

# From Creation to Christ

**When was the ice age? What about dinosaurs? How do other nations fit into Biblical accounts?  
See how human history aligns with the Bible in this overview from creation to the time of Christ.**

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*Note: All dates given are approximate and could be off by a few years or even a few decades, simply because it is usually not possible to know the exact date of ancient events with certainty. However, this does not detract from the purpose of this study. The Bible is true history, and it is in full harmony with other aspects of human history.*

## **Part 1 – Creation**

God alone was present during creation. When attempting to discover the age of the Earth, no source is more reliable than God's Word, the Bible. While no exact date is given in the Bible, we are given lists of people, including when they were born and how long they lived. Based on this information, multiple people have calculated that God created the world around the year 4000 BC. While we cannot know the exact year with certainty, there is ample evidence that the world is about 6,000 years old.

There are scientific dating methods that claim the earth is millions of years old. However, those methods have been shown to be highly unreliable and often involve circular reasoning. We also see light from distant stars that would have taken millions of years to reach earth. But it would be simple for God to create those stars in such a way that we would be able to see them, even if the universe is only 6,000 years old. It is easy for us to forget that God exists outside of time, He created time for our benefit, and He easily could have created the world and the universe in any way He chose.

When we fail to believe God's Word regarding the age of the Earth, it is because our human pride is in the way. We want to figure things out for ourselves and do things our own way, rather than falling before God in obedience and humility. Though determining an exact year is not important, it is crucial that we trust God's Word regarding creation rather than trusting fallible humans who claim that we evolved over millions of years. Jesus Christ, Paul, and the author of Hebrews quoted from Genesis as factual history. Not trusting God about the beginning leads to a weaker foundation of faith.

## **Part 2 – The Garden of Eden**

At the end of each of the six days of creation, God said that His creation was good. In fact, at the end of the sixth day, He said that everything He had created was very good. The world that God made was perfect, entirely free from sin, decay, and death. It is hard to imagine such a world, but that is exactly how the Earth was when it was first created. It was a reflection of God Himself, who is perfect and holy beyond anything that we are able to understand.

God created many different kinds of animals on the fifth and sixth days, and He created them in such a way that each species would multiply and fill the Earth, giving us the wide variety of animal life that we see today. The biblical account stands in contrast to the theory of evolution, which claims that over a long period of time, simple organisms changed into all the species we see today. But scientifically, creation explains what we observe in the world far better. For example, we have many different dog breeds, but they are all dogs. Sometimes, a new breed of dog may be born, but it is still a dog. We do not observe a dog changing into an entirely different kind of animal, because that is not possible. God created humans last and named the first man Adam. In turn, Adam named the first woman Eve.

However, the perfect world did not last long. Adam and Eve chose to sin against God. Eating a piece of fruit from the wrong tree may seem insignificant, but it is not. They both made a willful choice to disobey God's command and do things their own way instead. God Himself killed the first animal so He could provide clothing for Adam and Eve to wear, then banished them from the Garden of Eden. Instead of evolution, we actually see that sin, decay, and death have reigned over the world ever since.

### **Part 3 – Ancient Mesopotamia**

During the Earth's first 1,656 years of existence, the climate was probably very different from what we know today. Though the details are uncertain, it seems likely that the weather was calmer than what we experience today. Due to that, and also due to the lack of disease so soon after sin entered the world, people lived much longer than they do now, and the world population quickly grew. This also helps us understand the extremely long lifespans that we see recorded both in the Bible (Genesis 5) and on the Sumerian King List, an artifact that recorded ancient kings ruling for very long periods of time.

The most well-known ancient culture is that of Mesopotamia in the Middle East, where many of Adam's descendants likely lived. Since everything prior to the great flood of Noah's time was destroyed, we know very little about what life was like for these ancient people. Based on the brief accounts given in the Bible, it was likely a lawless, violent society, perhaps with no central government. However, based on artifacts that have been discovered, there is also evidence that they were rather advanced in areas such as writing, math, and agriculture, and that they were skilled at making pottery, tools, and wheels.

For the most part, though, these ancient people did not worship God or give Him thanks for all that they were able to accomplish. Temples were built for the worship of false gods, and it seems that most people did not worship and serve the one true God. We know from Genesis 5:24 that Enoch walked with God, but God tells us in Genesis 6 that most people of that time were wicked and did not follow God. A little more than 1,500 years after creation, there was so much evil in the world that God told Noah that He would destroy nearly everything with a catastrophic worldwide flood.

### **Part 4 – Noah and the Flood**

Noah and his family almost certainly lived somewhere in Mesopotamia, doing their best to worship and serve the one true God in the midst of a wicked, pagan, ungodly culture that worshipped many false gods. People no doubt mocked Noah and his family as they watched them build a giant boat far away from any large bodies of water. Suddenly (at least from the perspective of everyone who did not trust God's warnings), rain began to fall and would not stop for 40 days. In that relatively short period of time, all of mankind's accomplishments and all of mankind's wickedness were washed away.

The great flood is believed to have occurred a little before 2300 BC. It took about a year for the floodwaters to fully subside, and once the flood had fully come to an end, Noah and his family would have walked off the ark into a very different world. Not only were they the only people still alive in the entire world, but the land itself would have looked much different than it did before.

Some people make the mistake of seeing the great flood as a gentle rise in the water level, but that is far from what actually happened. This flood was a significant, catastrophic event, dramatically altering the landscape around the world. When we have local floods in our modern world, we can see that a relatively small amount of fast-moving water can effortlessly move very heavy objects and cause significant damage. On a worldwide scale, then, the great flood no doubt changed the very layout of the lands and oceans around the world as mountains and valleys were permanently reshaped. One of many amazing examples of this dramatic reshaping can be seen with the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

## **Part 5 – Evidence for the Flood**

People can view the past through the lenses of two very different worldviews. Someone who does not believe in the God of the Bible may believe that the world has remained relatively unchanged as creatures evolved over millions of years. But if we take the Bible (which has far more evidence to support it than any other ancient book) to be the true Word of God, then the theory of evolution cannot be true. The events surrounding the great flood provide a key piece to this puzzle from Earth's past.

As rain fell around the world for 40 days, every living thing outside the ark (except some sea creatures) died. The fossil record generally shows smaller creatures buried farther down with larger creatures toward the top, and evolutionists use this evidence to claim that small creatures evolved into larger, more complex creatures. However, during a severe flood, it makes sense that the smallest creatures would have died first, while large creatures could have survived longer before dying and being buried as well. Furthermore, fossils are sometimes discovered in the opposite sequence than expected, which a catastrophic flood explains well. The fact that we have so many fossils at all provides further evidence, because creatures aren't usually fossilized except during a great catastrophe involving water.

Along with the scientific evidence, we also know that many cultures around the world have legends of a great flood that have been passed down throughout the generations. The Epic of Gilgamesh is the most well-known, but there are many others. Why would vastly different cultures that did not interact with one another all share this common story from the past unless it actually happened?

## **Part 6 – The Ice Age**

A 40-day deluge of heavy rain would have significant consequences for the climate of our planet. Scientists have discovered that, at some point in the past, large sheets of ice covered many parts of the world. Yet they have struggled to determine what caused the Ice Age to begin. From a Biblical worldview, however, it is easy to figure out. Significant volcanic activity was very likely another aspect of the great flood, as the fountains of the deep were opened up. Volcanic ash acts to cool the Earth by blocking out sunlight. That, along with a significant amount of evaporation once the rain ended, led to a major cooling effect across a planet that had been used to warm, peaceful weather before the flood.

After the floodwaters had receded, the period known as the Ice Age began and continued over the next few centuries as the Earth's climate slowly adjusted to a new normal. At its peak, massive sheets of ice covered much of what we know today as Europe, northern Asia, and northern North America. Ice sheets also pushed from Antarctica northward into parts of South America and Australia. Meanwhile, people continued to mainly live in warmer areas such as the Middle East and southern Asia.

Large creatures known as woolly mammoths thrived in the colder post-flood climate but died out as the Earth began to warm. Dinosaurs also had difficulty adapting to the new climate. Once the giant sheets of ice receded into arctic areas, probably around or shortly after 2000 BC, the oceans and landmasses of the world finally resembled what we see today. The godly man Job probably lived towards the end of the Ice Age (he lived in the land of Uz, presumably founded by Noah's great-grandson Uz), and the book of Job contains most of the references to ice that are found in the Bible.

## **Part 7 – Dinosaurs**

One common question that comes up when discussing creation deals with the existence of dinosaurs. Didn't dinosaurs live for millions of years and die out before humans evolved? The answer is, not necessarily. The most reasonable explanation, based on the evidence that we have, is that dinosaurs lived alongside humans before the great flood, then many of them died during the flood and the remainder died out after the flood, unable to adapt to a vastly different climate on Earth.

