



Sample – TruthQuest History: Middle Ages

Enjoy this sample! How does it work? *Easily! Naturally!* Just as you discuss life with your kids as an innate part of parenting, simply gather on the couch and together read aloud the commentary which begins each lesson. It won't ask kids to “passively” accept a worldview “download.” Rather, the commentary's subtle hints at biblical principles will have them “actively” hunting for truth—little by little, lesson by lesson. By the end of each guide, the lightbulb will be full-on! The kids will, surely, absorb countless brain-facts; but more importantly, they'll develop spiritual eyes to seek God's powerful truths at work in history. This will show convincing proof that He is, and always has been, real and right! They will no longer think (as we were taught) of “history” as merely human names and dates (utterly devoid of culture-healing power), but will instead relish the engaging, eternal, worthwhile, inspiring, life-changing, unforgettable heart-story of God and mankind!

After the commentary has been read and discussed, each child is ready to dig into the historical event/personage being studied by enjoying a great book for their age level (from our lists here, or whatever resources are at your library). Thanks to your “priming” time in the commentary, they can probe almost any book and find surpassing lessons. Alternatively, you may wish to read aloud a single book for all to enjoy. Too, Dad can launch a great historical-fiction read-aloud at evening time—the older book gems are especially thrilling adventures—for everyone's enjoyment and his participation in the kids' learning/thinking/believing. (*Starred books were in-print at time of writing. But, usually, the older the book, the better.)

Some lessons include a (strategically-placed) *ThinkWrite* exercise, deepening their spiritual insights through writing. Most lessons, though, have the kids simply talk, read, and think, which requires time, peace, and relationship. Because “out of the heart the mouth speaks,” you'll also hear their learning bubble up in conversation, play, etc. Hands-on activity resources are cited at many junctures. Feel free to use them, or not, as desired. You may also enjoy the companion notebooks/lapbooks/timelines created for *TruthQuest History* by AJTL, but all are optional. Walking and talking together, reading God's Word: this is how Jesus taught to the disciples the most important truths of all times, and enabled them to turn the world upside down. That is good enough for us! He created families as the place for teaching the young, and He authored the ultimate Book. So, family discussions and riveting reading are the heart of the matter!

16. Roll Out the Red Carpet for a “Star” of the “Dark” Ages: Charlemagne

Pepin, as you know, had become king, so his son did likewise (768). Now, this son happens to be one of the most famous men of history! He was named *Charles* for his grandfather (Charles Martel), but you probably know him by his French name—*Charlemagne*—wherein the French words for “Charles the Great” became one unified name—a unique honor!¹

1 Asimov 142.

Don't think this guy is famous? Well, how do you answer when asked for your height? Four feet? Five feet? Six feet? Whose foot do you think was the standard for that measurement? Yup. Charlemagne's! Or, so it is said.²

Charlemagne, a human thunderbolt, made quick work of the Lombards (with whom Pepin had tangled). He was now king of the Franks *and* Lombards, and the papacy was again free of the Lombard threat. A friendship sprang up between the pope and Charlemagne, although there were also subtle power struggles between them, especially relating to the title of Roman Emperor, as you'll see. Nonetheless, a certain curtain had come down:

*All were gone now of those tribes that had ripped the Western [Roman] Empire apart since the time of Alaric. Gone were the Visigoths, the Vandals, the Sueves, the Alemanni, the Ostrogoths, the Lombards. All had vanished from the pages of history—all but the Franks. They alone had survived.*³

The Franks weren't just surviving, though! Under Charlemagne, they were thriving! They decided to "thrive some more" by annexing the lands held by fellow (German) barbarians further to the east: the Bavarians, Thuringians, Frisians, and Saxons. (You geography buffs will recognize these names as sections of modern Germany!) Of course, the Franks no longer considered themselves as barbarians compared to the tribes still in huts shaded by dark German forests. St. Boniface had found success in Christianizing the first three tribes we mentioned. They quickly adopted Frankish customs. This made the remaining tribe—the doggedly pagan Saxons who sometimes offered human sacrifices⁴—resist Christianity even more. To them it meant accepting not only a new religion, but a new king and culture as well, an idea which they detested. (You can see, even this early, what happens when potential converts tie cultural specifics with the supra-cultural gospel.) Charlemagne's response? To convert them at swordpoint. We can thus wonder what understanding of God's truth Charlemagne really had, what his Big 2 Beliefs were at the deepest level, his famed devoutness notwithstanding. But we must also remember that Christianity was relatively new to these areas, so contrary barbarian thinking was still in place.

Because they had shared enemies, Charlemagne developed a friendship with the caliph of Baghdad, Haroun al-Rashid. Haroun (which means *Aaron*) ruled the huge Islamic Empire when in its Abbasid dynasty (remember that we dealt with Islam earlier in this guide) and he was the idealized subject of the famous Arabian Nights tales.⁵ You may have heard stories of the gifts exchanged between Haroun and Charlemagne, including an elephant, which astounded the Franks!

