

# CHARLEMAGNE

## How great was he?

**Charlemagne** was born on April 2, 742 in Northern Europe. Charles was the eldest son of Pippin III and Bertrada of Laon. "By the sword and the cross," Charlemagne became master of Western Europe.

In 768, when Charlemagne was 26, he and his younger brother Carloman inherited the kingdom of the Franks. In 771, Carloman died, and Charlemagne became sole ruler of the kingdom. At that time the Franks were falling back into barbarian ways, neglecting their education and religion. The Saxons of northern Europe were still pagans. In the south, the Roman Catholic church was asserting its power to recover land confiscated by the Lombard kingdom of Italy. Europe was in turmoil.

Charlemagne was determined to strengthen his realm and to bring order to Europe. In 772 he launched a 30-year military campaign to accomplish this objective. By 800 Charlemagne was the undisputed ruler of Western Europe. His vast realm encompassed what are now France, Switzerland, Belgium, and The Netherlands. It included half of present-day Italy and Germany, and parts of Austria and Spain. By establishing a central government over Western Europe, Charlemagne restored much of the unity of the old Roman Empire and paved the way for the development of modern Europe. His kingdom was called the Carolingian Empire.

On Christmas Day in 800, while Charlemagne knelt in prayer in Saint Peter's in Rome, Pope Leo III placed a golden crown on the bowed head of the king. Charlemagne is said to have been surprised by the coronation, declaring that he would not have come into the church had he known the pope's plan. However, some historians say the pope would not have dared to act without Charlemagne's knowledge.

Charlemagne learned to read Latin and some Greek but apparently did not master writing. At meals, instead of having jesters perform, he listened to visiting scholars read from learned works. Charlemagne believed that government should be for the benefit of the governed. He was a reformer who tried to improve his subject's lives. He set up money standards to encourage commerce and urged better farming methods. His economic policy brought much of Europe together.

As is often the case when people are considered great by historians, they are great killers as well. Throughout his conquests, Charlemagne was responsible for the death of masses of people who refused to accept Christianity, or their new king. Choosing to keep faith with their old gods and leaders, many thousands were slaughtered.

At Charlemagne's death in 814 only one of his three sons, Louis, was living. Louis's weak rule brought on the rise of civil wars and revolts. After his death his three quarreling sons split the empire between them by the Partition of Verdun in 843. This was the custom of Frankish kings and led to the end of the Carolingian Empire.

War	
Government Structure	
Social Structure	
Migration and Geography	
Trade, Economic, and Technology	
Religion and Culture	