The word "dinosaur" cannot be found in the Bible because that word is a modern-day invention. However, near the end of the book of Job, God describes two large, ferocious creatures in great detail. It is very possible that these creatures would now be labeled as dinosaurs. Stories of dragons from long ago also provide evidence of humans and dinosaurs co-existing. But God told Job that even these large creatures were within His control (Job 41:10-11), and they became extinct not long after that time.

Even though some scientists claim that dinosaurs existed many millions of years before people, much of this is based on fossil evidence without considering the possibility of a worldwide catastrophe, such as a great flood. Such a catastrophe could easily make it falsely appear that much more time has passed since dinosaurs roamed the Earth. Neither theory can be fully proven nor disproven through science, so it becomes a matter of worldview. Do you believe what the unchanging Bible says about these things, or do you put your trust in people and ever-changing science?

## **Part 8 – The Dispersion From Babel**

Many of Noah's descendants did not obey God's command to multiply and fill the Earth (Genesis 9:7) and remained in one area. Around 2200 BC, just over one hundred years after the flood, Noah's great-grandson Nimrod led many of the people, known as Sumerians, to try to construct a tower that would reach into the heavens. Their goal was to make a name for themselves in that place, disobeying God's command to scatter and populate the Earth. God responded to this prideful rebellion by confusing the speech of the people. The theory of evolution can provide no reasonable explanation for the variety of languages that we see throughout the world, but this is easy to understand from a biblical worldview.

As these groups spread out and became isolated, some aspects of appearance such as skin color and facial features became dominant in certain groups. For example, people who moved into areas with more sunlight became darker-skinned as their bodies produced more melanin, while those who went to areas with less sunlight became lighter-skinned. There were probably cave dwellers during this period, as many these groups of people would have struggled to survive for a while because they were so few in number. Also, this dispersion of so many cultures from one place helps to explain why many cultures around the world have passed down stories of a great flood and why many have similar false religions.

Babylon and Assyria were two ancient empires that developed from the descendants of Noah. Both empires were in the Middle East, where some people continued to live after the dispersion from Babel, and they existed side-by-side for several centuries. Around 1765 BC, Hammurabi, King of Babylon, overtook Assyria, bringing much of the region under Babylonian rule for a time. Also, it is likely that Job (who we know from his book in the Bible) lived somewhere in this area during this period of time.

## **Part 9 – Indus Valley Civilization**

As people began to migrate away from Mesopotamia following the introduction of different languages, one large group headed southeast, into the area we know today as Pakistan and northern India. The Indus River brought plenty of water to the region, allowing the Indus Valley Civilization to grow and flourish. Their cities were highly advanced for their time with elaborate drainage and water supply systems. The climate of this area includes seasonal monsoon flooding, but these people learned how to tame the floodwaters and use the abundant water to sustain their growing population.

The people of the Indus Valley Civilization achieved great accuracy in measuring length, mass, and time, and were among the first cultures to develop a system of uniform weights and measures. They also developed an extensive trade network, establishing trade routes with civilizations in Mesopotamia such as Babylon and Assyria. They carried supplies in boats and also in wheeled carts, making them perhaps the first civilization to develop and use wheels to transport and trade goods. The civilization is also known for making pottery, creating items out of metal, and extensive farming.

Eventually, the culture began to decline, possibly because of a gradual decrease in the amount of available water in the region. There are indications that increases in violence and disease may have also been factors in the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization. By 1700 BC, most of the cities had been abandoned, but the culture continued to exist in more rural areas. Some people began to migrate to the south and east, settling into other portions of what would later become the country of India.

## **Part 10 – Ancient China**

A little farther northeast, another group of people settled into what we know today as China. This civilization began near the Yellow River, which was prone to seasonal flooding. Early on, various tribes and clans often fought with one another for control of the region. There is much debate about the history of early China, as there is little in the way of written records. The history that follows is a commonly held perspective on the origins of China, but it is not possible to be certain of every detail.

According to legend, a man known as Yu the Great was able to successfully control the flooding of the Yellow River, following his father's failed attempts. He led the people to construct a series of canals and the project was completed after thirteen years of perseverance and hard work. Yu the Great was a member of the Xia clan, and he became the leader of the tribes in that area. In that way, China formally began as the Xia Dynasty established itself as the ruling class around 2070 BC. Sadly, the early Chinese people appear to have worshipped many false gods, as we see the truth of the God of the Bible largely missing from Chinese history until missionaries began to go to China in more recent times.

By controlling the seasonal flooding and limiting the destruction that the flooding often caused, agricultural production increased and the Xia Dynasty gained more power. Yu also led an army that defeated other nearby tribes in battle, increasing their power even further. As Yu neared his death, he passed the throne along to his son, which established the dynastic pattern of rule in China. Periodically over time, one dynasty would replace another, but the general pattern would continue for nearly 4,000 years until finally collapsing in AD 1912.

## **Part 11 – Minoan Civilization**

Another group of people migrated northwest from Mesopotamia, toward what we know today as the country of Greece (including the island of Crete) in southern Europe. This general area became known as the Aegean civilization and included several smaller people groups such as the Minoan civilization, which primarily settled on the island of Crete. Like those who settled in the Indus Valley, the Aegean people were also well-known for trade and farming.

On the island of Crete, the Minoan civilization flourished and became the first advanced civilization in Europe. Its large, elaborate palaces reached as tall as four stories high and contained elaborate plumbing systems. Trade was a major part of their society, and they traded not only with mainland Greece but with other civilizations as far away as Egypt and Canaan. Minoans also created much in the areas of art, pottery, jewelry, bronze weapons, and metal kitchen items, both for their own personal use and also to use for trading with other civilizations.

Minoans apparently worshipped many gods and idols, perhaps led by a mother goddess. Like other ancient civilizations that developed within the centuries following the great flood, the people quickly turned away from the one true God and began to worship false gods while building up treasures and cities for themselves. Based on the artifacts that have been found, they seem to have been a very religious people, but without a proper understanding of God. Eventually, around 1500 BC, the Minoan civilization declined, likely due to a volcanic eruption on Crete and a subsequent invasion.

## **Part 12 – Ancient Egypt**

The other major group of people to migrate away from Mesopotamia traveled westward and settled along the Nile River in the area that became known as Egypt. The Egyptian civilization quickly became very advanced and is known for its massive pyramids and one of the first written languages. It is difficult for an evolutionary worldview to explain how people such as the Egyptians became advanced so rapidly. However, with a biblical worldview, it is easy to see how these people carried with them some of the knowledge that they had gained prior to the incident at the Tower of Babel.

It seems most likely that Egypt was founded by Noah's grandson Mizraim around 2188 BC. Some historians attempt to place the beginning of Egypt as much as 1,000 years earlier, but those theories fail to take into account the fact that Egyptian kings often had overlapping dynasties as different kings ruled over different areas of the kingdom. There is considerable evidence to tie together a more accurate timeline of Egyptian history with the history of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament.

The Old Kingdom of Egypt was ruled by a strong central government which owned most of the land. The people farmed much of this land, growing food and raising livestock, a portion of which was to be given to the government for distribution across the kingdom. This strong government was likely also a key factor in the Egyptians' ability to organize people for the purpose of building large stone buildings, including their well-known pyramids. After several hundred years of prosperity, however, idolatry led to the downfall of the Old Kingdom of Egypt. As priests of their false idol, the sun god Ra (pronounced "Re"), increased their influence, the king's power faltered. For a time, the kingdom was in disarray.

### **Part 13 – Israel Begins**

While various groups of people (separated by their different languages) settled in places such as modern-day India, China, Greece, and Egypt, others remained in Mesopotamia. One such man was named Terah, a descendant of Noah's son Shem, who was born nine generations after Noah. Terah lived in a place known as Ur of the Chaldeans, which was located in the southern part of modern-day Iraq. He only lived to the age of 205. As Earth slowly settled into its new post-flood climate, lifespans were gradually getting shorter and would soon be more in line with what we are accustomed to today.

One of Terah's sons was named Abram. Terah and Abram likely worshipped many false gods, as was common in the culture of that region. So, it was probably a shock when, at age 75, the one true God spoke to Abram. The first part of Genesis 12 tells us that God commanded Abram to leave his country and family behind and go to a new land which God would give to Abram and his descendants (although he did not yet have any children). Exact dates from so long ago are uncertain, but estimates place this event around 1900 BC. As far as we know, Abram did not know the true God before this encounter. But God chose to save Abram (whom he would later rename Abraham) and Abram obeyed, taking a long journey west before finally arriving in the land of the Canaanites, in the region we know today as Israel.

Rather than waiting on God's promise, Abram took matters into his own hands and had a son by his servant, Hagar. This son was named Ishmael, and Muslims trace their ancestry back to him. Finally, according to God's perfect timing, Abraham's wife Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the son of promise, around 1875 BC. God's chosen lineage continued through Isaac's son Jacob and Jacob's son Joseph.

