

CHAPTER 8

WHO IS REACHING WHOM?

THE PROBLEM OF THE BARBARIANS

In its declining years the Roman Empire (especially the Western part of the empire) had both internal and external problems. It was being destroyed from within because of immorality, sin, corrupt leaders and worldliness in the church. It was also being threatened by enemies and invaders from without. It was being weakened from within and attacked from without. [Consider our own nation, the United States. What kind of INTERNAL problems do we have? What kind of EXTERNAL threats do we face? Which of these problems are the most serious?]

Those peoples who threatened the Roman Empire from without were called **BARBARIANS** (we will explain this word later). Most of these invaders came down from the north, from areas which today would be part of Germany and the Soviet Union. They did not invade the empire in one massive invasion like a tidal wave. Their entrance into the empire was more like the rising tide which advances and retires and gradually overtakes more and more ground. The Barbarians were not a single people but many different migrating tribes. They were not one organized army but many hordes of wild warriors ruled by different kings. These peoples wanted to move into the Roman Empire, conquer it if necessary, and settle there with their families.

Barbarians in the Bible

The term **BARBARIAN** is found in the New Testament. The word referred to people who spoke a different language (see 1 Cor. 14:11), and thus it came to refer to those who were foreigners. These were people of a different language and culture and usually they lived outside of the Roman Empire. Webster defines "Barbarian" as "originally an alien or foreigner in the ancient world, applied especially to non-Greeks, non-Romans, or non-Christians."

In Acts 28:1-2 the Apostle Paul was shipwrecked and was able to make it safely to the island called Melita. Were there barbarians on this island (Acts 28:2,4)? _____ Were they friendly or hostile (Acts 28:2)? _____ These island natives were

"barbarians" because they spoke a different language and they were not part of the Greek/Roman culture.

In Romans 1:14 Paul wrote, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the _____; both to the wise, and to the _____. " Paul felt that he owed something to all men, including Barbarians. He had an obligation and a duty to all men, including barbarians, and he was willing and eager to perform this duty! "SO, as much as in me is, I am _____ to _____ the _____ to you that are at Rome also" (Romans 1:15). God has good news even for barbarians! The gospel is to be preached to every _____ (Mark 16:15). Salvation is for people of "every _____ and _____ (language) and _____ and _____" (Revelation 5:9). God wants His witnesses to go everywhere, even to the uttermost part of the _____ (Acts 1:8), which is where the barbarians lived! Race or nationality or color of skin or language or culture--all, of these things make no difference. God's salvation is offered freely to all. God wants the Church (true believers) to reach the barbarians with His message of saving grace.

Are you doing anything to get the gospel to all men everywhere? What part do you have in reaching out to others, even to foreigners? What part could you and should you have? What part does your church have in promoting and helping foreign missions?

What happens when a barbarian believes the gospel and receives Christ as Saviour? He becomes saved and part of the body of Christ just like anyone else. In Christ's body "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, _____, Scythian, bond (slave) nor free: but _____ is all and in all" (Colossians 3:11). In Christ there is no language barrier, there is no culture barrier and there is no racial barrier. FAITH in CHRIST is the only entrance requirement.

Colossians 3:11 also mentions the SCYTHIANS. These were an extreme group of barbarians. These were the most uncivilized people you could imagine. They were savage and warlike. According to the historian Herodotus, "They drank the blood of the first enemy killed in battle, and made napkins of the scalps, and drinking bowls of the skulls of the slain. They had the most filthy habits and never washed with water." Josephus, the Jewish historian states: "The Scythians delight in murdering people and are little better than wild beasts." Yes, God had good news even for the Scythians! And even a Scythian, when he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, became a member of Christ's body! Even the worst kind of barbarian could find new life in Christ Jesus! God could even transform a Scythian into a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17)!

Here Come the Barbarians!

In the fourth century, certain German barbarians, known as the GOTHS, began to move and to migrate. Actually the GOTHS were forced to move by another group of barbarians known as the HUNS. The HUNS were wild warriors, fierce horsemen and hideous to look upon. If these people were to suddenly move into your neighborhood you would probably decide to move out as well!

The GOTHS were terrified by the HUNS, and so in 376 A.D. a German tribe known as the Visigoths (West Goths) crossed the lower Danube River. Their dread of the HUNS caused them to move down from the north into the Roman empire. This was the first time that a tribe of barbarians entered the empire.

Soon they were joined by other barbarians who were called the Ostrogoths or East Goths. In 378 A.D. Emperor Valens battled the Goths near the city of Adrianople. This city was located where present day Bulgaria is, not too far from Constantinople, which was the capital of the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. The GOTHS were completely successful in this battle. The Roman army was destroyed and Emperor Valens was killed.

