

ATTILA THE HUN

(406?-453)

It was early in the fifth century A.D. The mighty Roman Empire was about to collapse. It was losing control of Gaul. (Gaul was the early name for France.) Germans, called Franks, were moving deeper and deeper into Roman lands. It was only a matter of time before Rome itself would fall—but that was still in the future. For the moment there was a more immediate problem. This problem threatened Franks, Gauls, and Romans alike. What was it that could so affect these three European peoples?

The Scourge of God

The problem was Attila the Hun. This invader from Asia was called "the Scourge of God." Just the thought of Attila and his Huns could terrify people. Wild rumors were spread about the Huns. It was said that their mothers were witches and their fathers were demons. These Asian Huns rode on horseback. They destroyed everything in sight. Their skin was burnt by the sun. The Huns were short but powerfully built. Their roughly-cut hair made these barbarians look even more fearful. There was a favorite saying at this time. "The grass would never grow again where Attila has gone."

Attila the Hun had a special sword. It was believed that he got it as a gift from the god of war. With this sword, Attila could not be defeated. There was no reason to argue the point. Every time Attila went into battle he was successful. In city after city and in country after country, no one could stop the Huns.

Now he headed for Paris. The people of Paris got ready to flee the city. Then, according to legend, they were stopped. A young shepherd girl, named Genevieve, told the people to stay in their homes. She had prayed to God so the city would be saved. The people respected Genevieve. It was thought that she had a special gift of prayer. In any event she was right. Attila changed his mind. He would not attack Paris. He would attack Orléans instead.

Unlike Paris, Orléans was well defended. The people were willing to fight the Huns. The Huns did not disappoint them. They attacked Orléans. The citizens fought bravely, but soon their food supply began to run low. Attila's battering rams were weakening the walls of the city. Help from the outside was now needed. None came at first. Attila was about to deal his finishing blow. Then, suddenly, a cloud of dust was seen on the horizon. It was the rescuing army of Franks, Gauls, and Romans.

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This inspired the people of Orléans to fight harder. Attila was forced to regroup. He circled the supply wagons in his camp. He stirred the Huns with a fiery speech. He knew that he was in for the greatest fight of his life. The next day the battle began. It lasted all day. Only the coming of night stopped it. Then Attila withdrew to his camp. He piled up all his treasures. He told his men that the enemy must not capture either him or his treasures. If he was defeated, his treasures should be set on fire. Then Attila would throw himself into the flames. Under no circumstances would he or his treasures fall into the hands of the enemy!

The next day's fighting was furious. Legend says that the spirit of the dead continued the fight for three days in the clouds. On the ground, however, Attila was defeated. Luckily for him and his treasures, the Europeans did not try to capture him. He was allowed to withdraw to Germany. The battle to save Gaul was over.

The next year, however, Attila was back. This time his goal was Italy. This time he won. City after city fell before the Huns. Then, suddenly, the Scourge of God died. His men were heavy with grief. Regular tears were not good enough for such a great warrior. So the Huns slashed their faces with knives. Now the tears were blood. Attila was buried in an iron casket. The grave was left unmarked. The slaves who dug the grave where killed. No European would ever know where the great Hun was buried.

Attila the Hun was a man whom only the Huns could love. For everyone else his name meant only fear and terror.

COMPREHENSION CHECK

Choose the correct term or name from the following list to complete each sentence below.

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|------------------|-----------|----------------|
| - Attila the Hun | - Gaul | - Roman Empire |
| - Paris | - Orléans | - Geneviève |
| - Huns | - Italy | - Franks |
| - demons | - sword | |

1. The city of Paris was saved by the prayers of _____.
2. After his defeat in Gaul, Attila the Hun attacked _____ the next year.
3. _____ was known as "the Scourge of God."
4. Attila changed his mind and decided not to attack the city of _____.
5. The _____ were short but powerfully built.
6. The Germans were called _____.
7. The special _____ of Attila was thought to be a gift from the god of war.
8. _____ was the early name for France.
9. The city of _____ was saved by a combined army of Franks, Gauls, and Romans.
10. It was believed that the fathers of the Huns were _____.
11. The _____ was about to collapse in the early fifth century A.D.

WORD SEARCH

Find the following words in the puzzle and circle them. The words may go across, up and down, or diagonally. Some words are spelled backwards. Check them off in the list as you find them.

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| _____ scourge | _____ iron casket | _____ Paris |
| _____ Franks | _____ Italy | _____ Attila |
| _____ witches | _____ Genevieve | _____ Hun |
| _____ France | _____ sword | _____ Orléans |
| _____ Gaul | _____ Asia | |

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G A U L F R W A S I A P E I U
C B L S C O U R G E I U V S P
P M N W B K L Y C S X R E V C
L Y M O F R A N K S C Y I R E
M L E R X Z A S D P J L V I O
A A K D I R O N C A S K E T A
O T S Q F O P H U R Y M N W S
N I T D F H G J Y I W V E U K
B V W I T C H E S S H L G I H
Z D J K L K O P D V C N T Y P
L O R L E A N S X W Q T E Z X
  
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