

Genghis Khan (1162-1227)

His name alone could terrify people. For centuries, the words *Genghis Khan* have been a symbol of ruthless destruction. This ruler commanded great armies of skilled warriors on horseback. They swept across Asia, killing their enemies and burning cities. Genghis Khan was one of the greatest conquerors in the history of the world.

The future conqueror was born in what is now called Mongolia. It is a harsh land, where **nomadic** tribes once moved from place to place. (Nomads are wanderers who do not live in one place.) At birth, the boy was called Temuchin. His family was powerful. His father was a tribal chief. But when Temuchin was nine, his father was killed by enemies. Temuchin, his mother, and brothers were abandoned by their tribe and left to starve.

Temuchin survived. As an adult, he began to gain power. He gathered supporters. He organized bands of sheep herders, skilled in horsemanship and archery, into a powerful army. He became the leader of his people. By 1206, he ruled Mongolia. He united many different tribal groups into one people—the Mongols. They called him Genghis Kahn, or Universal Ruler.

For the next 20 years, Genghis Kahn expanded the Mongol Empire. He led huge armies into China. By 1215, he controlled Beijing. The Mongols burned city after city. They killed the people or forced them to serve in the Mongol armies. Then they moved into Central Asia to complete their conquest.

By the time of Genghis Kahn's death, the Mongol Empire stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Pacific Ocean. It was one of the largest areas of land ever controlled by one people. Today, there are many countries in what was once the Mongol Empire. But the country of Mongolia still exists. Their writing system today is based on the one Genghis Kahn introduced. The Mongol nation honors Genghis Kahn as their founding father.