

# THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION

VOLUME I:  
THE ANCIENT WORLD

# THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION

## **Volume I: The Ancient World**

Text Book

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# THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION

## VOLUME I: THE ANCIENT WORLD

FROM THE DAWN OF HISTORY TO THE CONVERSION OF CONSTANTINE

Phillip Campbell

TAN

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Cover and illustrations by Chris Pelicano

ISBN: 978-1-50510-566-7

Cataloging-in-Publication data on file with the Library of Congress.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TAN Books

Charlotte, North Carolina

[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)

2016

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## FOREWORD

### A Note to Parents

There can be no doubt that the central claims of the Christian faith are deeply intertwined with historical events: A Christian ignorant of history is a Christian without any sense of his own identity. Nevertheless, ignorance of our past has never been more widespread among educated Westerners than it is today; despite the technological marvels of modernity, the post-Christian West has lost its memory and thus stands in danger of losing its very soul.

As with all educational problems, this crisis has its foundations in childhood education, which has moved resolutely over the past three decades away from teaching “history” in the traditional sense, substituting the social sciences and mere cultural exposure in history’s place. In many school curricula for children, the only appearance “history” makes is as a form of trivia—arbitrary facts about far-away times and places that are unlikely to make

a radical impact on the young student’s understanding of the world and his place in it. Catholic children are left without a robust sense of identity as Catholics; instead, the media and prevailing culture fill the vacuum, providing students with, at best, a poor understanding of their Church’s history and of the civilizations and societies shaped by Catholic culture.

Thus there is a tremendous responsibility imposed on the Catholic parents and educators of today. I would even argue that they are tasked with providing historical training as surely as they are tasked with providing moral and religious formation. Without the former, the latter will always rest on an imperfect foundation, for a young person without a proper historical education is liable to be swept away when confronted with false or tendentious narratives or with slanders against the history of his Church.

False historical narratives are not hard to find; in fact, many of them are embedded in the fabric of our culture, saturating our minds with prejudices and pre-conceptions that are hostile to our Church and its traditions, and hostile to historical fact. The prevalence of anti-Catholic historical narratives is especially marked in the English-speaking world, where the legacy of Reformation-era propaganda and “Confessional” history is enduringly anti-Catholic. The crude slanders of John Foxe in his sixteenth-century *Book of Martyrs* gave way, over the centuries, to the more sophisticated (and more decidedly anti-Christian) rationalism of Edward Gibbon in the eighteenth century and to the socially respectable, casual anti-Catholicism of Henry Charles Lea in the nineteenth. English-language historiography is thus leavened with anti-Catholicism in a way that has unavoidably influenced English-speaking Catholics. One can detect the echoes of this tradition even today, as many otherwise

fine school textbooks retain an anti-Catholic tone, even to the point of including myths that have been long since debunked by professional historical scholarship.

Outside the English-speaking world, moreover, the aggressive secularism of our time has taken a similar toll, even in countries that were devoutly Catholic in their former days. Famously, the 2004 proposed constitution for the European Union neglected to mention Christianity at all, even among the historically shared values of Europeans. Thus we live in a time of great need; parents and educators have to be able to turn somewhere for materials to educate their children on the history of the Western world.

Into this gaping breach steps TAN Books, which for decades has been fighting a lonely and increasingly desperate battle against the misinformation about the Church that dominates the press and the airwaves. Over the years, TAN has sought to publish both new works and reprinted classics on Catholic devotional life, dogma, liturgy, theology, and history. Now TAN has accepted a new challenge, responding to the needs of the time: providing the materials that homeschooling parents desperately need. I can personally attest to the timeliness of TAN's new mission; as a homeschooling father, I know how hard it can be to find materials that are trustworthy, intellectually stimulating, and engaging for children. Phillip Campbell's new *Story of Civilization* series is all of the above and more. Both he and TAN deserve enormous praise for bringing this project to fruition; more so than any other academic field, history has had an unfulfilled need for materials just like this for many, many years.

Here in Volume I, Phillip Campbell brings the history of the ancient world to life with vivid, colorful narratives and lucid explanations. This is no small task: He

covers the foundations of civilization in the ancient Fertile Crescent, the flourishing of the primordial empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the unique and fascinating history of the Israelites, and the glorious achievements of the Greeks and Romans. The Hittites and Canaanites are here, as are Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. He not only presents an insightful, fascinating take on the ancient world, from the dawn of history to the conversion of Constantine, but manages to infuse his narrative with passionate excitement, a flair for the dramatic, and a level of attention to the human element that will please any educator and charm any young student. What you hold in your hands is a treasure, a gift of tremendous value to today's world.

*Brendan J. McGuire, PhD  
Associate Professor of History, Christendom College*

## INTRODUCTION

### Your Time Has Come

Have you ever heard the expression “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it”? The quote is attributed to Edmund Burke, an Irish politician and author who lived in the eighteenth century. What did Mr. Burke mean when he said this?

To answer that question, imagine this scenario: You are four years old, sitting in the den and playing with your toys, when your older brother walks into the room. You look up and notice that he has a scar on his right hand, a burn mark you had never noticed. You have two options: You can either ask where the burn came from or ignore the new observation you have made and continue playing with your toys.

Let’s say you choose the second option and stick to your toys. Your brother walks past you and you never discover where the burn mark came from. Then let’s suppose a week later you are in the kitchen and your mother has

just removed a delicious batch of her famous chocolate chip cookies. You cannot stand to wait for them to cool, so you run up and grab one, placing your hand directly on the hot pan.

Do you see where this is going? Probably so!

Minutes later, as your mother sits consoling you and icing down your burned hand, your older brother walks in and says, “I did that very same thing when I was your age; look, I have the burn to prove it!”

If we make the decision to ignore what happened in the past—just like we ignored our brother’s scar in the previous example—we are likely to make the same mistakes as those who came before us. It won’t be long before we are grabbing at the delicious cookies atop the hot pan and burning ourselves. But if we had chosen to ask him where his burn mark came from—if we had learned the *history* of his scar—we would have learned from his experience and waited for the pan to cool.

Now take this simple, everyday story of your brother burning his hand and turn it into the story of the entire known world—*The Story of Civilization*. It may seem more difficult to learn about the history of the world than to learn about the history of your brother’s scar, but the good news is that it is far more interesting. In fact, it’s fascinating!

Although the world has often been a dangerous and harsh place for many centuries, there is no denying that the stories of the world’s history are fun to learn about. There are stories of war and betrayal, triumph and love, and courage and valiancy. You’ll learn of emperors and conquerors, kings and queens, soldiers and warriors, and saints and scoundrels.

Your time has come now to learn about it all, to learn about *The Story of Civilization*. There is a great need for

young people to know about the world’s past, because only by learning about the world can you make it a better place.

Edmund Burke’s famous quote teaches us that if we don’t learn about the mistakes our ancestors made, we are likely to repeat them, just as we might also repeat our brother’s mistake and grab the hot pan of cookies. *But the other side of this is true as well.* We can also learn about the righteous triumphs of the good and noble people of the past and strive to imitate their example. In this sense, we may want to restructure Mr. Burke’s quote. We could say, “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past and destined to not build upon the heroics, virtue, and wisdom of the past.”

The truth is that a lot of bad things happened in humanity’s past, but a lot of good things happened as well, and we have to learn about *all* of it. Learning the history of the human race will help us make sense of the world we live in and help us discover how we got here, as well as help us create a better future for those who come after us.

So open your ears and ready your imagination, because you are about to embark on an adventure, one that will take you into the distant reaches of the past. When you return, you’ll be ready to take an adventure of your own; you’ll take the wisdom you’ve learned and walk confidently into the future!

## In This Volume

In *The Story of Civilization: The Ancient World*, our journey begins with the earliest nomads and takes us up through the conversion of Emperor Constantine.

In some ways, this volume will be one of the most difficult to read because it covers a period so long ago, when life was very different from how we live now. Additionally,

it was so long ago that we don't have any pictures to help us see the people, places, and kingdoms we'll be learning about. We have to learn about these distant times from written texts and things archeologists have dug up from the ground. As we read about these ancient stories, we might find ourselves struggling to relate to the ways of life and cultural traditions of people who lived thousands of years ago. But the good news is that reading about things that are very different from our own lives can be exciting and fascinating too.

For example, did you know that young people in the Minoan culture participated in bull-leaping games? Did you know that King Xerxes of Persia ordered his soldiers to whip the waves when the ocean became rocky below his boats as they sailed to invade Greece? Speaking of the Greeks, did you know that the Greek inventor Archimedes built a giant heat ray to protect his hometown of Syracuse? The ray worked by reflecting sunbeams off giant mirrors and shooting them at enemy ships, which would catch them on fire. Or did you know that the powerful Carthaginian general Hannibal used elephants to march his army over the Alps when he went to attack the Romans? I'm sure you know about the famous Julius Caesar of Rome, but did you know that he fell in love with the famous Cleopatra of Egypt?

Hopefully you see that you'll be learning about a lot of strange but fascinating things in this first volume. Once you complete it, you'll be familiar with all the ancient civilizations of the world, including the Egyptians, the Sumerians, the Phoenicians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and many more. Of course you'll also learn the story of the Israelites from the Old Testament and our Savior, Jesus Christ, who came and redeemed us all from our sins and established His Church. The volume will

conclude with the story of the Roman Emperor Constantine and the dramatic story of his conversion to the Church that Christ founded.

So prepare yourself for a journey back in time. Soon, you'll be walking alongside the earliest nomads and helping the Egyptians construct the pyramids. Many questions you had about how things came to be will soon be answered, but one question in particular must be asked before we move forward. . . . Are you ready for an adventure?



## CHAPTER 1

# The Dawn of Civilization

### **The Nomads**

Our journey through history begins a long time ago, long before your parents or grandparents were born—before even your grandparents' grandparents were born. In fact, we must go *way* back—about seven thousand years—to the very dawn of civilization.

What was life like seven thousand years ago? For starters, you would have no computers, cars, or grocery stores, nor would you see any roads or cities. Mankind was scattered across the face of the earth in small families or tribes.

Most people did not live in one place. Instead, they roamed the earth, searching for food and sleeping in caves, in tents, or under the open sky. These early people fed themselves by collecting fruits and nuts or by hunting wild animals. When the food ran out in one place (which happened often), they gathered up everything they had

and moved to another. Those who lived this way were called *nomads*.

The world must have been a mysterious place for the early nomads. For example, modern science tells that it gets dark at night because the earth turns away from the sun. But the nomads did not know this. Imagine not knowing why the sun disappeared each night, cloaking the sky in blackness. Imagine not knowing what plants were good or deadly to eat, what caused thunder and lightning, or where sickness came from. The world of the nomads was beautiful, but it was also wondrous and dangerous.

The early nomads lived before people began to write history down, so we call this period *prehistory*. We know very little about their lifestyle, or even just their names. We can only make educated guesses about what their life must have been like.

How do we learn about the peoples of prehistory? We learn about them mainly from the remains of bones and tools dug up by scientists who study the people of the past. These scientists are called *archaeologists*.

Archaeologists discovered that the nomads buried their dead lovingly; often they placed tools and other useful items with them in the ground for use in the next life. By discovering these graves, we can learn things about the people who made them. The tools buried with the dead show that early people believed life would go on after death. In this, we learn that from the very beginning, humans had religious ideas.

It is hard to say how long life went on this way, but it was certainly a long time, and it was certainly a difficult life. People had to work extremely hard to stay alive and usually did not live to be very old.

But about seven thousand years ago, something

changed in the world. People began to settle down in one place and build cities. They gradually gave up the nomadic life of hunting and gathering. This change from nomadic life to city life was the beginning of civilization.

What is civilization? A *civilization* is a society that has become advanced and developed certain skills. When people become civilized, it usually means they have discovered how to farm, build cities, and develop writing. Some scientists also include working with metal, training animals, and making pottery as other signs of civilization. Let us look at how the nomads became civilized and where they built their first cities.

### **Life by the River**

Civilization did not happen just anywhere. The first civilizations always grew up near rivers. Why is this? Imagine that you are part of a nomad tribe. You follow the migrations of animals, hunting them as they move. One day, your family follows the animals into a lush river valley. The animals have come there to drink.

Your tribe soon realizes the river can provide them with all they need. The river offers a source of freshwater, fish to eat, and lots of mud and reeds to build simple houses. Rich varieties of plants grow near the river, providing food, and the animals you hunt come there to drink. You don't have to move around anymore; you can live near the river.

The Tigris-Euphrates river valley was home to the world's most ancient civilizations. The Nile River in Egypt, the Indus River in India, and the Yangtze River in China were also the sites of ancient civilizations. By 4000 b.c., these rivers had large groups of people living near them all year long.

These rivers would occasionally flood. The rushing floodwaters would carry dirt called *silt* from the riverbed.

The silt was rich in nutrients; as the floodwaters spread out over the land, they also spread the silt. This made the lands near the river very good for growing things. The first nomads who settled by the rivers soon realized the connection between water and growing crops. Eventually, they would start planting their own crops and relying on the flooding rivers to water them. This was the beginning of agriculture.

### **Shukallituda the Gardener**

Of course, men did not learn how to farm overnight. It may have taken hundreds of years. One ancient Sumerian story, the tale of Shukallituda the gardener, reveals a little bit of the struggle the earliest farmers must have had in figuring out the best techniques:

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Shukallituda planted for himself a vast garden in which he hoped to grow all kinds of green plants. Yet no matter what he did, Shukallituda found that his plants were always dying. Shukallituda was very perplexed by this.

One day, he went out to his garden, and a raging wind blew dust from the nearby mountains into his face. The blazing sun also beat down upon his head. Shukallituda perceived that the sun and the dust blown off the mountains were destroying his plants. How could this be stopped?

Shukallituda lifted his eyes to the heavens, studied the divine laws of nature, and asked the gods for wisdom. Then the answer was revealed to him. Shukallituda planted trees around his garden—pleasant trees with broad leaves that gave shade from dawn to dusk. They also formed a barrier to stop the wind and dust from striking his garden with such force. After this, Shukallituda's garden blossomed with all sorts of green plants.

We will revisit the Sumerians in a later chapter. The point of this story is that learning these skills was often the result of trial and error over a long period of time.

But once farming was mastered, what a difference it made! Imagine for a moment the thrill early people must have experienced when they realized they did not have to roam about the world chasing their food but instead could grow it right in their own backyards! Imagine how much easier life would become if you did not have to spend all day walking around picking up seeds and berries. Of course, life was still difficult, but with the development of farming, it became much less treacherous.

### **The Spread of Cities**

With farming came more food. With more food available, more people could live closer together. They used the mud from the riverbeds to build mud-brick houses. Mud does not sound very sturdy, but once dried in the sun, mud-brick houses were fairly stable. These settlements provided safety and an easier life. More people were attracted to them. These settlements became the first cities.

Once people came together in cities, they realized that not everybody needed to farm. Farmers continued to tend their fields outside of the towns, but other people did different things. Some people used the clay from the riverbed to make pottery. Others raised sheep and spun the wool into clothing. Some made tools out of wood or beaten copper. Some took these goods and traded them with other cities.

Like modern cities, the early cities were bustling, busy places full of noise and activity. Such a life required someone to keep order, so some men became rulers. Their job

was to keep the city safe and make sure people treated each other fairly. These rulers were the first kings. In the beginning, each city had its own king. Each city and the farms surrounding it was its own little kingdom.

Besides making city life possible, the rivers also provided a way to travel. By making rafts of wood or reeds, people could travel up and down the rivers, visiting other cities and trading goods with them. These people were called *merchants*. By carrying crops and tools from place to place, the merchants helped the spread of ideas. Civilization spread farther, and more people settled down in the river valleys.

### The Written Word

It was the trading of the merchants that led to the creation of writing, another sign of civilization. Many archaeologists think writing may have developed from trade. In order to trade goods, people needed a way to keep track of what and how much of it was being bought and sold. The merchants kept track of this information by making marks in tablets of wet clay. For example, if a merchant shipped ten jars of oil, he might make ten marks on the clay. The marks were a way to keep count. Over the centuries, the system became more complex. Combinations of marks could mean different numbers and eventually different words.

Writing is extremely important for civilizations to thrive. Once writing developed, ideas could be passed on to others with greater ease. Imagine you want to tell a story. Without writing, the only way to do this would be to tell the story with your mouth. Each time a new person wanted to hear the story, you'd have to retell it. This could be very time consuming.

But with writing, you no longer have to do this. Now



anybody who wants to know the story can simply read it. It could be read by many, many people. In fact, that piece of writing might still be going around long after you have grown old and died. Thousands of people could read your story for many lifetimes—and you only had to write it once! This is how writing helps ideas pass from place to place and from generation to generation. Stories of the ancient world are still being read today—many of them by you right now in this very book.

Eventually, other developments came. People learned to extract metal from rock to make beautiful vessels and jewelry. They learned to tame oxen, pigs, chickens, horses, and other animals for food, clothing, and transportation. They even began developing art and literature. All this happened around five or six thousand years ago, between 4000 and 3000 b.c. It was a very exciting time to be alive. In the following chapters, we will voyage to several of the earliest civilizations, those of Egypt and Sumer.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Gift of the Nile

#### **King Narmer's Victory**

We will start this chapter by bearing witness to the ceremony honoring the great King Narmer after his victorious march against the northern kingdom of Egypt:

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We are standing on a plain beside a broad and gently flowing river. The plain is crowded with all sorts of people: merchants, potters, elders, and many farmers. They are buzzing with excitement. They have all come to see the return of Narmer, the great king of the south. He had marched off to war in the distant north and has returned victorious.

A hush falls over the crowd as the procession of the king approaches. First come the priests of Amun-Ra, clouding the air with incense to the sun god for Narmer's victory. Next we see the soldiers of the great king. They

are dressed in white tunics and carry spears and small wooden shields. Marching rank on rank, they lead a train of prisoners captured from the enemy's army.

Finally, we see the great king himself: Narmer. He rides in a chariot of bronze pulled by two mules. On his head is a tall, white crown, and in his hand, he carries a war club. When he lifts his war club in the air, all the people shout with excitement. The chariot stops, and the great King Narmer dismounts. The crowd again falls silent.

A prisoner is brought before the king. He is naked except for a small cloth around his waist. This man is the king of the north, the king whose army Narmer defeated. The prisoner is thrown trembling to the ground. Narmer approaches the defeated king and grabs him by the hair. With his other hand, he touches his war club to the man's forehead. This symbolizes Narmer's victory.

A court official then steps forward and presents Narmer with the crown of the conquered king. It is a slender crown of red. Narmer slides it upon his head and over his own white crown. This symbolizes that Narmer is now king of the north and the south. The captives and the conquered king are taken away to the sounds of the people cheering.

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## Egypt and the Nile

We don't know all the details, but something like this happened in the North African land of Egypt around 3100 B.C. How do we know what happened in Egypt more than five thousand years ago? The Egyptians carved a picture of Narmer's victory on a flat piece of stone. That stone was later discovered by archaeologists. This stone, called the Narmer Palette, is believed to be the oldest historical document in the world.



In the previous chapter, we saw how civilization tended to start in river valleys. This was the case with Egypt. Egypt is located in the northeastern corner of Africa on the border of the Sahara Desert. Most of Egypt is desert and cannot support a human population. Sometimes Egypt can go many years without getting any rain.

The only good land in Egypt is near the Nile River.

The Nile is one of the longest rivers in the world. It starts in the highlands of central Africa and flows thousands of miles northward, up toward the Mediterranean Sea. While most of Egypt is barren and lifeless, the land near the Nile River is lush and very good for farming. Why is this?

Every summer, the Nile flooded, overflowing its banks and spreading out into the surrounding farmland. The floods would carry silt from the riverbed; as the floodwaters spread out over the land, they also spread the silt. This made the lands near the river very good for farming.

The Nile was a broad, peaceful river. Its yearly flooding was regular and fairly gentle. The Egyptians learned to predict exactly when the river would flood and planted their crops accordingly. The annual floods allowed the Egyptians to grow rich harvests of wheat, barley, vegetables, figs, melons, and pomegranates.

Though there was not very much farmland in Egypt, it was able to produce more than enough for the Egyptian people. Egypt became more populous, villages merged, and bustling cities formed along the banks of the Nile—great cities like Thebes, Memphis, and Abydos. Today all that remains of these cities are the lonely ruins of their massive stone temples, but once they were filled with thousands of people.

## Two Kingdoms

As Egypt grew, two different kingdoms developed. In the north, the Nile River branches into seven smaller rivers and flows into the Mediterranean Sea. This is called the *Delta* region. The people of the Delta were peaceful and lived in small farming villages. Their capital was a city called Memphis. They were ruled by a king who wore a red crown.

