

Akhenaton

?–1354 BC



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Akhenaton was the Egyptian pharaoh who is known for encouraging Egypt to worship just one god instead of many gods.



As you read the biography below, think about how Akhenaton's beliefs changed Egypt during his reign.

Akhenaton was pharaoh of Egypt during the eighteenth dynasty. He first reigned under the name of Amenhotep IV, inheriting the throne from his father when he was just twelve years old. After six years as pharaoh, he changed his name to Akhenaton to honor the sun god Aton. Akhenaton is Egyptian for “Aton is satisfied.”

When Akhenaton's reign began, Egypt was still practicing **polytheism**, or the worship of more than one god. Akhenaton was believed in **monotheism**, the worship of just one god. The god he worshiped was Aton, the sun god. Akhenaton believed that he was actually Aton's son. He believed that Aton was all-powerful and absolute, so there could be no other gods. Akhenaton moved the capital of Egypt from Thebes. He built a new capital city, which he named Akhenaton, and dedicated it to his religion.

Akhenaton was married to Nefertiti, and the couple had six daughters. During this time, Egyptian artists represented Akhenaton and Nefertiti in an exaggerated style. Sculptures often showed the two with elongated heads and necks, and protruding stomachs. One of the most familiar images to come out of this dynasty is a bust of Nefertiti.



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VOCABULARY

monotheism belief or worship in one god

polytheism belief or worship in many gods

During his rule Akhenaton built many temples to honor the god Aton. Akhenaton was fanatical in his beliefs. He defaced every monument in Egypt where another god's name appeared. This angered the people of Egypt and caused much resentment. Akhenaton was known as a cruel, but inept ruler. During his reign Egypt lost control of many of its provinces.

After his death in 1354 BC, Akhenaton's mummy was destroyed and most of the references to him were removed from the temples and palaces throughout Egypt. The religion that Akhenaton founded became unpopular. Many of the temples that Akhenaton built to Aton were later torn down to provide building materials that were used by other pharaohs to make their own temples.

Akhenaton's son-in-law Tutankhamen became the next pharaoh. Tutankhamen, known popularly as King Tut, soon rejected monotheism and Egypt returned to polytheism.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What changes did the Pharaoh Akhenaton make to Egypt?

2. **Analyze** Do you think Akhenaton's decision to make Egypt practice monotheism was a good choice? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY

3. Use an encyclopedia or online reference to learn about another god that was worshiped in Ancient Egypt. Use an index card or sheet of paper to make a list of a few facts about this god.

Vocabulary Builder Section 1

1. F; Deltas
2. F; Cataracts
3. T
4. F; dynasty
5. F; pharaoh

Vocabulary Builder Section 2

1. life after death; a happy place
2. people of wealth and power; could afford to have mummies made
3. the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes; used for building the pyramids in Egypt
4. most famous pharaoh of the Old Kingdom; ruled in the 2500s BC
5. specially treated bodies wrapped in cloth; embalmed bodies
6. people from rich and powerful families; many priests and officials
7. a period in Egyptian history that lasted from about 2700 BC to 2200 BC; the Third Dynasty began the rule of this kingdom
8. huge stone tombs with four triangle-shaped walls that met in a point on top; used as tombs for Egyptian rulers

Vocabulary Builder Section 3

1. Ramses the Great; Ramses the Great was an Egyptian ruler who had one of the longest reigns in Egypt.
2. Middle Kingdom; The Middle Kingdom was a period of order and stability in Egypt that lasted until about 1750 BC.
3. Queen Hatshepsut; One ruler who worked to increase Egyptian trade was Queen Hatshepsut.
4. trade routes; Profitable trade routes developed in Egypt.
5. New Kingdom; The rise to power of Ahmose of Thebes marked the beginning of the New Kingdom.

Vocabulary Builder Section 4

1. Papyrus
2. hieroglyphics
3. King Tutankhamen
4. Rosetta Stone
5. Sphinxes
6. obelisk

Vocabulary Builder Section 5

1. b
2. a
3. d
4. b
5. a
6. a
7. b

Biography Akhenaton

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Akhenaten instilled monotheism in Egypt during a time when it was still polytheistic.
2. I think it was not a good choice. It seems like Akhenaten made many changes that must not have been beneficial because they were immediately changed back after his death.

ACTIVITY

3. Answers will vary.

Biography Nefertiti

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Possible response: Because she was so beautiful, the people of Amarna may have seen her as a goddess.
2. One possible response: I think the people were probably mad and scared of how the other gods would punish them.

ACTIVITY

3. Answers will vary.