Before we close our discussion of Charlemagne, we must address one more topic. He was aware that Frankland was more backward than its neighbors—Spain, England, Italy, and Byzantium⁶—but think of what the earlier Franks had been! Remember, the earlier Teutonic men had done nothing much but make war and play dice! Productivity and learning had *not* been one of their hallmarks. Even the new Franks were not interested in reading or writing; it was done only by priests (our word *clerk* comes from *cleric* for this

2 Miller and Guerber 97; Asimov 141.

3 Asimov 145.

4 Miller and Guerber 91-92.

5 Asimov 153.

6 Asimov 164.

very reason)⁷ who were usually from the original Roman families of the area. Conquering the Romans had made the Franks (foolishly) believe that the sword is mightier than the pen.⁸ Charlemagne, however, pushed himself to learn and sent away for a top-notch scholar since there was no local talent; Alcuin of York (a British gentleman) took the job.⁹ Together, Charlemagne and Alcuin built a school which would admit boys—even of ignoble birth—who showed promise!¹⁰

Charlemagne was well known for his support of the church, and he encouraged priests to become better educated by providing improved monastic schools.¹¹ He also worked at organizing his lands and providing better laws. In fact, he sent out inspectors, established town markets, and set uniform weights and measures. These changes helped his people work more cooperatively and efficiently.¹² Altogether, his impact—called the *Carolingian Renaissance*—(*Carolingian* is Latin for *Charlemagne*) was the brightest light in the “Dark” Ages of the Franks, and that was no small accomplishment! Even centuries after his death, Charlemagne was fodder for dramatic medieval songs (*chansons-de-geste*), even if they were, admittedly, sometimes more romantic than accurate.

ThinkWrite 5:
“Charlemagne—how great was he?”

What kind of man was Charlemagne? What about the contradictions in his life? What was the significance of the pope crowning him and his Roman title? What was his impact on history?

Well, let’s meet the guy! (Please do *ThinkWrite 5* after you’ve studied Charlemagne.)

16a Charlemagne

- **Story of the World: Volume 2*, by Susan Wise Bauer, Ch. 13b Gr. 3-6
Some families enjoy this book's scope so asked us to cite it; others do not care for the worldview; parental decision.
- *Greenleaf’s *Famous Men of the Middle Ages*, Ch. X Gr. 3-7
- **Story of the Middle Ages*, by Miller and Guerber, Ch. XXXVII-XXXIX Gr. 4-8
- **Middle Ages*, by Dorothy Mills, Ch. V, Pt. 4 Gr. 6-12
- Dark Ages*, by Isaac Asimov, Ch. 7 and pp. 172-175 Gr. 8-12
Asimov is a well-known humanist, but his history books are surprisingly valuable as vivid narratives filled with unique insights. Do filter through the Biblical worldview.

7 Asimov 165.

8 Asimov 164.

9 For more information on Alcuin, see: *Heroes and Saints*, by R.J. Unstead, Ch. 7, Gr. 3-9.

10 Jennifer Westwood, *Stories of Charlemagne* (New York: S.G. Phillips, 1972) 9.

11 Mills 77.

12 Miller and Guerber 96.

- **Child's History of the World*, by V.M. Hillyer, Ch. 45 Gr. 1-4
- **Birthdays of Freedom: Vol. 2*, by Genevieve Foster, pp. 15-16 Gr. 2-5
- Book of Heroes*, by Dorothy Heiderstadt, pp. 29-37 Gr. 3-6
- **Middle Ages: Cultural Atlas for Young People*, by Mike Corbishley, pp. 20-21 Gr. 3-8
Most students should know more about Charlemagne than is covered in this book.
- Fire Upon the Earth*, by Norman Langford, pp. 76f-79 Gr. 4-8
Church history during Charlemagne's reign. (Ignore last chapter of book.)
- **Son of Charlemagne*, by Barbara Willard Gr. 4-10
Charlemagne's life through the eyes of his son. This book is in the format of a novel, but is so historical and so interesting that I'm going to list it here, where there is less chance of anyone missing it.
- **Charlemagne and the Early Middle Ages*, by Miriam Greenblatt Gr. 5-12
I've not seen this book. An online reviewer said the final section includes letters, poems, and spells, so be warned about that.
- **Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History*, by Richard Hannula, Ch. 10 Gr. 5-12
- Importance of Charlemagne*, by Timothy Biel Gr. 6-12
Online reviewers claimed this book was interesting. It was recently in print.
- **World in the Time of Charlemagne*, by Fiona Macdonald Gr. 6-12
- Charlemagne*, by Manuel Komroff (Messner) Gr. 7-12
- **Stories of Charlemagne*, by Jennifer Westwood Gr. 7-12
These tales (in reprint) are based on the *chansons-de-geste* ("songs of deeds") of the 110s and 1200s which reflect the ideas of that age about Charlemagne, etc., and became beloved, romantic tales related by traveling medieval singers.
- **Charlemagne*, by Susan Banfield (World Leaders Past and Present) Gr. 8-12
One reviewer said this book is poorly written and hard to follow.
- Charlemagne: Monarch of the Middle Ages*, by M. Stearns (Immortals of History) Gr. 9-12
- **Holy Roman Empire and Charlemagne in World History*, by Jeff Sypeck Gr. 10-12
- **Life of Charlemagne*, by Einhard Gr. 11-12
This biography was written by Charlemagne's own secretary! A long-time classic.