### **Part 14 – Israel in Slavery**

Jacob had twelve sons (which would later become the 12 tribes of Israel) and he loved them all, teaching them the truths about God. But he loved his son Joseph in a special way because Joseph was the son of his old age, as we are told in Genesis 37:3. Because of this, and also because Joseph told his brothers that he dreamed about them bowing down to him, his brothers became extremely jealous. They thought about killing Joseph, but they decided instead to sell him to some slave traders. As Joseph was taken to Egypt, his brothers lied to their father, telling him that Joseph was killed by a wild animal.

God was with Joseph, even in a foreign land. He became a slave to Potiphar who was an officer of Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. Joseph proved himself to be trustworthy, and at the same time, God was working to ensure that everything Joseph did prospered. So even as a slave, Joseph was eventually given great responsibility. One day, Potiphar's wife made a false accusation against Joseph, and Joseph was thrown into prison. But even there, God remained with Joseph and gave him the ability to interpret dreams. When Pharaoh had a troubling dream that no one else could understand, Joseph interpreted the dream correctly and helped Egypt prepare for 7 years of famine that was coming.

Joseph's family lacked food due to the famine, so they eventually reunited with him in Egypt and remained there for another 215 years. That yields a total of 430 years since Abram first journeyed to Egypt, fulfilling God's timeline for His chosen people (as explained in Exodus 12:40 and Galatians 3:17). During this time, the Israelites multiplied rapidly while living under the protection of Egypt.



## **Part 15 – The Exodus**

As time passed and the Israelites grew in number, the Egyptians became concerned that they might become overpowered. So, they began to force the Israelites into slave labor. At God's appointed time (around 1470 BC), He chose Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and into the land that He had promised to Abraham 430 years before. God sent Moses and his brother Aaron to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to demand that he allow the Israelites to leave and offer sacrifices to God. But just as God had said, Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go, so that God's power would be shown for all to see.

As a consequence of Pharaoh's refusal to let the Israelites go, God began to send plagues on the people of Egypt. First, the Nile River, a water supply that was crucial to the prosperity of Egypt in ancient times, was turned into blood for a period of seven days. God sent more plagues after that, each one worse than the one before, but still Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt. In those days, the Pharaoh was viewed by Egyptians either as a god or as a representative of the gods, and Pharaoh was not about to show any sign of weakness that there could be some other God stronger than him.

But after the tenth plague, Pharaoh finally relented and let the Israelites go. The one true God had proven his power and superiority over the false gods of Egypt and over Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh tried once more to chase down the Israelites after allowing them to leave, but his army was drowned in the Red Sea. The Israelites themselves often lacked faith as well, but God remained faithful to His promise and eventually led them into the land that He had promised Abraham so long ago. At last, God's chosen people had their own land to call home after being freed from slavery in Egypt.

## **Part 16 – The Shang Dynasty**

During the time that the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, the Chinese people were steadily growing in number and power. The Xia Dynasty remained in power for several hundred years following their clan's successful efforts to control the seasonal flooding of the Yellow River. Over time, though, the ruling family became more corrupt and wicked. Around 1600 BC, the Xia Dynasty was overthrown in the Battle of Mingtiao, and the Shang Dynasty took over as rulers in China.

Not only did the early Chinese people worship false gods, but ancestor worship was also a significant part of their culture. Various ceremonies from court rituals to religious rituals sought favor and approval from loved ones who had passed on. A common belief in this culture was that deceased ancestors held some measure of power over those who were still living. Sadly, all their worship and religious rituals served no real purpose, as they did not know the one true God.

Based on what we know about the Shang Dynasty, it appears to have been a very organized society, ruled by a king who passed down the throne within the family line. Each king appointed officials of agriculture and hunting, as well as pastors and guards, to oversee different areas of their society. Detailed records from some of their religious rituals have been found, further demonstrating how organized they were. They were also known for large-scale production of bronze vessels (such as sinks or cups) and bronze weapons, using a highly organized labor force to accomplish all this work. The Shang Dynasty continued for more than 500 years until they were defeated in battle by the Zhou.

## **Part 17 – The Egyptian Empire**

After God took His people away from their enslavement, the nation of Egypt fell into a brief period of turmoil. However, within the next century, a unified Egypt grew stronger once again. From approximately 1350 to 900 BC, many pharaohs expanded Egypt's territory by conquering surrounding lands through military battles. This period in Egypt is known as the New Kingdom.

Some of the pharaohs that ruled during this period became quite well-known and respected. Hatshepsut, a rare female pharaoh who took over after the death of her husband, greatly expanded trade routes and commissioned hundreds of building projects. Thutmose III, widely considered to be a military genius, led at least 16 war campaigns in a 20-year period. He reportedly captured 350 cities and greatly expanded the area which Egypt ruled. Tutankhamun, commonly referred to as King Tut, became very well-known when his well-preserved tomb was discovered in the year 1922.

Despite seeing God display His power in Moses' day, Egyptians continued to worship false gods. Pharaoh Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti led Egypt toward the practice of worshipping one god—but it was still not the one true God. Instead, they worshipped a false god called Aten, a representation of the Egyptian sun god Ra. Over time, the great Egyptian Empire began to decline, largely due to two invasions by the Sea Peoples. Egypt won the battles but used a lot of money defending its land. The Egyptian government became unable to pay their royal tomb-builders, leading to the first recorded labor strike in history. Egypt's power declined further due to increased drought and ongoing corruption of its leaders.

## **Part 18 – Israel Ruled by Judges**

God used Joshua to lead His people into the promised land, conquering the land in a series of battles. Some people argue that God was unjust in this while forgetting that everything belongs to God in the first place. In addition, the people who were living there were very wicked and ungodly (especially the Canaanites, following the curse recorded in Genesis 9:25). After the land was conquered and settled, Israel headed into a darker period. Over the next 350 years or so, they had no king, and the people did what seemed right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25). Since the unguided and unrestrained human heart is naturally inclined toward sin and evil, many of the people wandered away from God during this time, even after He had brought them out of their slavery in Egypt and given them their very own land.

From time to time during this dark period, God raised up judges to lead the people. These judges held a different role than what we think of as a judge today; their primary function was to do justice by ruling over the people and leading military battles against Israel's enemies. One well-known leader during this period of time was Gideon. After God had allowed the Midianites to oppress Israel for seven years as a consequence of Israel's disobedience, God led Gideon into battle with just 300 men and defeated the Midianites while making it clear that it was God, not the people, who won the battle.

Other well-known people from this time include Samson, known for his strength; Ruth, known for her loyalty; and Samuel, who was the last judge over Israel. God Himself was King over Israel during this time, but when an aging Samuel was preparing to hand leadership over to his sons, the people wanted to be like all of the other nations around them and demanded a king instead.

## Part 19 – The Phoenicians

The ancient Phoenician civilization developed around 1200 BC as the people who were once known as Canaanites were pushed out of their land by Israel and other nations. They settled along the coast just north of Israel and developed a sea-faring culture that was known for trade, trading both materials and skills. The Phoenicians traveled across the Mediterranean Sea, peacefully establishing many colonies and trading posts in northern Africa and southern Europe. They are also known for the development of the Phoenician alphabet, one of the world's oldest written alphabets. They are also credited for innovations in shipbuilding, navigation, industry, agriculture, and government.

The Phoenicians had frequent interactions with Israel during the time of King David and King Solomon, as mentioned in the Bible in such places as 1 Kings 5 and 7. Their skills in building and trade proved to be valuable to the Israelites as the Phoenicians helped the Israelites build homes, palaces, and the Temple. 1 Kings 5:1 tells us that King Hiram of Tyre had a strong, positive relationship with King David of Israel, as the two nations co-existed peacefully and helped each other out in different ways.

Sadly, it seems that the eventual downfall of the Phoenicians was a result of their pride in their skills and abilities, relying on themselves rather than on God. It is unclear how much they knew of God, but they were probably at least aware of God's existence through their relationship with Israel. Their main cities of Tyre and Sidon are frequently mentioned in the Bible in a negative context, as several Old Testament prophets proclaimed warnings against them. In particular, Joel 3:4 and Zechariah 9:2 seem to indicate a problem of pride among the Phoenician people, and we know that God hates pride.

## Part 20 – The Trojan War

The inhabitants of ancient Greece developed a complex mythology of gods and goddesses who were often in conflict. Zeus was the king of their gods and the god of the sky, thunder, and lightning. There was a god of war, a goddess of love, and many others, eventually including "an unknown God." Centuries later, the apostle Paul would speak to Greeks in the city of Athens concerning their false gods, explaining how the God that was unknown to them was actually the only true God (Acts 17). But the people of ancient Greece worshipped and feared their numerous false gods and goddesses instead.