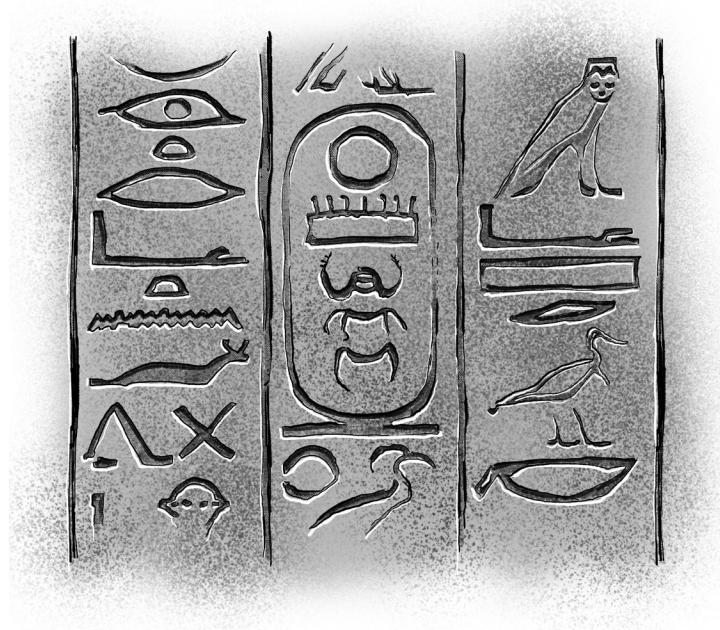
Farther south, the land rises into large, sloping hills. The desert creeps in closer to the river, and the climate is much harsher. The Egyptians who lived here were stronger and more polished warriors. Their capital was the great city of Thebes, where they were ruled by a king who wore a white crown. Narmer was the king of this southern kingdom.

Because southern Egypt is full of hills and highlands, it was called Upper Egypt. Because northern Egypt is lower and the Nile flows down into it, it was called Lower Egypt. This means that if you look on a map, Upper Egypt will be on the bottom, and Lower Egypt will be on the top—the exact opposite of how you would expect it to be!

Upper and Lower Egypt had much in common. Their people spoke the same language, they both depended on the flooding of the Nile for their livelihood, and they both grew the same sorts of crops. They even worshipped the same gods: Amun-Ra, the god of the sun; Sobek, the god of crocodiles; Hathor, the goddess of motherhood; Horus, the god of the sky; and many others.

It was the priests of these gods who developed the first system of writing in Egypt, called *hieroglyphics*. Hieroglyphics were a kind of pictographic writing. This means that their words were little pictures: a falcon, an eye, a mountain, and hundreds more. Hieroglyphics were often carved in stone on temples and tombs for religious purposes. Many of these carvings survive today.

In the beginning, Upper and Lower Egypt were often at war with each other. Nobody knows how long this went on, but it is thought to have lasted for centuries. Then, around 3100 b.c., King Narmer of Upper Egypt defeated the king of Lower Egypt and united the two kingdoms. To symbolize the union of the two kingdoms, Narmer combined the red crown of Lower Egypt with

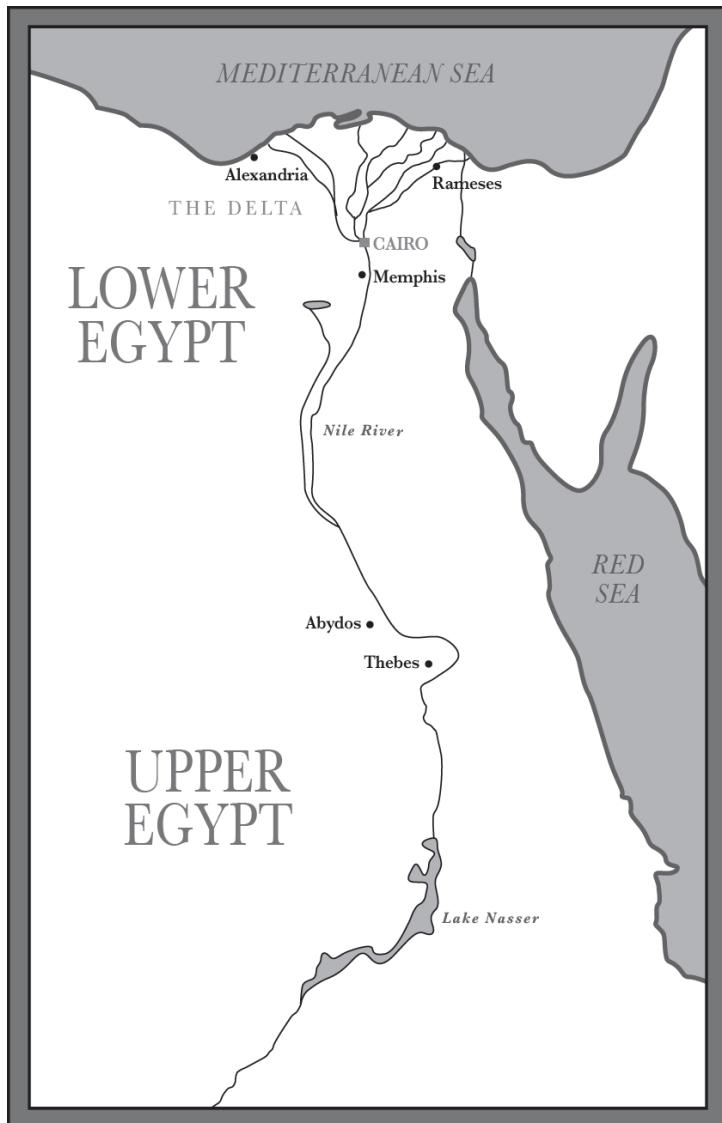


the white crown of Upper Egypt. Narmer is considered to be the first king, or *pharaoh*, of unified Egypt.

Though the Egyptians were unified, they never forgot that they had once been two kingdoms. The Egyptians always referred to their own kingdom as the “Two Lands.” Later, in times of trouble or war, Egypt would break up again into two kingdoms. But then a strong pharaoh would arise, reunite Upper and Lower Egypt, and again take up the double crown of Narmer.

### A Common Egyptian Day

What was life like for an average Egyptian during the reign of Narmer? Very few Egyptians were priests, nobles, or craftsmen; the majority of them were farmers. Let’s take a look at a day in the life of an Egyptian family from 3100 b.c.:



The day begins with the sunrise. Pentu, the father of the house, rises and puts on his coarse linen tunic while his wife, Kawit, lights a fire and begins grinding wheat. After a quick breakfast of dried fruit and bread, Pentu and his two sons head out to the fields to tend the crops.

At harvest time, Pentu knows he will have to present some of his crops to the officials of the Temple of Amun-Ra at Thebes, for it is the temple that owns the land rather than his family. Pentu and his sons are simply the cultivators of the land in exchange for rents paid in crops. This is how it was for him and all his fellow farmers.

When Pentu and his sons examine the heads of grain, they find them ripe and full. He smiles. This year there will be plenty of food, even after giving the due portion to the temple.

At home, Kawit has begun baking bread. Her nine-year-old daughter, Ipwy, scuttles off down to the Nile carrying the family's laundry. Detergent has not been invented, so Ipwy must clean the linen garments by wetting them in the river and slapping them against a large stone.

Meanwhile, Pentu and his sons rest under the shade of a great sycamore tree. They eat their lunch of bread, dried meat, and beer. Pentu's two sons also drink beer. In ancient Egypt, beer is a very common beverage, with people of all ages drinking it. After lunch, Pentu and his sons will tend to their melon patch as well as the family's small flock of ducks.

The melon patch looks dry. Pentu and his sons use a device called a *shaduf* to get water from the Nile. The shaduf is a simple bucket on a lever that draws water from the river and irrigates the crops. Using the shaduf is very hard, but necessary, work.

Ipwy returns from the river to find bread cooling and her mother busy preparing beer. Kawit is mixing crumbled barley dough into a vat of heated date juice. The mixture will be left to sit for a time before it is ready to drink. When her mother is done with the beer, Ipwy will help her prepare stew for dinner.

The sun is now dipping low behind the western mountains. Shadows fall over the Nile Valley. Pentu and the boys return from the farm, dirty and with empty stomachs. Kawit has prepared a delicious stew of boiled duck, lentils, and onions served with bread and beer. Before eating, Pentu stands and pours some of his beer onto the dirt floor of the family's home. This is an offering to the god Bes, the protector of the household. Pentu is grateful for the good crop and health of his family.

After dinner, the children are sent to bed. Pentu and Kawit gather by the soft light of an oil lamp and discuss the day. Kawit mends the tears in the children's linen garments as she listens to her husband speak of the good harvest awaiting them. As the stars turn in the sky above their home, they shuffle off to bed to regain their strength for another day of labor.

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Such was a day in the life of an Egyptian peasant farmer in the days of Narmer.

By 3100 b.c., the Egyptians had developed their own unique civilization. While many Egyptians lived in great cities beside the Nile, most continued to farm in small villages throughout the Nile Valley. Egypt became more populous. Under Narmer, the first pharaoh, the two kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt were united. All this made possible the great flowering of Egyptian civilization we will see in the following centuries.



## CHAPTER 3

# Egypt in the Pyramid Age

### **Pharaohs and Dynasties**

Have you ever thought about how roads bring people into contact with each other? You probably live on a street with other houses. If you wanted to visit one, you would walk down the street to get there. If you wanted to go to the store with your parents, you would hop in a car and follow the road to get where you wanted to go. Roads bring people together.

In ancient Egypt, the Nile River was like a main road. Merchants, using simple reed rafts, traveled the Nile to sell their goods in far-off cities. Officials of the pharaoh's court also used the Nile to send messages to different parts of the kingdom. Since there was peace, it was safe and easy to travel. This brought the Egyptian people closer together. Under Narmer and his successors, Egypt became a very prosperous kingdom. Egyptian pharaohs

grew very strong. In this chapter, we will look at some of the advances of Egyptian civilization after Narmer.

As the first pharaoh, Narmer was also the founder of the first Egyptian royal dynasty. When we speak of Egyptian history, a *dynasty* refers to a family or kinship group who ruled the kingdom. Over the centuries, ancient Egypt would be ruled by more than thirty-one dynasties. Some dynasties held power for only a very short time, while others remained in control for a hundred years or more; it depended on the strength or weakness of each pharaoh.

In the first dynasties, the pharaoh was very powerful. The people believed he was the son of Amun-Ra, the most important god of Egypt. The people of Egypt worked to support the pharaoh and his court. The pharaoh kept tight control over his kingdom. He told Egyptian farmers what crops to grow and how much was needed. Like the temples, the pharaoh owned a great deal of land, and farmers who lived there owed him a portion of their crops.

The earliest dynasties come from a period called the *Old Kingdom*. The Old Kingdom lasted from the time of Narmer to around 2181 b.c. The pharaohs of the Old Kingdom made their capital at a city called Memphis in Lower Egypt.

### **The First Pyramids**

The pharaohs of Memphis liked to build large monuments. This showed that they were important people. Some of the most splendid buildings were the tombs of the pharaohs. The Egyptians believed that a king would live forever in the next life if his body was preserved. They built large, thick tombs of stone to protect the body of the pharaoh to ensure his spirit would live forever.

The earliest tombs were called *mastabas*. Mastabas were large, rectangular buildings underneath which the body of the pharaoh was buried. At first, mastabas were made of mud brick, but later they were done in stone. Most of the great Egyptian buildings were made of stone. Egypt did not have a lot of trees for wood, so important buildings were constructed from rock quarried from the mountains surrounding the Nile Valley.

Of course, when we think of Egyptian tombs, we think not of mastabas but of *pyramids*; however, the Egyptians did not build pyramids at first. They were invented in the middle of the Old Kingdom by a royal architect named Imhotep. Let us peek into the workshop of Imhotep to see how the pyramid was invented:

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The year is 2680 b.c., about 320 years after Narmer's unification of Egypt. The pharaoh is Djoser, of the third dynasty. It is evening. Imhotep leans over the rough, wooden table in his workshop, looking at papyrus scrolls. These scrolls contain plans for some of Djoser's monuments. As chief architect, Imhotep is in charge of designing and building all the pharaoh's most important buildings.

There is a knock at the door. A servant enters with a grave look on his face. "Master, you have received a message from the Ruler of Rulers, the great King Djoser."

Imhotep stops. A message from the pharaoh is always serious.

"Bring it to me at once."

The servant bows and hands his master a rolled-up piece of papyrus. Imhotep unrolls it and squints to read the dark ink by the light of his oil lamp. His jaw drops.

"What is it, my master?" asks the servant.

"The great Djoser sends directions to begin work on

his tomb at once. But he says he does not wish for a tomb like those of his forefathers. He wants something that will be grand—something that will make the people marvel!"

"That should not be difficult for you, my master. You are the most well-respected architect in all of Egypt."

Imhotep does not look so certain. Worry consumes his face. "Perhaps," he says. "But kings are difficult to please. Let us pray the gods grant me wisdom to find pleasure in his sight!"

The servant bows and departs. Imhotep stays up late into the night sketching ideas for Djoser's tomb, but nothing looks good enough. It gets late, and Imhotep is weary.

Then inspiration strikes the great architect—a brilliant idea! Imhotep begins drawing and talking to himself.

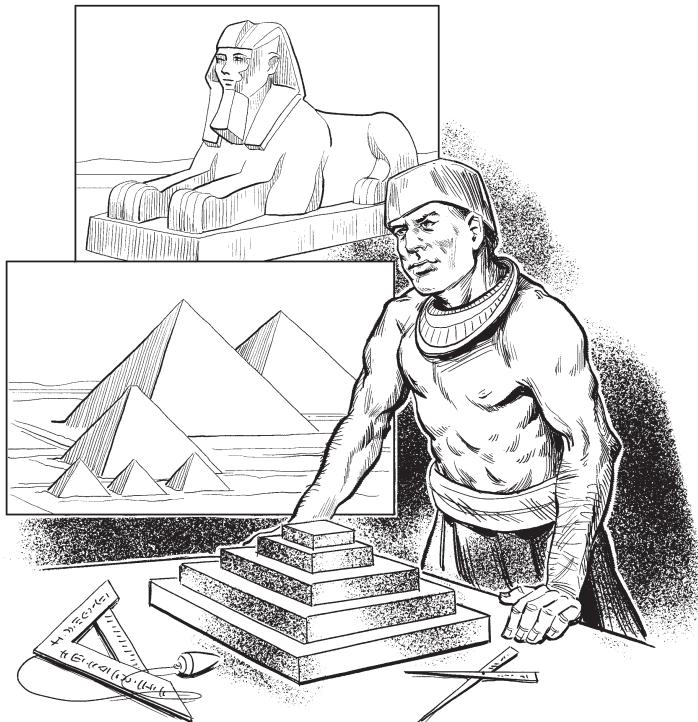
"What if, instead of one mastaba, we stack *two* on top of each other—a second, smaller mastaba on top of the first?" He quickly sketches out his vision. "Yes! Yes!" he says excitedly. "But why stop there? Why not another? And *another*?"

The grand concept begins to take form on paper as Imhotep rejoices.

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Imhotep's inspiration led to the world's first pyramid: the famous step pyramid of Djoser. The design stacked six mastabas on top of each other, each smaller than the one before, reaching a height of 203 feet. The pyramid of Djoser still exists today in the desert just west of Memphis. Some of the stone has worn away, and the steps are always covered with sand blown in from the desert, but it still stands as a testament to the glory of Djoser and the genius of Imhotep.

After Imhotep, other architects would improve on his



design and build bigger and bigger pyramids. The biggest pyramid ever constructed was the *Great Pyramid* of Giza. This pyramid was built as a tomb for the pharaoh Khufu, who lived about a hundred years after Djoser. At 481 feet, it was the tallest man-made structure on earth for many centuries. It has been called one of the wonders of the world.

The Great Pyramid took twenty years to build. It was full of dead ends, false doors, and hidden passages. Tomb robbers often broke into pyramids, looking for the gold and jewels that were buried with the pharaohs. Khufu wanted a tomb so large and secure that nobody would be able to find his grave. Despite his efforts, the

Great Pyramid was broken into and robbed. All the treasures of Khufu—even the king's body itself—are long gone.

Another famous monument was the *Sphinx*, a statue of a lion with a human head. This famous statue was built by Khufu's son, Chephren. Nobody knows who designed it or why it was built. Even the Egyptians of later days were not sure. It remains a mystery.

### The Afterlife

The most important Egyptian buildings were all religious, either temples or tombs for the pharaohs. The ancient Egyptians were a very religious people. Their religion was very mystical, with lots of rituals and magic spells. Many of the rituals had to do with preparing for the next life. The rites surrounding the death of a pharaoh were the most important.

When a pharaoh died, his body underwent a complex process of preparation for mummification. A *mummy* is a body that has been treated so that it does not decay. It was believed that the king's departed soul would have peace so long as his body was preserved. The Egyptian priests were in charge of carrying this out. The priests wrote a book called the *Book of the Dead* that explained all these rituals.

In the beginning, the Egyptians believed only the pharaoh's soul was privileged enough to enjoy rest after death, while the souls of common people went down to a dark underworld. But gradually, Egyptians came to accept that anybody could enjoy peace in the next life if they were righteous. The Egyptians believed that at death, a person's soul was weighed on a scale against a feather. If they had done no evil, they would be admitted into eternal happiness.

## The Beginning of the End

Though the Egyptian Old Kingdom was powerful, the Egyptian people were not warlike. They were content to work their fields, drink their beer, and live in peace. The pharaohs of the Old Kingdom were more concerned with building monuments, mining copper, and trading with other lands than waging war. Their reigns were generally peaceful and prosperous.

Egypt was a large place. The pharaohs of the Old Kingdom governed it by appointing governors called *nomarchs* to oversee the different regions of the kingdom, which were known as *nomes*. The nomarchs were responsible for collecting taxes and enforcing the pharaoh's decrees.

Life continued like this year after year and century after century. Farmers woke with the sun and labored in their fields. The Nile's annual flooding kept the land fertile. Crops were collected by the pharaoh and the temples. Pharaohs came and went, each with his own tomb and monument. The ancient rituals were carried out. Law was administered from the court of the pharaoh through the nomarchs.

But things did not go on this way forever. Toward the end of the Old Kingdom, there was a pharaoh named Pepi II. Pepi had a reign—not a lifespan but a *reign*—of ninety-four years! Through much of his reign, he was an old man, and in his elder years, he was not able to control the nomarchs. They took more power for themselves while the pharaohs got weaker.

The nomarchs eventually became so powerful that they did not obey the pharaohs anymore. They ruled like little kings in their own regions and began warring with one another. Trade and communication broke down. The pharaohs lost control. Egypt was split again into Upper and Lower Egypt. Everywhere there was chaos and confusion.

Even though the Old Kingdom ended badly, the Egyptians had much to be proud of. They had built marvelous stone structures like the pyramids and the sphinx when most people in the world were still building with wood and mud. They had a well-run system of government in a time when most humans still lived in primitive tribes. They had developed beautiful hieroglyphic writing when most cultures had no writing at all.

We will now leave Egypt for a time to look at another river valley where civilization was thriving: the Mesopotamian land of Sumer.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Land Between Two Rivers

#### A Merchant and His Son

Let us peek in on an Egyptian father and son as they journey down the Nile on a trading expedition:

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Along the shady banks of the Nile, Anen secures the cargo on the deck of his father's ship. Anen's father, Merniptah, is one of the most well-respected merchants in the Egyptian city of Memphis. Anen lashes clay jugs together with a rope while his father talks to a royal official. This trip is very important. The chief steward of the pharaoh's household has asked Merniptah to bring back something special for the pharaoh. It is also Anen's first time going abroad with his father.

After some time, father and son are ready to depart. Merniptah uses a long pole to push the ship off into the Nile. The craft is thin and long with only a small, linen

sail. One end of the ship is loaded with clay jugs, bowls of polished copper, and jewelry made of tin. The other end is bare, except for a small reed hut where Anen and his father will live for the duration of the voyage.

The boat drifts down the river as the sun begins to dip in the west and a cool breeze blows across their faces. Anen asks Merniptah, “Father, what is it the royal official has asked us to retrieve?”

“A very special stone, my son—something called *lapis lazuli*. It is a rare and beautiful stone, deep blue in color and polished brightly. But we will not find it in Egypt. We must travel many days to obtain it.”

“Why does the pharaoh want this lapis lazuli?”

“Pharaoh is about to hold his *Sed festival*,” his father explains. “This means he is celebrating thirty years on the throne. He wants to commemorate the day with a special stone in his crown, a stone of lapis lazuli.”

“And he has asked you to obtain it for him!” Anen says with pride.

His father smiles. “Lapis lazuli is found in the distant cities of Sumer. I am one of the few merchants of Memphis who has been there before. Pharaoh wants someone who knows what he’s doing.”

Anen scratches his head. “Where is Sumer, father? Is it far?”

Merniptah laughs and tousles Anen’s hair with his rough hands. “Very far, my son, very far indeed.”

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## Mesopotamia

The cities of Sumer that Merniptah spoke of were in the land of Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia is the name for a region of western Asia that was home to another flourishing

## CHAPTER 4—THE LAND BETWEEN TWO RIVERS



civilization. Compared to Egypt, the climate in this region is much better. It is milder with more rainfall. Water is more abundant, as Mesopotamia is home to not one but two major rivers, called the Tigris and the Euphrates.

The lands of the broad river valley between the Tigris and Euphrates are excellent for farming. In fact, the name Mesopotamia means “land between the rivers.” These two rivers begin flowing in the far west, among the distant Taurus Mountains. They wind their way lazily down the plains of Mesopotamia and irrigate the entire region until spilling into the Persian Gulf in the south. Ancient merchants like Merniptah and his son traveled down these rivers, trading in Mesopotamia’s many cities.

Many different groups of people settled Mesopotamia over the centuries. The first of the Mesopotamian city builders were called the *Sumerians*; they called their homeland Sumer, which was in southern Mesopotamia. It is in the cities of Sumer that Merniptah and Anen hoped to trade their goods and obtain the precious lapis lazuli stone.

