and sacked Rome in 410. It was the shockwaves from this event that caused Augustine to write his opus *City of God*.
- 2.3. However, the invasions of the West did not end with the Visigoths in 410. They were followed by the Vandals, Burgundians, Franks, Ostrogoths, Lombards, and even armies from the remaining Roman Empire of the East. Consequently the Western Empire was broken into many sub-empires, each of which were attempting to overthrow the others, but all of which lacked the strength to re-unite the Western Empire.
 - 2.3.1. In a series of seemingly endless waves, barbarian hordes crossed the frontiers of the Empire, sacked towns and cities, and finally settled in areas that had been part of the Roman Empire. There they founded their own kingdoms, many of them theoretically subject to the Empire, but in truth independent. The western Roman Empire had come to an end. - Gonzales, location 4324
 - 2.3.2. When Augustine died, the Vandals were besieging the city of Hippo. Shortly thereafter, they were masters of the northern coast of Africa, except Egypt. A few years earlier, in A.D. 410, Rome had been taken and sacked by Alaric and his Goths. Even earlier, at the battle of Adrianople in 378, an emperor had been defeated and killed by the Goths, whose troops had reached the very walls of Constantinople. The ancient Empire, or rather its western half, was crumbling. - Gonzales, location 4319

2.3.3. When Augustine died in 430, the Vandals were at the gates of Hippo. While the Council of Chalcedon was in progress in 451, Leo the Great was negotiating with the Huns to save Italy from their ravages. Western history was dominated in the fifth and sixth centuries by the movement of (principally) Germanic peoples into the territory of the old Roman Empire. - Ferguson, location 5520

2.3.4. The fall of the western Roman Empire created a number of independent kingdoms, each of which was of great significance for the later history of the church in its territory. It also gave new functions and power to two institutions that had begun to develop earlier: monasticism and the papacy. Finally, new invasions, this time from the southeast, posed new challenges for Christianity. Each of these developments merits separate consideration. - Gonzales, location 4668

2.4. A map of the area as it existed around 490 is seen below:



2.5.

3. Overview of the Barbarian Invaders

3.1. One of the interesting things regarding the barbarians is that this was not how they would have described themselves - that was the designation given to them by the citizens of the Roman Empire. In fact, some of the invading tribes considered themselves to be part of the Roman Empire, and many of them wished to simply settle within the lands of the Empire. They did not come with the desire of destroying the Roman Empire in the West - though that was the effect.

3.2. The contact between Rome and these tribes had been going on for centuries. Some of the contact was peaceful, but much of it was hostile. However, Rome had even invited many of the German people to come into the Empire and settle on lands, and eventually many of them served in the Roman army.

3.2.1. for the most part they were tribes from the north, originally in or near Scandinavia—Vandals, Franks, Angles, Saxons, Goths, Lombards, Burgundians, and others. - Shelley, location 2918

- 3.2.2. When they started to give the Romans problems in the third century they were at a cultural stage midway between a pastoral and an agricultural economy. They engaged in so little commerce that cattle, rather than money, marked the man of wealth and power among them. - Shelley, location 2919
- 3.2.3. The Germans lived to fight. Every warlord had a retinue of warriors, linked to their leader by a personal oath of loyalty. - Shelley, location 2925
- 3.2.4. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, the Germans were notoriously heavy drinkers and gamblers. On the other hand, Tacitus praised their courage, respect for women, and freedom from many Roman vices. - Shelley, location 2921
- 3.2.5. During the centuries that the Romans and Germans faced each other across the Rhine-Danube frontier, they had countless contacts with each other—peaceful as well as hostile. - Shelley, location 2927
- 3.2.6. During the troubled third century many barbarians were invited to settle on vacated lands within the empire or to serve in the Roman legions. By the end of the fourth century the Roman army and its generals in the West had become almost completely German. - Shelley, location 2929
- 3.3. The barbarian invaders came for a variety of reasons. Some of them were being forced from their own homes by other tribes and simply were looking for a place to settle. Others were invading because treaties the Roman/Byzantine Empire had broken. Some were looking for treasure, and for others conquering and plundering were simply a way of life. There were many reasons that these vast numbers of tribes flooded into the old Roman Empire, but the result was the total breakdown of the Empire in the West.
 - 3.3.1. Although the “barbarians” appeared to the Romans as looters with their minds set on destruction, most of them really aspired to settle within the borders of the Roman Empire, and there to enjoy some of the benefits of a civilization that until then they had only known from afar. Thus, after a period of wandering, each of the major invading bodies settled in a portion of the Empire—some because that was the territory they fancied, and others simply because they had been pushed into that land by other invaders. - Gonzales, location 4671
 - 3.3.2. The crisis of mass invasions came with the sudden appearance of a new uncontrollable force—the Huns. Late in the fourth century, this wave of Asiatic people crossed the Volga and soon subjugated the easternmost Germanic tribe, the Ostragoths. Terrified at the prospect of conquest by the advancing Huns, the Visigoths (or West Goths) petitioned the Romans to allow them to settle as allies inside the empire. Rome granted the request and in 376 the entire tribe crossed the Danube into Roman territory. Shortly, however, corrupt Roman officials mistreated the Visigoths, and the proud barbarians went on a rampage. The inept Eastern emperor Valens tried to quell them, but in 378 he lost both his army and his life in the battle of Adrianople (in today’s Turkey). - Shelley, location 2931
 - 3.3.3. The fifth century was the culmination of a long process of somewhat controlled immigration in which the Germans found land, settled within the frontiers of the empire, and served in the empire’s military. - Ferguson, location 5575