The next emperor, Theodosius, was more successful against the GOTHS and was able to subdue them and bring them under control. From this time on the GOTHS left the eastern part of the Roman empire alone. Instead they tried to invade the western part of the empire, where modern Italy is today. These barbarians slashed their way through the empire. There was much bloodshed. Women, priests and others were insulted and slain. Some churches were destroyed.

In 410 A.D. an important event took place. The GOTHS made a surprise attack against the city of Rome under the leadership of Alaric. For several days and nights the barbarians trooped through this city and plundered it. The palace of the emperor and the homes of the rich were stripped and robbed. This event was very important because for the first time in 800 years Rome was taken by a foreign enemy.

Jerome was a Christian monk and Bible translator who lived far from Rome in the city of Bethlehem. When he heard the news about Rome being plundered by the barbarians he wept and said, "The city which has taken the whole world is itself taken!"

Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall and even the greatest of kingdoms must come to an end. Who is in charge of the rising and the falling of kingdoms (Daniel 4:17,25)?

What is the only kingdom that will never come to an end (Daniel 2:44; Luke 1:31-33)? Rome was a great kingdom and a great empire, but it did not last forever. The conquering city was itself conquered!

Another group of barbarians were known as the VANDALS. After moving through Spain and North Africa they made their way to Rome (by way of the sea). In 455 A.D. these VANDALS attacked Rome and they too plundered it. Today we still use this word "VANDAL" to describe those who willfully or ignorantly damage or destroy property, either public or private. This destruction of property is called VANDALISM. For example, those who throw rocks at school windows or throw paint on school walls are acting in some ways like the barbarians of long ago. The destruction of property is a form of stealing and is condemned by the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:19 and Exodus 20:15). Let's not be "modern vandals."

Attila the Hun

Perhaps the most famous of the barbarians was Attila the Hun. We have already mentioned the HUNS (see above). Attila became king of the HUNS at the early age of 21. He and his people soon became feared all over Europe. The HUNS pillaged (looted) and stole wherever they went and they were fierce fighters.

Attila, according to legend, was short of stature, but he held his large head high and stuck out his broad chest. Instead of adorning himself with gold, silver and precious jewels (which he had plenty of), Attila dressed very simply in animal skins. "He walked with a proud step, darting a haughty glance this way and that as if he felt himself lord of all" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1957, p.661).

Attila the Hun was a great conqueror, overtaking cities wherever he went. He became known as "THE SCOURGE OF GOD." A scourge is a whip or an instrument of punishment. Many believed that God was using Attila as His whip to punish the Romans and other peoples.

Attila was involved in one of history's bloodiest battles which took place at Chalons (modern day France) in 451 AD. It was here that the Romans (under General Aetius), the

Goths (under King Theodoric), the Franks and the Burgundians all joined forces against Attila. The battle waged hot and furious all day long. More than 150,000 men were killed on both sides. The fighting was so fierce that legends say the dead warriors continued the battle in the sky! Finally Attila was driven back.

Later Attila decided to invade the western part of the Roman empire. In the year 452 A.D. he almost took the city of Rome. Pope Leo went with two companions into the hostile Hun camp and was able to persuade Attila not to attack Rome.

Attila would have continued to invade and conquer, but God brought a sudden end to his life. He got married and in the night after his great wedding banquet he died. His body was put into a coffin of gold which was put into a coffin of silver which was put into a coffin of iron. Men were sent to bury Attila (as the legend goes). When they came back they were killed! No one must ever know Attila's burial place!

After Attila's death little was heard of the HUNS again. They never recovered from the loss of their great leader.

The End of the Roman Empire

The Barbarians finally conquered Rome in the year 476 A.D. This is an important date because it marked the beginning of the Middle Ages which would continue for almost 1000 years until the fall of Constantinople in 1453 A.D. It took the barbarians only 100 years – from the crossing of the Danube River in 376 A.D. when the Goths first entered the empire to the fall of Rome in 476 A.D. – to conquer the great kingdom of Rome.

The Empire Fell but Christianity Survived

The Roman empire came to an end but Christianity did not. The Empire fell but the church survived. Many of the barbarians accepted Christianity. For example, when the GOTHS came into the empire, many of them were already professing Christians. Christianity became the RELIGION of the barbarians! How did this happen?