## The Sumerians

The Sumerians made many important discoveries: They were the first people to develop writing, build sailboats, use irrigation, and domesticate animals. They also invented the time system based on sixty-second minutes and sixty-minute hours, which we still use today.

Because there was better land in Mesopotamia than in Egypt, the Sumerians could support more people and build bigger cities than the Egyptians—and more of them! The ruins of these great cities can still be seen on the Mesopotamian plains today—places like Uruk, Lagash, Eridu, Nippur, and Kish.

Cities were much more important in Mesopotamia than in Egypt. Unlike the Egyptians, who mostly lived in small farming villages, most Sumerians lived in cities. At first, the Sumerians had no single king or ruler like the pharaohs of Egypt; instead, each city was its own independent kingdom. Every city had its own king and its own special gods. A city that is an independent kingdom is called a *city-state*. All the early Sumerian cities were city-states.

Cities were often built around a sacred area dedicated to the city's patron god or goddess. The city's gods were worshiped at massive temples called *ziggurats*. A ziggurat looked like an Egyptian pyramid but with temples at the top that were reached by massive staircases.

Outside the sacred precinct, there were homes for thousands of people of all sorts. Some Sumerian cities were home to as many as two hundred thousand people. The cities of Sumer made alliances to ensure peace, but often cities became enemies and fought wars against each other. Since they were often at war, most Sumerian cities were surrounded by walls.

The Sumerians were busy people; they were builders,

laborers, woodworkers, potters, coppersmiths, weavers, sculptors, fishermen, and gardeners. Many were also merchants, trading with far-away lands like India and Afghanistan, where they obtained the precious lapis lazuli stones sought by Merniptah for the pharaoh's crown.

Like the Egyptians, the Sumerians had their own form of writing. But unlike Egyptian hieroglyphics, it was invented not by priests but by merchants. Sumerian writing was called *cuneiform*. It was made by pressing wedge-shaped marks into wet clay; the word “cuneiform” literally means “wedge-shaped.” Eventually, it became the system of writing used throughout all of Mesopotamia.

What sorts of things do we read about in the surviving cuneiform inscriptions? Many of them relay the deeds of the city-states’ kings, men with strange names like Ensipadzidana, Undalulu, and Ur-Zababa. We learn about their wars, waged often for gathering wealth, lands, and honor. We also read lists of donations made to the temples.

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

The Sumerians also wrote stories. Many wonderfully entertaining tales from Sumerian mythology still survive today—stories of the founding of the world, the arguments of their gods and goddesses, and the deeds of their great heroes. The most famous Sumerian story is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*; an *epic* is a poem, song, or story about the adventures of a great hero.

When Gilgamesh’s good friend Enkidu dies, he travels the world, seeking the secret of eternal life so that he will never have to face death himself. Gilgamesh finds a plant that can make him live forever, but things don’t work out the way he planned. Let’s pause for a moment to look in on his adventure:

Gilgamesh trembled with excitement. He held in his hand the plant of eternal life.

“All I have to do is eat this, and I will live forever,” he said to himself.

But he was still worried. *What if it doesn’t work?* he thought. *Or worse, what if it makes me sick? How can I be sure?* Gilgamesh pondered the problem for a moment. Then he had an idea.

“I must test it first!” he finally said. “When I return to my city of Uruk, I will feed some to an old man and see if it truly does restore his life. If so, then I too will take it.”

Gilgamesh set off for Uruk, bringing the plant of immortality with him. But the journey was long, and the sun of Mesopotamia was hot. Weary after crossing a dusty plain, Gilgamesh sighed and said, “I’m burning up and covered in dirt! A king can’t return home looking like this. I’ll stop and bathe myself.”

He found a cool, bubbling spring that looked very refreshing. Gilgamesh took off his clothes and jumped into the water to bathe. He left his clothes—and the plant—on the shore. *I’ll only be a moment*, he thought to himself.

But while he was in the water, a serpent slithered out of the weeds, sniffing about curiously. The snake found the plant of immortality among Gilgamesh’s clothes and began to munch on it. Gilgamesh looked up just in time to see the snake eating the plant.

“Stop!” he cried out.

But it was too late. The snake slid back into the weeds, having eaten the plant of immortality. As the snake left, it shed its old skin and became young again. Gilgamesh cried and beat his fists on the ground; he had lost the gift



of immortality. He made his way back to Uruk in sorrow with nothing to show for his journey.

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Gilgamesh's sorrow is not the end of the story, though; the goddess of wine making appeared and told Gilgamesh that death is the common end of all people. Since it cannot be escaped, the best thing we can do is enjoy our lives here and cherish those who are close to us.

Even though death can make life sad, life is still good, and its goodness ought to be enjoyed. When Gilgamesh returned home, his friend was still dead, and he knew that one day he too would die, but he was a better man for making the quest. Eternal life would continue to elude man, at least for the time being.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* shows that the Sumerians were capable of very beautiful thoughts. Even at this early age in history, people were asking big questions about the world. Where did everything come from? What is the meaning of life? How are we to live? What happens when we die? Like Gilgamesh searching the world to find the secrets of life, the pagans of the ancient world searched to find the answers to these big questions. People have always wanted to know the truth about the world and themselves.

## Foreign Invaders

While Narmer was able to unite the peoples of Egypt, the Sumerians were never able to bring their city-states together into a single kingdom. Despite their pleasant land, their creativity, and their hard work, the kings of the city-states continued to bicker and fight among themselves. This constant strife made the Sumerian people weak.

Around 2270 b.c., another group of people called the Akkadians came from the north and began to settle in Sumer. At first, the Sumerians traded peacefully with the Akkadians, but eventually the Akkadians conquered all the Sumerians' cities. A powerful king named Sargon unified all the Sumerian city-states into a single kingdom. He was the first king of unified Mesopotamia.

The Akkadians were not the last group to invade and settle Mesopotamia. Other cultures—Amorites, Kassites, Elamites—all came to Mesopotamia in turn. Most of these peoples adopted the culture and writing of the Sumerians.

### **Hammurabi and His Laws**

One important ruler was Hammurabi, the king of Babylon. He wrote down one of the world's first *law codes*. A law code is a list of laws telling people what is allowed and what is not allowed in society. In the old days, laws were not written down, but Hammurabi thought they should be written so that everybody could read and learn them.

What sort of things did Hammurabi's code say? His code was very simple; it consisted of a list of crimes and the punishments that went with each crime. Most of the laws were strict. Robbery, kidnapping, and saying false things about people were all punished with death. Some of the laws said that whatever one person does to another, the same shall be done to him. For example, if a man poked out another man's eye, he would have his eye poked out in return.

Hammurabi's code was not perfect, but it was better than having no law at all. It shows us that ancient people cared about justice. Future kings would continue to work on making better laws. Though often troubled by wars,

floods, or other disasters, civilization in Mesopotamia would continue to develop.

Beginning with the Sumerians, Mesopotamia became the center of an advanced civilization. Merchants from far-off lands, like Merniptah and his son, would come and bring Mesopotamian goods back with them. Mesopotamian languages, trade, and knowledge spread beyond the borders of their river valley and enriched the world around them.

In fact, trade was making people everywhere more aware of each other. This will have tremendous consequences, as we shall soon see.

## CHAPTER 5

# Egyptian Empires

### **Senusret**

When we last left Egypt, we saw how the growing powers of the nomarchs (governors) led to civil war and the breakup of the Old Kingdom. Historians don't know much about this period of Egyptian history. But by around 2000 b.c., the pharaohs seemed to have regained some control, and life returned to normal. Egypt was entering what is known as the Middle Kingdom period, which took place from 2000 to 1700 b.c.

The most powerful pharaoh of the Middle Kingdom was Senusret. Under Senusret, the nomarchs kept some powers, but others were returned to the pharaoh. The pharaoh and the nomarchs shared power.

As Egypt began to grow strong, the pharaohs became more interested in trade. Senusret sent Egyptians to the Sinai Peninsula to mine tin and copper. The Sinai is a little piece of land east of Egypt. Not many people live

there, but its rocky hills are full of tin and other precious metals. These metals were traded with Mesopotamia.

Over the years, *trade routes* were established between Egypt and Mesopotamia. A trade route is a road or path used by merchants to get their goods from one place to another. A lot of wealth passed along these trade routes. Cities located along the routes became important, and kingdoms that controlled them became wealthy.

Most of the routes passed through Canaan, the hilly country between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Both the Egyptians and the people of Mesopotamia wanted to control this area. Senusret sent an army to Canaan to try to control the trade routes, but he was unsuccessful. Despite this, Senusret was a good pharaoh who brought stability back to Egypt. But this stability would not last for long.

### The Hyksos

Around 1800 b.c., a group of people called the Hyksos invaded Egypt. Nobody knows where they came from, though archaeologists think from Asia. The Egyptians were not ready for the Hyksos or the horses they rode on. They had never seen horses before, and their appearance threw them into a state of fear and confusion. The Egyptians used only donkeys and oxen. The horsemen of the Hyksos easily overcame the Egyptian armies.

The Hyksos settled in Lower Egypt and took control from the Egyptians. They established their own ruling dynasties. This was humiliating for the Egyptians because they had never been conquered by outsiders before.

The Hyksos ruled Egypt for several centuries. We don't know much about this time. Some historians think the biblical Israelites may have come into Egypt during the time of the Hyksos. It's hard to say; we do know

that the Egyptians were so humiliated that they did not record what happened during those long, dark years. But eventually the Egyptians rose up and fought back. By around 1570 b.c., the Hyksos were driven out, and Egypt was again unified under an Egyptian pharaoh.

After this, the Egyptians were changed. They learned that if they wanted to be safe from invasion, they had to be powerful—so powerful that nobody would dare to attack them again. The Egyptians also began using horses in war, copying what they had seen from the Hyksos. This made their armies stronger and able to move more quickly. With their new armies, it became possible for the Egyptians to engage in their own wars of conquest.

### The New Kingdom

This period after the fall of the Hyksos is known as the New Kingdom. It lasted from 1750 to around 1050 b.c. The pharaohs of the New Kingdom were great warriors who sought to make Egypt the richest and most powerful kingdom in the world. They were also some of Egypt's greatest builders.

One of the greatest New Kingdom pharaohs was not a man but a woman named Hatshepsut. Hatshepsut was the queen of Egypt, but her son, Thutmose III, was still very young when her husband died. Although Hatshepsut and her son reigned together, Hatshepsut held all the power. She took the title of pharaoh and even wore a fake beard!

Hatshepsut was one of Egypt's most successful rulers. She sent a trading expedition into Africa that brought back vast wealth for her kingdom. She also built many splendid monuments, many of them so perfect that later pharaohs tried to claim them as their own.

The most famous of Hatshepsut's buildings is her



mortuary temple, which is more like a tomb, carved into the cliffs near Thebes. Hatshepsut's elegant tomb complex remains to this day. It is one of the best preserved Egyptian tombs. By the time of the New Kingdom, Egyptians were no longer building pyramids. They preferred these tombs carved into cliff sides instead. Perhaps the knowledge of how to engineer pyramids was lost. It is a mystery.

Hatshepsut was succeeded by her son. Thutmose used the wealth and stability brought by his mother to spread Egypt's power abroad. He wanted to control the affluent trade routes between Mesopotamia and Egypt and had other lofty aspirations. But he is remembered most as a warrior-king. Thutmose went to war seventeen times and returned home victorious every time.

The armies of Thutmose relied heavily on chariots. A *chariot* is a type of small cart pulled by a team of horses. The cart serves as a vehicle to carry warriors and provides a stable platform from which to shoot a bow. Egyptian chariots were pulled by a team of two or four horses. The chariots carried archers and often a shield bearer to protect the archer while he fired. The wooden carts were covered in strips of metal for further protection.

In his first campaign, Thutmose led his army into Canaan and defeated the king of Megiddo, an important Canaanite city. Then he traveled throughout the region, claiming the allegiance of the petty kings and city-states of Canaan. They were afraid of the mighty Egyptian pharaoh and his army of chariots. They paid him *tribute*; tribute is money one people or kingdom gives to another as a sign of submission. Thus wealth poured into Egypt from the conquests of Thutmose.

It seemed that no city or kingdom could stand up to Thutmose and his chariots. He even crossed the Euphrates River into northern Mesopotamia. When the rulers of that land heard of Thutmose's invasion, they were so frightened that they hid themselves in caves! Thutmose drove his army up and down the banks of the Euphrates, plundering and conquering, before returning to Egypt victorious.

Thutmose had many such victories. By the time he died in the fifty-fourth year of his reign, he had created an Egyptian empire. He had demonstrated the power of the chariot in battle and made Egypt wealthy and secure.

## Rameses II

Unfortunately Thutmose III's successors were not able to hold together his vast empire. It is one thing to conquer an empire and another thing to govern it. Soon it began

to fall apart. The territories so hard-won by Thutmose were taken by other kingdoms, and the pharaohs were too weak or uninterested to stop it.

This could have been the end of Egypt, but as often occurs in history, something quite unexpected happened. This was the rise of Rameses II to the throne in 1279 b.c. Rameses was inspired by the glory of Egypt's past conquests. He wanted to recover the empire of Thutmose and had the leadership and intelligence to do so.

Rameses moved the capital of Egypt to the north, to a city called Pi-Rameses. This was closer to Canaan, making it easier for Egyptian armies to go to and return from war. He attacked the cities of Canaan and Syria, winning great victories and bringing home much tribute.

But Egypt was not the only empire interested in Canaan. During Rameses' reign, much of Canaan was already claimed by the Hittites, another powerful empire. The Hittites were angry at Rameses' invasions and planned to make war on him.

In 1274 b.c., Rameses fought what would be the largest chariot battle in history over a city called Kadesh, located in Syria. The Battle of Kadesh involved more than five thousand chariots! It is the earliest battle in history about which we know any real details. We know about Kadesh because of the notes Rameses himself kept of the battle, which he later inscribed on monuments throughout Egypt.

What was the Battle of Kadesh like? Let us sit in as a shield bearer in one of Rameses' chariots to get a better view from the ground:

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The Egyptians are encamped along the broad, stony ground west of the Orontes River. The spring air is cool.

There is a relaxed atmosphere throughout the camp. Word has come that the Hittite army is far away to the north. The city of Kadesh has been left unguarded. In the morning, the Egyptian army will cross the Orontes River and seize the city without a fight. The soldiers are spending the day relaxing and drinking beer. It will be a pleasant evening for them.

But when the sun rises the next day, there is a murmur throughout the camp. Pharaoh Rameses has captured two Hittite spies who were hiding under the cloak of night. They tell him that the Hittite army is not far away; it is hiding very close, behind the crest of a nearby hill. Even now the enemy is spreading out and preparing to attack the Egyptians. Rameses gives the order for every charioteer to make ready to depart at once.

You grab your long bronze shield and leap into the chariot. Beside you is Tanu, one of the royal archers. You will not have to fight. Your job is to drive the chariot and protect Tanu with your shield while he fires arrows at the enemy. You sling your shield over your back and take the reins. There is a great clamor and stomping of horses as the chariots of Rameses move out. Pharaoh has ordered his army to move toward Kadesh swiftly, hoping to take the city before the Hittite army arrives.

But it is too late. The Hittite chariots come into view from behind the hill, riding atop the horizon and closing in fast. You take the reins in one hand, and with the other, you try to protect Tanu with your shield. Horses are racing furiously across the plain. The two chariot armies crash into one another. Tanu fires a few shots, but there is not much you can do. Most of the Egyptian chariots are overturned or fleeing. You turn to take Tanu out of the battle.

As you flee, the Hittites pursue. A stray arrow hits

Tanu in the shoulder. You stop the chariot and drag Tanu behind a tree to tend to his wounds. Meanwhile, Rameses himself leads another division of chariots against the Hittites, but they too are destroyed. The Egyptians are fleeing. You can see the pharaoh's chariot through the dust. Rameses is all alone with several Hittite chariots pursuing him. This may be the end of the great pharaoh.

But at that very moment, Egyptian reinforcements arrive! Fresh charioteers ride in from the west. The Hittites were not expecting this. The Egyptian chariots are lighter and faster than those of the Hittites. Now it is the Hittites' turn to flee as the Egyptian chariots run them down. Many Hittites leap from their chariots and jump in the Orontes River to swim away from the battle. Rameses shouts for victory; you and Tanu cheer alongside the rest of the men!

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Rameses never did take the city of Kadesh, but he dealt the Hittites a defeat they would not soon forget. Soon after that victory, the great Rameses would conclude a peace treaty with the Hittites, which we will hear more about in the next chapter.

Like Thutmose III, Rameses was a great conqueror and a splendid builder. He left behind many statues and monuments, many of which still survive to this day. He lived to the ripe old age of ninety. His succession was secure, with ninety-six sons and sixty daughters from multiple wives. (In the ancient world, it was common for kings and other men of power to have more than one wife.) Rameses is often considered one of Egypt's greatest pharaohs.

But even the greatest of empires is bound to fall. Shortly after Rameses' death, Egypt again began to suffer from famines and drought, and soon the Egyptians



began warring among themselves. Invaders came from across the seas and ravaged the cities of the Delta. Upper and Lower Egypt again broke apart. By 1050 b.c., the Egyptian New Kingdom—and the empires of Thutmose and Rameses—had collapsed.

Egypt was one of the greatest and oldest civilizations. But when one civilization collapses, another rises. We will soon discover that other cultures were beginning to flourish throughout the ancient world.



## CHAPTER 6

# Peoples of the Levant

### The Levant

Thus far, we have focused on Egypt and Mesopotamia, the homes of the world's first true civilizations. By the time of Rameses II, civilization had spread beyond Egypt and Mesopotamia. Many other civilizations were cropping up, each with its own cities and customs.

In this chapter, we will study some of the civilizations of the *Levant*. The Levant is the strip of land at the far eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia. Egyptians and Mesopotamians passed through the Levant while navigating the trade routes. The peoples of the Levant learned civilization from the Egyptians and Mesopotamians.

One culture that lived among the Levant was that of the Hittites, whom we learned about briefly in the previous chapter. Their wars with the Egyptians ended



after the peace treaty, leading to more peaceful relations between the two peoples.

Let us stop for a moment and place ourselves back during this period so that we can observe how these two cultures began to intermingle:

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A large procession of Egyptians winds its way up a lonely mountain pass. The procession is very long: dozens of Egyptian officials and nobles riding on camels, hundreds of soldiers from the pharaoh's special guard with spearheads glittering in the morning sun, and teams of mules and oxen pulling carts filled with treasure. We see no chariots, however; this land is too rocky and uneven for them.

The morning sun peeks out from behind dark, gray clouds. The mountain wind whips fiercely, blowing light flurries of snow down from distant peaks. The Egyptians grumble and pull their linen cloaks tight around their bodies. They are not used to this sort of weather, as they are very far from home.

The leader of the expedition is Yuny, the *vizier* of the great Pharaoh Rameses II. A vizier is like a chief servant, the head of the pharaoh's household. As the procession reaches the top of the mountain pass, the walls of a tremendous city come into view.

“Halt!” cries Yuny. The tired Egyptians stop on his command and sit down to rest, waiting for further orders. Meanwhile, Yuny addresses his captains: “We have arrived before the great Hittite capital of Hattusa. Let one of you go forth and announce our arrival in the name of the great Pharaoh Rameses.”

“I will go, my lord!” says one of the captains. He trots off toward the city on camelback. As Yuny and the rest

of the Egyptians wait for his return, they marvel at the strange city sitting below their elevated perch.

How different Hattusa is from the cities of the Nile! It sits not on a low river plain but rather high up in the midst of the mountains. Its walls are massive, with guard towers almost forty feet high. The land surrounding the city is rocky, with very thin soil that is bad for farming.

“What a strange capital,” the Egyptian soldiers say to each other, “and so difficult to get to! Why would anybody live way up here in these dreary mountains?”

“That’s the whole point,” Yuny tells them. “Its location makes it safe from attack. Can you imagine how hard it would be to march an army all the way up here?”

“You have a good point, Yuny,” another says. “Have not the Hittites dominated all of the surrounding countryside, right down to Syria, from this mountain fortress?”

“Yes,” Yuny replies. “And after the battle at Kadesh, the great Pharaoh Rameses and the Hittite king Hattusili have decided that their houses will be united in marriage so that there will be peace. And thus we are here to escort Princess Bentresh back to Egypt.”

Before long, the captain returns with news that the Egyptians have been given permission to enter Hattusa. The weary soldiers stand, and the camels start moving. The huge wooden gates creak open, allowing the procession to enter the city. Thousands of Hittites stand by, watching with wonder. They are a short, stocky people with big noses, dark hair, and beady little eyes.

“Ugly little people, aren’t they?” one of the Egyptian officials jokes.

“Hold your tongue!” snaps Yuny. “You are talking about the people of the pharaoh’s future wife!”

Hattusa is as grand on the inside as it looks from the outside. It is full of buildings of all sorts—stone, wood,

and mud brick. The center of the city contains a massive temple to Teshub, the Hittite god of thunderstorms. While the Hittite buildings are big, they are not as nice as the ones in Egypt. They are rougher looking and adorned with less decoration.

“Be on your best behavior,” Yuny says to his men. “King Hattusili approaches!” He turns to the king. “Hail Hattusili, O most glorious lord of the Hattusa!”

“Hail, O honored and noble guests from the two kingdoms of the divine and powerful Rameses!” bellows the king with his hand raised in salute. Beside King Hattusili stands young Princess Bentresh, wearing a long gown of fine silk and a lovely golden tiara upon her head. She has an expressionless face.

