

IV.1.b  
Beyond the  
Empire

Politics Beyond the Empire

We can say but little of the barbarian territories. To the west were the Goths, Vandals and Franks. To the north were the Franks and Vandals. To the east were the Ostrogoths (and northeast) while the far east had the Persians and the Indian peoples. To the south were the Vandals (again!) and Normans. Rome had as little to do with these groups as possible but the release of captured slaves, etc., did something to put some Gospel testimony among these groups. The church did not forego its mission side but the barbarian wildernesses were formidable and not inviting. The culture of Rome and Greece slowly made inroads in the barbarian nations and by 500 many of them would be announcing themselves to be Christian. But it was slow work.

Much of this mission work was accomplished under the strong efforts of Ulfilus, an Arian missionary although we are not sure of his full theological orientation. Under his service a number of the Goths, Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths became Christians. They continued as militarists however and it seems their conversion did not do much to pacify them. But it did give them a different attitude towards Rome and the Christian settlements.

Incidentally..if you are partial to such things...there is a series of "comics" issued in Europe known as "Astericks"...accounts of the difficulty Rome had with one particular group of Goths. Humorous if you like that sort of thing. If you don't forget that I mentioned it.

Persia, to the east, had been a longtime foe of Rome and many a Roman army had come to grief there. But the church in Persia had the distinction of not being organically connected to the Mediterranean churches and was as independent of the empire as was the Persian government. Persian pressure in Asia Minor held the Romans in check in many areas. But note that the Persians were not barbarians...they could read and write and had a civilization quite old.

In short the Roman government was failing within as a result of inept administrative policies and failing without as it could not cope with the resurgence of barbarian forces at its door.