CHARLES the Great, or “Charlemagne,” was King of the Franks, King of Italy, and the first Holy Roman Emperor. This Frankish ruler has earned praise for reuniting most of Western Europe during the early Medieval years and, with a burst of cultural and educational activity, for bringing Europe a welcome reprieve from the Dark Ages.

**Carolingian Empire after the treaties of Verdun and Meersen**

### Reading and Assignments

In this unit, students will:

- Complete three lessons in which they will learn about **Charles Martel**, **Pepin the Short**, and **Charlemagne**, journaling and answering discussion questions as they read.
- Define vocabulary words.
- Explore the following websites to learn more about Charlemagne and his life:
  - [http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/medieval/history/earlymiddle/charlemagne.htm](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/medieval/history/earlymiddle/charlemagne.htm)
  - [http://www.mrdowling.com/703-charlemagne.html](http://www.mrdowling.com/703-charlemagne.html)
- Visit [www.ArtiosHCS.com](http://www.ArtiosHCS.com) for additional resources.
Leading Ideas

An individual’s character will be reflected in his leadership.

*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.*
— Proverbs 23:7 (KJV)

There is power in the spoken word to do evil or to do good.

*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*
— Matthew 12:34

The rise and fall of nations and leaders is determined by God.

*The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*
— Proverbs 21:1

God’s Word is the supreme source of God’s revelation to man.

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*
— 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Vocabulary

Lesson 1: indolent
Lesson 2: overpower
Lesson 3: opinion

Key People, Places, and Events

Pepin of Herstal
Charles Martel
Pepin the Younger
Battle of Tours
Charlemagne
Wittekind
Lombards
Roland
Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi
Treaty of Verdun

Double-headed eagle with coats of arms of individual states, symbol of the Holy Roman Empire
“Holy Father, who ought to be the king of France — the man who has the title, or the man who has the power and does all the duties of king?’

‘Certainly,’ replied the Pope, ‘the man who has the power and does the duties.’

‘Then, surely,’ said they, ‘Pepin ought to be the king of the Franks; for he has all the power.’”

—John Henry Haaren
Medieval to Renaissance: Middle School
Unit 6: The Carolingian Kings

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: Charles Martel and Pepin the Short / The Defeat of the Saracens, the Rise of the Carolingians, the Donation of Pepin.
- Narrate about today’s reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define each vocabulary word in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Create a timeline for this unit and put the key people and events for Lessons One and Two on your timeline.
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Vocabulary
indolent
usurp

Key People, Places, and Events
Pepin of Herstal
Charles Martel
Pepin the Younger
Battle of Tours

Discussion Questions
1. Why was there a group of kings known as the “do-nothings”?
2. What did the character of these “do-nothing” kings allow within their rule?
3. What was Pepin of Herstal’s job?
4. Describe how Pepin the Younger became king.
5. Explain how the relationship between the Church and the King changed during Pepin’s reign.
6. Explain how the Papal States were founded. Who was the biggest beneficiary of the agreement between Pepin the Younger and the papacy?

Adapted for Middle School from the book:

Famous Men of the Middle Ages
by John Henry Haaren

Charles Martel and Pepin the Short
and from the book:

The Story of Europe
by Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall

The Defeat of the Saracens, the Rise of the Carolingians, the Donation of Pepin

After the death of Mohammed, his followers, who became known as Saracens, became great warriors. They conquered many countries and established the Muslim religion in them. In 711 A.D. the Saracens invaded and conquered a great part of Spain.
and founded a powerful kingdom there, which lasted about seven hundred years.

They intended to head north and conquer the land of the Franks next, and then all Europe.

They thought it would be easy to conquer the Franks, because the Frankish king at that time was one of a number of kings who were called the “do-nothings.”

The kingdom of the Franks was the only one of the Teutonic kingdoms built upon the ruins of the Roman Empire which was to endure. But for many years after the reign of Clovis, its history was one of turmoil and bloodshed. It was divided and redivided more than once. After a time the Merovingian kings lost their vigor due to drunkenness and immoral living. They became mere figureheads and are known as the rois fainéants or “do nothing” kings.

Surrounded by luxury and pomp, they sat in their palaces, indolently dreaming the time away, while all the business of state drifted more and more into the hands of the “mayors of the palace.”