“She looks upset,” an Egyptian servant says under his breath.

“No doubt she is not entirely happy about being given away to a strange man at such a young age,” says another. In these days, it is very common for marriages to be arranged for political reasons. Bentresh’s fate is not unique.

“So young! I’ll bet she’s not yet fourteen years old!” whispers an Egyptian noble to Yuny.

“Well,” Yuny says, “her older sister was about the same age when she was given to the pharaoh.”

Bentresh is not the first but the *second* daughter of Hattusili to be given as a bride to Rameses II.

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This is probably a good time to sneak away from Yuny’s talks with King Hattusili. They are not going anywhere quick. First, there will be several days of banqueting, displays of the treasure Rameses sent as a gift for Hattusili, lots of rituals, and the swearing of a solemn oath of friendship between Rameses and Hattusili. Only then

can Yuny return to Egypt with Rameses' young bride. The whole event will take many days—perhaps weeks.

### The Hittites

King Hattusili and Princess Bentresh come from the Hittite people. The Hittites were a rugged, mountain-dwelling folk who settled in the highlands of Anatolia around 2000 b.c. Anatolia is a large, mountainous peninsula that forms the westernmost point of Asia. It is northwest of Mesopotamia, and it is from the Sumerians that the Hittites learned writing and civilization.

Hittite cities were far up in the highlands of Anatolia. Some, like Hattusa, were right in the mountains. This gave them protection from their enemies.

The highlands of Anatolia were good lands for horse grazing. The Hittites adopted the chariot and became master horsemen. Like the Egyptians of the New Kingdom, they created vast armies of charioteers. Some soldiers rode horseback and used the bow and arrow.

The Hittites grew powerful. Their horses and chariots came rumbling down from the highlands in hopes of conquest. They subdued the weaker kingdoms of northern Mesopotamia and settled in the plains near the mouth of the Tigris River. Eventually they turned south and conquered Syria, Lebanon, and northern Canaan. They controlled all the important trade routes and became rich. For a short time, they had a very powerful empire that stretched from Mesopotamia to the borders of Egypt.

But they had not reckoned on the power of the Egyptian Empire. As they pushed south, they engaged in battles with the Egyptians. As we have seen, Rameses II tried to defeat them once and for all at the Battle of Kadesh. The Egyptians and the Hittites eventually made their peace treaty, but not long after the time of Rameses,

the Hittite kingdom would fall apart as other, even stronger kingdoms overcame them.

Despite their vast kingdom, the Hittites did not build many cities or leave many monuments. They left very few things behind. They were content to collect tribute and leave their subjects in peace. Because they left so little trace of their presence, archaeologists were once unsure they ever existed. It was only with the discovery of the ruins of Hattusa in 1893 that archaeologists began to learn about the Hittites.

### **The Canaanites**

Between the lands of the Hittites and the Egyptians dwelt the Canaanites, people of the land of Canaan. Canaan was a lush and fertile country. Its people raised olives, figs, and grapes. They grazed sheep in its grassy valleys and planted crops in its rich soil. It was also very hilly.

The important trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia all went through Canaan. This is why Egypt and the Hittites both wanted to control it. The land was often fought over, and so it became a dangerous place to live. Due to this danger, the Canaanites built their cities on top of Canaan's many hills for protection. To this day, the ruins of most Canaanite cities are found on hilltops. These great hills of Canaan are called tells. Some of the tells had very large cities—such as Gezer, Lachish, and Megiddo—each home to tens of thousands of people.

The Canaanites worshiped three main gods: Baal, Astarte, and Moloch. They worshiped by setting up wooden poles and altars at the tops of hills. Animals like pigs, goats, and birds were sacrificed here. Sometimes the Canaanites even sacrificed other people. It is a good thing to seek the truth and to wish to honor God, but Canaanite human sacrifice shows that when people don't know who



God is or how He wants to be worshiped—when they don't know any better—they can do very wicked things.

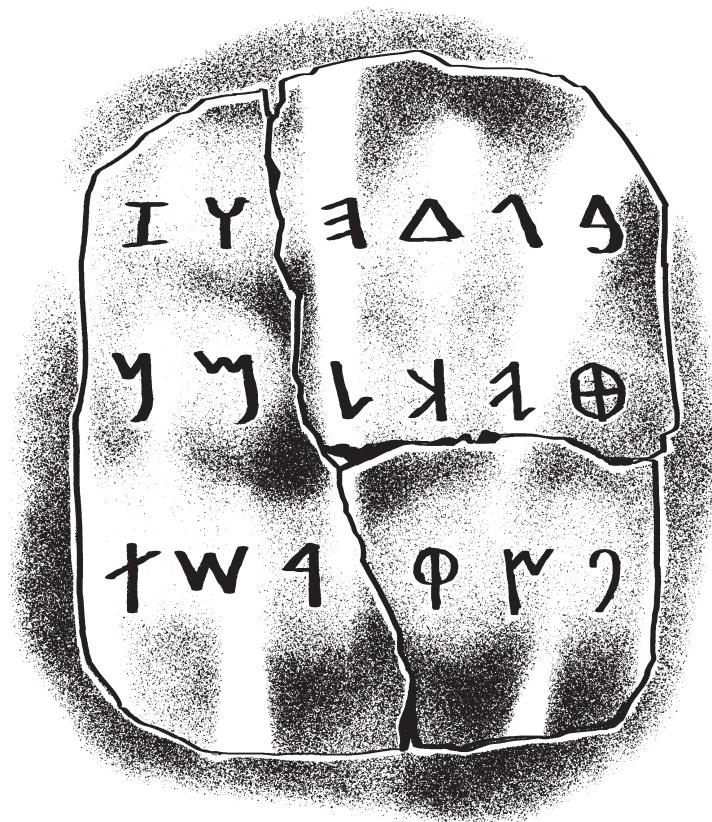
### **The Phoenicians**

Most of the Canaanites were simple farmers or herdsmen. But some of the Canaanites who dwelt by the sea became sailors and merchants. The most important of these were the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians dwelt in the cities of Tyre and Sidon on the coast of the Mediterranean. From their twin cities, they sent ships throughout the Mediterranean, trading and spreading their culture.

The kings of Tyre and Sidon were very wealthy and

powerful. One king, Hiram of Tyre, was an ally of King Solomon of Israel and gave him wood to build the Jerusalem Temple, as we shall see in the next chapter. The Phoenicians were famous for their cedar trees.

But the greatest gift of Phoenicia was her *alphabet*. The hieroglyphics of Egypt and the cuneiform of Mesopotamia were both pictographic, which meant that each picture represented a word. The writing of Phoenicia was alphabetic, meaning that each symbol represented a sound. Since it is simpler to memorize twenty-six letters



than three thousand picture symbols, it was much easier to learn Phoenician writing. The Phoenician alphabet would spread to the lands the Phoenicians visited on their voyages. In fact, our English system of writing comes from ancient Phoenician.

Except for the Phoenicians, each Canaanite tell was an independent city-state. Sometimes the Egyptian armies came in and demanded tribute from the Canaanites. Other times, it was the Hittites or other Mesopotamian kingdoms. The Canaanites were seldom left alone. Their cities were often attacked and destroyed by outsiders. In our next chapter, we will see how a very important tribe of nomads invaded and conquered the Canaanite cities in the fifteenth century B.C.

## CHAPTER 7

# The God of Israel

### **The Foundations of Religion**

We have covered a lot of time, from the rise of the first cities to the collapse of the Hittite Empire—almost three thousand years!

We have seen many different religious customs in the civilizations we have studied: everything from the primitive burial customs of the nomads to the complex religious rites of the Egyptians, from the mysterious rain and thunder gods of Hittites to the Sumerian city gods that were worshipped atop their mighty ziggurats. We have seen peaceful gods, like the gentle god of the Nile River worshiped by the Egyptians, and we have seen blood-thirsty gods, like Moloch, to whom the Canaanites sacrificed human beings.

In the ancient world, the largest buildings, the most beautiful temples, and the greatest literature were all religious. Think of the Great Pyramid or the ziggurats of

Sumer. Religion is everywhere in human culture. In fact, it would be right to say that humans are religious by nature. Being religious is part of being human.

In the ancient world, oftentimes a very important aspect of nature would be worshiped as a god. The Nile and the sun were important to the Egyptians, so they were worshiped. The rain was important among the Hittites and the Canaanites, so the rain god was greatly respected. In Sumer, where life was centered on the city-state, one's god was identified with one's city.

The ancients were also concerned about the souls of their loved ones. What happened to people after they died? Where did their souls go? Many ancient religious rituals were meant to make sure the soul was happy after death, like the burial customs of the Egyptians, for example. In the story of Gilgamesh, we learned that he wanted to find a way to live forever and bring his friend Enkidu back to life. These examples show that ancient people were troubled by the problem of death.

The ancient religions struggled to make sense of life, death, and the will of the gods. The truth was that nobody had ever seen a god, and nobody knew what the will of the gods was. The world was very beautiful, and the mysteries of nature were powerful and awe inspiring. It was clear to the ancients that *some* power was behind the harmony and beauty of the world, but nobody knew whom or what exactly that power was. Whatever god or gods were in control had not revealed themselves to men.

Until the days of Abraham.

### **Abraham**

Abraham lived in the Sumerian city of Ur around 1800 B.C., around the same time as Hammurabi. Abraham was a member of an obscure tribe known as the

Hebrews. The Hebrews were related to the Amorites, one of the many peoples who had settled in Mesopotamia after the decline of the Sumerians. Abraham is unique to all of human history because to him, the true God decided to make Himself known.

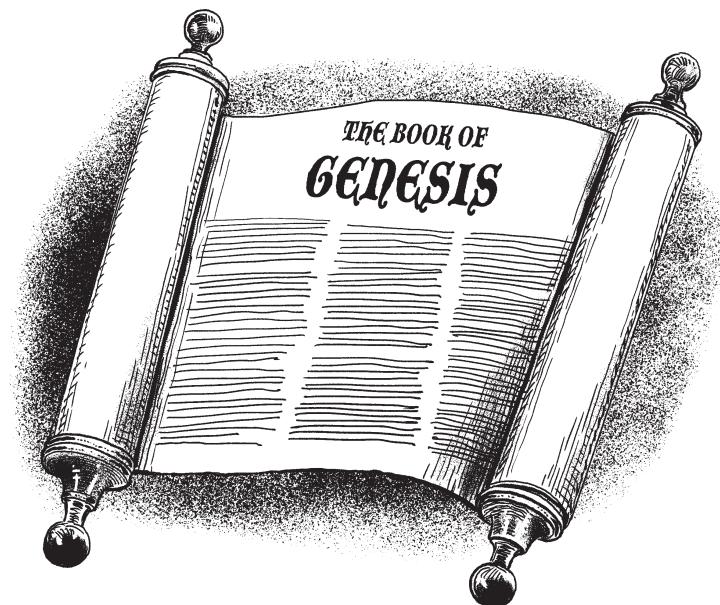
The story of Abraham is preserved for us in the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. It records the extraordinary story of God's first revelation to mankind.

Abraham was a wealthy merchant. He had many servants, great flocks of animals, and a lot of gold and silver. In the eyes of the world, he was a success. But he lacked one thing. His wife, Sarah, was barren; this means she could not have children. This grieved Abraham and Sarah.

One day, God Himself spoke to Abraham. He told Abraham to take his wealth, his animals, and his wife and leave Mesopotamia. Then God promised Abraham that he would make him the father of a great nation of people. Abraham did not understand how this was possible, for he and Sarah were already old—beyond the normal age to have children. Nevertheless, he had faith in God. He gathered his belongings and left his home.

God brought Abraham to the land of Canaan, which we visited in the previous chapter. Abraham dwelt there as a nomad, wandering from place to place and grazing his flocks. He saw the hills with their great cities, the lush valley around the Jordan River, and the fertile plains that stretched down to the sea. God told Abraham, “All this land I will give to your descendants.”

One day, three men visited Abraham and Sarah. Abraham greeted them, and his wife prepared them food. They told Abraham that in one year's time, Sarah would conceive and bear Abraham a son. Sarah did not believe the men and laughed when she heard their words. But the



men were messengers from God. They told Sarah that she would indeed have a son, and his name would be Isaac, which means “laughter.” It happened just as God’s messengers said; one year later, Sarah was pregnant and gave birth to Isaac. Instead of laughing in disbelief, she was laughing with joy!

### **Abraham’s Descendants**

God told Abraham he wanted his family to be set apart for God in a special way. He did not want Abraham to worship the gods of the surrounding peoples—only the true God. As a sign of his devotion, God asked Abraham to have all the males of his household, including servants, circumcised. Circumcision was the special sign of God’s promises to Abraham.

Abraham continued to wander throughout Canaan,

and his family grew. Isaac took a wife and had two sons named Jacob and Esau. Jacob, who was also called Israel, had twelve sons, and they each had many children.

“Look up at the sky,” God had told Abraham. “I will make your descendants as many as the stars of the heavens or the sands of the seashore.” Now God’s promise was coming true!

Abraham and his sons are known as *patriarchs*. Patriarch means “father,” and Abraham and his sons were the fathers of the Israelites. The Israelites are named after Israel, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, although most still refer to him by his birth name, Jacob. After Abraham died, God continued to teach the children of Abraham about Himself. The patriarchs continued to wander and graze their flocks in Canaan. You can read more about them in the Book of Genesis.

When Israel was very old and his sons were all grown with families of their own, a great *famine* came over the land. A famine means there was not enough food for everybody; they happen when there is not enough rain for the crops to grow. Jacob and his sons worried about how they would feed their families.

Egypt, however, had plenty of food. So Jacob and his sons gathered their belongings and went down to dwell in Egypt. One of Jacob’s sons Joseph had many years earlier been sold into slavery by his own brothers but, through a strange course of events, had gone from being a slave to becoming an important official in the court of the pharaoh. After reuniting with his family and forgiving his brothers, Joseph provided them with good land in a place called Goshen, situated in the Nile Delta. Thus the Israelites came to dwell in Egypt.

In Egypt, the people of Israel multiplied still more. God’s promise to Abraham was continuing to be fulfilled,

and within a few generations, there were thousands of Israelites living and working there. Archaeologists have even found the remains of Israelite houses in Egypt.

Things went well for a time, but eventually a pharaoh came to the throne who did not know Joseph and his family. The Egyptians began to worry about all the Israelites living in their midst. They took away the rights of the Israelites and eventually turned them into slaves. Then the Egyptian pharaoh ordered that all the male children of the Israelites be drowned in the Nile.

But one child survived, and it is to this child that we must now turn.

### **Moses**

When the decree came to slay the boys, an Israelite woman named Jochebed made a little basket of reeds and placed her young son adrift on the Nile in hopes that he might be saved. The child was found by an Egyptian princess who named him Moses, which means “drawn out,” since he was drawn out of the water. Let us check in on Moses to see what direction his life took after being pulled from the Nile and how he would one day move the sea with his staff:

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Despite being the son of an Israelite woman, Moses was raised in the court of the pharaoh and given a good education. While the rest of the Israelites lived as slaves, he lived a life of comfort and prestige. But he never forgot his true heritage.

One day, he became enraged when he saw an Egyptian guard whipping several of the Israelites. He attacked and killed the guard for treating his people so poorly. Moses was then forced to flee to avoid punishment for his crime.

He went to the land of Midian, where he took a wife and settled down, working as a shepherd for his father-in-law. It seemed that Moses' life would be uneventful.

Then, one day while he was out tending his flock on Mount Horeb, he saw a bush that was engulfed in flames, though it did not burn. He approached the bush, thinking to himself, *I must see why it is on fire yet does not burn to ashes!*

But as he neared it, he heard a loud voice calling out to him.

“Moses! Moses!”

“Here I am!” Moses said, wondering who was calling to him.

“Do not come near,” the voice boomed. “Take off your shoes, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

When Moses heard this, he hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to the land of Canaan, a good land, flowing with milk and honey. Come, I will send you to the pharaoh so that you may bring my people out of Egypt.”

Moses returned to Egypt and asked for the pharaoh to set the Israelites free. He laughed and refused, but Moses warned that trouble would come. God sent plagues into the land, turning the Nile to blood, sending darkness over the land, destroying Egyptian crops with hail and locusts, and slaying the firstborn of each Egyptian family.

Eventually the pharaoh relented and allowed the

Israelites to go free. But after they left, he changed his mind.

“Ready the horses and chariots!” he screamed to his men. “Let us go and retrieve our slaves. They will return, or they will die!”

He set out into the desert with thousands of his soldiers. The Israelites had been led by God out of Egypt, who appeared to them as a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. He led them to the banks of the Red Sea. Soon it became apparent that they were trapped, with the immense waters before them and the pharaoh’s army at their backs.

The people began to speak out in fear. “Moses and the Lord have led us into a trap!” they yelled. “We will all die on this day!”

But Moses had faith. At the instruction of God, he lifted his staff and parted the waters of the Red Sea. The people journeyed into the valley, running between two walls of water!

When the pharaoh saw this, he yelled to his men, “After them!”

His men pursued the Israelites, not knowing they were running to their death. When the last of the Israelites had made it across the sea, Moses commanded the water to fall, and so it did, killing the pharaoh’s men. After this, the pharaoh did not pursue them anymore.

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Moses had saved his people, and for a time, they were grateful. But as we will see, it was not long before they doubted both him and God once again.

## God's Commandments

God led Moses and the Israelites to the mountain where God had first spoken to Moses. There Moses received the *Ten Commandments* from God. The Ten Commandments taught the Israelites that God wanted them to worship Him alone and explained the rules by which He expected them to govern themselves:

- I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before Me.
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.
- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not kill.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
- You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

These rules are the basis of a just society. God wanted the Israelites to show their dedication to Him by obeying these laws.

God also gave Moses many other laws: teachings on how He wanted to be worshiped, on marriage and family life, and on what sorts of foods should and should not be eaten. Some of the laws were very strict. But the purpose of these laws was to teach the Israelites what kind of God He was and what He expected of people.

When God speaks to mankind directly, it is called *Divine Revelation*. The Israelites were the first people to whom God made a revelation, and for the time being,



God would speak to them alone. For now, the world was not yet ready for God's message.

Historians debate when the Israelites left Egypt and whom the pharaoh from the story was. Some say it happened around 1450 b.c., during the reign of Pharaoh

Thutmose III. Others think it happened around 1250 B.C., during the time of Rameses II. Nobody is sure. Other than pottery shards and the ruins of some workmen's houses, the Israelites left very little behind for archaeologists to find in Egypt.

What is certain is that by the thirteenth century B.C., the Israelites had entered the land of Canaan, according to God's promise to Abraham. In the next chapter, we will see how the Israelites displaced the Canaanites and became the dominant civilization in Canaan.



## CHAPTER 8

### The Kingdom of David

#### **Joshua's Conquest**

Moses and the Israelites did not pass immediately into Canaan. They spent many years wandering as nomads in the wilderness. The story of their wanderings can be found in the biblical Books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Numbers.

After forty years of wandering, God told the Israelites that it was time to enter Canaan. Moses, however, was very old and died before they could settle the land. Moses' place of leadership was taken by his assistant, Joshua. Just as Moses had led the Israelites from Egypt, so Joshua would lead them into Canaan.

As we saw in chapter 6, Canaan was already populated with various tribes of people called the Canaanites. But God had promised this land to the Israelites. Joshua and the Israelites waged war for more than forty years to take

control of Canaan. By the time Joshua died, most of Canaan was under the control of the Israelites.

Joshua's wars in Canaan are referred to as the *Conquest*. Archaeologists are unsure when the Conquest happened exactly; most place it between 1400 and 1100 b.c. This was a very good time for Joshua to invade. Egypt's New Kingdom was going into decline, the Hittite Empire was dissolving, and the cities of Mesopotamia were at war. None of them had time to worry about what was going on in Canaan.

Lots of evidence of the Conquest has been left behind. A famous example is the city of Jericho. The biblical Book of Joshua tells us that Jericho was one of the strongest of all the Canaanite cities. Its walls were so large that the Israelites were afraid to attack it. Joshua himself did not know how to take it. But after consulting with God, Joshua was told what to do:

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God spoke to Joshua and said, “Go and march the Israelite army around the city for seven days, carrying the *Ark* *the Covenant*.” Joshua peered over to the Ark, the special golden box containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments. “On the seventh day,” God went on, “march around the city seven times. Then, after you go around Jericho for the seventh time, order the priests to blow their trumpets and every man to shout. Then the city will be yours.”

Joshua did not understand God’s plan, but he knew God could be trusted. He echoed God’s commands.

“We are going to march around the city carrying the Ark,” he told the people. The Israelites had faith in God and began walking around the city, carrying the Ark.

The people of Jericho laughed at them.



"This is the strongest city in Canaan," they said. "Do they think all their walking will help them?" But the Israelites were faithful to God's command. They continued walking around the city for seven days in a liturgical *procession*. A procession is a kind of religious walk that is a type of worship. The Israelite walk around the city was a kind of worship; today, Christians still honor God by having processions on important feast days.

On the seventh day, the Israelites walked around the city seven times. When Joshua gave the word, the priests blew the trumpets, and the Israelite soldiers gave a great shout. Something marvelous then happened: The walls

of Jericho began to shake and eventually collapsed to the ground with a mighty crash!