- 3.3.4.** Pressures from the movement of peoples out of central Asia, broken treaties between the Romans and the Germans, and search for better living conditions turned the tide of migration into an armed flood. - Ferguson, location 5579
- 3.4.** Some of the invaders were still pagans. They still worshipped the same gods which their ancestors had worshipped. Interestingly, however, these tribes eventually converted to Christianity. Although they had militarily conquered the Roman empire, the faith of the Roman Empire eventually conquered them!
- 3.4.1.** The task of converting these northern peoples was enormous. To bring them to a nominal adherence to Christianity was not so difficult, because they wanted to enter into the grandeur that was Rome. Christianity was, in their eyes, the Roman religion. - Shelley, location 2951
- 3.5.** However, most of the invaders were not pagan but rather Arian! The almost forgotten heresy of Arius came roaring back into the life and consciousness of the West as wave after wave of Arian invaders rolled through the West. These groups were more difficult to convert to Orthodox Christianity than were the pagans.
- 3.5.1.** It was of great significance that when the barbarian Germans swept through the western Roman world in the fifth century, they came (for the most part) not as pagans but as Arian Christians. - Ferguson, location 5590
- 3.5.2.** The result was that, by the time of the great invasions, many of the invaders were Christians (although of the Arian persuasion). This meant that the issue of Arianism, which had been considered virtually dead for decades, once again came to the foreground in the West. Eventually, yielding to the influence of those whom they had conquered, all these Arians would accept the Nicene faith. But this was not done without a great deal of struggle and suffering. - Gonzales, location 4344
- 3.6.** These tribes had come into contact with Arianism because when Christianity first reached them, it was during the time that Arianism was ascendant within the church and empire. The predominant missionary who went to these tribes was a man named Ulfilas—whose name means “little wolf. He took them the message of the Gospel (in its errant Arian form), created a written language for them, and translated most of the Scripture into their language. (He left out the books of Kings, reasoning that the tribes were already too warlike and did not need anymore examples of war from Scripture!). It must also be stated that Ulfilas does not appear to have engaged in much of the speculative theology as he carried the message to these illiterate tribes, focusing rather on monotheism and the tenets of the Gospel.
- 3.6.1.** Foremost among these missionaries was Ulfilas—whose name means “little wolf”—who invented a way to write the language of the Goths, and translated the Bible into it. - Gonzales, location 4340
- 3.6.2.** Since most of this contact had taken place when Arianism was on the upswing, it was to Arianism that the Goths had been converted. - Gonzales, location 4342
- 3.6.3.** The principal missionary among the Goths was Ulfilas (c. 311–c. 383), consecrated bishop in 341 by Eusebius of Nicomedia. He was of mixed ancestry and spoke Greek, Latin, and Gothic. He signed the Homoean creed of the Council of Ariminum (Rimini, 359) while at Constantinople in 360. As far as Ulfilas knew, he was carrying the proper form of Christianity to the Goths. - Ferguson, location 5592