Fiction/Historical Fiction

- Marvellous Blue Mouse*, by Christopher Manson Gr. 1-4
I hope you can find this don't-miss book for the younger set. What did one of Charlemagne's inspectors find?
- Two Travelers*, by Christopher Manson Gr. 1-4
Another don't-miss book from Manson. It is probably still at many public libraries, and is based loosely on the true story of a servant delivering to Charlemagne a gift elephant from Haroun al-Rashid.
- Emperor's Arrow*, by Burke Boyce Gr. 1-6
Legend of a boy who helps Charlemagne. This looks really good.
- Baghdad Mission*, by Sidney Rosen Gr. 3-9
Boy taken to Baghdad tries to return to Charlemagne. Rosen's books are usually very interesting, especially to boys; I've not read this one.
- Little Dusty Foot*, by Marian Magoon Gr. 4-10
Boy fleeing from Saxon raids travels far with a caravan. This book is hard to find.
- Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers of France*, by Alfred J. Church Gr. 5-10
These tales are based on the later-written *chansons-de-geste* ("songs of deeds") which reflect the ideas of their age (1100s and 1200s) on Charlemagne and current events...and became the beloved, romantic ballads of traveling medieval singers. This book is a rare antique, but I mention it anyway since some folks don't want to miss children's books by Mr. Church.
- For Charlemagne!*, by F. Emerson Andrews Gr. 5-10
Story of a young student and soldier.
- **Magic Runes: A Tale of the Times of Charlemagne*, by Emma Leslie Gr. 6-12
I'm not familiar with this, but it has been strongly recommended that we include this Christian book. The girl protagonist meets a Saxon family captured by Charlemagne.

Want to read more about Alcuin?

**What Really Happened During the Middle Ages*, Ch. 3, by Terri Johnson Gr. 4-8

16b Roland, Charlemagne's Knight

Roland—probably a real knight and governor under Charlemagne—was immortalized in one of the later tales (*chansons-de-geste*) written about the battles of Charlemagne. In the story, he bravely gives his life in a battle with the Moors/Saracens at Roncesvalles. Charlemagne really did fight a battle there, and

was attacked from the rear, but that attack came from the Christian Basques who wanted to maintain their independence! However, the Crusades were raging at the time of the song's actual writing so a Saracen enemy was deemed more suitable.¹³ Some consider the story of Roland to be "the greatest poem of the early Middle Ages."¹⁴ Furthermore, "the ideals of [medieval] chivalry which developed later owed their beginnings to Charlemagne, for whatever may have been some of his deeds, he handed down traditions of both knighthood and kingship..."¹⁵

<i>The Song of Roland</i> , by Eleanor Clark (Legacy)	Gr. 2-8
<i>The Horn of Roland</i> , by Jay Williams	Gr. 3-10
<i>The Ivory Horn</i> , by Ian Serraillier	Gr. 5-12
* <i>The Story of Roland</i> , by James Baldwin Classic version with gorgeous illustrations.	Gr. 6-12
<i>The Song of Roland</i> , by Robert and Marguerite Goldston	Gr. 9-12
* <i>Song of Roland</i> , by Dorothy Sayers Sayers was a highly esteemed author, educator, and medieval expert.	Gr. 9-12

16c Haroun al-Rashid, Caliph

We dealt with Islam earlier in this guide, so please remember the issues that we discussed there.

*Greenleaf's <i>Famous Men of the Middle Ages</i> , Ch. XI -----	Gr. 3-7
* <i>Child's History of the World</i> , by V.M. Hillyer, Ch. 45	Gr. 1-4
* <i>Birthdays of Freedom: Vol. 2</i> , by Genevieve Foster, p. 14b	Gr. 2-5

Fiction/Historical Fiction

<i>Two Travelers</i> , by Christopher Manson I hope you can find this don't-miss book, based on true story of a servant bringing Charlemagne a gift elephant from Haroun al-Rashid. (Also listed earlier.)	Gr. 1-4
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The **Arabian Nights* tales were collected during Haroun's reign. If you'd like to read some, there are many versions for various ages. Do be *very* careful of the content of some tales!

13 Westwood 13.

14 Mills 68.

15 Mills 68.

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