The people of Jericho were stunned. The Israelites cheered. “Now, my brethren!” Joshua cried, holding his sword aloft. “God has delivered the city into your hands!” The Israelite army ran straight into the city. By nightfall, the city of Jericho was captured.

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The ruins of Jericho were dug up by archaeologists in the 1930s. They found that the walls of the city had collapsed outward in some disaster. The inside of the city was burned, and most of the homes were destroyed, just as the Book of Joshua says. The ruins of many other cities captured in the Conquest tell a similar tale.

By 1100 b.c. (at the latest), the Israelites were firmly in control of most of Canaan, occupying the great tells, such as Jericho, Shechem, and Shiloh. But they did not have one single ruler. The Israelites lived in clans that were all part of larger tribes. Each tribe had its own elders, and each clan its own rulers.

The Israelites were not the only outsiders to invade Canaan. Another group called the Philistines had invaded the Levant from the sea. They built their homes on the coast, south of the Israelites. The Philistines had weapons and tools made out of iron, which was hard. The Israelite tools and weapons were bronze, which was a weaker and softer metal.

The Israelites could not stand up to the Philistines. The Philistines oppressed them and tried to conquer them. The people of Israel realized they needed to stand together against the Philistines, so they asked God for a king to lead them against their enemies.

## From Saul to David

Israel's first king was Saul, who ruled from 1052 to 1010 b.c. Saul united the clans of Israel into a single kingdom and won great victories for the Israelites against the Philistines and their other enemies. Saul built fortresses throughout Israel to protect his little kingdom. The lonely ruins of Saul's once great palace at Gibeah can still be seen today.

The greatest king of Israel, however, was David, who ruled from 1010 to 970 b.c. David came from humble origins and was a musician in Saul's court. He became famous for slaying the Philistine giant Goliath with a sling in one of Saul's wars. When Saul and his sons were killed in battle with the Philistines, David succeeded him as king of Israel.

David made Israel powerful. He drove back the Philistines and subdued many of the hostile Canaanite tribes who surrounded his kingdom. But the most important thing David did was set up his capital at the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a well-fortified Canaanite city located on top of a steep hill. When David conquered it, he called it the "City of David" and brought the Ark of the Covenant into it to signify that God was with him.

David was a good king. He was a powerful war leader and was feared by his enemies, but he was also a generous and just man. Though he was not perfect, he is remembered as Israel's greatest king. God loved David so much that He promised David's sons would reign after him forever.

## Solomon and His Temple

David's son Solomon, ruler from 970 to 931 b.c., was also a good king. Whereas David had been a powerful warrior, Solomon enjoyed a reign of peace and prosperity. He

made an alliance with King Hiram of the Phoenicians as well as with the kings and queens of far off kingdoms. People from distant lands heard of Solomon's wisdom and came to learn from him.

Solomon is best known for building a Temple for God in Jerusalem. Ever since Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, the Ark of the Covenant had been kept in a simple tent. Solomon built God a grand Temple to house the Ark. King Hiram of Phoenicia sent Solomon cedar wood and craftsmen to help build the Temple. It was a sign of friendship between the two kingdoms.

Under Solomon, Jerusalem became the religious capital of the Kingdom of Israel. It was the place where all the Israelites came to worship the God that had brought them from Egypt and established them in their own land under good kings.

Solomon built many other things: palaces, fortresses, and even Israel's first navy. But all that construction was expensive, so Solomon taxed the Israelites heavily to pay for these projects. He even enslaved some of his people to work on them. It is no surprise that this made the Israelites angry.

### A Time of Strife and Division

When Solomon died, the people of Israel asked his son, Prince Rehoboam, to reduce the taxes and lighten the burden of work. But Rehoboam said he intended to tax and work them even more! This infuriated the Israelites. They had not escaped slavery in Egypt only to become slaves to the family of David.

Many of the Israelite tribes revolted against Rehoboam and the house of David. These tribes set up their own capital at Samaria in northern Canaan and proclaimed their own king. From then on, there were two Israelite

kingdoms: the Kingdom of Judah in the south, ruled by the descendants of David, and the Kingdom of Israel in the north.

The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were all wicked men and bad rulers. The rich oppressed the poor, and the Israelites were encouraged to worship the gods of the Canaanites. The kings of Israel made unwise alliances with the kingdoms of Syria and Mesopotamia that dragged them into several wars. Eventually, another people called the Assyrians came in and wiped out the Kingdom of Israel in 722 b.c. We will learn more about the Assyrians in the next chapter.

The southern Kingdom of Judah had better luck. The heirs to David's kingdom were generally better men than those who ruled in the north. Judah was a small kingdom, but its lands were rich, and its capital, Jerusalem, was well defended.

But that does not mean all was well in Judah. Many people worshiped the gods of the Canaanites, just as they did in the north. The Israelites in Judah frequently forgot the worship of the true God and practiced the evil deeds of the Canaanites. The rulers were often corrupt. The Israelites forgot the laws that God had given them through Moses.

## **The Prophets**

During the kingdom period, men known as prophets called for the Israelites to return to serving God with all their hearts. A *prophet* is a person who is inspired by God to speak on His behalf. The prophets preached that the Israelites should stop committing evil deeds and obey God's law sincerely. They taught that it was much more important to serve God with a pure heart than to offer sacrifices.

Here are some words from the prophet Micah to show you how they spoke to the people:

With what shall I come before the **LORD**,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the **LORD** be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my first-born for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
He has showed you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the **LORD** require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God? (Mi 6:6–8)

Both the northern and southern kingdoms had their own prophets, men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Hosea. They were not always well liked. Some kings even persecuted the prophets because they did not like their message. The wicked King Ahab of Israel tried to kill the prophet Elijah, and King Zedekiah of Judah had the prophet Jeremiah thrown into a well!

The rulers were not always open to God's Word. But the prophets also taught that one day God would send a special ruler called the *Messiah*. The Messiah was a kind of priest-king. The prophets said He would turn the hearts of the people back to God and establish a kingdom of justice. He would write the law of God in people's hearts so they would be able to serve Him faithfully.

If the Israelites refused to change their ways, the prophets warned that God would punish them. We have seen that the northern kingdom was wiped out by the Assyrians. In the end, the Kingdom of Judah was also

destroyed. Other empires were rising across the Levant, and the little Kingdom of Judah was not strong enough to fight them off.

In 587 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed the city of Jerusalem and burned down the splendid Temple built by Solomon. The people of Judah were taken away in *captivity* to Babylon; when people are taken captive, it means they become prisoners. Thus Judah became a Babylonian province. The prophets said this was punishment from God because of the sins of the Kingdom of Judah.

The kingdom of David was no more. But the Israelite people did not disappear. Even in captivity, they maintained their traditions. They gathered together the sacred writings of their history and their dealings with God and compiled them together into a single book, which we now call the *Old Testament*. They remembered the promise of the Messiah and looked forward to the day they would return to Jerusalem.

We will meet up with the Israelites again much later, when they return from their exile in Babylon. In the meantime, let us turn north to the region of Assyria and learn about this new and fearsome empire.



## CHAPTER 9

# The Bearded Kings of the North

### **The Assyrians**

As we mentioned in chapter 4, many tribes moved in and out of Mesopotamia over the centuries. One of those tribes was that of the Assyrians. The Assyrians originally lived on plains north of the Tigris River. To trace their story, we must go back in time a few centuries, back before the Israelites and the Canaanites. In fact, we need to go back to around 2300 b.c., when the Assyrians—who took their name from their god Assur—came into Mesopotamia with the Akkadians.

For many centuries, the Assyrians lived under the control of the Akkadians, Hittites, or Babylonians who surrounded them. In the beginning, they were weak and small. But eventually, they grew powerful. In fact, the Assyrians would build the largest empire the world had ever known up to that point.

At first, the Assyrians were not that much different

from other Mesopotamian tribes. But their power grew because they learned to master the horse. We have seen how ancient peoples used the horse to pull the chariot. Assyrian warriors, however, learned to ride on the horse's back; they also learned to shoot a bow while riding! This meant they could attack very fast, and mounted riders could change direction quicker than chariots.

While this was a positive advancement in battle tactics, horses are not helpful against fortified cities. Therefore, to deal with cities, the Assyrians invented the *battering ram*. The Assyrian battering ram was a great log tipped with a point of iron. It could be swung from ropes or wheeled on a cart. The log was rammed into the walls of cities; the iron point wedged itself between the stones in the city walls and loosened them so the army could pull them down. With their swift-moving, mounted army and their dreadful battering ram, no people or city was safe from the Assyrians.

What kind of people were the Assyrians? Many pictures of the Assyrians survive in *reliefs*. A relief is a kind of sculpture where figures are carved so that they are higher than the surrounding material. This means the carvings have a three-dimensional look to them. Assyrian reliefs show that the men were tall and muscular, with long, heavy beards. The Assyrian kings wore the biggest beards of all, sometimes down to their chests. The beards were often curled and adorned with gold ringlets.

The Assyrians portrayed themselves as very strong. Almost all their sculptures depict them in battle or hunting. A famous relief shows the Assyrian king Assurbanipal grabbing a full-grown lion by the neck and attacking it with a sword. His face is calm, his muscles huge and bulging. We do not know whether Assyrian warriors were really as muscular as their sculptures show, but they certainly were men of action and power—and avid hunters!



The Assyrians were very cruel to people beaten in battle. Prisoners were often beheaded or had body parts chopped off. They invented many vicious ways to torment their prisoners. All of this tells us that the Assyrians loved war. They loved it like the Egyptians loved building—and they were good at it! But conquering other kingdoms wasn't enough. They wanted to make sure the people they conquered would never fight back again. So they practiced *deportation* of conquered peoples. Deportation means the conquered people were rounded up and forced to leave their homes and live somewhere else. Once they left their homes, other tribes were brought in to live there. This mixed up populations and made it more difficult for people to revolt.

Both the violence of the Assyrians and the practice of

deportation were meant to scare people. If the Assyrians were scary enough, their enemies would not fight. They would give up without having to battle. If a city surrendered without a fight, the Assyrians would usually let them stay in their homes.

These methods were successful. The Assyrian Empire reached its height between 1115 and 627 B.C., when it was ruled by a series of very powerful kings. These kings—men like Tiglath-Pileser, Sennacherib, and Assurbanipal—not only extended the might of the Assyrian kingdom but created the first great empire of the ancient world.

### Tiglath-Pileser

Tiglath-Pileser reigned during a time when the Hittite kingdom was collapsing, from 1115 to 1076 B.C. He led armies of Assyrian horsemen rumbling across the plains of northern Mesopotamia into the rocky hill country of Anatolia. The cities of Anatolia fell before the armies of Tiglath-Pileser and his much-feared battering rams.

After that, Tiglath-Pileser and his armies turned south to gather tribute from the cities of the Levantine coast. Here, Tiglath-Pileser marveled at the immensity of the ocean, which his eyes had never seen.

What's that we see? The great king is getting on a boat! Let us slip onboard with Tiglath-Pileser and see what awaits him on the open seas:

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The boat belongs to the princes of the Arvadites, a small Canaanite tribe that has pledged allegiance to Tiglath-Pileser. The Arvadites know the Assyrians love to hunt. They want to please King Tiglath-Pileser. They ask him if he would like to hunt from the boat. The king is confused;

he has hunted from chariots and on foot, but what can be hunted from a boat?

The king soon finds out. The skies are clear and the wind fair. Powered by two rows of oarsmen and a small sail, the boat leaves port and drifts out into the wide, blue sea. Tiglath-Pileser and the Assyrians seem wobbly; they have never been on the open sea before. But the Arvadites are skilled mariners, and the sailing is smooth.

The boat stays close to the shore, where the waters are calm and full of reeds. The Arvadites tell Tiglath-Pileser that great sea beasts lurk in these marshy waters. The king and his warriors clutch their spears tightly, scanning the water for the slightest movement.

There! A large, gray form moves near the boat. Its body lurches above the water, only for a moment, before diving back under. The king and his men hurl their spears. But the water is still. The beast is gone.

“What was that monster?” the king asks. The Arvadites tell him it was a sea cow, but later generations will call it a hippopotamus.

They do not see anything further, so the Arvadites put the boat out a little farther from the shore. Here they have more luck. The Assyrians spot what looks to be a great fish leaping from the water, larger and longer than any they have ever seen. They throw spears and shoot arrows. One of the Assyrians manages to hit it with a harpoon. They draw it close to the boat. It is longer than a man and as round as a tree trunk. Tiglath-Pileser strikes it with his spear while his men try to throw ropes around it. The king orders it to be pulled onto the boat.

The Assyrians marvel. This is the greatest fish they have ever seen! It is wounded with many spears and arrows and breathes its last. Tiglath-Pileser declares that it is the greatest beast he has ever killed. He gives the

Arvadites thirty bars of silver for the hunt and orders his men to have an image of the animal carved on his palace walls back in Assyria. Tiglath-Pileser calls the beast a *nahiru*, but as you may have guessed, it was probably some kind of dolphin or a small whale.

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This story of King Tiglath-Pileser and the Arvadites probably occurred around 1100 b.c. Tiglath-Pileser was a great warrior-king who expanded the boundaries of his empire into Anatolia and Phoenicia. But the Assyrian Empire would grow even larger.

In 722 b.c., the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V captured the Israelite city of Samaria after a long siege. The Kingdom of Israel was destroyed, and its people were deported, as we mentioned in our previous chapter. The Israelite prophet Isaiah called the Assyrians a rod of God's anger, while the prophet Jeremiah described their conquest of Israel as a lion devouring a sheep.

## Nineveh

The capital of Assyria was a great city called Nineveh, located along the banks of the Tigris River. This city was made great by one of Assyria's most powerful kings, Sennacherib. King Sennacherib ruled from 705 to 681 b.c. During this time, he was determined to make Nineveh a fitting capital for his great empire.

He constructed a gigantic palace in the center of the city and built sprawling gardens with artificial rivers. He also built a great *aqueduct*, a manmade tunnel or channel that carried water into the city. The streets were widened, and he raised great temples to the gods of Assyria. The city walls were also strengthened. Under Sennacherib,



Nineveh became the greatest city in the world and home to more than three hundred thousand people!

Like other Assyrian kings, Sennacherib was also a warrior. He brought his armies into southern Mesopotamia and conquered Babylon. He also attacked Jerusalem, but a plague broke out among his army and forced him to return home. The Israelite prophets said this plague was the wrath of God, who was angry with Sennacherib for attacking the holy city of David. You can read about Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in the biblical Books of Isaiah and 2 Kings.

Jerusalem got lucky. No other kingdom was able to stand up to the fierce Assyrians. Not even Egypt could withstand them. Esarhaddon, son of Sennacherib, led the Assyrian army into Egypt and defeated the armies of the pharaoh. The Egyptians had grown weak since the

time of Rameses II. The archers and horsemen of the Assyrians easily overcame them. Egypt was now an Assyrian province.

Assyria reached the height of its power under King Assurbanipal, ruler from 668 to 627 b.c. Assurbanipal conquered many more lands for Assyria. But he also cared about learning and education. He built an immense library in Nineveh where all the histories of the peoples he conquered were to be recorded and stored.

But Assurbanipal was also very cruel to his enemies, even for an Assyrian. Once, he put a chain around the neck of a defeated king and made him live in a cage like a dog! All the peoples of the Levant disliked living under the Assyrians. They were harsh masters who could be very wicked at times.

### **The Fall of the Assyrians**

It is not surprising that when Assurbanipal died, all the conquered peoples revolted. They were led by a strong prince of Babylon named Nabopolassar. The Assyrians tried to put down the revolt, but it was no use. Their cruelty had made them too many enemies, and nobody was willing to help them.

The Assyrians lost an important battle, and their last king was killed. Then the enemies of Assyria came swarming out of the deserts and hills and attacked Nineveh. They burned and destroyed the great city so completely that only a few hundred years later, people were not sure it had ever existed. Nineveh remained lost until the twentieth century.

But now there was a new power in the world: Nabopolassar and the Babylonians. The peoples of the Levant found they had thrown off one empire only to have it replaced by another.

## CHAPTER 10

# The Splendor of Babylon

### Nabopolassar

The Assyrians had united all the peoples of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Levant into a single empire. But the Assyrians were very harsh rulers. They were obeyed but never loved. As we saw in the previous chapter, as soon as their subjects had the chance, they rose up and destroyed the Assyrian kingdom.

The leader of those who overthrew Assyria was a man named Nabopolassar. Nabopolassar had been the governor of the Mesopotamian city of Babylon. Babylon was once a very important city back in the days of Hammurabi and the Sumerians. When Nabopolassar emerged as the leader of those opposed to the Assyrians, Babylon would once again become important.

The lands of the Assyrians now became *vassals* of Babylon, meaning that they owed allegiance and paid tribute to Babylon. The Assyrian Empire was replaced by the

Babylonian Empire. Nabopolassar was a wise ruler who knew how to govern. Even though they had not gained freedom, the vassals of the Babylonians found their rule better than the Assyrians and were fairly happy about their new masters.

Unlike the Assyrians, Nabopolassar and the Babylonians did not want to rule through fear. They wanted their subjects to like their rule. The Babylonians often brought youths from around the empire to be educated in Babylon. Then, when grown, they could be sent back to their homelands to serve as Babylon's governors. Thus the Babylonians thought that training and education were more important to ruling the people than ruling them by way of the sword.

But the Babylonians could certainly fight, as well! The armies of Nabopolassar were led by his son, Nebuchadnezzar. Whereas Nabopolassar specialized in administering the government, Nebuchadnezzar specialized in warfare. Nebuchadnezzar was an excellent commander and popular with his men. With the wisdom of the father and the might of the son, the Babylonian Empire was secure.

### **King Nebuchadnezzar**

Nabopolassar died in 605 b.c. after ruling the empire for only seven years. Nebuchadnezzar became the king of Babylon at the age of twenty-nine. He would enjoy a long reign of forty-three years and be the most successful of all the rulers of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's reign began with many battles. After the fall of Assyria, the Egyptians were again trying to win back their old territories in the Levant. Nebuchadnezzar led his armies south and defeated the army of Pharaoh Necho II at the Battle of Carchemish. This took place in Syria in 605 b.c. We don't know the details of the battle,

but Nebuchadnezzar won a striking victory over the pharaoh. From then on, Egypt would be a Babylonian vassal.

The little kingdom of Judah also gave Nebuchadnezzar trouble. As we saw in our previous chapter, Judah was saved from Assyrian conquest. But Nebuchadnezzar succeeded in making Judah a vassal kingdom; in fact, the Judean king Zedekiah only held power because he was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar.

King Zedekiah eventually decided that he wanted freedom from Nebuchadnezzar, but some were not so sure this was a good idea. The prophet Jeremiah warned the king that God had given Nebuchadnezzar great power and that to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar was to invite disaster. Zedekiah did not listen to Jeremiah and instead revolted against Babylon.

In 587 b.c., Nebuchadnezzar brought his armies to Jerusalem to punish it. King Zedekiah fled, but Nebuchadnezzar captured him. Nebuchadnezzar was so angry at Zedekiah that he killed his sons and then poked his eyes out before sending him in chains to Babylon. Jerusalem was destroyed, and the great Temple built by Solomon was burned down. Nebuchadnezzar took thousands of young Judeans captive and sent them to Babylon to be educated as Babylonians. This marked the end of the Kingdom of Judah and the reign of the house of David.

Sometimes Nebuchadnezzar preferred to make peace treaties rather than wage war. East of Babylon was a powerful little mountain kingdom ruled by people called the Medes. Because the Medes lived very close to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar wanted to have good relations with them. The Medes and Babylonians made a peace treaty. Like Rameses II taking the daughter of the Hittite king, the treaty gave Nebuchadnezzar the Median princess Amytis as his wife.

## To Please a Queen

Nebuchadnezzar deeply loved his wife. There are many legends about Nebuchadnezzar and Amytis. One tells us that Amytis could not get used to life in Babylon because she was homesick. The land of the Medes was full of lush, forested mountains. But Babylon sat on the broad, flat Mesopotamian plain. This made Amytis sad. She longed to see mountains again. Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed armies, burned cities, and made powerful alliances, but how would he deal with a homesick wife? One legend stands out above the rest:

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We can see Amytis pacing sadly across one of the many balconies in Nebuchadnezzar's great palace. She looks out over the plains of Babylon and sighs.

The great King Nebuchadnezzar steps forth onto the balcony, flanked by servants shading him from the hot sun with feathered fans. The king furls his dark, bushy eyebrows. He can see his queen is not happy.

“Dearest Amytis,” he says in his deep and powerful voice, “are you not happy here with me?”

The queen turns and bows deeply before Nebuchadnezzar.

“Your majesty is all kindness,” she replies. “I am housed in beautiful quarters with an abundance of servants. Fine food, gold, and precious gems are at my disposal—and my husband is lord of the earth! What more could a queen want that you have not provided?”

Nebuchadnezzar smiles beneath his long beard. He brushes Amytis's cheek with his hand. “Women are delicate creatures, my dear. And I can see plainly you are disturbed. Your eyes speak the truth you hide with your words. Come, tell me what troubles you, my queen.”

The queen points to the vast plains she sees from her balcony.

“Babylon is a great and mighty city, my lord. The waters of the Euphrates bring ships and trade; the lush fields around us supply us with grain and wine in abundance.”

“It is so,” the king nods in agreement, proud of his wealthy kingdom.

“And yet the land is so flat, my king! In all directions are plains about the city as far as the eye can see. O my lord, I am sick for the mountains of my homeland!”

