CHARLEMAGNE AND THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

After the fall of the Roman Empire in Western Europe, Charlemagne built an empire that extended more than 800 miles from east to west. Though he ruled in an era many scholars describe as a “Dark Age,” Charlemagne made the capital of his vast kingdom a center of learning.

Charlemagne was a Frank. The Franks were a Germanic tribe that developed in present day France. He was part of the Carolingian Dynasty begun by his father, Pepin the Short, and named for his grandfather, Charles Martel. A giant of a man, Charlemagne was six feet, four inches tall in an era when most men were little more than five feet tall.

Charlemagne inherited his predecessors’ talent for war. For many years after assuming the throne in 768, Charlemagne led his army on military campaigns throughout Western Europe, expanding the Frankish kingdom as he vanquished his foes. During his reign, Charlemagne doubled the size of Frankish territory to include present day France, northern Spain, Germany, and Italy.

Charlemagne sought to unite all of the Germanic tribes into a single kingdom that was modeled after the Romans. The Frankish kingdom eventually included people of diverse cultures who spoke many languages, so Charlemagne appointed native members of the lands he conquered to administer the provinces in his name.

Charlemagne provided funds that allowed monks to copy the works of Greek and Roman authors. Couriers traveled throughout Europe to collect ancient manuscripts. Although Charlemagne was only barely able to read, he set up schools throughout his empire, and invited scholars from throughout Europe to establish a palace school in Aachen, the German city where he moved his capital.

In 800, Charlemagne traveled to Rome to celebrate Christmas with Pope Leo III. As Charlemagne rose from prayer, Leo placed a crown on Charlemagne’s head and proclaimed him "Augustus," emperor of the "Holy Roman Empire." The coronation united Christendom under Charlemagne’s rule, but it also troubled the newly crowned emperor. For if the Pope had the power to proclaim Charlemagne as King, the Pope might also have the right to remove his power.

Charlemagne crowned his son, Louis, King of Aquitaine in 813. Charlemagne presided over the ceremony himself and did not invite the Pope. Many years later, as Napoleon was about to be crowned Emperor of France in 1804, he took the crown from Pope Pius VII and set it on his head himself.

Charlemagne’s empire crumbled soon after his death and the promise of returning the glory of Rome to Western Europe soon faded. The term Holy Roman Empire described various Frankish and German lands for another ten centuries, but the empire never again attained Charlemagne’s promise of uniting Christendom into one kingdom.

Francis II, who ruled until the early nineteenth century, was the last monarch to call himself the Holy Roman Emperor. But after a defeat by Napoleon’s army, Francis renounced his title and decreed himself emperor of Austria.

* A higher-order learning question. Any reasonable answer will be accepted.
©2015 Mike Dowling, www.mrdowling.com, All rights reserved.
Fill in the Blanks

Charlemagne was the greatest ruler of a *F__a__k__sh kingdom that emerged in W__s__e__n Europe after the fall of the R__m__n Empire. By his death in 814, Charlemagne *d__u__l__d the size of the kingdom he inherit ed from his father, P__p__n the S__o__t.

C__a__l__g__e’s army captured land in present-day S__a__, Germany, and I__a__y, so his empire included people of different c__l__u__es who spoke many l__n__u__g__s. Charlemagne administered his *d__v__r__e empire with help from a__m__n__s__r__rs he appointed from the lands he c__n__u__r__d.

Charlemagne made his empire a center of l__a__n__g in an era many scholars consider a “Dark Age,” despite being barely *l__t__r__te himself. He provided funding that allowed m__n__s to c____ the works of G__e__k and R__m__n authors.

Pope Leo cr__w__ed Charlemagne H______ R__m__n E__p__r__ in 800, a title that concerned the Frankish ruler. Charlemagne wanted his *s__bj__cts to believe he ruled on his on authority, and not by *p__r__i__s__on from the ruler of the *c__u__ch. Thirteen years later, C__a__l__g__e did not i__v__te the P______ as he c__o__n__d his s_____ the King of Aquitaine.

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. Why was Charlemagne known as a Carolingian ruler?

2. What modern nations were part of Charlemagne’s empire?

3. Why was Charlemagne hesitant about being crowned Holy Roman Emperor?

4. What happened to the Holy Roman Empire after Charlemagne’s death?