The Aztecs Control Central Mexico

Key Terms and People

**obsidian** hard, volcanic glass used by early peoples to make sharp weapons

**Quetzalcoatl** Toltec god

**Triple Alliance** association of city-states that led to the formation of the Aztec Empire

**Montezuma I** ruler of the Aztec Empire from 1440 to 1469 who is known for building up Tenochtitlán

**Montezuma II** ruler under whom the Aztec Empire weakened

Before You Read

In the last lesson, you read about Maya civilization.

In this lesson, you will read about societies that arose in central Mexico, including the Aztecs.

As You Read

Use a chart to note reasons for the establishment and growth of the Aztec Empire.

THE VALLEY OF MEXICO

*What civilizations arose in the Valley of Mexico?*

The Valley of Mexico is more than a mile above sea level. It is a good place for people to settle because it has lakes and fertile soil. An early city-state called Teotihuacán (“City of the Gods”) arose in this area in the first century AD. The city had between 150,000 and 200,000 people at its peak in the sixth century.

The city was the center of a major trade network. The most important trade item was **obsidian**. This green or black volcanic glass was used to make sharp weapons. The huge Pyramid of the Sun, which measured some 200 feet high and 3,000 feet around its base, dominated the city. By 750, Teotihuacán was abandoned. The reasons why are not clear.

The next people to dominate the area were the Toltecs. They rose to power around 900 and ruled over central Mexico for about 300 years. The Toltecs were warlike and worshiped a warlike god.

One Toltec king, Topiltzin, tried to replace the warlike god with a different one and change Toltec ways. This god was called **Quetzalcoatl**, the Feathered Serpent. Followers of the warlike god rebelled and chased Topiltzin away. The Toltecs became warlike again. Over time, Topiltzin and Quetzalcoatl became one in Toltec legends. In these legends,
someday Quetzalcoatl would return and bring a new reign of peace. This legend lived on in central Mexico for centuries.

1. What was Teotihuacán?

2. How was Aztec society organized?

REVELATION RULES AZTEC LIFE
What role did religion play in Aztec life?

Religion played a major role in Aztec society. Temples were built in cities for the many different gods. Priests led religious rituals. The most important rituals were for the sun god. Priests made the sacrifice of human blood to make sure that the sun god was happy, and the sun would rise every day. People taken captive in war were sacrificed. The need for a steady supply of victims pushed the Aztecs to fight their neighbors.

3. Why and how did the Aztecs sacrifice to the sun god?

PROBLEMS IN THE AZTEC EMPIRE
What weakened the Aztec Empire?

Montezuma II became emperor in 1502. The Aztec Empire began to have problems during his reign. The Aztecs ordered the other peoples they had conquered to hand over even more people to sacrifice. These other peoples finally rebelled against the Aztecs. In the midst of this conflict, the Spanish arrived and made contact with the Aztecs for the first time. Some saw their arrival as the legendary return of Quetzalcoatl.

4. Why did conquered peoples rebel against the Aztecs?
Lesson 6, continued

As you read this lesson, note one or more reasons why the Aztecs took each of the following actions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. The Aztecs first worked for local rulers as soldiers-for-hire.</th>
<th>2. The Aztecs joined two other city-states to form a Triple Alliance.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. In Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, the Aztecs built hundreds of temples and religious structures dedicated to the gods.</td>
<td>4. Aztec engineers built three causeways over water and marshland.</td>
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<td>5. Aztec priests sacrificed humans atop the Great Temple.</td>
<td>6. The Aztecs built a calendar in the main ceremonial plaza of Tenochtitlán.</td>
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<td>7. Some of the conquered provinces rebelled against Aztec rule.</td>
<td>8. Montezuma II reduced the number of public officials.</td>
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