The mayors of the palace were officers who at first managed the King’s household. Afterward they were made guardians of kings who came to the throne when very young. So long as the King was underage, the mayor of the palace acted as chief officer of the government in his name. And as several of the young kings, even when they were old enough to rule, gave less attention to business than to pleasure, the mayors continued to conduct all the business, until at last they did everything that the King ought to have done. They made war, led armies in battle, raised money and spent it, and carried on the government as they pleased, without consulting the King.

The “do-nothings” had the title of king, but nothing more. In fact, they did not desire to have any business. The things they cared for were dogs, horses, and sport.

**Pepin of Herstal**

One of the most famous of these mayors of the palace was a man named Pepin of Herstal. Once a year, it is said, Pepin had the King dressed in his finest clothes and paraded through the city of Paris, where the court was held. A splendid throng of nobles and courtiers accompanied the King and did him honor as he went along the streets in a gilded chariot drawn by a long line of beautiful horses. The King was cheered by the people, and he acknowledged their greetings most graciously.

After the parade the King was escorted to the great hall of the palace, which was filled with nobles. Seated on a magnificent throne, he saluted the assemblage and made a short speech. The speech was prepared beforehand by Pepin and committed to memory by the King. At the close of the ceremony the royal “do-nothing” retired to his country house and was not heard of again for a year.

**Charles Martel**

Pepin of Herstal died in 714 A.D., and his son Charles, who was twenty-five years old at that time, succeeded him as mayor of the palace. He had fought in many of his father’s battles and so had become a skilled soldier. His men were devoted to him.

While he was mayor of the palace he led armies in several wars against the enemies of the Franks. His most important war was against the Saracens, who finally came across the Pyrenees from Spain and invaded the land of the Franks, intending to establish the Muslim religion there.
On their march through the southern districts of the land of the Franks, the Saracens destroyed many towns and villages, killed a number of the people, and seized all the property they could carry off. They plundered the city of Bordeaux, and, it is said, obtained so many valuable things that every soldier “was loaded with golden vases and cups and emeralds and other precious stones.”

But meanwhile Charles was not idle. As quickly as he could he got together a great army of Franks and Germans and marched against the Saracens. The two armies met between the cities of Tours and Poitiers in October, 732.

Here the fair Teutons of the North, steel clad, heavily armed, and somewhat slow of movement, met the dark-faced, agile men of Asia. For six days there was nothing but an occasional skirmish between small parties from both sides; but on the seventh day a great battle took place.

Mounted upon Arab coursers, the Saracens again and again dashed uphill against the solid wall of the well-trained Teutons. Again and again they were broken and scattered like waves upon a rocky coast. Yet, undismayed, they returned to the attack, and above the din of clashing steel there rose the shout, “Allah, Allah Akbar!”

Both Christians and Muslims fought with terrible earnestness. The fight went on all day, and the field was covered with the bodies of the slain. But toward evening, during a resolute charge made by the Franks while Frankish scouts made a ruckus among the Saracen baggage train, the Saracen leader was killed, and the Saracens gradually retired to their camp.

It was not yet known, however, which side had won; and the Franks expected that the fight would be renewed in the morning.

But when Charles, with his Christian warriors, appeared on the field at sunrise there was no enemy to fight. The Muslims had fled in the silence and darkness of the night and had left behind them all their valuable spoils. There was now no doubt which side had won.

The Battle of Tours, or Poitiers, as many think it should be called, is regarded as one of the decisive battles of the world. It decided that Christians, and not Muslims, would be the ruling power in Europe.

Charles is especially celebrated as the hero of this battle. It is said that the name “Martel” was given to him because of his bravery during the fight. Marteau is the French word for hammer, and one of the old French historians says that as a hammer breaks and crushes iron and steel, so
Charles broke and crushed the power of his enemies in the Battle of Tours.

But though the Saracens fled from the battlefield of Tours, they did not leave the land of the Franks, and the Franks had to fight other battles with them before they were finally defeated. At last, however, they drove them back across the Pyrenees, and they never again attempted to invade Frankland.

After his defeat of the Saracens, Charles Martel was looked upon as the great champion of Christianity, and the Pope, now Gregory III, implored him to give aid against the Lombards, who had invaded Italy. But Charles was friendly with the Lombard king, Luitprand, and had no wish to fight against him. So, although he received the Pope’s messenger with all honor and loaded him with gifts, he sent him back to Rome without any promise of help. Again the following year Gregory sent to Charles, adjuring him by the true and living God not to prefer the friendship of the Lombards to that of the prince of the Apostles. But again Charles failed to give the answer which the Pope craved, and soon afterward he died.