The Church Seeks to Reach the Barbarians

As the barbarians were seeking to reach into the empire, the church was seeking to reach the Barbarians. One of the earliest efforts to reach the barbarians was made by a man named ULFILAS. His great accomplishment was to translate most of the Bible into the Gothic language. He did not translate the books of Samuel and Kings because these books have much to say about battles and Ulfila was afraid that this would not be of help to the GOTHS who were a very **war-loving** people. (Note: No man should be the judge as to which books of the Bible people should read and which books they should not read. All 66 Books of the Bible are important and should be translated and read – see 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Because of the work of Ulfila and others, when the GOTHS came into the kingdom (empire), many of them had already embraced Christianity.

We should remember, however, that embracing Christianity does not mean that people become genuine Christians. **Professing** Christ with the lips does not mean that the person actually **possesses** Christ in the heart. See Titus 1:16. Are these people **professing?** _____ Are they **possessing?** _____ Do you see the same thing in Matthew 7:21-23?

An example of this is found in the life of Clovis, the leader of the Franks. The Franks were another group of barbarians who lived where modern day FRANCE now is. In fact, it is from the FRANKS that we get the name FRANCE. Clovis was supposed to have been converted to Christianity in the year 496 A.D. In an event similar to what happened to Emperor Constantine, Clovis prayed to God for help in the middle of an important battle and vowed that he would become a Christian if he won the battle. After the victory was won Clovis went to the bishop (church leader) and he was baptized along with 3,000 warriors. Do you think these people were really saved? Remember, conversion comes about when people realize that they are lost, hell-bound sinners, not when they recognize that they are victorious warriors.

At first people had accepted Christianity **individually**. But now things were different. When a king became a Christian, his whole tribe would be baptized and they would all call themselves Christians. This does not mean they were born again believers in Christ. Actually they were just **BAPTIZED BARBARIANS!** They were heathen wearing a Christian name.

It is a known fact of history that Clovis and his men lived cruel and wicked lives, even **after** they embraced Christianity. Does this tell you something about the genuineness of their faith? As one person has said, "in embracing Christianity they did not give up a single pagan vice and did not adopt a single Christian virtue." In other words, their lives did not change one bit! What message does God have for those who name the name of Christ (2 Timothy 2:19)?

Other Missionary Efforts

Before the fall of the Western empire, Christian soldiers introduced Christianity into the British Isles (England).

We have all heard of "St. Patrick's Day." Patrick is known as the great "Apostle of Ireland." He was the man who brought Christianity to Ireland. Patrick was probably a true believer in Christ and a man whom God used in a special way. He once wrote, "I am greatly a debtor to God, who has bestowed his grace so largely upon me, that multitudes were born again to God through me. The Irish, who never had the knowledge of God and worshipped only idols and unclean things, have lately become the people of the Lord and are called the Sons of God." Patrick died in 461 AD. In his writings he never mentioned Rome or the Pope and he seemed to recognize the Scriptures as God's holy and authoritative Word. He had a great zeal for the souls of men and he devoted his life to missionary work. He seems to have been one of the outstanding believers of early church history.

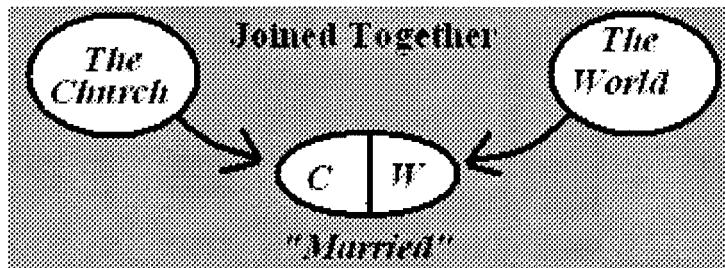
While Patrick was the great missionary to Ireland, a man named Columba was the missionary in Scotland. Columba lived about 100 years after the death of Patrick and he established Christianity in Scotland. Another man, Boniface, did missionary work in Germany. One of the greatest gods worshipped by the Germans was THOR. As the legend goes, Boniface cut down a big oak which was believed to be sacred to that god. The heathen looked on with awe, expecting that Thor, the god of thunder, would strike him down with lightning. When nothing happened to him the heathen gave up their belief in Thor and accepted Christianity. Boniface became known as "the Apostle of Germany."

Who Conquered Whom?

Did the Church conquer the barbarians or did the barbarians conquer the church? Were the pagans Christianized or were the Christians paganized? Actually both of these things took place. The pagans became "Christianized." They called themselves Christians; they were baptized; they took part in Christian rituals and ceremonies, etc. But it is also true that the Christians were paganized. The church became more and more like the world. Also the church opened its doors to more and more people who were not **real** and **genuine** Christians. Not only did the church reach the barbarian hordes, but the barbarian hordes reached the church.

