



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**Church History – Part One (100-1500 AD)**  
**Lesson 24 – The Invasions of the “Barbarians”**

**Northern Africa**

Various “barbarian” tribes pushed into the weakened Western Roman Empire and gradually developed independent kingdoms of their own in the region. The Vandals traveled from Germany through France and Spain and settled in northern Africa. The Vandals were Arians. They replaced both the orthodox and the Donatists as the dominant party in Africa. The Byzantine Empire from the East took over control of northern Africa for a time. Eventually, in the seventh century, the whole area was conquered by the Muslims, and Christianity virtually disappeared from the area.

**Spain**

The Visigoths, another barbarian tribe, captured Rome in 410 AD and then moved west to rule Spain. They also were Arians who had been influenced by the missionary Ulfilas (see lesson 21), but the Visigoths were gradually influenced by the Roman Christian culture. When a Visigoth king was converted to Nicene Christianity in the sixth century, many of the people followed his lead, and Arianism disappeared in Spain. One of the Spanish Christians of this time was Isidore of Seville. He collected some of the wisdom of the past and preserved it for future generations.

This was a brutal age, and the Christian leaders trampled on the people by enacting strict laws instead of using the Gospel to encourage people. For example, if a priest disobeyed his bishop and got married, the bishop would remove the man’s wife and sell her as a slave. Jews who converted to Christianity were forbidden to have any relations with Jews, even close members of their own families. In the early eighth century the Muslims (the Moors) invaded Spain, and the struggle between Moors and Christians for the control of Spain continued for many years.

**France**

France was taken over by the Arian Burgundians and the pagan Franks. When a Burgundian king was converted to Nicene orthodoxy, the Burgundians followed his lead. Later, when a Frankish king married a Burgundian princess, he promised to become a Christian himself if the Christian God gave him a victory in battle. He won the battle and the Frankish king and most of his people were baptized and became Christians.

In the early sixth century the Franks defeated the Burgundians and became the rulers of France. But the Muslims from Spain invaded France and threatened to conquer all of

Europe. In the decisive battle of Tours in 732 AD, however, Charles Martel (called “the Hammer”) drove off the Muslims and saved Europe for Christianity. The son of Charles, Pepin the Short, was recognized as the king of France by the pope. Pepin’s son, in turn, was Charlemagne, who became the first emperor of what became known as the Holy Roman Empire.

### **England, Ireland and Scotland**

England had been divided by the Roman emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD) into two areas separated by Hadrian’s Wall. The Christian religion had entered into England in the south, but the people north of the wall remained pagans. When the Romans lost their power in the region, the pagans from the north took over the country and only a few Christians remained.

The neighboring island of Ireland had been Christianized by the famous missionary, Saint Patrick. Many monasteries were founded in Ireland, and these monasteries sent missionaries to Scotland. Among these missionaries was a man named Columba. The Christians in Ireland and Scotland developed their own style of organization, separate from the type of organization controlled by the pope and his bishops.

Pope Gregory the Great sent a missionary named Augustine (not Augustine of Hippo) to work in England with a number of others. They succeeded in converting King Ethelbert to Nicene Christianity, and many of his people followed the lead of their king. Augustine became the first archbishop of Canterbury, head bishop of the English Christians loyal to the pope.

There were conflicts between the Scotch-Irish Christians who were separate from the papacy and the Christians under the papacy. A meeting was held at Whitby in 663 AD to iron out the differences between the two groups. The papal group prevailed because it was felt safest to obey one who was a successor of the apostle Peter. This brought all of England’s Christians under the dominion of the pope.

### **Italy**

In Italy there was conflict also, in this case between the invading Ostrogoths, who were Arians, and the original Romans, who were Nicene Christians. The Nicene Christians in Italy agreed with the Christians of the Eastern Roman Empire, which was centered in Constantinople. The Ostrogoth ruler Theodoric suspected the Nicene Christians of treason and imprisoned some of them, including the scholar Boethius and Pope John (who was pope from 523-526 AD). While he was in prison, Boethius wrote *On the Consolation of Philosophy*.

The powerful Byzantine (Eastern) emperor Justinian sent his army against the Arian Ostrogoths and brought an end to their rule. The Lombards then invaded northern Italy, and for a time Italy was the scene of warfare between the Byzantines and the Lombards. The Byzantines became weaker. To defend themselves against the Lombards, the pope and his

forces allied themselves with the Franks. Eventually Nicene Christianity prevailed, and both Arianism and paganism lost their strength in Italy.

**Questions:**

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1. What are the names of some of the barbarian tribes that invaded Europe?
2. How did it happen that most of these tribes were Arians?
3. Which two groups struggled for many years for the control of Spain?
4. At which famous battle were the Muslims driven back from Europe?
5. Which two groups struggled for the control of France?
6. What was accomplished through the work of missionaries Patrick and Columba?
7. What decision was made at the meeting in Whitby?
8. Which forces struggled for the control of Italy?
9. How was God contending for the truth in this period of church history?