

CHARLEMAGNE

(742-814)

His name was Charles. Because he achieved a great deal during his reign as the king of the Franks, he became known as Charles the Great, or Charlemagne. Charlemagne was a man of boundless energy and strength. He had to be. Charlemagne could hold his kingdom together only if he was strong. To be a success as a king, he had to be a success as a general. So during his forty-six-year reign, he fought many long wars. These wars had two main goals. One was to extend his lands. The other was to extend Christianity.

The Wars of Charlemagne

When Charles became king, Europe was in the middle of the Dark Ages. The Roman Empire had been gone for centuries. Wild barbarians still roamed parts of Europe. Trade and education had almost ended. Population was declining. People were often afraid to leave their homes. It seemed that the best hope for Europe was to convert the barbarians to Christianity. Then, perhaps, law and order would return.

The Saxons were the last great tribe of barbarians. They were a main obstacle to progress. They lived next to Charlemagne's kingdom on the east side of the Rhine River. The Saxons came from Germany. The Franks did also. The Saxons and the Franks hated each other. The Franks were now Christians and lived in cities. The Saxons were still pagans and lived in the forests. The Saxons laughed at the Franks. They could not understand why the Franks gave up their god Thor for Christ. On the other hand, the Franks looked down at the Saxons as savages.

For thirty years, Charlemagne tried to defeat the Saxons. It was not easy. The Saxons were fierce warriors. They once cut down a Roman army "like grass." The Saxons even set up a column to glorify their victory. But Charlemagne was determined to defeat the Saxons. Finally, he reached their stronghold. He smashed their column. He also destroyed an altar on which the Saxons offered human sacrifices. The Saxons were forced to yield.

Charlemagne was a missionary as well as a soldier, so the church followed in the wake of the army. Priests were sent into Saxon lands. Churches were built. The Saxons were expected to convert, but they did not. Instead they killed the priests and burned the churches.

Charlemagne took full revenge. He put thousands of Saxons to death. He scattered the remaining Saxons throughout his kingdom. He then made these Saxons an offer they couldn't refuse. "You can be baptized or you can be put to death." Church membership grew rapidly among the Saxons. They were the last barbarians to accept the Christian religion.

The Pope was pleased with Charlemagne's success. Europe could now be united under the Christian banner. The Pope had another reason to thank Charlemagne, too. The Lombards kept attacking the Pope in Rome. The Pope asked Charlemagne for help. Charlemagne crossed the Alps and drove the Lombards away. Three more times the Pope would ask Charlemagne for help. Finally, the Lombards were defeated. The year was 800 A.D.

It was on this last visit that the Pope surprised Charlemagne. On Christmas Eve Charlemagne went to Mass. The Pope himself was conducting the service. Then, without warning, the Pope placed a crown on Charlemagne's head. The crowd let out a shout. "To Charles Augustus, crowned of God, great and peaceful Emperor of the Romans, life and victory." Charles was no longer just the king of the Franks. He was now the emperor of the new Holy Roman Empire.

The crowning of Charlemagne was a turning point for Europe. It linked the emperor with the Church. It also separated the western half of Europe from the eastern half. This split would affect Europe for many centuries.

Match each term or name in the left-hand column with its description in the right-hand column. Write the letter of the description in the blank. The first one has been done for you.

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|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. <u> </u> Charlemagne | A. ancient god of the Saxons |
| 2. <u> </u> Saxons | B. tribe from Germany who were Christians |
| 3. <u> </u> Dark Ages | C. also known as Charles the Great |
| 4. <u> </u> Christianity | D. city where Charlemagne was crowned emperor |
| 5. <u> </u> Rhine | E. group that kept attacking the Pope |
| 6. <u> </u> Thor | F. period in European history during which Charlemagne ruled |
| 7. <u> </u> Pope | G. finally crushed by Charlemagne after thirty years |
| 8. <u> </u> Alps | H. Charlemagne was the emperor of this. |
| 9. <u> </u> Lombards | I. crowned Charlemagne on Christmas Eve |
| 10. <u> </u> Holy Roman Empire | J. river separating Franks and Saxons |
| 11. <u> </u> Franks | K. the religion of Charlemagne |
| 12. <u> </u> Rome | L. mountains on the Italian border |

WORD SCRAMBLE

Unscramble the following names and words. Each appears in the story on Charlemagne. The circled letters, when unscrambled, will spell the name of a great king.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. KSRAF ⁹ N	—	—	—	○	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
				10							
2. XSSNOA	—	—	○	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
			3								
3. IITAYNRHCS	○	—	—	—	—	—	○	—	—	—	—
	1						8				
4. MAYNREG	○	○	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	9	6									
5. ROHT	—	—	○	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
			2								
6. DBLOSAMR	○	—	—	—	—	○	—	—	—	—	—
	5					4					
7. HSSMIATRC	—	—	—	—	—	○	—	—	—	—	—
						7					
8. EPPO	—	—	—	○	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
				11							