Perhaps the most well-known event involving the ancient Greeks was the Trojan War, which supposedly began because of a dispute among the gods and goddesses. The actual war most likely took place around 1200 BC as the Achaeans from Greece attacked the city of Troy. The well-known books *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer offer an exaggerated account of this war and its aftermath, but recent discoveries seem to indicate that some type of battle did take place between these two civilizations.

While the details are uncertain, it seems that the Achaeans attempted to attack Troy over a ten-year period without much success, being kept out by the city wall. Finally, they acted like they were giving up and going back home, leaving a giant wooden horse as a gift for the people of Troy. However, the Greek army was hiding inside the horse, so when it was brought into the city of Troy, the army jumped out attacked the city from within, causing significant death and destruction. However, the Greek army encountered many difficulties on their journey back home, and only a few survived.

## **Part 21 – Israel Ruled by Kings**

The period of the judges came to an end when the people of Israel demanded to have a king like all the nations around them, rebelling against God as their King. God warned them that their king would be evil, but they persisted in their demands, so God granted their request and anointed Saul as their first king around 1040 BC. Saul was considered to be a strong, handsome leader, but his outward appeal was accompanied by a heart that consistently rebelled against God. Eventually, Saul's disobedience caused God to take the kingdom from him and give it to David, who would become Israel's second king.

King David ruled for 40 years, from approximately 1010 to 970 BC. Though no one is perfect and sinless, he did prove to be a far better king than Saul, generally obeying God and leading the people of Israel to follow God along with him. Despite his flaws, King David is referred to as a man after God's own heart because of his overall desire to follow God and do what was right. The book of 2 Samuel primarily covers David's reign as king. David also wrote at least half of the book of Psalms in the Bible.

Because King David was involved in numerous wars during his reign, God would not allow him to build His temple, but David's son Solomon would instead receive that honor. King Solomon ruled for the next 40 years, from approximately 970 to 930 BC, and his reign was a time of peace for Israel. The temple was built in Jerusalem during this time so that God would have a special, holy, set apart place to dwell in the midst of His chosen people. Solomon, known for his great wisdom, was the primary author of the book of Proverbs in the Bible. He wrote Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs as well.

## **Part 22 – Israel is Divided**

It is a striking picture of human sin and prideful rebellion against God that the strong, unified nation of Israel under the leadership of a king would not exist for much more than 100 years. We read in 1 Kings 11 that, despite the great wisdom which God had given him, King Solomon loved and desired many foreign women. Because these women worshipped false idols, Solomon allowed them to lead his heart away from serving and worshipping God alone. As a result of this sin, God told Solomon that He would tear most of the kingdom of Israel away from his family upon his death.

Even during the reigns of David and Solomon, certain people among the 12 tribes of Israel had made attempts to take over control of the nation. Until this time, God had not allowed those attempts to be successful. But following Solomon's death, the majority of the nation of Israel refused to follow Solomon's son Rehoboam as king. Therefore, the nation was divided into two parts. Israel, the northern kingdom (including 10 tribes) separated themselves and followed Jeroboam as their king. Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah (consisting of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin) continued to follow kings in the family line of David and Solomon.

Over the next 250 years or so, the northern kingdom of Israel would be ruled by one evil king after another, with every single one leading the people to rebel against God. Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah had a mixture of good and bad kings over the next four centuries, falling away from the Lord at times and returning to Him at other times. The books of Kings and Chronicles in the Bible cover this period of time in great detail.

## **Part 23 – The Zhou Dynasty**

Around the same time that God was giving Israel a king, the Zhou defeated the Shang and took over control of China. The Zhou Dynasty would ultimately become the longest-lasting Chinese dynasty, ruling for nearly 800 years. Officially, the Zhou Dynasty began in 1046 BC and lasted until 256 BC, though the dynasty was strongest during its first three centuries. Towards the end of this period, as the Zhou's power weakened, several regions separated and proclaimed themselves to be independent kingdoms.

A key factor that kept them in power for so long was the Mandate of Heaven. The Zhou claimed that their sky-god had told them to take control of China but to rule in better way than the corrupt Shang kings, bringing harmony and honor to their country. Since the true God of Heaven was focused on His people, Israel, this claim was obviously false. However, it sufficiently convinced the people of China, who had long ago forgotten about the one true God. One way they were convinced was with the royal calendar, which had specified times for agricultural work and celebrations. Unexpected events like solar eclipses caused doubts about this mandate. Since the Zhou claimed that their authority came from heaven, they made great efforts to gain accurate knowledge of the stars and to perfect their calendar.

Like the Shang, the Zhou were known for organized large-scale production, making tools, weapons, and decorations out of bronze. Having long ago lost the knowledge of the true God of Heaven, Chinese philosophy also began to develop during the latter portion of this period as people sought other ways of attempting to understand life and the world around them. The best-known philosopher of this time was Confucius, who emphasized good morals, justice, and kindness. Yet those good works can earn us nothing with God, because we all fall short of those ideals when we compare ourselves to Him.

## **Part 24 – Ancient Native Americans**

In earlier lessons, we learned about the various groups of people that migrated into different parts of the world following the scattering at the Tower of Babel. We studied two of these groups—those which moved east and settled in India and China. However, some of these people continued traveling beyond Asia and all the way into what we now know as America.

In the present day, the eastern tip of Russia and the western tip of Alaska are separated by just 55 miles at their closest point. But prior to 2000 BC, sea levels were lower because glaciers still covered parts of the world due to the post-flood Ice Age, and a land bridge connected the two continents. This ancient group of Noah's descendants traveled across this land bridge and eventually settled into areas we now know as Alaska, Canada, and the United States. Over time, some migrated farther south into modern-day Mexico and South America as well. Their population steadily grew into tens of millions, even though their existence was unknown to the rest of the world until 1492.

Unfortunately, we have limited knowledge of these people during this period because they separated into so many smaller tribes and had no written language. They also tended to be nomadic, moving often from one place to another. It is not surprising, then, that their primary focus seemed to be on the essentials, such as hunting and gathering food. Many tribes developed religious rituals as well, but they worshipped false gods and idols rather than the one true God.

## **Part 25 – Ancient Greece**

Greece, located in southeastern Europe, began to experience significant cultural growth and development around 800 BC as they modified the Phoenician alphabet to create their own Greek alphabet. However, rather than having a strong central government, Greece was divided into several hundred self-governing communities known as city-states. This was mainly due to the geography of the region, which consisted of many mountains as well as many islands. Each community was largely cut off from surrounding areas simply by geography, so each community functioned as its own government.

Most Greek city-states preferred to remain independent and peaceful; wars between city-states were quite rare. Their governments varied as well; some were ruled by a monarchy, while others enjoyed early forms of democracy. However, Greeks also began to expand their territory during this time, as the population quickly exceeded the relatively small amount of land that was available for farming. Greeks began to form numerous colonies all across southeastern Europe. This rapid growth caused Greek culture and philosophy to expand across the entire region.

Ancient Greek philosophy placed a high value on reason and knowledge as they tried to explain the world in natural ways, apart from faith in God. They also made great advances in science, mathematics, and astronomy, which will be discussed in more detail in later lessons. Literature, poetry, music, and dance were also significant parts of the ancient Greek culture. Religion was a significant part of life in ancient Greece but, lacking the knowledge of the true God in heaven, their religious system consisted of many gods and goddesses. Animal sacrifices, prayer, and hymns were a major part of their religious life as they sought to earn favor from this large group of gods and goddesses.

## **Part 26 – The Olympic Games**

The ancient Olympic Games were a series of athletic competitions between different city-states in Greece which began in or around 776 BC. Similar to the pattern seen today, ancient Olympic Games were held every 4 years. But the ancient games were always held in Olympia, a small town in southern Greece, which was uninhabited the rest of the time and had no permanent structures to support the vast numbers of visitors who came to watch. At first there was only a long-distance foot race, but other events such as a long jump, spear throwing, wrestling, horse racing, and chariot racing were added later.

The Olympic Games were as much a political and religious event as an athletic event. The games became a political tool used by city-states to assert dominance over their rivals, and politicians would also announce political alliances at the games. At first, even though freeborn men from any Greek city-state could compete, only people from nearby areas participated. Over time, though, the games grew and began to attract more athletes from all across Greece. The games were held in honor of the Greek god Zeus and included religious rituals and animal sacrifices in addition to the athletic competitions.

The ancient Greek Olympic Games would continue in some form for more than a thousand years, even through the period of time when Rome ruled Greece, though the games began to decline in popularity after the first several centuries. The games eventually came to an end around AD 400, until the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece in 1896.