**Pepin “the Short”**

Charles had been King of the Franks in all but name, and now his son Pepin the Younger, sometimes called Pepin “the Short,” made up his mind to be king in name as well as in fact. So he sent messengers to the Pope, now Zachary, to ask whether he who remained in his palace free from all peril, or he who bore the cares and dangers of the kingdom on his shoulders, should have the title of king.

Already it would seem as if the Pope was regarded as a lawgiver to princes, and Zachary replied as Pepin had desired he should. “By the authority of the Apostle Peter,” he bade the Franks acknowledge for their king he who worked and wielded the royal power. So the last Merovingian king was shorn of his flowing locks, the sign of his sovereignty, and sent to end his days in a convent, and Pepin the Younger became the first “Carolingian” King of the Franks (the name “Carolingian” is derived from Charles Martel).

The accession of Pepin was not merely the beginning of a new dynasty. It was the beginning of new claims both for king and priest; it was an exalting both of Church and state. Formerly when the Franks had chosen a chief, standing upon his shield he was raised shoulder high by his warriors, who
acclaimed him king and ruler. Now with solemn ceremony, surrounded by bishops and priests, Pepin was led to the great church at Soissons. There, kneeling upon the steps of the altar, he was crowned and anointed by Boniface, the Apostle of the Germans. He was the chosen now of God and of the Church, and kingship took on a new and holy character.

**Pepin, King by the Grace of God**

Here we have the beginning of “kings by the Grace of God,” and of that “divine right” which in days to come was to bring in its train such grievous woes and cause such desperate struggles between kings and peoples.

The Pope already looked upon Pepin’s crown as the gift from the Church. And gifts from the Church were not given without expectation of return. So very soon Pepin was called upon to show his gratitude. For the year after his coronation a new Lombard king and a new pope ruled in Italy, and, disregarding the peace which had been made by King Luitprand, King Aistulph renewed the attacks on Rome and on Ravenna. The Pope, Stephen II, then sent piteous appeals for help to Pepin, and as he did not yield to them immediately, he resolved to make an appeal in person.

Midwinter although it was, he hastened across the Alps, braving “frost and snow, many waters and rushing torrents,” as he himself writes. But in spite of hardships and dangers he reached France in safety, and followed by his priests he went at once to greet the King. Clad in a coarse woolen robe, and with ashes sprinkled on his head, he bowed himself before Pepin, imploring his help. Nor would he rise until his prayer was granted.

Pepin promised the aid for which the Pope begged, and in return the Pope once more crowned Pepin, and anointed both his queen and her children. Then, under pain of excommunication, he forbade the Franks ever to choose a king save from this family “thus consecrated upon the intercession of the holy Apostles by the hands of their vicar the Sovereign Pontiff.”

The new coronation over, the Pope gave to Pepin and his sons the title of “Patrician of Rome.” It was a title created by Constantine the Great, and could be conferred only by an emperor, so in giving it to Pepin and his sons Pope Stephen usurped the authority of the Emperor. But as the faraway Emperor showed himself more and more incapable of protecting Rome, and more and more indifferent to its fate, both pope and people had begun to forget that they owed any allegiance to him, and this usurpation was only one among many signs that Italy was no longer truly a part of the empire.

Shortly after his second coronation Pepin set out to redeem his promise to Stephen. In two campaigns he conquered the Lombards king, Aistulph, and forced him to give up Ravenna and the other parts of Italy which he had lately seized.

**The Donation of Pepin**

Italy, and especially Ravenna, were still in theory part of the empire. But Pepin considered that these provinces were now his by right of conquest, and that he could do with them as he pleased. And so much did he think this that he caused a deed of gift to be written out, bestowing the conquered lands not upon the Emperor but upon St. Peter and his successors, the sovereign pontiffs, for all time.
The Pope well understood the value of the gift. With solemn ceremony the keys of the conquered cities, together with the deed of gift, were laid upon the tomb of St. Peter in Rome. Then they were locked up by the Pope among his most precious treasures.

This presentation of lands to the Pope is called the Donation of Pepin. By it the Papal States were founded, and the Pope, from being little more than a priestly farmer, became a ruling prince and took his place among the sovereigns of Europe.