“Mountains, my queen?”

“Yes, dear husband. The majestic mountains of Media—covered in trees, casting great shadows in the valleys, sheltering the dwellings of my people. How I miss seeing them!”

Nebuchadnezzar smiles. He takes his wife by the hand. “My dear, would the sight of mountains bring joy to your heart? If I could bring the mountains to Babylon, would you then truly be happy?”

Amytis laughs. “You are mighty, my lord, but not even *you* could move a mountain.”

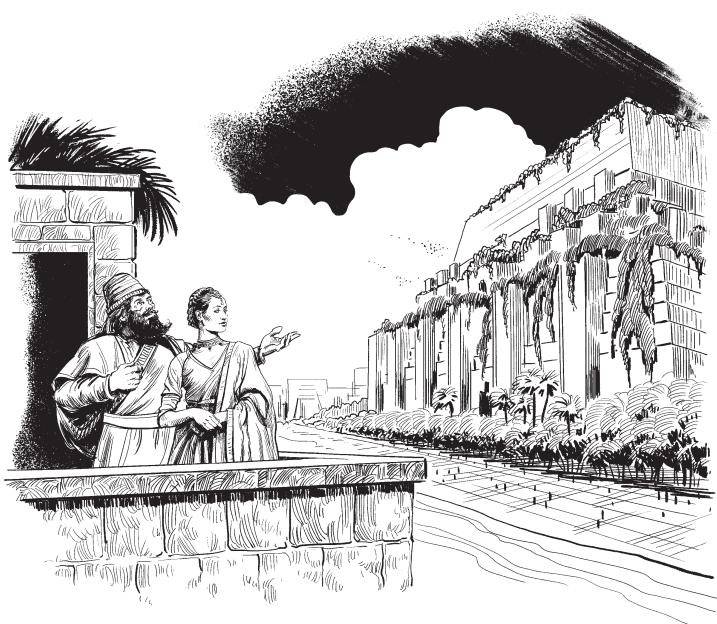
“Perhaps not,” Nebuchadnezzar says thoughtfully. “But I’ll bet we could build one.”

Amytis looks into her husband’s eyes with wonder and confusion. “My lord Nebuchadnezzar, what is it that has entered into your head?”

He chuckles deeply. “You shall see, dear wife. You shall see—and marvel! And so shall the whole earth!” He hugs his wife and falls silent, gazing in deep thought over the Mesopotamian plain.

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And so began the famous *Hanging Gardens* of Babylon. The Hanging Gardens were a type of terraced pyramid



built by Nebuchadnezzar within the city. We are not sure how high they were—perhaps three stories, maybe more. Each terrace contained a garden filled with exotic plants imported from Media. Some historians have said that special screws were used to move water up the terraces to keep the garden watered; others have said there were tubes that would spray mist at certain times.

We are not certain how the Hanging Gardens looked or how they worked, nor do we know how Amytis liked them. But we do know that the Hanging Gardens were so spectacular and beautiful that they were later called one of the wonders of the world.

## Nebuchadnezzar's Mighty Babylon

The Hanging Gardens were only one of the great projects completed by Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar loved building and was always involved in many projects. Babylon was the seat of a great empire, and he wanted its importance to be reflected in the splendor of its buildings.

Another example was the defenses of the city. Nebuchadnezzar wanted Babylon to be impossible to conquer. He constructed new walls around the city. These walls were so massive and thick that two chariots could ride side by side on top of them. Some of these walls and their wonderful gates, painted blue and decorated with royal lions, still survive.

The city was built around the Euphrates River; half of Babylon was on the west side of the river, and half was built on the east. The walls surrounded the city, but the Euphrates ran through the center from an opening left in the walls. Thus Babylon always had access to water.

Nebuchadnezzar also wanted to rebuild the great ziggurats of the Sumerian period. Babylon was already an ancient city in his day. Ruins of the old Sumerian temples were all over. Nebuchadnezzar had many of these ruins cleared away. He had newer and grander ziggurats built. Nebuchadnezzar wrote about one of these ziggurats, Etemenanki, which he restored: “The tower, the eternal house, which I founded and built. I have completed its magnificence with silver, gold, other metals, stone, enamelled bricks, fir, and pine. . . . Marduk, the great god, excited my mind to repair this building. I did not change the site, nor did I take away the foundation. . . . I set my hand to finish it and to exalt its head. As it had been done in ancient days, so I exalted its summit.”

## The Fall of Babylon

Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon became a magnificently prosperous city. When he died in 562 b.c., Babylon was the seat of a proud and vast empire. But Nebuchadnezzar's sons were not as wise as he was. They plotted and killed one another, and the kingdom grew weak. Other peoples began to covet Babylon's wealth.

The kings of Babylon did not notice that a new power was growing in the east: the Persians, kinsmen of the Medians. The Persians made war on Babylon, but the Babylonians did not think they were in danger. They thought the massive walls of Nebuchadnezzar protected them. Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, even threw a party while the city was being attacked! He did this to show his confidence that the walls were impossible to capture.

But the Persians did not have to capture the walls. Remember how the Euphrates flowed through the city, how it went into Babylon through an opening in the walls? The Persians simply blocked up the river. When the water went down, the Persians were able to walk right into the city on the dry riverbed through the opening! Belshazzar was killed. When the Babylonians woke up in the morning, the Persians were in control.

Babylon fell to Persia in 539 b.c., only twenty-three years after Nebuchadnezzar's death. The empire Nebuchadnezzar worked so hard to build came to a sudden and unexpected end. Such is the fate of the kingdoms of men.

## CHAPTER 11

### The Rise of Persia

#### **Kingdoms Conquering Kingdoms**

By now, you may have noticed a pattern. The Sumerians were conquered by the Akkadians, and the Canaanites were conquered by the Hittites and Israelites. They, in turn, were conquered by the Assyrians. The Assyrians were overthrown by the Babylonians; the Babylonians were overthrown by the Persians. The Egyptians were still around, but they too had been conquered by the Hyksos and later the Assyrians; in this chapter, the Assyrians will fall again, but this time to Persia. The whole story of the ancient world is one of kingdom conquering kingdom.

The Israelite prophet Daniel noticed this pattern as well. Daniel was one of the noble youths of Jerusalem exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. God gave Daniel a vision showing these kingdoms attacking each other like wild animals:

I [Daniel] saw in my vision by night, and behold the four winds of the heaven blew upon the sea. And four great beasts, different one from another, came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle . . . And behold another beast like a bear stood up on one side: and there were three ribs in its mouth . . . After this I beheld, and lo, another like a leopard, and it had upon it four wings as of a bird, and the beast had four heads, and power was given to it. After this I beheld in the vision of the night, and lo, a fourth beast, terrible and wonderful, and very strong, it had great iron teeth, eating and breaking in pieces, and trampled down the rest with its feet. (Dn 7:2–7)

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was the lion with eagle's wings. In this chapter, we will learn about the great bear of Daniel's vision, the Persians.

### The Persians

The Persians were related to the Medes, the people from whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken his wife, Amytis. The Persians began as nomads in the days of the Assyrian Empire. They spent most of their lives on horseback, grazing their horses and hunting in the plains between the Tigris River and the Persian Gulf. Their men wore tunics and had long beards. The earliest Persians fought from horseback, using powerful bows.

The Persians and Medes banded together to help Nabopolassar overthrow Assyria. During the Babylonian period, the Persians became an important ally of the Medes. They also became more cultured, settling down in cities and learning the art of government.



## King Cyrus

The first important Persian ruler was King Cyrus, who ruled from 559 to 530 b.c. Cyrus had an interesting childhood. He was the grandson of the last Median king, Astyages, but on his father's side, he was Persian. Astyages had a dream that one day, Cyrus would overthrow him. He ordered Cyrus to be killed when he was still a baby, but a kindhearted servant of the king took the young Cyrus and gave him to a shepherd family instead. Cyrus grew up and eventually returned to claim the throne of Astyages. He defeated Astyages in battle, became king, and joined the Persian and Median kingdoms together.

Cyrus conquered many other lands. He was the one who led the Persians against Babylon and overthrew the Babylonian Empire. Cyrus also led armies far to the west, into Asia Minor and even to the borders of Europe. Here the Persians would encounter the Greeks for the first time. We will learn more about the Persians and the Greeks in another chapter.

Cyrus had a long reign. Despite being the most powerful king in the world, he was good and just, unlike some of the other ruthless leaders we have discussed. He wanted his subjects to feel loyal to Persia. Cyrus allowed many of the peoples deported by the Assyrians and Babylonians to return to their home countries. This included the people of Judah, called Jews. Cyrus passed a law allowing the Jews to make the dangerous trek from Babylon, across the hot, barren desert, back to their homeland. He even allowed them to rebuild their beloved city, Jerusalem. The Jews loved Cyrus for this. The Old Testament calls Cyrus a shepherd and even God's anointed one.

The Persian Empire flourished under Cyrus's rule. He would later be called Cyrus the Great. When he died,



he was buried in a simple tomb, which still exists today. The inscription on his tomb reads,

Passer-by, I am Cyrus, who gave  
the Persians an empire, and was king of Asia.  
Grudge me not therefore this monument.

### **The Vanishing Army**

After Cyrus's death in 530 b.c., his son, Cambyses, became king of the Persians. When Cambyses took power, only Egypt was not yet under Persian rule. Cambyses gathered a great army and marched into Egypt. The pharaoh of Egypt fought him but lost and was killed. Cambyses put on the double crown and took

the title of pharaoh for himself. Egypt was now under Persian control.

Far in the western Egyptian desert there was an *oasis* called Siwa. An oasis is a fertile spot in the desert where water and trees are found. At Siwa, there was a temple to the Egyptian god Amun. Cambyses heard this temple was rich with treasure; he wanted to attack and plunder it. He sent fifty thousand Persian soldiers to march across the desert to attack Siwa. But as we shall see, the attack didn't work out how Cambyses had hoped. Now would be a good time to peek into King Cambyses' tent during the Egyptian campaign, for a scout is about to return with disturbing news:

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King Cambyses paces anxiously in his tent. The king is unhappy. His counselors glance at each other nervously; nobody dares to say a word. A slave cools the great King Cambyses by waving a feathered fan, but everybody else is sweaty and in a foul mood. Egypt can be so miserably hot!

"I can't wait until this Egyptian campaign is over so we can return to Persia!" the counselors grumble to one another.

Suddenly, a messenger bursts into the tent, kneels, and bows his head to the ground. The king turns.

"What news?" Cambyses snaps impatiently.

"Great king," the messenger says, "your scouts have returned from the western desert."

"And what do they say of the battle?" Cambyses says. "Do we have victory? Has Siwa fallen?"

The messenger is silent. The counselors of the king shift uncomfortably. Silence is never a good answer when the king asks a question.

“Answer me!” demands King Cambyses. “What of the army we sent to Siwa?”

“My lord,” begins the messenger trembling, his head still on the ground, “let the king go out and ask the scouts for their report. They will tell the king everything he wishes to know.”

Cambyses storms out of his tent, followed by his slaves and counselors. The king squints as he steps into the bright Egyptian sun. The entourage of soldiers, ministers, and servants standing outside the tent all bow as he emerges.

“Where is that scout?” the king demands angrily. A moment later, the scout is brought to the king. He bows and puts his head to the ground.

“Scout,” says King Cambyses, “I have sent you to ride west and determine the position of our army. Well, where is it?”

“Your . . . your majesty,” the scout stammers, “I am afraid there is no trace of them.” The king’s counselors raise their eyebrows in alarm. All eyes turn to Cambyses.

“What joke is this?” the king demands angrily. “What do you mean there is no trace?”

“They have vanished, my lord. I went to look for them east of Siwa, but all I could find was some equipment and abandoned chariots scattered throughout the desert.”

Cambyses is mystified. “There was no telling where they went? No signs?”

“No, my lord. That is the strangest thing. No tracks, no signs, nothing. . . . It’s like they just disappeared.”

The counselors all murmur among themselves. The army of Persia, vanished? What could this mean? Cambyses, frowning, sends another patrol to see if the scout’s story is true.

“Gone,” he says to himself, pacing nervously as the

new patrol runs out into the desolate Egyptian desert.  
“Fifty thousand soldiers. They can’t just be gone. . . .”

---

But they were, in fact, gone. They never arrived at Siwa, and nobody ever heard from them again. What happened to Cambyses’ lost army? Nobody knows. The people of Siwa said that a great sandstorm blew up out of the desert and buried them. Others said they were attacked and killed, and the Egyptians buried the bodies in the sand. Archaeologists have searched for the remains of Cambyses’ lost army but without success. What happened to those fifty thousand men is one of the great mysteries of the ancient world.

### King Darius I

The Persian Empire was made up of hundreds of different cultures. From the very beginning, the Persian kings sought to unify their subjects. The Persian king Darius I, who ruled from 550 to 486 b.c., built a grand road running from his capitals to the furthest boundaries of the empire. This road, called the *Royal Road*, enabled messengers to move quickly throughout the empire. It was a kind of primitive postal service!

But Darius’s greatest work was his plan for governing the empire. The Persian Empire was extremely big. At its height, it stretched from India to Europe and from Egypt to Armenia. How could an empire that size be governed effectively?

To solve this problem, Darius divided his empire up into lots of small territories called *satrapies*. Each satrapy was ruled by a governor called a *satrap*. Satraps were appointed by the Persian king and were often local people chosen for their knowledge and ability. Each satrap was

responsible for collecting taxes and supplying men for the Persian army. If a satrap couldn't do these things well, the Persian king replaced him—or killed him if he was in a bad mood.

By using the satrap system, Darius was able to better govern his vast kingdom using the talents of governors loyal to him. It also allowed local people to participate in the government. The satrap system made the Persian Empire more stable than the Assyrian or Babylonian Empires had been.

### Persian Greatness

The peoples of the empire were also brought together in the Persian army. Persians, Medes, Babylonians, Syrians, Canaanites, Egyptians, Arabs, Jews, Philistines, Afghans, Armenians, and every other tribe and tongue served in the Persian army. A Persian army on campaign might have had as many as five hundred thousand men; that's almost equal to the size of the entire U.S. Army! Most could not stand up to a force this large.

Those soldiers who showed they were the strongest and the toughest could be selected to serve in the king's special guard. This guard was called the *Immortals*. The Immortals were a group of ten thousand of the best soldiers chosen to guard the Persian king in battle. It was considered a great honor for a soldier to be chosen to serve with the Immortals.

But not only were the Persians warriors; they were also great artists and sculptors. Many Persian buildings and statues remain to this day. Their human figures are stiff but elegant. It was in their depictions of animals that the Persians were at their best. Relief carvings of bears, elephants, lions, horses, and all sorts of mythical beasts

decorated their palaces. Persians could be fierce, but they had an eye for beauty.

Persian religion was unique in the ancient world. The Persians followed the teachings of a man called Zoroaster. Zoroaster taught that the universe was a battleground between two forces: the good god, Ahura-Mazda, and the god of destruction, Ahriman. A host of lesser spirits and demons tried to influence man either for the good or for the bad. People were part of this battle and had a duty to choose good over evil.

By the time Darius I died in 486 b.c., the Persians were ruling the biggest and best organized empire of the ancient world. From the Nile Delta to the hills of Judea, from the mountains of Asia Minor to the plains of Mesopotamia, all men bowed to the rulers of Persia. The peoples of Asia were united under a single kingdom with a single law, and for a time, there was peace.

This is a good time to leave Asia and the Levant, for other things are afoot in the west, far over the waters of the Mediterranean Sea.

## CHAPTER 12

# Peoples of the Isles

### Distant Lands

If we were to travel due west from the heartland of Persia, we would cross the Mesopotamian plains and eventually come to Syria and the old Canaanite territories. Going farther southwest, we would move into the fertile coastal regions of Phoenicia and Palestine and then into the shimmering blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea, where the Phoenicians traded and where Tiglath-Pileser hunted whales centuries ago.

For the peoples of the Levant, this was the very end of the world. In the Old Testament, the Israelite prophets speak about the western sea as a great unknown. Most of the cultures we have discussed so far thought this way about the Mediterranean.

But the Mediterranean was not the end of the world. In fact, if we were to get on a ship from Tyre and head farther west into the sea, we would find many islands,

both large and small. The small ones may have been too tiny to support civilization, but the larger ones were well equipped with forests, farmable land, and freshwater. These larger islands can—and did—give rise to their own civilizations.

### Crete

“There is a land called Crete in the midst of the wine-dark sea, a fair land, and rich, surrounded by water, and therein are many men innumerable, and ninety cities.”

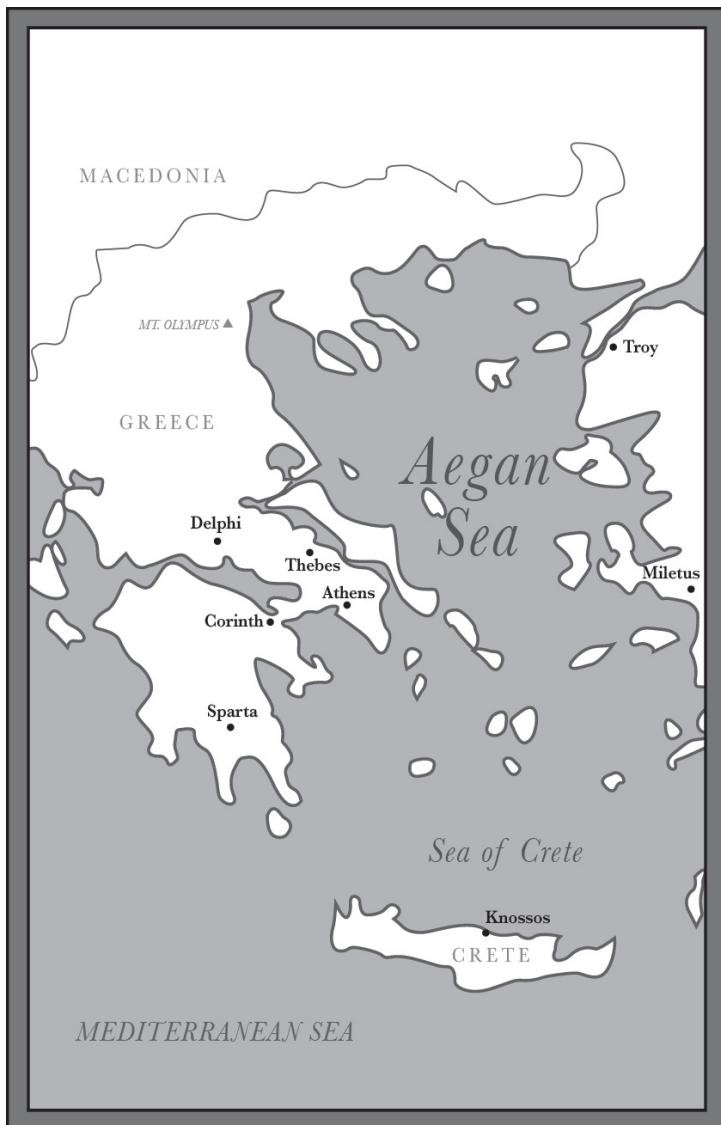
These words were penned by the Greek poet Homer more than 2,500 years ago. He was describing the island of Crete, one of the larger islands of the Mediterranean.

Crete is a long, narrow island, only about 160 miles from east to west. Rugged mountains stretch across the entire island, except for a few plains in the north. Within the gorges created by the mountains are lush valleys filled with cypress, pine, and other hardy trees. A few lakes and several gushing rivers provide freshwater to the island. Crete’s many hills are covered in lovely wild flowers.

British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans came to this beautiful island in 1900. He was sure that an ancient civilization once lived on Crete. Evans began digging. Between 1900 and 1903, Evans and his team uncovered the ruins of a vast civilization.

What did Evans find? Sprawling palaces with hundreds of rooms, great courtyards, storage buildings, broad streets, and much more. The buildings were solidly constructed, supported with large columns, and brightly painted. They were as grand as anything found in Egypt. These ruins were discovered at a place called Knossos. But who were the people who once lived in the glorious city of Knossos?

Other than the ruins, all Evans had to go by were



the *frescoes* he found in Knossos. Frescoes are paintings done on the plaster of walls or ceilings. The ruins of Crete were decorated with many frescoes. Most of the paintings depicted everyday scenes, like beautiful women picking flowers, servants carrying goods, and men fishing or playing sports. Some frescoes were of birds, dolphins, or other wildlife.

Bulls show up in many frescoes. These pictures show young boys and girls leaping over a charging bull. Sometimes they are shown doing somersaults over the bull's back! This must have been an exciting and dangerous sport, but it was very popular; it is depicted in many Minoan frescoes.

### The Minoans

The bull pictures reminded Sir Arthur Evans of the ancient Greek myths about King Minos. Minos was a legendary king of Crete who kept a monster called the *Minotaur* locked beneath his palace. The Minotaur was half man, half bull. Evans called this ancient people the Minoans after King Minos. He thought the Minoan people who built Knossos probably lived between 1700 and 1500 b.c. This was more than a thousand years before the rise of the Persians and several hundred years before the Israelites came out of Egypt. In studying the Minoans, we are taking another step backward in time.

There is great debate about where the Minoans came from. Some archaeologists thought they came from Phoenicia; others thought they came from Egypt. It seems they traded with Egypt occasionally, and the Egyptians certainly knew about the Minoans. Still others say they came south from Europe. The origin of the Minoans is a great mystery.