## **Part 27 – Athens and Sparta**

Two of the most prominent city-states in ancient Greece were Athens and Sparta. As early as 900 BC, Athens began to develop as a center of trade, aided by its central location in Greece and its access to the sea. The people of Athens also valued education, literature, philosophy, and art, and they were among the first to develop a form of government that was ruled by the people. In fact, they created the name “democracy” to describe their form of self-government. This was quite radical during a time in which rule by kings within a family line was the most common form of government.

Though their first attempts at democracy struggled, a politician named Cleisthenes brought about lasting change in 508 BC. From that point on, a stable democracy would continue for the next 170 years. In this system, 500 names were chosen at random from among all the free males in Athens, and those men were required to serve in their government for that year. When they proposed a new law, all male citizens had the opportunity to attend the assembly on a specific day to vote on that new law.

Though equally well-known, the competing city-state of Sparta had a very different way of life. They were ruled by a small number of leaders and did not have a democracy. Sparta had a very strong military, and the ancient Spartan warriors were known for their bravery, professionalism, and skill. Men in Sparta were required to spend much of their lives in military service, including actively serving as full-time soldiers from age 20 until at least age 40. Though Sparta did use its military might to conquer other lands at times, it mainly saw itself as the protector of Greece, and would often come to the aid of other city-states who were being invaded by foreign armies.

## **Part 28 – Ancient Rome**

The ancient Roman Kingdom began in the city of Rome, located within the Italian peninsula. According to legend, the city was founded in 753 BC, but people may have begun settling in the area as much as 200 years earlier. Limited information and no official records have survived from the ancient Roman Kingdom, largely due to a battle in Rome around 390 BC when many of Rome’s historical records were destroyed. Therefore, while a timeline of history has been pieced together by historians, the details of ancient Rome remain uncertain.

Based on the limited information that has been found, it seems that a series of seven kings ruled the Roman Kingdom from 753 BC until 509 BC. Unlike typical kings, all except the first king were elected by the people of Rome to rule for the rest of their lives, so they did not have to rely on military force to keep their power. The king was chief priest, legislator, and judge, and essentially held all power to make decisions himself. The Roman Kingdom also had a Senate which eventually grew to 300 members, but all members were appointed by the king and the Senate had no real authority. Instead, Senators primarily served as advisors to the king.

While several of the ancient Roman kings were good, peaceful leaders, their seventh and final king was known for using violence and intimidation to control Rome. After he and his family were expelled from Rome in 509 BC, the government gradually moved away from rule by a single king, which marked the beginning of the Roman Republic.

## **Part 29 – India and Hinduism**

As the cities of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization were abandoned, people turned to an agriculture-based lifestyle in what would eventually become known as the country of India. Their culture also included a significant amount of literature and poetry. The most notable of these works are the Vedas, the poetic religious text of Hinduism which were primarily composed between 1500 and 800 BC.

Since its beginnings in ancient India, Hinduism has grown to become the world's third largest religion. One key tenet of Hinduism is reincarnation, the belief that when a living being dies, the soul is reborn into a new body. According to Hinduism, there are four main goals of human life: dharma (ethics and duties), artha (work and prosperity), kama (passion and desires), and moksha (liberation from the cycle of reincarnation). Essentially, the more one focuses on dharma and being a good person, the better chance that person has of escaping from the continual cycle of reincarnation.

Hindus claim to worship a divine trinity, but it is not the same as the trinity that is taught in the Christian Bible. The Hindu trinity consists of Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). Because of the similarities, it is reasonable to conclude that the descendants of Noah who settled in this region remembered some of the teachings of the true God, but they gradually became intermingled with other philosophical ideas. At its core, Hinduism teaches that people are rewarded for being good, while the Bible makes it clear that no one is good apart from salvation in Jesus Christ.

## **Part 30 – Buddha and Confucius**

Around 500 BC, as the religion of Hinduism became more widespread in India, other religious ideas began to take root as well. Gautama Buddha, who founded Buddhism, was born in Nepal but lived in nearby India for much of his life. The teachings of Buddhism center on the Four Noble Truths which, roughly translated into English, are: life is suffering, suffering is caused by greed, suffering ends when we stop being greedy, and the way to do that is to follow the Eightfold Path (which teaches people to live ethically and unselfishly). Essentially, the main idea of Buddhism is that worldly pleasures will never fully satisfy us, so we must free ourselves from them. Similar to Hinduism, Buddhism also teaches that if one can reach nirvana (the full liberation from worldliness), that person can escape the continuous cycle of rebirth. The idea of karma, that consequences are based on intentions, also comes from Buddhism.

Around the same time, Confucius was developing his own philosophies in nearby China. Confucianism, though, focuses more on morality than on the afterlife, with a belief that human beings are fundamentally good, and teachable, improvable, and perfectible. Confucius, who lived during a time of war, violence, and injustice, primarily taught the five virtues of helpfulness, right duty, right conduct, wise thinking, and trustworthiness. He believed that good morality helps promote harmony in society.

Much of Asia, particularly India and China, have been heavily influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism since their development thousands of years ago. More than one-fifth of the modern-day world's population follows one of these systems of belief. They all represent people's attempts to improve themselves, rather than admit their sinfulness and their need of a Savior. While living morally can make the world a somewhat better place, these religions provide no true hope for eternity.



### **Part 31 – The City of Nineveh**

The city of Nineveh holds a unique place in the Bible. While most of the prophetic books are warnings to the people of Israel or Judah, two of them (Jonah and Nahum) feature warnings to Nineveh. The capital and largest city of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh was located along the Tigris River in the northern part of modern-day Iraq. The Assyrian people and especially their leaders seemed to struggle with pride, due to their accomplishments and their military strength.

Around 760 BC, God sent His prophet Jonah to Nineveh to warn them of God's wrath due to their sin and pride. However, since the people of Nineveh were Gentiles and not Israelites, Jonah did not like them and did not want to deliver God's warning. So instead of obeying God, Jonah sailed toward Tarshish, a city located more than 2,000 miles in the opposite direction in modern-day Spain. But God won't allow one of His children to run from Him for very long. God sent a storm along with a special fish to temporarily swallow Jonah and take him back in the direction of Nineveh.

Even after the fish spit Jonah out upon dry land, Jonah still had a long way to go, as Nineveh was about 600 miles northeast of Israel. When he finally reached the city, he delivered God's warning that Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days. Instead of ignoring or harming Jonah, the people listened and repented of their sin—an unusual occurrence of God saving a large group of Gentiles in Old Testament times. Jonah, who still did not like the Assyrian people, was displeased with God for forgiving them. It seems that Jonah forgot that he, too, had been forgiven for his sins. The city of Nineveh prospered over the next century, particularly under King Sennacherib, but their repentant spirit would not endure long.

### **Part 32 – Israel Falls to Assyria**

Following the reign of King Solomon, when Israel split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, those who remained in Israel were ruled by one evil king after another. Over a period of about 200 years, 19 different kings ruled over Israel, and each one led the people in an ungodly manner by worshipping idols and committing a wide variety of other sins against God. Not a single one of those kings followed and served the one true God, despite all that He had done for Israel.

God sent prophets to warn Israel to repent of their sin. Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah warned the people of Israel about what God would do to them if they failed to repent. (Prophecies against surrounding nations were sometimes included as well, but God had higher expectations for His chosen nation, whom He had led out of slavery and into the promised land.) But as a whole, the people of Israel refused to listen and continued to live in rebellion against God. In God's perfect time, He brought the powerful Assyrian army against Israel to conquer the land and take the people into captivity.

Only about 40 years had passed since the capital city of Assyria, Nineveh, had experienced great repentance following the warning that God delivered through Jonah. Sadly, though, it seems their repentance did not continue into the next generation, and their pride resurfaced instead. In 722 BC, Shalmaneser king of Assyria led his army toward Israel, imprisoning Israel's King Hoshea and besieging the land for three years (see 2 Kings 17). Then the Assyrians took the people of Israel captive and led them away from the promised land which God had given them some 700 years earlier.

### **Part 33 – Judah Defeats Assyria**

The people of the southern kingdom of Judah, whose kings continued to follow the lineage of David, fared somewhat better than did the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. They had a total of 20 kings over a period of about 350 years, 12 of which were ungodly and 8 of which were godly. At times, a godly king would come to power and would remove the idols from the land and lead the people in repentance for their sins. But at other times, an ungodly king would lead the people away from God.

Following the Assyrians' conquest of Israel in 722 BC, King Sennacherib took power and led his people in a period of great prosperity. But much had changed since the time of Jonah, and instead of having a humble heart, this king boasted in pride against God. Around 701 BC, the Assyrians attempted to capture Judah as King Sennacherib led his massive army toward Israel. But God hates pride, so He answered the prayers of King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah and responded by killing 185,000 people of Sennacherib's army in their sleep. (This is recorded in 2 Kings 18-19, 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 36-37 and also apart from the Bible in King Sennacherib's personal accounts.) As a result, King Sennacherib quietly returned home. In 681 BC, he was murdered by two of his sons in their quest to seize power.