- 3.6.4. The Arian influence apparently began with missionary work among the Visigoths. A half century after the Council of Nicea (325) a missionary named Ulfilas (or Wulfila) crossed the Danube to work among them for forty years. Aided by other unknown missionaries, Ulfilas led them to faith in Christ as Arius had preached him. - Shelley, location 2962
- 3.6.5. We know that Ulfilas translated the Bible into the Gothic language, with the exception of the Books of Kings, which he thought too bellicose to be edifying for a people already extremely fierce and warlike. From the Goths, then, Arian Christianity spread to other German tribes. - Shelley, location 2964
- 3.6.6. To the Goths, accustomed to three chief gods (Tu, Thor, and Woton), who had no control over the lesser gods (called demons by the missionaries), Ulfilas insisted on monotheism. He used the figure of Jesus as a prince, the hero (held), under the Father as King. In this simple form he taught the people and avoided Logos speculation. From the Goths Arian Christianity spread to other Germanic peoples (with the exception of the Franks). - Ferguson, loc. 5600
- 3.6.7. The task of conversion was facilitated by two historical realities: (1) the Germanic peoples' old religion was in decline at the time of contact with Christianity and (2) the Germanic peoples all spoke a common tongue. - Ferguson, location 5595
- 3.7. The nature of the Arianism of the Germanic tribes was not nearly as philosophical as in much of the Eastern church. Furthermore, one of the main distinctions was that these churches lacked an ecclesiastical center. In other words, the structure was much more localized, not looking to centers such as Constantinople, Rome, Antioch, or Alexandria. Furthermore, the Christianity of these tribes was often more ritual than moral - they followed worship patterns, but did not necessarily abandon their warlike tendencies or other sinful practices. Of course, this last point was all too true within the Roman Empire by this time as well!
 - 3.7.1. Arius' doctrine spread among them from the time in the fourth century when Arianism was strong in the empire. This Arianism, however, was more ecclesiastical than theological, because the Germans were not interested in the niceties of abstract theology. Their Christ was the firstborn creature. They tended to think of him as a glorified warlord. But the main difference between the Arians and the orthodox in the West lay in the structure of the church. The Arians had no ecclesiastical center. - Shelley, location 2956
 - 3.7.2. Arian Christianity among the Goths had the following characteristics: 1. They spoke of the Father and the Son as of "one blood," instead of the Greek philosophical language of one substance, and so avoided theological debate. 2. The liturgy and the Scriptures were in the vernacular. 3. No distinctive church community was created, but social ties remained those of the family and the clan. 4. The bishops and priests from the beginning were rather like military chaplains, for there were no fixed geographical dioceses, and there were no metropolitan bishops (there were no cities!). Synods were assembled by the ruler, since there was no hierarchy between the bishops and the ruler. 5. The prevailing organizational pattern was the "proprietary church", or "church of the ruler" or of any lay patron, since a prominent member of the "folk" who built a chapel and secured the services of a priest considered the church as in a sense belonging to himself. This authority of the proprietary lord over priests weakened episcopal jurisdiction. - Ferguson, location 5603

- 3.7.3. As in the empire, the ritual side of Christianity counted more than the moral. - Ferguson, location 5614
- 3.8. The struggles between orthodoxy and Arianism (again!)
 - 3.8.1. All of this meant that a new struggle between Arianism and Orthodoxy ensued again. However, this time was mainly in the West rather than in the East. As the Germanic tribes rolled through the West in successive waves, they conquered and set up their own rule.
 - 3.8.2. As we will see below, this sometimes led to real conflict between the Arian invaders and the orthodox Romans, but sometimes it did not, and the Arians themselves eventually converted peacefully to the orthodox Christian faith.
- 3.9. As noted above, there were a wide variety of “Germanic” tribes that invaded the Empire. Covering all of these would be impossible, but we will take a look at a few of the main tribes below, describing their conquest, their religion, and the eventual outcome for these tribes.

4. A Look at Some of the Specific Invading Tribes

- 4.1. The Visigoths
 - 4.1.1. The Visigoths were part of the Germanic tribe known as the Goths. The Visigoths were the Western tribes among this group.
 - 4.1.2. When a new wave of Huns crossed the Volga river in the lated 4th century and subjugated many of the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, who lived a bit further West, pleaded with the Roman Emperor to allow them entry into Roman territory. This request was granted by the Emperor Valens, and the Visigoths settled within the Eastern part of the Empire. The Visigoths were Arian, as was Valens, the emperor at the time. However, after a time, they became angry at their treatment by the Romans, who they said were breaking treaties, and they began to fight against the Romans.
 - 4.1.2.1. The first contact of the Romans with the Goths came under Decius. During the time of Constantine the Goths became allies (foederatae), and they often entered the army in high offices. The West Goths were hard-pressed by the Huns, and in 376 they sought refuge on the Roman side of the Danube. The emperor Valens granted this, and there began a mass conversion to Arianism. - Ferguson, location 5629
 - 4.1.3. The Visigoths defeated the Romans at the battle of Adrianople in 378 - killing the Arian emperor Valens and thus ensuring the victory of Orthodoxy within the Empire! However, in many ways this spelled the death knell of the Empire. A Roman army had been routed by a foreign Army, and the emperor himself had died.
 - 4.1.3.1. Due to mistreatment, the Goths revolted in 378 and killed Valens in the battle of Adrianople, an event that marked the real beginning of the Germanic invasions and shocked the East in a way comparable to the effect of the sack of Rome in 410 on the West. - Ferguson, location 5631

