

# Attila the Hun



**BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK**

**ATTILA THE HUN: THE "SCOURGE OF GOD"**  
(LIVED CIRCA 400-453 C.E.; REIGNED 434-453 C.E.)

The Goths were considered by the Romans to be "improvable barbarians." But the Huns whom Attila led to ravage the fair peninsula were, to the people of ancient Rome, mere Tartar savages of the lowest stamp.

All the other invaders of Italy were of Teutonic (Germanic) origin. But the Huns were Mongols from Asia—of such perfect hideousness to European sensibilities of the time that Jornandes regarded them as the offspring of witches and demons. Attila, son of Mundzuk, "the scourge of God," resembled his soldiers in his flat, tan features, deep-set, fierce, rolling black eyes, and short figure. Historically, Westerners viewed the Huns as uncivilizable savages, who might harry a continent, but neither under Attila, nor Genghis, nor Tamerlane, could ever found a centrally organized kingdom.

1. Why did the Romans scorn the Huns more than other barbarians, such as the Goths?

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This terrific and brutal little Kalmuck, with his bead-like eyes, this skin-clad devourer of raw flesh, delighted to lay waste whole empires with fire and sword, and to terrify the world. In 434, Attila became king of the Huns with his brother Bleda. In 445, Bleda died, possibly by murder. In 445, Attila, now sole king of the Huns, invaded the Eastern Roman Empire, and ravaged it even to the gates of Constantinople. He was only bought off from destroying it by an enormous tribute.

2. Who was Attila's brother and co-ruler?
- a. Bleda
  - b. Genghis
  - c. Mundzuk
  - d. Tamerlane

The infamous plot to assassinate him by the treachery of Edecon, who was one of his counselors, was discovered and foiled, and Attila sent message after message filled with insults to Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Emperor Theodosius II.

In 451, Attila's vast army moved westward, and devastated Gaul. It was met in the Mauriac plain and

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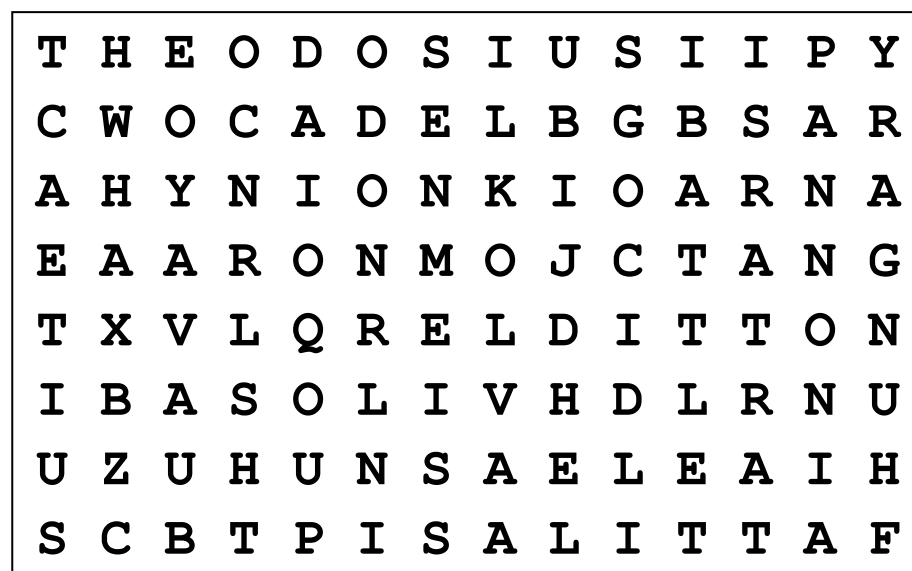
defeated by Ætius in the tremendous battle of Chalons, after a carnage among the most frightful that the world has ever seen.

3. Who defeated Attila at the Battle of Chalons (451)?

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### Word Search Puzzle



### Terms

Aetius	Huns
Attila	Ildico
battle	Leo I
Bleda	Pannonia
Chalons	Tartars
Honorius	Theodosius II
Hungary	Venice

The Huns were only saved from final destruction by the heroic boldness of Attila. He had a vast hill of

saddles and other spoils erected, and declared his determination to burn himself alive rather than be taken

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captive. He led back his shattered host to Pannonia, and there in his wooden palace meditated revenge. In the one authentic glimpse which we get of his mode of life, we see him at a banquet, while his nobles and warriors caroused and burst into peals of laughter at the buffooneries of an idiot and a jester. But the Hunnish king sat grave and silent, caressing the cheeks of the boy Ernak, his favorite son, whom the augur pointed out as the heir of his destinies.