Around 660 BC, God sent another warning to Nineveh through the prophet Nahum: Due to their ongoing sin and pride against God, Nineveh would be destroyed. This time, however, the people did not repent like they did when Jonah preached to them a century earlier, so God followed through on His promise to destroy the proud, powerful Assyrian nation. Internal civil wars beginning in 627 BC weakened the city, and Nineveh was destroyed and abandoned by 612 BC. The Assyrian Empire itself collapsed by 605 BC, being absorbed by the Medes and the Babylonians.

### **Part 34 – Judah Returns to God**

King Josiah took power in Judah in 640 BC. In the century prior to that, four different kings had ruled over Judah, three of which led people away from God. (King Hezekiah, mentioned in the previous lesson, was the only good king who ruled during that period.) But King Josiah loved the Lord and was a good king, ruling over Judah for the next 31 years. One of the first things he led the people to do as king was to repair the temple, which had been neglected for some time.

As the repairs were being done, the high priest Hilkiah found the Book of the Law—the first five books of the Old Testament which God had given to the people through Moses. Upon hearing these words, King Josiah was distraught over the sin of the people. He asked for mercy from God, then he led an effort to destroy all the altars that had been built to make sacrifices to false idols. In the 18th year of his reign, he led the people to observe the Passover. This was the first time the Passover had been observed in such a pure and reverential manner across the nation since the days of Moses and Joshua.

After reigning for 31 years, King Josiah was suddenly killed in battle, as he sought to stop the king of Egypt from leading his army through the land of Judah on their way to battle the people of Assyria. It appears that Josiah did not seek the Lord's guidance before going into battle, which may have been the reason for his death. There was great mourning throughout the land of Judah at the death of their godly king, including laments that were uttered by the prophet Jeremiah (2 Chronicles 35:25).

### **Part 35 – Judah Falls to Babylon**

While godly reforms took place during King Josiah's reign, much evil had already been done during the prior reign of King Manasseh. Four more ungodly kings followed Josiah, leading the people back into sin. Despite many warnings from the prophets Joel, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, the nation continued to disobey God. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon overtook Jerusalem in 605 BC and began taking captives. Two of those taken into captivity were Ezekiel and Daniel, prophets that God would use while His people were exiled in a foreign land. By 586 BC, Babylon had fully captured Judah, burning and destroying Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations as he watched this occur.

The young prophet Daniel was among those taken captive in 605 BC. King Nebuchadnezzar chose some young Israelite men who appeared highly intelligent to study Babylonian literature and language, and Daniel was among those chosen. Through his refusal to eat the king's defiled food, Daniel's strong faith in the one true God was visible to all those around him. Scholars often attack the book of Daniel as being inaccurate, but artifacts have been found that confirm the existence of a fiery furnace and a lions' den to punish those who refused to worship Babylonian kings and false gods.

King Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 BC and a turbulent time followed, with several different kings ruling during the next 25 years. King Belshazzar was temporarily ruling in his father's place in 539 BC when a mysterious message appeared on his wall during a large party. Daniel interpreted the message, telling Belshazzar that he would die and his kingdom would be given to the Medes and the Persians. He died that very night, and the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians soon after that, under the rule of Cyrus the Great. (There is some uncertainty regarding King Darius, who sent Daniel into the lions' den. Based on history and on Daniel 9:1, Darius was most likely appointed as a regional king under Cyrus.)

### **Part 36 – The Temple is Rebuilt**

By the year 536 BC, King Cyrus of Persia had established his rule over the former Babylonian Empire. He made a proclamation that the people of the Lord would be allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple (Ezra 1). This marked the end of a 70-year period from the time the first captives were taken in 605 BC, fulfilling the prophecy that God had given through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:1-14). This also fulfilled the prophecy given to Isaiah some 200 years earlier, when God specifically told His people that someone named Cyrus would fulfill His purpose in rebuilding the temple (Isaiah 44:28).

Upon hearing this more than 40,000 men, plus other people and livestock, left in the spring of that year and made the journey back to Jerusalem. King Cyrus also gave back the items that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem. Upon their arrival, the people first rebuilt an altar and made sacrifices to the Lord, praising Him for bringing them back to their homeland.

About a year after returning home, the people began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The rebuilding process was long and slow, and since Israel was no longer independent but was under the control of Persia, the rebuilding was stopped at least once because of complaints from other people who now lived in that region. Cyrus the Great died in 530 BC, but the rebuilding would not be completed until 515 BC. More details about the temple rebuilding can be found in chapters 1-6 of the book of Ezra.

### **Part 37 – The Persian Wars**

Following the death of King Cyrus, two other kings ruled Persia for a short time, then Darius the Great reigned from 522 to 486 BC. (For clarification, it was a different and much older Darius who had put Daniel in the lions' den while ruling under King Cyrus.) In 520 BC, under this King Darius, the people of Israel resumed the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah began their prophetic ministries at this same time (see Ezra 4:24, Haggai 1:1, and Zechariah 1:1) during the reign of King Darius, while the people of Israel continued to live under Persian rule.

Under Darius the Great, Persia sought to expand their territory and attacked surrounding lands on various occasions. The most notable of these became known as the Persian Wars, a series of conflicts between Persia and Greece between 492 and 449 BC. During this time, Persia attacked Greece on multiple occasions. One of the largest battles was the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, when the massive Persian army suffered a crushing defeat. Following the battle, the Greek army marched at high speed from Marathon back to Athens, and that 26-mile distance became the inspiration for modern-day Olympic marathons and other marathon events. Darius the Great then died in 486 BC.

King Xerxes I, son of Darius, took over the throne but the fighting did not end and Persia's desire to overtake Greece remained strong. Persia suffered another defeat in Greece in 479 BC and retreated, but not before inflicting significant damage on Athens. Sporadic fighting continued for another three decades. A peace treaty was signed in 449 BC, finally ending the war between Persia and Greece.

### **Part 38 – Xerxes I and Queen Esther**

There is agreement among most historians that King Xerxes I was the same person referred to as King Ahasuerus in the Bible, with the difference in names resulting from the translation of Xerxes into the Hebrew language. (We cannot be certain of this, and there are some historians who believe that Ahasuerus was actually the next king, Artaxerxes.) In the third year of his reign, the king held a huge festival to show off his massive wealth to all the high-ranking officials throughout his empire. At the conclusion of this festival, the king commanded his wife, Queen Vashti, to make an appearance so he could show off her beauty. When she refused to come, the king forever banished her from his presence.

Following that event, the king began a search for a new queen. He sent some of his officials throughout his kingdom, searching for beautiful young virgins. A young Jewish woman named Esther was among them, though she was advised by her Uncle Mordecai to keep her Jewish identity a secret. Esther was ultimately chosen by King Xerxes to become the new queen in 478 BC.

Sometime after this, Mordecai discovered a plot by Haman, the second-in-command under Xerxes, to kill all the Jewish people. He told Esther that she had to go before the king to plead for her people. Though appearing before the king without an invitation placed Esther in danger, she bravely did it anyway. She revealed her Jewish identity and told the king about Haman's evil plan. As a result of Esther's bravery and faith in God's protection, the Jewish people were spared. Haman was hanged on the gallows which he had constructed for Mordecai, and Mordecai was given Haman's position in the kingdom. The book of Esther is a beautiful story of God's providence and protection of His people.

### **Part 39 – The Wall is Rebuilt**

Following the murder of King Xerxes in 465 BC, his son Artaxerxes ascended to the throne and reigned over Persia for more than 40 years. In 457 BC, a Jewish priest and scribe named Ezra was given a decree from King Artaxerxes to lead a group of exiles back to Jerusalem for the purpose of restoring and rebuilding the city. (Although the temple had been completed in 515 BC, much of the city was still in ruins.) This decree is recorded in Ezra 7 and was given 483 years (69 groups of 7 years) prior to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, fulfilling the often-misunderstood prophecy given in Daniel 9:24-27.

One of King Artaxerxes' officials was a Jew named Nehemiah, who served as his cupbearer. (In those days, kings often had cupbearers to guard their drinks against anyone who may try to poison them.) When Nehemiah received a report that the wall of protection surrounding the city of Jerusalem had not yet been rebuilt, he sat down and wept, fasting and praying for days (Neh. 1:4). Without the wall, the Jews' beloved city of was still vulnerable to attacks and plundering.

King Artaxerxes noticed Nehemiah's unusually sad countenance and asked him why he was sad. Nehemiah prayed then responded, asking the king for permission to go and lead an effort to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. In God's providence, the king granted Nehemiah's request. Under the leadership of godly men like Ezra and Nehemiah, the work proceeded fairly quickly, though some opposition was encountered at times. In 445 BC, the wall was rebuilt. The last of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi, also brought messages from God to the people of Israel during this period of time.

