

# Charles Martel

c. 688–741



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** Charles Martel became mayor of the palace in northern Gaul. He reunited the Frankish Kingdom and helped convert Germany to Christianity. He won an important victory at the Battle of Tours.



*As you read the biography below, think about the determination Charles Martel needed to rise from being a prisoner to the powerful person he became.*



Charles Martel was also known as Charles the Hammer because of his military feats. He was the **illegitimate son** of Pepin II, the **mayor of the palace** in the eastern part of the Frankish realm. The Frankish realm covered what is now France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and southwestern Germany.

When Charles's father died the only legitimate heirs were three infant grandsons. Plectrude, Pepin's widow, was to govern until her grandsons became old enough to rule. She put Charles in prison but he escaped. After several brilliant military campaigns, Charles became powerful enough to overthrow Plectrude and become mayor of the palace in 719.

Charles waged military campaigns against other Frankish rulers and nearby territories. His conquests spread the Frankish rule and united the kingdom. Charles led armies in stopping the Spanish Muslim invasions of Frankish territories. He defeated Muslims at the Battle of Tours, which is also called the Battle of Poitiers. This ended the Muslims' attempts to spread into France. For this feat, Charles was given the name Martel, which means hammer.

## VOCABULARY

**illegitimate son** child born of unmarried parents

**mayor of the palace** person who ruled in the name of the king

**Charles Martel, *continued***

## Biography

Charles also played an important role in spreading Christianity throughout Germany. He sponsored the work of Saint Boniface, a leading missionary who succeeded in converting Germany to Christianity.

Charles never became king in spite of all his power. Before he retired Martel divided the Frankish lands between his two sons, Pepin and Carloman. One son, Pepin the Short, eventually became king. Martel's grandson was Charlemagne, who became Charles the Great, king of the Franks and emperor of the Carolingian Empire.

Charles died in 741 from illness, not long after his retirement.

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

- 1. Explain** Who was Charles Martel? What did he accomplish?

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- 2. Summarize** How did Charles Martel become the mayor of the palace after his father died?

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**ACTIVITY**

- 3.** Imagine that you need to interview Charles Martel for the newspaper *The Palace Times*. What are some questions you could ask him about his accomplishments? Write a short article based on your interview.