- 4.1.4.** The Visigoths were held in check by the Orthodox Emperor Theodosius I, who encouraged them to move Westward in the Empire and settle. But when Theodosius died in 395, they began to rampage and raid under their leader Alaric, and eventually sacked Rome in 410. By 415 they had settled in Spain, which they ruled until they were overthrown by Muslim invaders in the 711.
- 4.1.4.1.** Theodosius moved the Goths west. - Ferguson, location 5633
- 4.1.4.2.** For a few years the able emperor Theodosius I held back the Visigoths, but after his death in 395 they began to migrate and pillage under their leader, Alaric. He invaded Italy, and in 410 his followers sacked Rome. - Shelley, location 2938
- 4.1.4.3.** The Visigoths—another barbarian group—defeated the Romans at the battle of Adrianople in 378, then swept through the Balkans, and took Rome in 410. By 415 they were in Spain, and they ruled that country until they in turn were overthrown by the Moslems early in the eighth century. - Gonzales, location 4688
- 4.1.4.4.** The Gothic king Alaric died in the same year (410) as the sack of Rome, but by 419 his successor, Ataulf, had mastered southern Gaul and all of Spain. - Ferguson, location 5636
- 4.1.5.** Although the Visigoths were Arians, they did not persecute orthodox Christians, and eventually their emperor Recared converted to orthodoxy in 589. Soon all of the nobles converted as well, and Arianism disappeared from among the Visigoths. (On another note it was at Toledo in 589 - at the ceremony marking the conversion of the Emperor Recared - that the Nicene creed was altered with the addition of the *filioque* clause. It was this in part which eventually led to schism between the Eastern and Western churches.)
- 4.1.5.1.** They too were Arian, but they did not persecute the orthodox in their territories to the extent that the Vandals did in theirs. Almost two centuries after the conquest, it was clear that the orthodox descendants of the conquered inhabitants were the guardians of ancient culture, and that their participation was necessary in order to provide the kingdom with a measure of stability. This led to the conversion of the Visigoth King Recared (586–601) to Nicene orthodoxy, which he solemnly embraced at a great assembly in Toledo, in A.D. 589. After the king, the vast majority of the nobles became catholic, and Arianism soon disappeared. - Gonzales, location 4691
- 4.1.5.2.** By 565 Justinian had regained much of the West, including part of Spain. King Reccared (586–601) accepted Catholic Christianity in 587. This conversion was signaled by the third synod of Toledo in 589, where the Nicene creed was accepted. - Ferguson, loc 5639
- 4.1.5.3.** In an effort to establish orthodoxy, the synod may have overdone it by adding the filioque clause (“and from the Son”) to the creed. Whereas the current form of the “Nicene Creed” (approved in 381) said that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father,” the Latin of the creed adopted in 589 said the Spirit “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” an expansion based on Augustine’s theology of the Trinity and designed to emphasize the full deity of the Son. - Ferguson, location 5641

- 4.1.5.4. The clause was later to alienate Eastern Christians, who argued that the Nicene creed was inviolable and not subject to change and that the addition introduced two sources of deity into the Godhead. In any case, the Arians and Catholics in Spain united to drive out the Byzantines. - Ferguson, location 5645
 - 4.1.6. After their conversion to orthodoxy, the Visigoths ruled Spain for about another 130 years, until the Muslim invasions. During this time the church took an increasing role in the legislative affairs of the kingdom. However, the effect of this was often injustice and persecution of non-Christian groups, especially the Jews. In fact, some of these laws sound amazingly similar to laws in Muslim countries to which Christians object today.
 - 4.1.6.1. After the conversion of Recared, the church played the role of legislator for the Visigothic kingdom. In this it provided a measure of order, although in reading the decrees of its councils one cannot but cringe at the injustice and the inequalities that reigned. - Gonzales, location 4701
 - 4.1.6.2. The legislation regarding Jews was similar. The same council—whose president was Isidore of Seville, the most enlightened man of his time—decreed that Jews should not be forced to convert to Christianity, but that those who had been forcibly converted earlier would not be allowed to return to the faith of their ancestors, for this would be blasphemy. Furthermore, such converts were forbidden any dealings with Jews who retained their ancient faith, even if they were their closest relatives. And if any of them were found to be observing some of their traditional practices, particularly “the abominable circumcisions,” their children were to be taken away from them. Furthermore, any Jew who was found to be married to a Christian woman had to choose between conversion and leaving his wife and children. If the case was reversed, and the wife was Jewish and refused conversion, she had to leave the children with the father. - Gonzales, location 4705
 - 4.1.7. The Visigothic kingdom came to an end when the Muslims invaded Spain. However, by that time Christianity was so rooted in the country that it became the rallying point for the long struggle to reconquer Spain from the Moslem Moors.
 - 4.1.7.1. Finally, under King Roderick (710–711), the Moslems invaded Spain and put an end to Visigothic rule. By then, however, Christianity had become so rooted in the country, that it became the rallying point in the long struggle to reconquer the peninsula from the Moslem Moors. - Gonzales, location 4714
 - 4.1.7.2. In 711 the Muslims brought an end to the Visigothic kingdom. - Ferguson, location 5651
- 4.2. The Vandals