We have already studied how the world entered the church in the days of Constantine

(see **Chapter 6**). The devil's idea was this: "IF YOU CAN'T BEAT THEM, JOIN THEM!" This is exactly what happened. The world and the church joined together. Thousands of heathen rushed into the church without any change of heart. In the days of Constantine the world and the church joined together and got "married."



This CHURCH-WORLD union was not a very healthy marriage. It did not result in a very pure or powerful church. The devil was very pleased that the church had become so worldly! The church had become quite different from what God had intended that it should be.

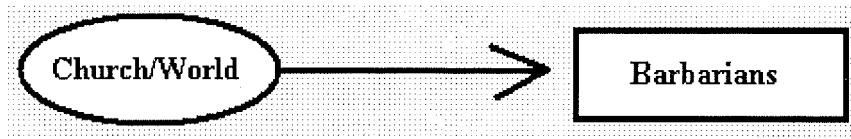
In Matthew 13:31-32 we learn the parable of the MUSTARD TREE. Actually the mustard plant is a herb or a bush; it is not a tree at all (see Genesis 1:11-12 where there is a very clear distinction between herbs and trees). But Jesus says that this mustard plant "becometh a _____" (Matthew 13:32). Luke says it became a G _____ T _____ (Luke 13:19) and Mark says it had G _____ B _____ (Mark 4:32). An actual mustard plant as found in Palestine, may under favorable conditions, reach as high as ten feet (as high as a basketball hoop). At the very most it might reach fifteen feet, but it rarely gets that tall. A fifteen foot tree would not be considered a "GREAT TREE" with "GREAT BRANCHES"!

A mustard bush growing into a huge tree is something unknown in the natural world. This is something ABNORMAL and UNNATURAL and UNUSUAL. This is not natural, healthy growth; this is freakish, perverted growth. This is a GREAT MONSTROSITY. Also as you look closely at this great monster of a tree, you notice creepy-looking, sinister birds peeking out at you (Matthew 13:32). There seems to be something evil about this whole thing.

This is exactly what happened to Christianity. From the days of Constantine and following, Christianity experienced remarkable growth. It became the universal religion of the Roman Empire. It became the accepted religion of the masses of barbarians. BUT IT WAS NOT THE RIGHT KIND OF GROWTH. There grew out of Christianity a monstrous religious system which claimed to be Christian but which actually provided

resting places for the enemies of God who are influenced greatly by Satan. It is not God's church that is flourishing. It is SATAN'S RELIGIOUS SYSTEM that is growing and prospering!

This CHURCH that had married the WORLD was now seeking to reach the barbarians.



What happens when the barbarians embrace Christianity? The barbarians join up with the CHURCH-WORLD, and this makes the CHURCH-WORLD even more worldly! We now have **CHURCH-WORLD-BARBARIAN**! The monstrous mustard seed is branching out more and more. This is certainly a marriage and union that was not made in heaven! Here and there you might still find true born again believers (such as Patrick), but the devil's religious system is becoming bigger and bigger. The barbarians, for the most part, are not really saved; they have just joined themselves to a church that has already left the truth of God's Word (an apostate church, a false religious system). This FALSE CHURCH tried to reach the world in the wrong way, with the wrong method and with the WRONG MESSAGE. SALVATION BY FAITH was rarely preached. THE BIBLE was quickly becoming the unknown book. The CHURCH and the RELIGIOUS SYSTEM was taking the place of CHRIST.

Where did all of this lead? It led to the MIDDLE AGES (also called THE DARK AGES) and to the further development of a great religious system which today is known as the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. Throughout the Middle Ages religious people tried to preserve, protect and promote their religious system in order to survive. ERROR must always promote and protect itself. The TRUTH does not need to do this. God stands behind His truth and believers simply need to LIFT UP THE TRUTH. John 3:16 is true regardless of what anyone does or what anyone says. We do not need to protect John 3:16. We just need to believe it and stand upon it!

In the next chapters we will learn more about this monstrous religious system (the continued growth of the mustard tree).

Are you a true Christian or are you a Christian in name only? Is your faith genuine or is your faith pretend? How do you show (prove) that your faith is genuine and real? Do you adhere to a "CLOVIS CHRISTIANITY" where your life is no different than it was before you were saved, or are you able to claim 2 Corinthians 5:17 as true in your life?

Are things different now for you since you came to Christ? Are you part of the true church or are you part of a false religious system? Are you separate from the world or are you joined up with the world? Let's not just play CHURCH, let's show the world CHRIST!

But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:8-11).