

## Cortes Lands on the Aztecs' Shore

The Aztecs had a difficult year in 1519. Their crops had failed. Their priests were arguing, and they saw strange signs in the sky. At the time, the Aztecs were being led by Montezuma II. Montezuma was usually a firm leader, but he was shaken by visions that a major disaster was about to happen to his people.

According to legend, the Aztecs believed that a fair-skinned, bearded god named Quetzalcoatl said he would help them if they needed him. Due to their problems with crops, the strange signs they were seeing, and the bickering between the priests, the Aztecs felt that they were sorely in need of Quetzalcoatl's help.

In 1519, Hernando Cortes, a Spanish explorer, arrived on the Aztecs' shore. After Montezuma's soldiers saw Cortes, Montezuma sent gifts of clothing, food, and jewelry to Cortes. The Aztecs believed that Cortes was Quetzalcoatl, and that he was finally there to help them in their time of need.

The Aztecs has many enemies. Their enemies convinced Cortes to pretend that he was in fact Quetzalcoatl, so that they could trick Montezuma and the Aztec people.

The Aztecs had never encountered Spaniards before, so they did not know anything about the Spanish people, their abilities, or their culture. When the Spanish first arrived, the Aztecs described the Spanish ships as moving islands. They compared Spanish horses to unearthly monsters or gigantic deer. The Aztecs were unaware of any civilization so different from their own. This is one of the reasons that the Aztec people were so easily tricked into believing that Cortes was actually one of their gods.

Cortes had sailed to Mexico in the hopes of finding gold and also converting the New World to Christianity. Many of the men that sailed with Cortes were afraid of the New World. In fact, in order to prevent his men from turning back, Cortes burned their ships once they landed.

Cortes spoke with several of the Aztecs' enemies in order to plot the downfall of the Aztecs. One of the chiefs of an enemy tribe was so eager to see the Aztecs fall that he gave Cortes a young slave girl named Malinche. Malinche spoke several different languages, and she was able to quickly learn Spanish. She became a spy for Cortes and also acted as his translator.

When Cortes arrived in Mexico, he only had 600 men. After a short time, Cortes and his men were led into Tenochtitlan. Since Montezuma fully believed that Cortes was Quetzalcoatl and was there to help his people, Cortes and his men were permitted to enter the heart of the city. Once there, Cortes and his men, who were armed with guns, armor, and horses, took Montezuma hostage.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Cortes Lands on the Aztecs' Shore (Cont'd)**

There was a brief time where it looked like the Aztecs and the Spaniards could avoid a bloody battle. The Spaniards were going to replace the Aztec priests and rulers. The problem was that the Spaniards also wanted the Aztecs to convert to Christianity. The Aztecs feared their gods would abandon them if they embraced Christianity.

Meanwhile, the enemies of the Aztecs were pressurizing Cortes because they wanted revenge against the Aztecs. The Spaniards were anxious to get more gold, and tension was growing. Eventually, the Spaniards fired upon a group of Aztecs that were unarmed. The Aztecs fought back fiercely and killed roughly three-quarters of the Spanish troops. Cortes managed to escape.

Though many Spanish lives were lost during their first encounter with the Aztecs and Cortes only escaped by chance, Cortes came back to Tenochtitlan again. This time, he brought new troops. The Spaniards surrounded the Aztecs' city and cut off their water supply. The Aztecs fought for 80 days, but many of them died. Eventually, too many of the Aztecs died in battle or from disease.

By August of 1521, the Aztec civilization was gone.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Cortes Lands on the Aztecs' Shore Questions

### Multiple Choice:

1. This man was the leader of the Aztecs in 1519:
  - a. Hernando Cortes
  - b. Montezuma II
  - c. Malinche
  - d. Cervantes
  
2. This person acted as a spy and translator for Cortes:
  - a. Malinche
  - b. Montezuma II
  - c. Pocahontas
  - d. Quetzalcoatl
  
3. The Aztecs believed in a god by this name:
  - a. Tenochtitlan
  - b. Montezuma
  - c. Quetzalcoatl
  - d. Malinche

### True or False:

- \_\_\_ 4. When Cortes arrived in Mexico, he only had 600 men.
- \_\_\_ 5. The Spanish embraced the religion of the Aztecs.
- \_\_\_ 6. By August of 1521, the Aztec civilization was gone.

### Fill Ins:

7. Cortes had sailed to Mexico in the hopes of finding \_\_\_\_\_.
  
8. The Spaniards surrounded the Aztecs' city and cut off their \_\_\_\_\_ supply.
  
9. When the Spanish first arrived, the Aztecs described the Spanish ships as moving \_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Cortes Lands on the Aztecs' Shore Answers

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