- 4.2.1.** In order to counter the advances of the Visigoths under Alaric, Rome had removed her armies from her northern frontier, opening the way for other Germanic tribes to pour into the Empire. One of the first to do this was the Vandals. The Vandals moved across the West and tried to go into Spain. However, after they could not dislodge the Visigoths, they moved on to Africa. They were besieging Hippo as Augustine lay dying in his bed. They eventually conquered North Africa, and occasionally even returned to Europe, as when they sacked Rome in 455.
- 4.2.1.1.** To counter Alaric's threat to Italy, the Romans had withdrawn most of their troops from the Rhine frontier in 406 and from Britain the following year. The momentous consequence of this action was a flood of Germanic tribes across the defenseless frontiers. The Vandals pushed their way through Gaul to Spain and, after pressure from the Visigoths, moved on to Africa. In 455 a Vandal raiding force sailed over from Africa, and Rome was sacked a second time. - Shelley, location 2940
- 4.2.1.2.** Gaiseric (king 428–77) led the Vandals across western Europe into North Africa (429). Carthage was taken in 439 and made the capital of an Arian Vandal kingdom. Gaiseric was an intolerant Arian. In 455 he felt so powerful that he sent his ships across the Mediterranean to sack Rome. - Ferguson, location 5621
- 4.2.1.3.** The Vandals, who crossed the Rhine in 407, wandered across France and Spain, crossed the Straits of Gibraltar in 429, and took Carthage in 439. By then they were virtual masters of all the northern coast of Africa - Gonzales, location 4676
- 4.2.1.4.** In 455, they sacked the city of Rome, and the destruction they wrought was even greater than that of the Goths forty-five years earlier. - Gonzales, location 4679
- 4.2.2.** The Vandals were Arians, and were not friendly to the orthodox. This initially encouraged the Donatists who were still set against the orthodox church in Africa (recall them from the discussion around Augustine). However, it soon became apparent that the Vandals were out to persecute everyone who was not Arian.
- 4.2.2.1.** The Donatists in North Africa initially rejoiced in the coming of the Vandals. - Ferguson, location 5623
- 4.2.2.2.** Their rule in North Africa was disastrous for the church. They were Arians, and repeated persecutions broke out against both Catholics and Donatists. - Gonzales, location 4680
- 4.2.2.3.** There was an abatement of persecution of Catholics under king Gunthamund (484–96), but his brother Thrasamund (496–523) resumed persecution. This religious persecution of Catholics did more to give the Vandals their bad name than any acts of "vandalism," for the Vandals were no more "barbaric" than the other Germans. - Ferguson, location 5624

- 4.2.3.** The Vandals ruled for almost a century, but then were attacked by armies from the Eastern part of the Roman Empire sent by Emperor Justinian who wanted to reunite the Empire and restore her ancient glory. (He was also responding to the please of a deposed Vandal King who had been friendly to both Justinian and the orthodox/catholic church.) His General Belisarius defeated the Vandals and brought North Africa back under the control of the Eastern Roman Empire (and the orthodox church).
- 4.2.3.1.** Finally, after almost a century of Vandal rule, the area was conquered by General Belisarius, of the Byzantine Empire. - Gonzales, location 4681
- 4.2.3.2.** Justinian's general, Belisarius, reoccupied North Africa for the Byzantine empire in 534. - Ferguson, location 5627
- 4.3.** The Huns
- 4.3.1.** As we have seen above, it was the advance of the Huns from central Asia towards the Roman Empire, that caused many of the Germanic tribes discussed above to begin moving into the Western part of the Roman Empire in waves.
- 4.3.2.** The Greatest of the Hun leaders was Attila, who became known as the "Scourge of God." Attila had invaded the Eastern part of the Empire twice, plundering the Balkans - but failing to take Constantinople.
- 4.3.2.1.** "YOU ARE the scourge of God," cried a hermit as Attila the Hun led his cavalry and well-armed foot soldiers out of the endless pastures of central Asia to invade the western half of the Roman Empire. - Shelley, location 2521
- 4.3.3.** Eventually Attila turned his attention westward and moved on Italy. He made it to the Gates of Rome. Because the emperors in the West were weak and inept, it was not the Emperor but Leo, the bishop of Rome, who met Attila to convince him to turn back without sacking Rome. His army was exhausted and near revolt, so Attila granted Leo's request and even agreed to withdraw from Italy.
- 4.3.3.1.** In June 452 the "Scourge of God" advanced on Rome. A sudden raid over the Alps brought him into northern Italy, where he met with resistance at only a few places. The weakened Roman army kept out of range and the population fled. - Shelley, location 2525
- 4.3.3.2.** At a fordable spot on the Po River, Attila met an embassy from Rome, the usual peace delegation. He was about to send them away when he heard that Bishop Leo was there, as emissary for the Roman emperor. - Shelley, location 2527
- 4.3.3.3.** Leo was commissioned to negotiate with one of the mighty men of the panic-stricken world, in the hope of avoiding chaos. He must save what there was to save. The Roman Emperor was doing nothing to preserve the ancient capital of the empire and its surrounding territories from devastation. So Peter's deputy, now acting in the name of the emperor, sat facing Attila alone. - Shelley, location 2529