Thus king and pope helped to make each other great. But there seems little question that the Pope was the greater gainer. The King had only received the Church’s sanction to hold the kingdom which he, in fact, already had; the Pope had gained possession of a kingdom which without Pepin’s aid he could never have hoped to win. Yet in the long run by thus entering the ranks of European rulers, the Church was to decline as a spiritual institution and power to do good.
CHARLEMAGNE helped to lift Europe out of the Dark Ages by creating schools, art galleries, and monasteries. In this lesson we will learn about the rise of Charlemagne and his greatest accomplishments.

Charlemagne Receiving the Submission of Widukind at Paderborn in 785, by Ary Scheffer

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: Charlemagne: King From 768-814 A.D.
- Narrate about today’s reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define each vocabulary word in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Add key people and events to your timeline.
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.
Vocabulary
overpower
opinion

Key People, Places, and Events
Charlemagne
Wittekind
Lombards
Roland
Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi
Treaty of Verdun

Discussion Questions
1. Narrate and describe the wartime accomplishments of Charlemagne.
2. Describe how Charlemagne was crowned ruler.
3. List and describe other accomplishments of the ruler Charlemagne. (Be sure to include areas of law/justice, education, and foreign relations.)

Adapted for Middle School from the book:
Famous Men of the Middle Ages
by John Henry Haaren
Charlemagne: King From 768 - 814 A.D.

Pepin the Younger had two sons, Charles and Carloman. After the death of their father they ruled together, but a few years later Carloman died, and then Charles became sole king.

This Charles became the most famous of the kings of the Franks. He did so many great and wonderful things that he is called “Charlemagne,” which means “Charles the Great.”

He was a great soldier. For thirty years he carried on a war against the Saxons. Finally he conquered them, and their great chief, Wittekind (or Widukind), submitted to him. The Saxons were a people of Germany who then lived near the land of the Franks. They spoke the same language and were of the same race as the Franks, but had not been civilized by contact with the Romans.

They were still pagans, just as the Franks had been before Clovis became a Christian. They even offered human sacrifices.

After Charlemagne conquered them, he made their lands part of his kingdom. A great number of them, among whom was Wittekind, then became Christians and were baptized; and soon they had churches and schools in many parts of their country.

Charlemagne also defeated the Avars, a pagan Asian wandering people group similar to the Huns, after they invaded territory near the Danube River.

Another of Charlemagne’s wars was against the Lombards.

Pepin the Younger, as you have read, had defeated the Lombards and given to the Pope part of the country held by them. The Lombard king now invaded the Pope’s lands and threatened Rome itself; so the Pope sent to Charlemagne for help.

Charlemagne marched quickly across the Alps and attacked the Lombards. He drove them out of the Pope’s lands and took possession of their country.

After he had conquered the Lombards he carried on war, in 778, in Spain. A large portion of Spain was then held by the
Spanish Saracens, called Moors, who now sought to cross the Pyrenees and invade the rest of Europe. Charlemagne drove them back and then set out on his return to his own country.

On the march his army was divided into two parts. The main body was led by Charlemagne himself. The rear guard was commanded by a famous warrior named Roland. While marching through the narrow pass of Roncesvalles, among the Pyrenees, Roland’s division was attacked by a tribe called the Basques, who lived on the mountain slopes of the neighboring region.

High cliffs walled in the pass on either side. From the tops of these cliffs the Basques hurled down rocks and trunks of trees upon the Franks, and crushed many of them to death. Besides this, the wild mountaineers descended into the pass and attacked them with weapons. Roland fought bravely; but at last he was overpowered, and he and all his men were killed.

Roland had a friend and companion named Oliver, who was as brave as himself. Many stories and songs have been written telling of the wonderful adventures they were said to have had, and of their wonderful deeds in war.

The work of Charlemagne in Spain was quickly undone; for Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi, the leader of the Muslims who had come from Damascus, soon conquered almost all the territory south of the Pyrenees.

For more than forty years Charlemagne was King of the Franks; but a still greater dignity was to come to him. In the year 800 some of the people in Rome rebelled against the Pope, and Charlemagne went with an army to put down the rebellion. He entered the city with great pomp and soon conquered the rebels. On Christmas Day he went to the Church of St. Peter, and as he knelt before the altar the Pope placed a crown upon his head, saying:

“Long live Charles Augustus, Emperor of the Romans.”