The Minoans seem to have been a joyful and peace-loving people. Since they lived on an island, they did not need to worry about being invaded by foreign armies. They spent their days farming the rich fields of northern Crete and fishing in the Mediterranean. The complexity of the palace of Knossos shows that their culture was quite advanced.

The Minoans valued sports highly. Many of the frescoes of Knossos depict sporting events, especially the bull-leaping game. The grand central courtyard at Knossos was probably used for such events. The vast courtyard today stands empty and quiet, but the frescoes of youths leaping over bulls can help us imagine what it might have been like to be a part of those festivities on a breezy summer day 3,500 years ago:

---

Kitane and her brother stood beside the courtyard wrapped in bright-blue gowns. Kitane was worried about her brother. Today would be his first time leaping the bull.

“Don’t worry, Pura,” she spoke kindly. “You will do fine.” Her little brother looked up at her, trying to put on a brave face. But Kitane could tell he was nervous.

The crowd around the courtyard erupted into cheers. Two tall, muscular men were boxing in the great courtyard. One had just knocked the other flat on the ground. Royal attendants ran out to drag away the fallen man, dazed and covered in dust. The king looked on approvingly from his window on the balcony.

“Are we next?” Pura asked impatiently.

“Yes,” Kitane said. “See, they are bringing out the bull now!”

The court attendants were leading a bull into the courtyard. He was large and dappled—and very angry. He

snorted and stamped about menacingly as he was led. A hush fell over the crowd as Pura's eyes widened. He had never seen a bull that big before.

Kitane turned to Pura. "Remember, I'll go first. Just do as I do. Move quickly and jump!"

"Move quickly . . . jump," little Pura repeated nervously.

*Poor little guy,* Kitane thought to herself. Ten seemed so young to be jumping his first bull. But then again, Kitane was not that much older when she had first jumped the bull. Now she was fourteen and had made the great leap many times.

A shrill blast from a horn rang out across the courtyard. The king waved his hand. The attendants released the bull.

"Here we go!" said Kitane.

She dropped the blue gown, revealing a linen wrap around her chest and a loin cloth about her waist, the traditional costume of a bull leaper. The bull trotted about the courtyard, snorting and sizing her up. Kitane, thin and nimble, ran out to meet him.

As she approached the bull, she leaped into the air in a single, graceful movement, her bare foot landing on the bull's thick head. He shook his head angrily. Kitane moved into a roll, placing her hands on the bull's back. Her feet flew into the air. For a brief moment, she found herself doing a handstand on the back of the beast! Then she flipped off the bull's back and landed firmly on her feet, her arms raised in triumph. The crowd cheered wildly. Kitane had successfully leapt the bull!

Then it was Pura's turn. The bull eyed him suspiciously, as if daring the boy to come. Pura gulped. He dropped his gown and stepped forward, clad only in a loin cloth. He paused.

“C’mom, Pura,” yelled Kitane from the side of the courtyard. “You can do it! Just like we practiced!”

His sister’s voice gave him courage. Little Pura was not as tall as Kitane, but he was very fast. He charged the bull, grabbed his horns, and was airborne only an instant later. The bull tossed his head with great force. Pura felt his feet above him as he somersaulted through the air. His feet landed on the bull’s back, but he lost his balance and fell. He unexpectedly found himself sitting backward on the bull as the crowd broke into laughter. With a mighty shudder, the bull shook Pura off, tossing him into the dust.

Kitane ran to her brother’s side. “Pura! Are you all right?” He stood and brushed the dust out of his hair before answering.

“That . . . was . . . amazing! When can I do it again?”

Kitane smiled. Her little brother had leapt the bull.

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Thus can we imagine the great bull-leaping festivities of the Minoan Kingdom at Knossos.

Life went on this way for many centuries at Knossos. All kingdoms come to an end, however, and the Minoans were no different. The cities of the Minoans all appear to have been destroyed around 1450 b.c. There was no evidence of violence. Most archeologists think a massive earthquake struck the island and threw down the Minoan cities. The Minoans continued to live on Crete, but they never quite recovered from this destruction. Gradually, they dwindled and were conquered by other peoples.



### The Mycenaeans

One of these peoples was the Mycenaeans. Around the time Knossos was destroyed, the Mycenaeans were spreading throughout the islands of the Mediterranean. The center of the Mycenaean culture was in Greece.

Greece is not an island but a rocky peninsula jutting off the south of Europe. From Greece, the Mycenaeans sailed to Crete and many other islands in the eastern Mediterranean, bringing them under their control.

The Mycenaeans were not peaceful like the Minoans. They lived in massive fortress-cities and were ruled by warrior-kings. Their great city was Mycenae in southern



Greece, from which they took their name. The Mycenaean kings and their bands of warriors often sailed from Greece to pillage and conquer other lands. Modern archaeologists discovered the tombs of the kings of Mycenae and found that they were filled with gold and riches, as well as swords and other weapons.

Years after the conquests of these Mycenaean warriors, they would be recalled in the poems of Homer. Homer wrote a very famous poem called the *Iliad*. In the *Iliad*, he tells how Agamemnon, king of the Mycenaeans, led a force of more than a thousand ships to conquer the city of Troy on the coast of Asia Minor. We will learn more about Homer and the tales of the Greeks in the following chapters.

The Mycenaeans proceeded to spread throughout Greece. They seized and fortified all the high places and mountain passes. Like the ancient Sumerians, each fortress-city was an independent kingdom with its own king. From around 1400 to 1100 b.c., the Mycenaeans dominated Greece, Crete, and the surrounding islands.

But Mycenaean civilization, too, was destined to collapse after 1100 b.c. Why did this happen? To answer that, we must cross over the sea from Crete and the islands into mainland Greece.

## CHAPTER 13

# The Founding of Greece

### Flying North

In our previous chapter, we mentioned King Minos, the legendary king of Crete who was said to have kept a monster called the Minotaur locked away in the *labyrinth* beneath his palace. A labyrinth is a collection of irregular passageways that is hard to find one's way out of. It is like a maze. According to this legend, the labyrinth was designed by an inventor named Daedalus. Minos, however, was suspicious that Daedalus would tell others the secret of the labyrinth, so he imprisoned Daedalus and his son Icarus in a tower.

But Daedalus was a very clever man. He fashioned wings for himself and his son, using feathers held together with melted wax. Daedalus and Icarus were able to fly away from Crete toward Greece. But on their way, Icarus flew too close to the sun. The heat of the sun melted the wax on his wings, loosening the feathers so that they

began to come out. He fell from the sky, plunged into the sea, and drowned. Daedalus continued on his way, alone and brokenhearted.

We too must now leave Crete for Greece. Let us imagine ourselves flying north from Crete, out over the sea, like Daedalus and Icarus. This is the Aegean Sea, the “wine-dark sea” that the poet Homer spoke of. As we fly north, we see more islands passing below us. Some are large, and some are small, but they are all rocky and mountainous. The Aegean Sea is home to thousands of islands.

Eventually, we come to Greece. In passing from Crete to Greece, we are landing in Europe. *This is important.* Up until now, every civilization we have studied has been in Egypt or Asia. But with Greece, we have something new: the beginning of European civilization.

Throughout the era we have been studying, Europe had no real civilization. There were different tribes living in small villages scattered around the dark and damp European forests. Some of these tribes even established farming communities. But there was no writing and no real civilization anywhere in Europe. That all changed with Greece.

## Greece

Greece is a *peninsula*. A peninsula is a piece of land almost entirely surrounded by water but still connected to the mainland. Greece is a very mountainous place, with lush valleys lying between the mountains. But these valleys are not good for farming, because the soil is too thin. The people who lived there used them for growing olive and fig trees and for grazing sheep and goats.

Cities grew up in these valleys and on the coasts. Because there were so many mountains in Greece, it was difficult for the cities to ever unite into a single kingdom.

Each city was independent and ruled by its own king. This gave the people a very independent spirit. The Mycenaean lords, whom we will talk about shortly, lived in their own fortresses around the Greek mainland and the islands. Each Mycenaean lord was probably the king of his own little kingdom.

We mentioned previously that Greece is surrounded by the waters and islands of the Aegean Sea. Since Greece is such a small peninsula, most Greeks, even those who lived inland, were never far from the water. Thus the people of Greece loved the water. They sailed all over the Aegean, settling its many islands. They often came to conquer, but sometimes they came to trade or just because they were curious.

### **The Mycenaeans and the Dorians**

The Mycenaeans of Greece were a tall people with long, reddish or blond hair. They carried powerful spears and shields of polished bronze. They must have been fearsome in battle. All the great heroes of the Mycenaean age were mighty warriors—men like Achilles, who was invincible everywhere except for his ankle; or Ajax, who stood head and shoulders above all other men and was so strong that he could carry a shield made of seven layers of oxhide; or Diomedes, who was such a feared swordsman that he was said to have beaten two gods in battle!

The warrior-kings of Mycenae ruled Greece and the Aegean for almost four centuries. Eventually, however, they grew weak. We do not know why. Perhaps they began to fight among themselves; perhaps they were conquered. But by 1100 b.c., their cities were in ruins.

Around this time, another wave of people, called the Dorians, came to live in Greece. They came from the north, from the plains of eastern Europe. They were different from

the Mycenaeans. The Dorians were not as tall and did not have red hair; their hair and eyes were darker. They swept down into Greece and lived in the Mycenaean cities. They crossed the Aegean and settled on its many islands. The Dorians intermarried with the Mycenaeans, and so the two peoples became one.

### A Time of Darkness and Silence

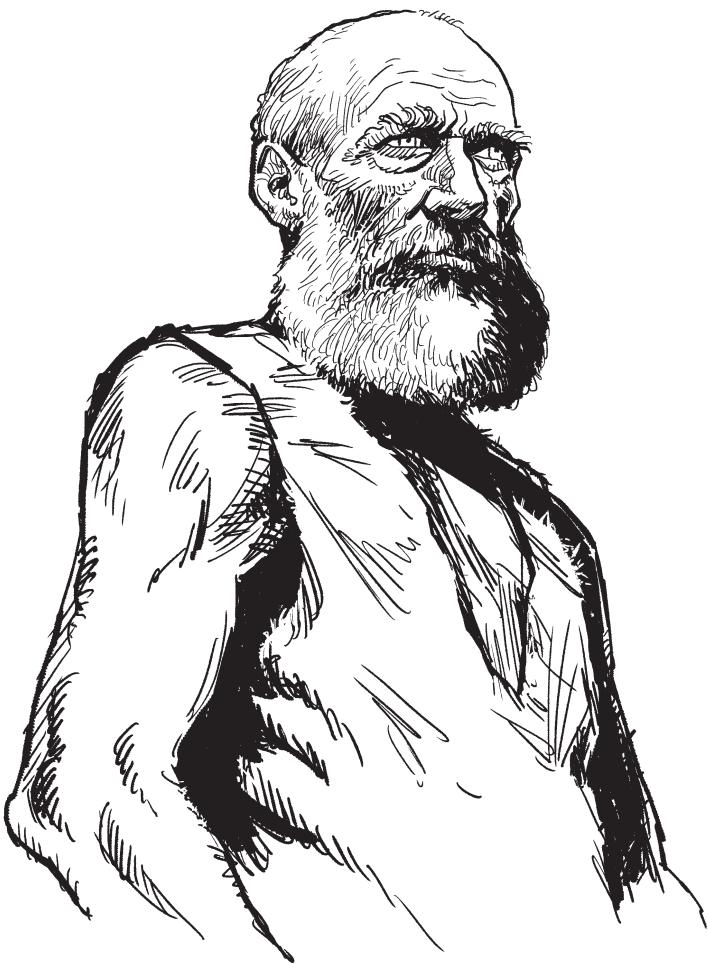
This was a very confusing time in the history of Greece. Not much is known about these years, leading some to call it “the Greek Dark Ages.” There was very little writing, and the old writings of the Minoans had been forgotten. Even the Mycenaean alphabet was no longer used. The Greeks of later years would eventually adopt the alphabet of the Phoenicians, which we learned about in chapter 6. But in the meantime, there was no writing.

If there was no writing, how did the Greeks keep alive the memory of the great Mycenaean heroes? Nowadays, if you want to remember something, you probably can write it down. But how would you remember it if there were no writing?

### Poets and Epics

The early Greeks faced the same problem. Instead of writing their histories, they turned them into songs. The tales of Achilles, Ajax, and the others were all passed down in the form of epic songs. The men who composed and sang these songs were known as poets.

The greatest of all these poets was Homer, whom we have spoken about before. He lived around 850 b.c. and was said to be blind, which makes his poetry even more remarkable. Two major poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are both attributed to him. The *Iliad* told the story of the Greek attack and destruction of the city of Troy during



the Trojan War; the *Odyssey* told of the wanderings and adventures of the Greek hero Odysseus as he tried to make his way home from the Trojan War.

These poems became very popular. A well-known Greek poet such as Homer would have been summoned to the halls of great lords to sing of the deeds of the old heroes. Let us imagine ourselves in the hall of one such

lord, more than 2,800 years ago, listening to the songs of Homer:

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The stone hall is dark, save for the dim light of a few torches on the walls. The flickering flames cast dancing shadows across the chamber. The master of the hall, a stern old warrior named Eurycles, sits upon his chair, his lovely wife, Chara, seated beside him. Many other important men and women from the city, as well as some children, are gathered in the hall. Eurycles has invited them.

An old, bearded man in a long, sleeveless tunic enters the hall. This, of course, is the famous poet Homer. Eurycles has summoned him to his hall this evening to relate the tale of the great war of the Greeks against the Trojans. A hush falls over the crowded room as old Homer takes his place, standing before the throne of Eurycles. Homer is already famous throughout Greece for his poetry. Eurycles is deeply honored by the presence of the great poet.

In a deep voice, Homer begins to sing of the Trojan War. Eurycles and his people already know this story, but that is all right. The ancient Greeks never got tired of hearing the tales of the old Mycenaean heroes.

Homer sings of how the Greeks sailed over the sea to attack the city of Troy. They wanted to win back the Greek princess Helen, who had been kidnapped by the Trojans. The Greeks attacked Troy for ten years but were unable to conquer it. Then a Greek named Odysseus came up with a clever idea. The Greek army built a gigantic wooden horse, which was hollow inside. Odysseus and his men crept inside the horse, while the rest of the Greeks went away and hid.

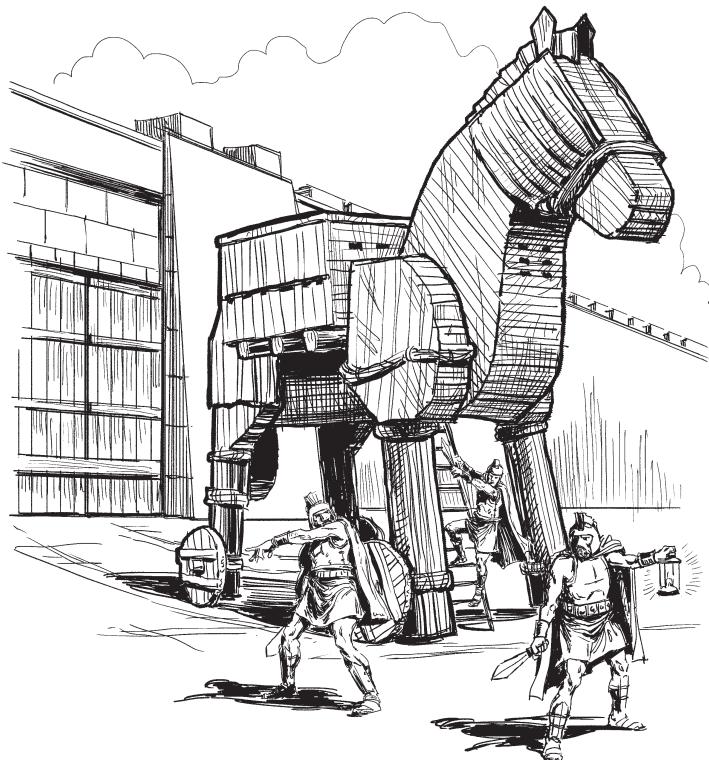
The next morning, the Trojans saw nothing outside their city except the strange wooden horse. They were curious and brought the horse inside the city of Troy. That night,

Odysseus and his Greek warriors crept from the wooden horse and opened the gates of the city. The other Greeks came out of hiding and stormed into Troy. By the time the Trojans woke up, the Greeks were everywhere! The Trojans were defeated, and the Greeks took possession of the city.

Eurycles and his men shout and clap with approval. Homer bows in the presence of the great lord.

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Homer's songs were eventually written down and have survived to this today. Even now, people enjoy reading



the stories of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the long-vanished Mycenaean warriors.

By 800 b.c., the Dorians and Mycenaeans were so mixed together that they could not be told apart. They were just Greeks, all living in thriving cities throughout the peninsula and the islands of the Aegean. Some had even settled in Asia Minor, in the old Hittite lands. There were Greeks everywhere, and since they adopted the Phoenician alphabet, they were beginning to write. What did the Greeks have to say? What kinds of things did they write about? Let us continue the voyage to discover these answers.

## CHAPTER 14

# Greek Mythology

### The Protector of Athens

One of the most important Greek cities was Athens. Athens was built on the sides of a steep mountain not far from the sea in the center of Greece. It was well positioned to dominate the entire region.

The old stories tell us that the first king of Athens was named Cecrops. When Athens was first built, it was such a splendid city that the gods themselves argued over who would be its special protector.

How would they decide who would be protector of the city? King Cecrops had an idea:

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“Let a contest be held!” the King bellowed. “Each god shall present the city of Athens with a gift. The Athenians will vote on which gift they like best. Whoever’s gift gets the most votes will be our special protector!”

Two gods came forward with gifts. The first was Poseidon, the mighty god of the sea. Poseidon was called “the Earth Shaker.” His weapon was a *trident*, a three-pronged spear. Poseidon wanted to show the Athenians how powerful he was. He thrust his trident into the hard ground. Immediately, a fountain of water came bubbling forth from the earth, gushing and splashing down the rocky hillside of Athens and emptying into the sea. The Athenians murmured in approval.

“Poseidon is very powerful!” When the people went forward to taste the spring, however, their opinion changed. “This water is salty!” they said in disgust. “What good is a saltwater spring?”

The second god to bring a gift was Athena, the goddess of wisdom. She was graceful and wise. She quietly knelt and planted something in the ground. The people watched carefully; at first, nothing happened. Then something popped through the soil. A small shoot grew up and put forth leaves. It slowly grew and spread out, turning into a splendid olive tree.

Poseidon snorted. “Anyone can plant a tree! What’s so special about that?”

But the Athenians saw that the tree gave them shade, and its olives were useful for food and for making oils and other valuable things. Unlike Poseidon’s saltwater spring, the olive tree was very useful.

“We choose Athena as our patron goddess!” the people shouted. King Cecrops declared that Athena would be the special protector of Athens from that day forward. Poseidon was so angry that he sent a flood to destroy the farms around Athens. But because Athens was built on a mountainside, the Athenians themselves were safe.

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## The Greek Myths

This story is an example of a Greek *myth*. A myth is a story invented to explain a truth about the world or how something came to be; in this case, the story of the contest between Poseidon and Athena explains why the Athenians worshiped Athena as their special protector.

A myth may be completely legendary, or it may mix legend and history. For example, many archaeologists think Homer's story of the fall of Troy is based on a true story. There really was a city called Troy that really was destroyed by the Greeks. The memory of this war is preserved in Homer's poems.

We saw in the previous chapter how the Greeks began to write around 800 b.c. The first things they wrote were the stories of their mythology. These early myths were often about the gods and their powers. One poet named Hesiod wrote a book explaining how all the gods of Greece came to be.

## Gods and Goddesses

What were the gods and goddesses Hesiod wrote about? There was Zeus the Thunderer, the god of the sky, lightning, and justice. He was the king of the Greek gods and hence the most powerful. Zeus had two brothers: Poseidon (the ruler of the sea whom we have already met) and Hades (the ruler of the underworld).

Zeus was married to his sister Hera. Hera was the goddess of marriage and the family. Her symbol was the peacock. Zeus and Hera often did not get along, and there are many stories about their problems.

Then there were the twins Apollo and Artemis. Apollo was the god of knowledge and light, and Artemis was the goddess of hunters, virgins, and all animals. Apollo was one of the most popular of all Greek gods.



One of the most unpopular gods was Ares, the god of war. Whenever he showed up, he brought violence and bloodshed. The Greeks did not care for him; they preferred his companion Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Why did the Greek myths have the goddess of love joined to the god of war? Perhaps to teach that love is proven by suffering?

There were many others: Hermes, the messenger of the gods; Hephaestus, the fiery god of craftsmen; Dionysus, the god of wine; Demeter, the goddess of the harvest; and of course Athena, whom we have already met.

These gods were called the *Olympians* because they were believed to dwell on Mount Olympus in northern Greece.

Other Greek myths were about the deeds of *heroes*. A hero was a human who was descended from the gods, usually because a god had married a human. Because they were part god, the heroes had amazing powers that allowed them to do marvelous deeds.

### Theseus vs. the Minotaur

One of these heroes was Theseus, a prince of Athens. Theseus was descended from the sun god Helios on his mother's side. On his father's side, he was descended from Poseidon.

In Theseus's day, Athens was under the control of Minos, the king of Crete who imprisoned Daedalus and Icarus in chapter 13. Every nine years, King Minos forced the Athenians to send him seven young girls and seven young men. These youths were to be fed to the Minotaur, the bull-like monster Minos kept locked up in the labyrinth beneath his palace.