- 4.3.3.4.** Long before the arrival of the embassy from Rome, Attila had probably made up his mind about further military thrusts. Epidemics in his army added to widespread famine were forcing him to break off the advance. But nobody knew it. So he willingly granted an interview to the imperial envoy, and in the course of it he granted the pope's plea that the capital should be spared. He even promised to withdraw from Italy, and he kept his word. The Bishop of Rome had assumed a new role and staked a fresh claim on the future. - Shelley, location 2534
- 4.3.4.** Meanwhile, the Eastern Emperor had refused to continue paying tribute money to the Huns. Around the same time, Visigothic armies from Spain also untied with the Romans. AS a result, Attila began to make his way back to the East. He planned to move against Constantinople again, but he died on the way, probably due to excessive drinking. The kingdom of the Huns were led by Attila's three sons, but was soon defeated in battle in 454, and then swiftly decreased and fell from the pages of history.
- 4.3.5.** One of the major reasons for the importance of the Huns in our study is the prestige that the meeting of Leo and Attila afforded to Leo and to later popes. Given that around the same time Leo's words were received with great effect at the Council of Constantinople, his stepping into the power vacuum could only increase his prestige and that of his successors. We will look at this further in a future session.
- 4.4.** The Ostrogoths
- 4.4.1.** The Ostrogoths were Eastern branch of the Gothic tribes. They had initially come under great pressure from the Huns in the East. After they were conquered by the Huns around 370, we hear little about them for about 80 years. Eventually the Huns were defeated (after the death of Attila) and the Ostrogoths became allies of the Eastern Empire. Over time, however, like the Visigoths before them, they began to migrate West.
- 4.4.2.** By the middle of the 5th century they are a force in central Italy. In fact, although there were still Western Emperors in Italy at this time, they increasingly became figureheads for the Generals running the Germanic tribal armies. This came to an end in 476AD when the Germanic leader Odoacer deposed Romulus Augustulus, the last Roman Emperor in the West.
- 4.4.2.1.** In 475 Orestes, the barbarian commander of the imperial troops, forced the Senate to elect his young son Romulus Augustulus ("Little Augustus") as emperor in the West. In the following year, however, another Germanic commander, Odovacar, slew Orestes and, seeing no reason for continuing the sham of an imperial line, he deposed Romulus Augustulus and proclaimed himself head of the government. That was it. No one was particularly shocked. That had all come a generation earlier with Alaric and Gaiseric and Attila. - Shelley, location 2913
- 4.4.3.** Initially Odoacer flattered the Emperor in the East and declared the Empire untied under the Eastern emperor. However, the situation eventually deteriorated and the Eastern Emperor asked the Ostrogoths to invade Italy in force, which they did. The Ostrogoths thus became the rulers of Italy.