4. How did Attila save himself and his remaining troops?

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In 452, Attila once more put his myriads in motion and invaded Italy. Everywhere, the land was as the garden of Eden before him; behind him it was a desolate wilderness. Encouraged by the omen of some storks leaving their nest, he stormed and destroyed Aquileia. Razing city after city into heaps of blackened ruins, he advanced to Milan, boasting that "where his horses' hoofs trod, the grass never grew."

5. Why do you suppose that Attila used a scorched earth strategy (destroying anything that his enemies might find useful) when fighting the Romans?

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Rome awaited with trembling a fate which seemed to threaten unprecedented catastrophe. But in this awful crisis the Pope, Leo I, showed himself the true *Defensor civitatis*. Leo I headed a splendid embassy to the camp of Attila. Already Leo had helped to trace with firm hand the deep lines of Christian orthodoxy which were accepted by the Church at the fourth great Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E. Now Leo showed what miracle could be achieved by the irresistible might of weakness.

6. Devise an English translation for the Latin term *Defensor civitatis*.

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Attila's god was a naked iron sword of gigantic size, which had been accidentally found by a herdsman and presented to him, but which Attila palmed off on his nation as the authentic sword of the Scythian war-god. Yet he was easily overawed by the majesty of religion. Attila scorned the guilty, corrupt courtiers of Constantinople, but he almost trembled before a holy man. Already, in 451, he had spared the defenseless city of Troyes at the entreaty of its bishop, St. Lupus, and had asked the benefit of his prayers. And when he gazed on the calm countenance, noble presence, and dauntless demeanor of Pope Leo, an awful dread fell upon him. Alaric had conquered Rome, but Alaric had died immediately afterward. How if it would be so with Attila? He yielded, he retired; he said—or perhaps he said—that he could conquer men, but that the wolf (Lupus) and the lion (Leo) had learnt how to conquer him.

7. Why was Attila in awe of Pope Leo I?

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The tide of brutal and barbarous invasion was rolled back again, and the world and the city saw that while

the Emperor Valentinian had been ready to fly, the Pope Leo was not afraid to advance, and that "when the successor of Cæsar had been proved useless, the successor of St. Peter had been a very present help." Indirectly Attila was the strengthener of the Papacy, and the founder of Venice. That stately and gorgeous city owes its origin to the Italians who fled in terror before the brutal Huns from ruined Padua to the islands and lagoons at the mouth of the Piave.

8. How was Attila indirectly responsible for the founding of Venice, Italy?

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In retiring, Attila had demanded once more the hand and dower of Honoria, the disgraced sister of Theodosius II, who had offered herself to Attila in order to avoid a forced marriage. But in 453, Attila added a beautiful maiden, Ildico, to his innumerable wives. Attila retired from the marriage banquet after a deep carouse, and in the morning was found dead amid a flood of gore by which he had been suffocated, while Ildico sat weeping beneath her veil by the dead king's bedside. Attila died as a fool dieth. His warriors gashed their

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cheeks and wept tears of blood, and gave him a splendid burial. And his name passed into legend as the King Etzel of the Niebelungen Lied, and Alti of the Saga.

Heruli reasserted their independence in the great victory of Netad in Pannonia in 454. And though the Huns left their name in Hungary, henceforth the empire of Attila became mere "driftwood, on its way to inevitable oblivion."

9. How did Attila die?

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10. The term "loutish sons" refers to whom?

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But Attila's "loutish sons" quarreled among themselves. The Teutons, Goths, Gepidæ, Alani, and

11. Imagine that you are Attila. Select and describe events and decisions from Attila's life that you would have handled or decided differently.

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## Attila the Hun

**Vocabulary Terms:** Match each term to its definition. Terms can be found in the text on Attila the Hun.

12. \_\_\_\_ a sudden, widespread disaster
13. \_\_\_\_ amusing jokes, tricks, odd gestures and postures, etc.
14. \_\_\_\_ appearance, especially a facial expression
15. \_\_\_\_ behavior, conduct, and deportment
16. \_\_\_\_ belief or practice of an approved form of a doctrine or ideology
17. \_\_\_\_ butchery or massacre
18. \_\_\_\_ capacities for feelings or sensations
19. \_\_\_\_ certain and necessary
20. \_\_\_\_ countless
21. \_\_\_\_ dazzling and gorgeous
22. \_\_\_\_ from this point forward
23. \_\_\_\_ having a very bad reputation
24. \_\_\_\_ not capable of being resisted
25. \_\_\_\_ prophet or soothsayer
26. \_\_\_\_ to annoy or harass

### Terms

- A. augur
- B. buffooneries
- C. carnage
- D. catastrophe
- E. countenance
- F. demeanor
- G. harry
- H. henceforth
- I. inevitable
- J. infamous
- K. innumerable
- L. irresistible
- M. orthodoxy
- N. sensibilities
- O. splendid

## Attila the Hun

**Artistic Expression:** Illustrate a scene from the life of Attila the Hun.