The people who were assembled in the church shouted the same words; and so Charlemagne was now Emperor of the Western Roman Empire, as well as King of the Franks (the emperors of Constantinople still called themselves Roman Emperors, and still claimed Italy, Germany and France as parts of their empire, though really their authority had not been respected in these countries for more than 300 years.).

Charlemagne built a splendid palace at Aix-la-Chapelle, a town in Germany, where perhaps he was born.

Charlemagne was a tall man, with long, flowing beard, and of noble appearance. He dressed in very simple style; but when he went into battle he wore armor, as was the custom for kings and nobles, and often for ordinary soldiers in his day.

Armor was made of leather or iron, or both together. There was a helmet of iron for the head, and a breastplate to cover the chest, or a coat of mail to cover the body. The coat of mail was made of small iron or steel rings linked together, or fastened on to a leather shirt. Coverings for the legs and feet were often attached to the coat.

The “Carolingian Renaissance”

Charlemagne was a great king in many other ways besides the fighting of battles. He did much for the good of his people. He made many excellent laws and appointed judges to see that the laws were carried out. He established schools and placed good teachers in charge of them. He had a school
in his palace for his own children, and he employed as their teacher a very learned Englishman named Alcuin.

In those times few people could read or write. There were not many schools anywhere, and in most places there were none at all. Even the kings had little education. Indeed, few of them could write their own names, and most of them did not care about sending their children to school. They did not think that reading or writing was of much use; but thought that it was far better for boys to learn to be good soldiers, and for girls to learn to spin and weave.

Charlemagne had a very different opinion. He was fond of learning; and whenever he heard of a learned man living in any foreign country, he tried to get him to come and live in Frankland.

The fame of Charlemagne as a great warrior and a wise emperor spread all over the world. Many kings sent messengers to him to ask his friendship and bring him presents. Harun al-Rashid, the famous caliph who lived at Bagdad in Asia, sent him an elephant and a clock which struck the hours.

The Franks were much astonished at the sight of the elephant; for they had never seen one before. They also wondered much at the clock. In those days there were in Europe no clocks such as we have; but water clocks and hour glasses were used in some places. The water clock was a vessel into which water was allowed to trickle. It contained a float which pointed to a scale of hours at the side of the vessel. The float gradually rose as the water trickled in.

The hour glasses measured time by the falling of fine sand from the top to the bottom of a glass vessel made with a narrow neck in the middle for the sand to go through. They were like the little glasses called egg-timers, which are used for measuring the time for boiling eggs.

Charlemagne died in 814. He was buried in the church which he had built at Aix-la-Chapelle. His body was placed in the tomb, seated upon a grand chair, dressed in royal robes, with a crown on the head, a sword at the side, and a Bible in the hands.

This famous emperor is known in history as Charlemagne, which is the French word for the German name Karl der Grosse (Charles the Great), the name by which he was called at his own court during his life. The German name would really be a better name for him; for he was a German, and German was the language that he spoke. The common name of his favorite residence, Aix-la-Chapelle, also is French, but he knew the place as Aachen.

Although Charlemagne is noted for many praiseworthy accomplishments, he was also guilty at times of great cruelty. History notes that at one time he had more than four thousand Saxon prisoners beheaded after a revolt, prompting more rebellion. His personal life was sinful as
well; he married, divorced, and remarried many times.

The great empire which Charlemagne built up held together only during the life of his son. Then it was divided among his three grandsons. According to the Treaty of Verdun in 843, Louis took the eastern part, Lothaire took the central part, with the title of emperor, and Charles took the western part.

**Lesson Three**

**History Overview and Assignments**

**On Your Own**

*Equestrian statue of Charlemagne, by Agostino Cornacchini — St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican*

**Reading and Assignments**

- To further explore Charlemagne and his life, visit the following websites and find some additional information to add to your notebook pages on Charlemagne:
  - [http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/medieval/history/earlymiddle/charlemagne.htm](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/medieval/history/earlymiddle/charlemagne.htm)
  - [http://www.mrdowling.com/703-charlemagne.html](http://www.mrdowling.com/703-charlemagne.html)
- Be sure to visit [www.ArtiosHCS.com](http://www.ArtiosHCS.com) for additional resources.