- 4.4.3.1. In Italy, the barbarian invasions brought a chaotic situation. Although in theory there were emperors in Rome until 476, these in truth were no more than puppets of various Germanic generals. Finally, in 476, Odoacer, leader of the Heruli, deposed the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, and wrote to Zeno, the emperor at Constantinople, telling him that now the Empire was reunited. At first Zeno was flattered by this, and he even gave Odoacer the title of "patrician." But soon there were conflicts, and the emperor decided to rid himself of the Heruli by inviting the Ostrogoths to invade Italy. This was done, and for a short while Italy was under the rule of the Ostrogoths. - Gonzales, location 4788
- 4.4.4. The Ostrogoths were Arian (like most of the Germanic tribes). Consequently many of the Orthodox looked to Constantinople for support - which made them look treasonous in the eyes of the Ostrogoth leaders. This in turn led to waves of persecution.
 - 4.4.4.1. Since the Ostrogoths were Arian, the older population of Italy, which followed the Nicene or catholic faith, looked to Constantinople for support. This in turn made the rulers suspect that their subjects plotted treason. For this reason, the orthodox were often persecuted, although usually not on religious grounds, but rather on charges of conspiracy. - Gonzales, location 4793
- 4.4.5. Eventually, Justinian, the Emperor who invaded the Vandals and ended their reign, also sent armies under General Belisarius to Italy. After a protracted campaign which lasted almost 20 years and cost untold amounts of money, the Ostrogoths were subdued, and their kingdom came to an end. The Empire was briefly reunited, and contained much of the territory that had been under the Emperor prior to the Battle of Adrianople in 378.
 - 4.4.5.1. Finally, when the Byzantine Empire, under Justinian, had a short period of renewed grandeur, Justinian's general Belisarius invaded Italy and, after twenty years of military campaign, he and others put an end to the kingdom of the Ostrogoths. - Gonzales, location 4799
- 4.4.6. However, the Lombards soon invaded Italy, and began a protracted struggle with the Byzantines. We wont cover the Lombards specifically, but they were a major force in Italy for centuries.
- 4.5. The Franks
 - 4.5.1. The Franks were were the least mobile of the Germanic tribes, settling in what is now Northern France and setting up a kingdom from there. Unlike most of the tribes we have discussed above, the Franks were still pagan at the time of the collapse of the Empire in the West.
 - 4.5.1.1. The Franks were the least mobile of the Germanic peoples, settling in what is now northern France and expanding their political rule from there. They joined other German tribes and the Romans in defeating the Huns in 451. They also had been the most immune to Christianity, before coming directly from paganism to Catholic Christianity under their king Clovis (c. 466 - Ferguson, location 5661

- 4.5.2.** The Franks joined the Visigoths and other Germanic tribes in fighting against Attila and the Huns in 451.
- 4.5.3.** The major change for the Frankish kingdom came during the reign of Clovis (466-511). Clovis united the entire group of Frankish tribes under a single leader rather than local chieftains, and he also established that the kingship would pass down to his heirs. This became known as the Merovingian dynasty which ruled France for the next two centuries.
- 4.5.4.** Clovis was a pagan, but he was married to a Christian woman named Clotilde. When she secretly had their son baptized and the son died, this strengthened Clovis' resolve to not become a Christian. However, some time later during a battle it appeared that Clovis was about to be routed, but when he called upon Christ, the tide turned. Clovis related this to his wife, who urged him to turn to the faith, which he did. (All of this seems very reminiscent of the conversion of Constantine, and Clovis and his dynasty were to occupy a very important place in the history of the Catholic church as well.)
- 4.5.4.1.** Roman Catholic influence began in the northern half of Gaul, among the Franks, the one tribe destined to greatness in the shaping of Christian Europe. The founder of the nation was Clovis (481–511), who was the first barbarian chief of any importance to convert to orthodox Christianity. It happened that he was married to a Burgundian princess who was a Christian. - Shelley, location 2990
- 4.5.4.2.** Then, in a battle with the Alamanni tribe, Clovis was on the verge of a total rout. He cried, "Jesus Christ, Clothilda says thou art the Son of the living God, and thou canst give victory to those who hope in thee. Give me victory and I will be baptized. I have tried my gods and they have deserted me. I call on thee. Only save me." The king of the Alamanni fell, and his army fled. Clovis returned and told Clothilda. - Shelley, location 2997
- 4.5.5.** Clovis spoke to the people and many of them decided to convert as well. He officially converted in an impressive ceremony, was baptized, and anointed as king. This all led to a mass conversion among the Franks to Christianity. It was one of the first mass conversions of peoples during the middle ages.
- 4.5.5.1.** She summoned the Bishop of Rheims, who exhorted the king to renounce his gods. "Yes, holy father," said Clovis, "but my people will not consent. However, I will speak to them." He did, and with one accord they renounced their German gods. - Shelley, location 3000
- 4.5.5.2.** Clovis advanced like another Constantine to the baptismal font and the bishop said, "Bend your neck. Worship what you burned and burn what you worshiped." Thus the king was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Three thousand of his army followed him in baptism. - Shelley, location 3003
- 4.5.5.3.** As a result, on Christmas Day, A.D. 496, he was baptized, along with a number of his nobles. Shortly thereafter, most of the Franks were baptized. - Gonzales, location 4723

