

Summary: California's Missions

A Chain of Missions

In the late 1700s, Spain wanted its power and wealth to grow. It also wanted to keep other European countries out of Alta California. Building settlements along the coast would help them meet these goals. Missionaries wanted to convert the Indians to the Roman Catholic faith.

By 1823 there were 21 missions linked by road. The Spanish settlers built forts and towns nearby. The forts protected the missions. The missions were built in places where there was fresh water, rich soil, and resources for building. California Indians did much of the work to build missions. The first missions were built of wood. Later, adobe was used. At first the Indians came by choice. Missionaries offered them gifts. As the mission system grew, the Indians were forced to come. The missions took lands that Indians had used. Then they had no choice but to come to the mission for food. Soldiers also forced them to come.

Life at a Mission

Indians gave up their way of life to become Roman Catholic. They had to stay on the missions, obey the priests, wear Spanish clothes, and learn Spanish. They worked all day in the fields. Some tried to continue practicing their own traditions. Some missions allowed this, but others did not.

The priests taught the Indians to grow plants from Europe and to raise farm animals. They taught them how to make goods that Europeans used. Sometimes Indians were whipped and chained to force them to convert.

Resisting the Missions

Missionaries believed they were helping the Indians by making them into farmers. They also needed the food for themselves and the Spanish soldiers. Some Indians resisted their new way of life. They broke tools and equipment or ran away. Some planned revolts. But in the end, California Indians lost their old way of life. They also lost the skills they needed to live outside the mission, and the land once used for hunting had been turned into farms. Without knowing it, the Spanish also brought diseases to California. By 1846, two-thirds of the Indians in California had died.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

convert *verb*, to change a religion or belief

adobe *noun*, a brick made of dried clay and straw

revolt *noun*, an uprising against a ruler

After You Read

REVIEW Why did the Spanish leaders and missionaries build missions in California?

Draw a box around the paragraph that explains the reasons the Spanish people built missions.

REVIEW What were some of the jobs California Indians did on missions?

Underline two sentences that explain what priests taught the Indians to do.

REVIEW What did California Indians do to resist the missions?

Highlight three sentences that explain how the Indians rebelled against the Spanish conquerors.