### **Part 40 – The Roman Republic Begins**

While the Jews lived under the rule of Persian kings, the Romans gradually moved toward a form of government that was more democratic. Rome had been ruled by monarchs since its founding, but in 509 BC, Tarquin (the last Roman king) was expelled from Rome. The Roman Senate, which before had mainly acted as advisors to the king, chose to abolish the monarchy. At first, most of the king's powers were transferred to two consuls, who were elected to one-year terms. Each had the power to veto a decision made by the other, preventing one person from having full control.

During the Republic's early years, about 50 large families of powerful, wealthy aristocrats held much of the power while most Roman citizens were regarded as commoners. These farmers, traders, managers, artisans, and tenants formed the backbone of Rome's economy and could even be required to serve in the military during times of war, yet they had little influence over political decisions.

During this same time, the plebeians emerged as an organized group of commoners. This group included people who had no rights to serve in high religious or government offices, yet they were sometimes punished for breaking laws of which they had no knowledge. However, they developed an effective tool to use against the government: There were times when they would withdraw their labor and services, leaving the city as a group while allowing the aristocrats to fend for themselves. This was first done in 494 BC, after some wealthy aristocrats were abusive to plebeians who were in debt during a famine. As a result of their protest, the Senate gave them access to their laws, and the plebeians began to elect tribunes to represent their interests in the government.

## **Part 41 – Greek Philosophy**

While the Persians were expanding their empire and the Romans were living under a republic, a major focus of the Greek culture was philosophy. Socrates, born in 470 BC, is often referred to as one of the founders of Western philosophy. (Europe, and now the Americas, is known as the West, while Asia is known as the East.) Though Socrates did not leave behind writings of his own, much can be learned about him from what has been written by his students and others that knew him. He is best known for developing the Socratic method, a teaching method in which Socrates would ask his students difficult questions in order to challenge their underlying assumptions or expose contradictions within their thoughts, since humans are able to use reasoning and logic to arrive at a solid conclusion.

A well-known student of Socrates was Plato, who was born around 425 BC. He founded the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. In his philosophical studies, he struggled to understand how humans can live a fulfilling life in an ever-changing world, where they can suddenly lose everything that is important to them. Plato was followed by his student, Aristotle, who was born in 384 BC and focused his studies on the idea that happiness is the goal of life. Aristotle would eventually become the tutor to the well-known king Alexander the Great.

A truly fulfilling life, though, can only be found by obeying and submitting to the God of the Bible. In fact, God warns us (in chapter 2 of the book of Colossians and at the very end of the book of 1 Timothy) about the dangers of vain philosophy and false knowledge, because such things lead people away from the truth of God's Word. First and foremost, mankind was created to bring glory to God. Attempts to study the world apart from a proper understanding of God will always come up short.

## **Part 42 – Alexander the Great**

The land of Greece continued to operate under independent city-states, as had been the case for many centuries. Athens, Sparta, and Macedonia were among the most well-known of these. The land went back and forth between periods of peace and times of war. During the 300s BC, Macedonia began to assert its military strength under the leadership of King Phillip II. Then, when he was killed, his son Alexander became King of Macedonia in 336 BC. Alexander was just 20 years old, yet he quickly became known for his military genius as well as his diplomatic skills in the regions which he conquered.

Alexander the Great was known for leading his men to battle with impressive speed, as smaller groups reached and broke through enemy lines before his enemies were ready for battle. Within about a 10-year period, he conquered a large part of southwestern Asia (including his defeat of the powerful Persian Empire in 329 BC), as well as portions of the Middle East, northern Africa, and southeastern Europe. Egypt, which had been under Persian rule, became part of Alexander's vast empire as well.

Alexander died in 323 BC, most likely from an illness, though his exact cause of death remains a mystery. His reign only lasted 13 years, but his influence would continue for centuries to come, as the Greek culture spread throughout the lands which he had conquered. The Jews were among those who were now under Greek rule, following two centuries under the Persians. At least for a while, the Jews experienced greater freedom than before, as the Greeks allowed the Jews to keep their own traditions.

### **Part 43 – The Septuagint and the Maccabees**

Egypt continued to be ruled by Macedonian Greeks following the conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. From 284 to 246 BC, Ptolemy Philadelphus reigned as Pharaoh of Egypt under Greek rule and wanted to have a copy of the Hebrew Bible for his library, so a translation needed to be made from Hebrew into Greek. A group of 72 translators (6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel) was selected to translate the first five books of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. The rest of the Hebrew Old Testament would be translated into Greek over the next century or so, and these translations became known as the Septuagint, which means “70” (the approximate number of translators).

With the Jews now living under Greek rule, Greek was quickly replacing Hebrew as their spoken language. Alexander the Great’s empire had been split into four parts after his death, and at first, the Jews were allowed to freely observe their religious traditions. However, this changed when Antiochus IV came to power in 175 BC. He began to persecute the Jews, outlawing Jewish religious practices and ordering the worship of the Greek god Zeus instead. When Antiochus sacrificed a pig to Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem in 167 BC, a group of faithful Jews revolted against him.

This would become known as the Maccabean Revolt, named after its primary leader, Judas Maccabeus. The Maccabees were able to capture Jerusalem and rededicate the temple in 164 BC, an event which is remembered today in the celebration of Hanukkah. After the death of Judas in 161 BC, his brother Jonathan made peace with their Greek rulers in 153 BC, establishing a semi-independent Jewish nation. The Jews enjoyed full independence from 116 until 63 BC under the Hasmonean Dynasty. More details about these events can be found in the four apocryphal books of Maccabees, which are generally considered to be reliable sources of history although they are not the inspired Word of God.

### **Part 44 – Life in India and China**

During the period between 600 and 300 BC, the land of India began to shift from a collection of small rural villages to larger cities ruled by kingdoms and empires. For the most part, India managed to remain independent, as Alexander the Great was only able to invade a small part of northwestern India. In 322 BC, the Maurya Empire unified most of the Indian subcontinent into a single, unified country. During this time, trade greatly expanded across India due to the creation of a single efficient system of finance, administration, and security. In 185 BC, the last Mauryan emperor was killed and the empire collapsed, ultimately resulting in the division of India into several separate empires.

Meanwhile in China, the already weakened Zhou Dynasty fully collapsed in 256 BC. This was followed by the Warring States period, as kings from several different Chinese states battled for power. In the end, the Qin (or Ch’in) Dynasty prevailed and began to rule over all of China in 221 BC.

However, the Qin Dynasty proved to be short-lived, lasting only 15 years and collapsing after the death of its first emperor. After another brief period of war the Han Dynasty prevailed, ruling China from 202 BC until 220 AD. This period is known as the golden era of Chinese culture and would have lasting impacts in areas of government, law, philosophy, history, and art. During this period, the Chinese developed the Silk Road trade network, improved tools for use in agriculture, and invented paper.

## **Part 45 – Rome: From Republic to Empire**

Since its inception following the overthrow of the Roman Kingdom in 509 BC, the Roman Republic lasted for more than 400 years. While the Roman people enjoyed more freedom than many other nations of that time, it was not a peaceful period, as the Romans found themselves in frequent wars. Rome generally defeated its enemies, but often sustained considerable losses in the process.

One such series of wars, the Punic Wars, was a series of three wars fought between Rome and Carthage between 264 and 146 BC. (Carthage had been established around 814 BC by Phoenicians from the city of Tyre who migrated to new areas before their land was overtaken by the Assyrians.) Carthage controlled sections of southwestern Europe and northern Africa, and the two nations fought for land around the Mediterranean Sea. Rome ultimately prevailed over Carthage, but both sides experienced great losses of both men and ships. Not long after, the Roman Republic began to collapse from within.

Around 133 BC, clashes between the wealthy ruling class and the poor common people began to intensify, though most Romans became used to ever-increasing government corruption and assumed that their republican government would endure. In 49 BC, Julius Caesar led an army that gained control over the Roman government, but he was assassinated 5 years later and a series of civil wars followed. In 30 BC, a group led by Julius Caesar's adopted son, Octavian, defeated their opposition and took over in Rome. In 27 BC, Octavian was granted the use of the name "Augustus" (indicating his status above all other Romans) and the title "Caesar" (after the name of his adoptive father). The Roman Republic had ended, and Caesar Augustus would rule as the first Roman Emperor until his death in AD 14.

## **Part 46 – The World When Jesus Came**

After their relatively brief period of independence from 116 to 63 BC, the Jews experienced a struggle for power and a brief civil war. The Romans took advantage of this internal strife and the Roman army captured Jerusalem, placing the land of Judea under the control of Rome in 63 BC. The Romans generally allowed the Jews to continue to rule themselves through their own local government, which was primarily controlled by the two leading political parties of that time, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It was under this political structure that Caesar Augustus called for a census around the year 4 BC, so that he could use his power to register and tax everyone in the relatively new Roman Empire.