1. The other method is mass conversion, and it was this method that converted Europe. Kings like Clovis embraced the faith, and their people followed them into the spiritual City as into the earthly. This meant that individuals were not uprooted from their culture, but it also meant that the converts brought with them into the church their superstitions and behavior. - Shelley, location 3010
2. Clovis' conversion was important for several reasons. First, it became a bulwark against the continuing influence of the Germanic Arian tribes, and helped lead to the eventual conversion of all of them to orthodox, catholic Christianity. Second, the example of him being anointed as king by church officials set an example that later kings followed. This strengthened the ties between these new leaders and the old church. Third, by uniting the people and setting up a dynasty, Clovis is often considered the founder of France. Finally, the Christian Frankish kingdom survived for centuries and eventually was led by Charlemagne, who was declared the Holy Roman Emperor - the first recognized Emperor in the West since 476.
 - 2.1. Clovis's conversion to Catholic Christianity was significant for future European history. Since the Vandals, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and most of the Burgundians were Arian, it was possible that Arianism would take over the West as the empire broke down. Moreover, alone of the Germanic kingdoms, the Frankish kingdom (under the Merovingian dynasty) survived, perhaps in part because Clovis early embraced the same faith as the majority of his subjects. - Ferguson, location 5664
 - 2.2. The anointing of Clovis after his baptism became a custom among the Franks at the appointment of kings. The resulting aura of sacred Christian kingship gave a justification for the Frankish control of the church. Clovis's character, however, remained little changed by his acceptance of Christianity. - Ferguson, location 5677
3. During this time the church in the Frankish kingdom began to hold synods. The first of these met in Orleans in 511. The union of the Church of the West with the people of what we now know as France was beginning and would be a strong force for centuries to come. It also meant the subjugation of the church to the emperors for the time being, as bishoprics became as much political as ecclesiastical positions.
 - 3.1. Under powerful kings such as Clovis, ecclesiastical leaders seemed to be content to support and obey the ruler. Soon it became customary for kings to decide who should occupy a vacant bishopric. This was understandable, since extensive holdings of land went with the office of bishop, and therefore a bishop was also a great lord. - Gonzales, location 4733
 - 3.2. The resulting aura of sacred Christian kingship gave a justification for the Frankish control of the church. - Ferguson, location 5677
4. It should be noted that although Clovis did convert, and with him many of his people, his conversion did not produce a marked change in character.
 - 4.1. Clovis's character, however, remained little changed by his acceptance of Christianity. - Gonzales, location 4733

2. The Aftermath of the Barbarian Invasions

- 2.1. This brief overview shows the rapid and constant pace of change over the two centuries running from around 400-600 AD. This period saw the complete collapse of the empire in the West, and a significant shrinkage of both land and power in the East through most of this time.
- 2.2. However, during the reign of Justinian (527-565) the Eastern Empire experienced a revival of power and regained much of the territory it had lost before. In particular, it retook Northern Africa, ending the reign of the Vandals, and Italy, ending the reign of the Ostrogoths. The effect of this was a temporary reunification of the Eastern empire with significant parts of what had formerly been the Western Empire.
- 2.3. However, the East simply could not hold these gains for long, and the Lombard tribe began to make incursions into much of Italy during the late 6th century. The Empire would never be reunited between East and West.
- 2.4. Thus, by around 600, the former Empire was mainly divided among several new Empires. The Byzantine empire continued to rule a large territory in Eastern Europe, Turkey, and a small strip in the Middle East, and the North African Coast. It also still held power in small pieces of Italy, which was mainly ruled by the Lombards. Spain was being ruled by the Visigoths (except for a small piece near the coast which was ruled by the Byzantine Empire). And France and much of Germany were ruled by the Franks. This can be seen in the following map:



- 2.5. However, this situation was to be short lived, for at this very moment, a new menace was rising that would shape the situation in much of this area until the present day - the rise of Islam.

3. Lessons From This Era

- 3.1. This era shows the great effect that events in the broader culture have upon the church. As we saw earlier in our studies, the fate of the church rose and fell with those governing the regions in which the church was found.

- 3.2. This era continues to show how often the church and the government are intertwined with one another. Sometimes this works to bring the rulers and many people to the Christian faith, but it also often works to undermine the purity and mission of the church.
- 3.3. This era continues to show that the more tribes and people came into the church, the more diluted the faith often became. The level on moral change among converts is much lower than that demanded in earlier ages. This is a continual struggle for the church through the ages, and as the church moves into new cultures and tries to make the faith culturally relevant and understandable, but hopefully does not compromise the Gospel and the Kingdom in the process.
- 3.4. However, this era also shows the resilience of the true Christian faith. Most faiths never survive such turbulent times. Few religions held by conquered people have actually ended up conquering the new overlords and replacing their old faith. Yet Christianity has done this time and again. This shows God's faithfulness to His gospel and His people. Even in chaotic times, He is ruling all things for His own ends and for the good of the faith.

Next Class: Major Forces in Christianity After the Fall of Rome: Monasticism, the Papacy, and Christianity in the British Isles.

Date: Saturday, April 23

Reading: Chapter 26 - The New Order