Therefore, Joseph and Mary were required to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the ancestral home of his family, to be registered. Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, as foretold by the prophet Micah, in about 4 BC. (Though history is split into BC and AD by the birth of Christ, He was probably not actually born in what we call year 0 due to some minor calculation errors.) The Bible (primarily in the gospel of Luke) provides few details on the birth of Jesus because His resurrection is far more significant.

Augustus installed Herod the Great as King of Judea in 36 BC. It wasn't long before Herod's death in 1 BC when he learned of Jesus from the wise men (who were most likely Medes that had studied Daniel's writings). Upon Herod's death, Augustus honored his request to divide his kingdom between his three sons. It was one of those sons, Herod Antipas, who ruled the area including Galilee. Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist and examined Jesus during His trial nearly 30 years later.



## **Part 47 – Death and Resurrection of Jesus**

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ is detailed within the four gospels of the Bible. With vastly more manuscripts than any other ancient book, the validity of the Bible is indisputable. Other ancient sources, such as the Jewish historian Josephus, add external verification to what God has told us in the Bible. Considering all the evidence, there is no legitimate reason to doubt the existence of Jesus. As for the resurrection itself, researcher Lee Strobel offers further evidence in his book *The Case for Christ*. It is noteworthy that the Jews did not crucify criminals, but the Romans did. God put the Jews under Roman rule during this time because “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13).

There is no viable reason to doubt the biblical accounts that Jesus was dead when His body was taken down from the cross. Having endured severe physical agony, He was certainly in no condition to fake His own death and then remove a heavy stone to escape from a tomb. In addition, the Roman guards verified His death before His body was taken down from the cross, and they were experts in making sure that death had occurred, because they would have to give their lives if someone escaped.

If the body of Jesus had remained in the tomb because He did not rise from the dead, either the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the Romans would have surely brought forth the body and displayed it publicly as evidence in order to stop the rapidly growing Christian faith. But this did not happen because He had risen from the dead. The risen Jesus then appeared to a number of people after His resurrection. Further proof is found in lives that have radically been changed through the work of God, both in biblical times and in the present day, as well as those who have willingly suffered and died for the sake of Jesus.

## **Part 48 – The Fall of Jerusalem**

Following the ascension of Jesus into heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Christianity began to spread rapidly. Jewish leaders as well as the Roman government attempted to stop its spread, but all their efforts were in vain. The truth of the Savior, who had died and risen again in order to pay the sin debt that we could never pay ourselves, could not be contained.

These early believers endured considerable persecution, which is chronicled in the Bible (especially in the book of Acts) as well as in Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*. One particularly brutal period of persecution for Christians came during Nero’s reign as Roman Emperor from AD 54-68, which led to a revolt in Jerusalem in AD 66. Nero died in AD 68, but the First Jewish-Roman War continued beyond his death. Following a brutal seven-month siege of Jerusalem in which no one could get in or out of the city, the Romans finally broke through the wall surrounding Jerusalem in AD 70. Much of the city was destroyed by fire, including the temple, just as prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24.

In all, the First Jewish-Roman War lasted seven years, finally ending in AD 73 with a clear Roman victory. Though the loss of the temple was devastating to the Jews, Christians view its destruction as God’s providential act in putting an end to the Old Testament sacrificial system once and for all. Based on the Bible (particularly the book of Hebrews), animal sacrifices were done to show obedience to God’s commands and to point the way to the coming Savior. But no animal sacrifice could actually forgive sin. Now, we have direct access to God through our Mediator, Jesus Christ, the great High Priest.

## **Part 49 – The Early Church**

The efforts of Jewish leaders and the Roman government to suppress Christianity actually had the opposite effect. Many followers of Christ fled areas that were being heavily persecuted, taking the good news of Jesus Christ with them into new lands. This was no doubt part of God's providence for spreading His gospel throughout the world. God sent Paul and others on various missionary journeys as well. As a result of these things, following the death and resurrection of Jesus, the church began and quickly spread throughout the known world (the Roman Empire at first, and eventually points beyond).

As these new churches faced persecution and other obstacles, Paul wrote letters to many of them, encouraging them to stand strong in the faith and instructing them in sound biblical doctrine. He wrote letters to churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica, along with letters to specific people (Timothy, Titus, and Philemon) which make up a significant portion of the New Testament. James, Peter, John, and Jude wrote letters that are part of the New Testament as well. All these letters are instructive for us today regarding matters of doctrine and Christian living.

The exact process by which the 66 books of the Bible were canonized remains somewhat of a mystery. The best explanation seems to be that all 66 books were accepted as God-inspired from the time they were written, and they were gradually collected over time and joined together into what we now know as the Bible. Some people have speculated that the biblical canon was made official in AD 325 at the Council of Nicaea, but there is limited evidence to support that claim. Most likely, the 66 books of the Bible were accepted long before that date. When one considers the harmony throughout the entire Bible, despite the fact that it was written by 40 different people over a period of about 1,500 years, it becomes clear that the Bible was written and put together through the supernatural power of God.

## **Part 50 – The Middle Ages**

Roman persecution of Christians continued for more than two centuries, finally ending in AD 313 when the Roman emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be legal. Some who suffered persecution during this time are documented in the first part of Foxe's Book of Martyrs. Over time, though, the now-legal religion of Christianity gained power and influence while becoming entangled with government, ultimately giving rise to the Roman Catholic Church and all its unbiblical heresies.

During the 600s and 700s, as the church slowly slid into darkness, a new religion called Islam was founded by Mohammed in the Middle East. Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet, not the Savior, and has become very widespread in certain parts of the world. But Islam shares a common theme with all false religions: There are good works that we can do to earn favor with God. The Bible stands alone in setting a standard that is impossible for us to reach on our own, pointing to our need of a Savior.

The primary conflict during the Middle Ages was between Catholics and Muslims (followers of Islam), who both laid claim to the same Holy Land. Muslims had conquered Jerusalem in AD 636, but the next 450 years were primarily peaceful. The Crusades began around 1095 as the Catholic Church sought to regain control of Jerusalem. The Crusades continued for about 200 years and resulted in continued Muslim occupation of Jerusalem but also a greater influence of the Catholic Church in Europe.

## **Part 51 – The Protestant Reformation**

In AD 405, Jerome translated the entire Bible into Latin, but the use of Latin eventually died out among the common people. However, Roman Catholic priests continued to use Latin, so when people would attend the mass each week, they could not understand what was being read from the Bible. The church also drifted away from the truths of Scripture, adding other ordinances and traditions. Wanting to hold on to their power and money while keeping the common people in ignorance, the Roman Catholic Church made it illegal to translate the Bible into the common language of the people.

Certain priests and scholars who had come to understand the truths of the Bible knew they had to take a stand for the truth. In the late 1300s, John Wycliffe led a group of scholars to translate the entire Bible into English, so the common people could read it themselves. The Roman Catholic Church condemned Wycliffe as a heretic and declared that owning an English copy of the Bible was illegal. John Huss also spoke against the church and was excommunicated before being burned at the stake in 1415.

In 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of his church, protesting a long list of heresies within the church. John Calvin, William Tyndale, and John Knox are among many who began to speak out against the church during the reformation. When efforts to reform the church failed, many people broke away from the Roman Catholic Church, forming some of the different denominations (Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc.) that we still see today. The Roman Catholic Church attempted to retain its power and authority, imprisoning and killing many of the leaders of the reformation. One of those men was William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English using the original Greek and Hebrew texts (as opposed to Wycliffe who translated from Latin) and was burned at the stake in 1536.

## **Part 52 – The Modern World**

As more people broke away from the oppressive Roman Church, significant advancements in science and art also began to take place. Contrary to popular belief, a firm understanding of Scripture encourages scientific research. Ultimately, ongoing unrest under oppressive rulers in Europe led to what would become the United States of America, as people left for the promise of a new land with freedom and opportunity. Though no nation is perfect, the United States led the way for many advancements, from freedom to scientific discovery. Where freedom and truth reign, people are free to discover new things. In addition, the United States was one of the first nations to outlaw slavery in the 1860s.

Meanwhile, Jerusalem remained under Muslim rule for centuries. The last in a series of Muslim empires, the Ottoman Empire, took control of the city in 1516 and ruled for 400 years until their defeat in 1917 during World War I. In 1948, following World War II, an independent nation of Israel was finally re-established as a home for the Jews, though unrest continues in that part of the world even now.

In modern times, there is a new battle to wage: the war for young minds, corrupted by media and public education. Equipping yourself with the truth, both from the pages of Scripture and from the lessons of history, is the best way to fight this new battle. Hopefully this booklet will help in that pursuit. Please share the truth about the unity between the Bible, science, and history with others in your life.

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