This upset Prince Theseus. “It is disgraceful that our youth should perish this way!” He volunteered to be sent to the Minotaur in hopes of killing it. The Athenians admired Theseus for his bravery, but they doubted he would succeed. The labyrinth was a gigantic underground maze. *Even if he kills the Minotaur, how will he ever find his way out of the labyrinth?* they wondered.

When Theseus arrived in Crete, the daughter of King Minos saw him and fell in love with him. Her name was

Ariadne. She did not want Theseus to die in the labyrinth. Ariadne gave Theseus a ball of thread.

"Fasten one end to the inside of the door at the entrance to the labyrinth," she told him. "Then unwind it as you go in. After you kill the Minotaur, you can follow the line of thread back out of the labyrinth."

Theseus did as he was told. He found the Minotaur at the center of the labyrinth and killed it with his bare hands. Then he used the thread to find his way back out. With the Minotaur dead, the Athenians no longer had to fear Minos. Theseus and Ariadne did not have a happy ending however; after fleeing Crete he abandoned her on an island. Then he became the king of Athens and reigned for many years.

### **Architecture and Arts**

The heroes had many great adventures. Some went on long voyages, such as Jason, who sailed to the end of the world to retrieve a golden fleece. Others performed difficult works, such as Hercules, the son of Zeus, who had to complete twelve challenging tasks in punishment for a crime he had committed. Some, like Cadmus, founded cities. Cadmus killed a dragon and planted its teeth in the ground. Men sprang up from the dragon's teeth, and with these men, he founded the Greek city of Thebes. The gods themselves often got involved in the deeds of the heroes to help or hinder them.

The Greeks built beautiful temples to worship their gods in. The temples were held up by decorated columns and painted brilliant colors. Often they contained elaborate statues of the gods or heroes they were dedicated to, for the Greeks were skilled sculptors. Offerings of pigs, oxen, or other animals were made at these temples, as well as smaller offerings of incense and wine.

But not only did the Greeks worship in their temples; they also worshiped by writing and performing religious plays. These plays acted out the great stories from their myths. Great theaters were built out of a rocky hillside. Thousands of Greeks came to these theaters to watch these religious plays. The plays also contained sacrifices and poetry. These Greek religious plays are called *dramas*. In ancient Greece, a drama was any play that told of the deeds of the gods.

The Greeks are considered the founders of the theater. Have you ever been to a play or movie? If so, thank the Greeks! All the principles of acting, playwriting, and theater were invented by the Greeks. Many of the Greek plays survive today and are still performed.

### **The Gods of Greece vs. the God of Israel**

One thing we have learned from the Greek religious writings and plays is that their gods were very flawed. They were not always good. They told lies. They stole things, as when Hermes stole the cattle of Apollo. They were often mean and vengeful, as we saw when Poseidon tried to flood Athens. They were unfaithful to each other. They were jealous of their power and often squabbled among themselves like little children. They could also be tricked and lied to by mortals and each other.

It is interesting to compare the Olympian gods with the God of Israel. The God of Israel is all-knowing and all-powerful; nobody could lie to Him or trick Him. The gods of the Greeks were very limited by their weaknesses. They were certainly not all-powerful. The God of Israel called Himself “I AM” and was so great that He could not be depicted by any statue; the Greek gods were imagined as beautiful humans, and many statues were made of them.



There are many more differences, but the main thing is this: The God who revealed Himself to Israel said He had made mankind in His image and likeness. But the Greeks imagined the gods in *their* image and likeness.

Despite the imperfections of the Greek religion, the Greek myths were some of the best stories ever written. Even today, people still read the stories of Hercules, Theseus, Odysseus, and the rest. The Greek myths have been made into books and movies. They continue to entertain us, even as they did the first Greeks who watched their dramas in the theaters so many centuries ago.

In our next chapter, we will learn about how the people of the little Greek city-states governed themselves.

## CHAPTER 15

# The Cradle of Democracy

### A New Way to Govern

Have you ever wondered what the best type of government is? Most people in the ancient world never gave this question much thought. From Egypt to Mesopotamia to Persia to Israel, all they had ever known was *monarchy*, which means “rule by a king.” The Greeks were the first people to stop and ask, “Is rule by a king really the only choice? What is the best way to govern?” In this chapter, we will learn how the Greeks decided to govern themselves.

In the beginning, the Greek city-states were ruled by kings. The Greek city was called the *polis*. A king who ruled a polis made decisions about governing the city. He was also responsible for the city’s walls, roads, and bridges, as well as defending the city against attacks. Most cities had their own little armies made up of citizens. A king could decide to make war on or make

alliances with another city. The polis was essentially its own little kingdom.

The early Greek kings were supported by the wealthiest people in each polis. These people often owned farm-lands outside the city and possessed a lot of influence. They advised the king and helped him make decisions.

But after some time, many Greek people started to ask themselves, “Is it fair that only the rich should have power? Isn’t there a better way?” In many cities, the people finally decided they did not want kings anymore. They decided that the citizens would govern themselves and make their own laws. A government in which a people governs itself is called a *democracy*.

Throughout the seventh century b.c., many Greek city-states either forced their kings out or changed their laws to reduce his power and give more to the people. Most kings were gone by 600 b.c. and were replaced by elected officials or groups of people who made laws. In Athens, for example, the elected leaders were called *Archons*. Laws were made by a group called the Areopagus Council.

Once the kings were gone, each polis had to decide how it would govern itself. There were many questions to be answered: Should the laws favor the rich or the poor? How should the courts be set up? Would the city have a strong army or a weak one? Should the city try to conquer other cities? Who should be allowed to vote, and who could be elected? Should the laws be harsh or gentle? Though all the Greek city-states were committed to democracy, democracy looked different in each polis.

### Laws for the People

In many cases, the Greeks turned to wise men and asked them to write laws for their cities. In the city of Athens,

the Athenians went to a man named Draco. “Please, write down laws for the Athenians,” they said to him.

Draco believed laws would work best if there were very harsh punishments for breaking them. He wrote a law code that was very strict. A person who owed money could be forced into slavery, and many crimes were punished with death—even little ones. One of Draco’s laws stated that a man could be executed just for stealing a cabbage!

The Athenians were very disappointed with Draco’s laws. When they asked Draco why he decreed that so many crimes be punished with death, he shrugged and said, “I thought those little crimes deserved death; besides, I couldn’t think of any other punishment.” The Athenians realized they had made a huge mistake in letting Draco write their laws.

### Solon the Wise

They turned to another man named Solon. Solon had served as Archon of Athens in the past and had a reputation for great wisdom. “Please help us get out of the mess we got ourselves into with Draco!” they begged. Solon agreed to write a new set of laws for Athens.

Things were very bad when Solon set to work. There were disagreements between different powerful families and rivalries between rich and poor. How could Solon bring peace to Athens and make sure the laws were just for everybody?

Solon ended the power of the rich over the poor by allowing all citizens—regardless of wealth—to serve in an assembly that governed the city. He abolished all debts and forbade the rich from enslaving the poor if they owed money. He also freed all slaves who were Athenians and made the voting system fairer.

The Athenians also came to value education, especially poetry. Some of the greatest poets from Greece came to live and study in Athens. Athens had a reputation for being a beautiful center of learning. Solon's reforms helped make this possible.

The people were happy with Solon's laws. Solon decided to leave Athens to travel around the world for ten years. He visited other Greek cities, the islands of the Aegean, and even far-away Egypt. Everywhere he went, Solon would ask the people about their laws and customs. He wanted to learn as much as he could about how different people in the world lived.

One tale of his wanderings describes how he came to the court of the great Croesus, king of Lydia in Asia Minor. In the court of Croesus, Solon and the king argued about what it meant to live a happy life. Let us listen in on this discussion for a moment:

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King Croesus of Lydia led Solon into his palace, parading him before the many treasures he possessed. The king wanted Solon to know how rich he was and how much joy his treasures brought him.

After they had toured the palace and took in all the king's riches, they came into his court to sit and talk. Servants brought them fruits to eat and wine to drink as they spoke.

"Stranger of Athens," King Croesus said after wiping the wine stains from his mustache, "I have heard of your great wisdom and of your travels through many lands. I am curious to ask your opinion: Who, of all the people you have seen, do you think is the most happy?" Croesus asked this because he thought *he* was the happiest man and was hoping to get Solon to say so.

Solon thought for a moment. “The happiest man I ever met was named Tellus of Athens. There was peace in all his days, he lived to see his sons grow up to be noble and strong, and he finally died gloriously in battle and was given a splendid funeral.”

Croesus frowned. “Well, who was the second happiest man, in your opinion?”

Solon again furled his brow in thought. “I would say the brothers Cleobis and Biton of Argos. Their mother needed to be taken to a festival in a cart. But when the oxen were not available to pull the cart, the brothers strapped themselves into the harness and dragged their mother to the festival. All the people of Argos praised the brothers for the strength and honor they showed to their mother. They praised the mother for raising such powerful and reverent sons.”

Now Croesus was angry. “Then where do you rank my happiness? Is it so little that you place the happiness of lowly men above mine, a great king?”

“Oh, great king,” Solon said, “you are rich beyond measure and master of many nations. But as to how happy you are, I cannot answer until I see whether your life ends happily or not. Many people have good things during this life, but only those who retain them in honor until death do I call happy.”

Croesus then sent Solon away. “What an arrogant fool!” he said to himself.

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Soon, misfortune would come upon Croesus. First, his son, the heir to his throne, died in an accident. Then the Persians under Cyrus came and conquered Croesus’ kingdom. Croesus lived to see his city destroyed and his treasure taken by the Persians. But Solon lived to a ripe

old age and died peacefully, honored by his people as a wise man.

### Mighty Sparta

The Athenians valued freedom and the participation of people. They made their laws to reflect their values. Different Greek city-states had different values and set up their governments differently. In the south of Greece, in a rocky peninsula known as the Peloponnesus, there was a city-state called Sparta.

The great lawgiver of Sparta was named Lycurgus. He lived around 750 b.c. Like Solon, Lycurgus traveled all over the world, learning about the ways in which other peoples governed themselves. When he returned from his travels, he wrote a set of laws for the people of Sparta.

Based on his travels, Lycurgus thought the most important thing for a Greek polis to have was strength. The Spartan laws written by Lycurgus valued three things: equality, military power, and simple living. “These virtues will make the Spartans a strong nation,” Lycurgus told his people when persuading them to adopt his laws. Let us look at some of Lycurgus’s laws.

All Spartan boys were taken from their homes at age seven to begin military training. This training was called the *agoge*. The agoge was all a boy did from ages seven through twenty-nine. They spent their days exercising and practicing military drills to prepare them for war. They were taught to live in harsh conditions. For example, they slept on the ground and had only a rough, red cloak to protect them from the cold. They were also underfed in order to get them used to being hungry. This was supposed to toughen them up.

All the boys in the agoge ate together in large halls rather than with their families. “A Spartan warrior must

be loyal to Sparta first of all,” said Lycurgus. “The love of Sparta is more important than the love of family,” he had taught.

Due to this difficult training, the Spartan army was the toughest and best organized in all of Greece. The other city-states were all afraid of the Spartans. Lycurgus was so proud of the Spartan army that he ordered that the walls of Sparta be torn down. “We don’t need walls of stone to protect us,” he said. “Our walls are our people.” Thus Sparta was the only major Greek city without walls.

Girls were part of the agoge too. They were encouraged to exercise with the boys and often participated in gymnastics and footraces. Girls were also expected to help the boys by teasing them in public. The Spartans thought that a boy who got teased by the girls would exercise harder to prove himself worthy.

Spartan boys grew up to be hardened warriors, and the girls grew up to be strong and proud mothers. When a Spartan man went off to battle, his wife would tell him, “Come back with your shield or on it.” This meant that he should either come back victorious or not come back at all. A defeated Greek warrior was expected to surrender his shield. This was a way of telling the man to never surrender.

Like other city-states, the Spartans had assemblies that Spartan citizens voted in. But they also had kings—two kings, as a matter of fact. Sparta was always ruled by two kings descended from two different royal families. These two kings, together with the Spartan assemblies, ruled the polis of Sparta.

We mentioned previously that by 600 b.c., most Greek city-states had adopted some form of democracy. The character of each polis was different, as we have seen by comparing Sparta with Athens. But every polis had



some sort of assembly that was elected by the people and was responsible for making laws. Aside from Sparta, most city-states had gotten rid of their kings.

But just because a polis got rid of its kings did not mean it was safe from danger. Sometimes, even in democracies, powerful men took control. Power-hungry men would use the democratic system itself to take over a city. Once in charge, these men ruled just like kings but without the

title. The Greeks invented a name for them, though: *tyrants*. A tyrant was a person who seized power by force and ruled alone, without an assembly or the participation of the citizens. Tyrants were threats to democracy.

### **Peisistratus the Tyrant**

One of the most famous tyrants was Peisistratus of Athens. Peisistratus was a wealthy citizen and an important general. One day, Peisistratus tore his clothes and smeared himself with dirt. He came into the assembly.

The Athenians asked, “What happened to you?”

“I was attacked and beaten up by a mob!” Peisistratus said. “I demand that you allow me to keep fifty bodyguards to protect me!”

The assembly voted to allow Peisistratus to keep fifty armed men for his protection. But once he had those men, he used them to take control of Athens, and he ruled it like a king. The assembly regretted that they had allowed Peisistratus to keep armed men. Eventually, they rose up and drove him out.

But that wasn’t the end of Peisistratus. He went out and found a very tall woman. Then he dressed her up in glittering armor and gave her a massive spear. He put the woman in a chariot and rode back into Athens beside her. When the people saw the glorious woman dressed in shining armor, they said, “It is Athena! Athena has come to Athens and is bringing back Peisistratus!” Peisistratus said that Athena herself wanted him to rule Athens, so he returned to power a second time.

Altogether, Peisistratus was kicked out and returned to Athens three times. The final time he took power, he kept it for life. When he died in 527 b.c., his power passed to his sons. But the Athenians had had enough of the family

of Peisistratus. They rebelled, kicked his sons out, and re-stored the democracy.

The episode with Peisistratus showed that sometimes men hungry for power could take advantage of the democratic system. They could use wealth, influence, and cunning to get the assemblies to vote them special privileges and powers.

To make sure no tyrants ever took over Athens again, the Athenians passed a law declaring that anyone who was too popular or too powerful could be exiled from Athens for ten years. This way, men suspected of trying to take power could be sent away before they had a chance to become tyrants.

### An Impending Conflict

In this chapter, we have seen how the Greek city-states tried to build forms of government based on equality and the participation of the people. At this time, democracies did not exist anywhere else in the world. They were unique to Greece. The Greek democracies allowed the Greeks to have a great deal of freedom and allowed them the ability to decide for themselves what sort of people they wanted to be.

But could the scattered Greek city-states stand up to the aggression of powerful empires like Persia? In the next chapter, we will see what happened when the worlds of Persia and Greece came into conflict.

## CHAPTER 16

### The Persian Wars

#### **King Xerxes**

Perhaps no other leader was more feared in the ancient world than the mighty Xerxes. Let us stop for a moment and meet this powerful man:

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King Xerxes of Persia was restless. The Persian Empire was the biggest and best organized empire of the ancient world. Since it was founded in the days of King Cyrus, it had spread from Egypt in Africa all the way to Afghanistan in Asia. Its borders reached from Arabia in the south to Armenia in the north and as far west as Asia Minor and the coast of the Aegean Sea. Great and ancient kingdoms like Babylon and Egypt had fallen before the might of Persia.

But all was not well for the king as he paced back and forth in his palace. He summoned his general, Mardonius.

“What does the king command?” said the general, bowing before Xerxes.

“Mardonius, the whole world lies at my feet, and yet the tiny peninsula of Greece eludes my power! What shall be done about this?”

“Make war on them!” boomed Mardonius. “Make their stubborn necks bow to Persian might.”

Xerxes stroked his chin thoughtfully. “I’m sure you are aware they defeated the armies of my father.”

“How could these tiny cities defeat the might of Persia?” asked Mardonius. “They have no kings, no empire. . . . They’re just a federation of little cities, and yet they continue to withstand you, great king!”

Xerxes thought momentarily. *Was Mardonius too eager for war?*

Xerxes’ father, Darius, had tried invading Greece some years ago. His armies had been soundly beaten by an alliance of Greek city-states led by Athens.

*Perhaps they should be left alone.* But on the other hand, maybe things had changed. Maybe they were weak and divided. *I am the king of kings. Can I allow a cluster of tiny city-states to defy the power of Persia?*

“Mardonius!” the king snapped. “I am resolved. Greece shall fall. Build me an army—the largest, greatest army that has ever been gathered. We will bring the full weight of Persia’s power against Greece. We will wash them away like the ocean washing away the sand!”

“Yes, great king!” Mardonius said, going out at once to prepare the glorious army of Xerxes, ruler of Persia and king of kings. Mardonius was excited. He hated the Greeks and wanted to conquer Greece so he could become its governor.





## The Greeks vs. the Persians

The army of Xerxes, led personally by him, invaded Greece in 480 b.c. It crossed from Asia Minor into Greece at a place called the Hellespont. The Persians made a bridge by tying a bunch of pontoon boats together. It was very difficult work. Once, when the waves were especially fierce, Xerxes ordered the water to be whipped in order to punish it! Eventually the pontoon bridge was complete, and Xerxes, Mardonius, and the Persians entered Greece.

The army that King Xerxes of Persia brought across the Hellespont was the largest the world had ever seen. Ancient Greek historians tell us that the Persian army turned green land into desert just by marching over it. Rivers and lakes were drunk dry by the thirsty Persian soldiers. We don't know if these tales are true or not, but we do know that Xerxes' army was much bigger than anything the Greeks had ever faced.

As we have learned, the Greek cities were very independent. But the Persian danger made the Greeks forget their differences and join together. They knew they had to work as *one* if they were to resist Xerxes. All the Greek cities formed an alliance called the Greek League. The Spartans were in charge of the League's army and the Athenians of the navy. This made sense because the Spartans were such excellent warriors and the Athenians were skilled sailors.

The Persians were not afraid of the Greek League. King Xerxes did not believe so few Greeks could pose a threat to his massive army. He thought the Greek cities were weak and divided. He marched his army down into Greece and prepared to attack Athens. Greeks everywhere fled before him.

But the Spartan king Leonidas had an idea. Leonidas took three hundred Spartan soldiers and fortified a small

pass called Thermopylae. Thermopylae was a very narrow passage with a cliff on one side and the ocean on the other. With this passage defended, Leonidas believed a few hundred Spartans could hold off the entire Persian army. Xerxes would not be able to get his hundreds of thousands of men through such a narrow funnel of land.

At first, the Persians laughed at the Spartans at Thermopylae. They thought their long hair made them look like women. But they weren't laughing after they saw the way the Spartans fought! Leonidas was right; three hundred Spartans blocking up the narrow pass stopped up the entire Persian army!

Xerxes was angry. His men called to the Spartans, "How can you resist us? We have so many archers that if we fire our arrows, it would block out the sun!"

The Spartans laughed, replying, "Good! Then we will get to fight in the shade!"

Eventually Xerxes found a way around, and Leonidas and the three hundred Spartans were killed to the last man. Xerxes had won the Battle of Thermopylae, but the Greeks had learned that it was possible to fight off the Persians if they could use the territory to their advantage.

Xerxes headed for Athens. He wanted to punish the Athenians for leading the Greeks against Persia. The Athenians were in terror of the Persians. They abandoned Athens and fled to the countryside. Xerxes and the Persians marched into Athens but found the city empty. In anger, he ordered that it be burned.

The Greeks debated among themselves about what to do. They sought advice from their gods. One oracle told them, "Greece will be saved by walls of wood." The members of the Greek League wondered what this could mean. An Athenian named Themistocles said that "walls of wood" referred to ships because ships are made

of wood. He argued that the Greek League should try to defeat Xerxes with its navy. Its leaders agreed and put Themistocles in charge of the navy.

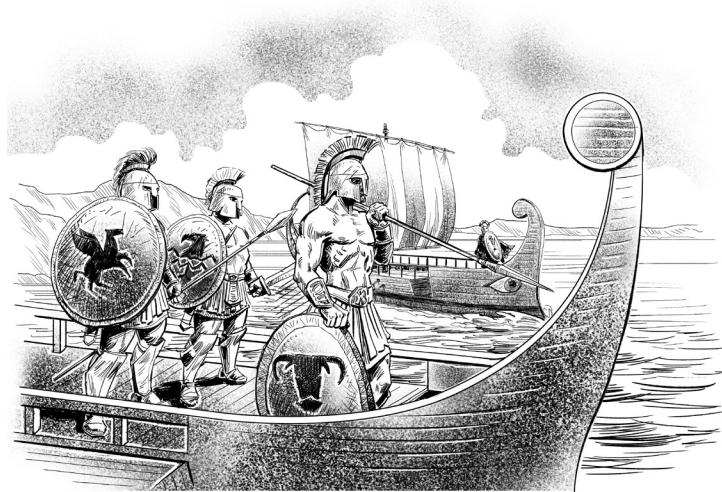
But the navy of the Greek League was so much smaller than Xerxes' mighty fleet. The Persians had more than 1,200 ships, while Themistocles only had 375! Some of the Greeks thought challenging the Persian fleet was a lost cause. Themistocles, however, had learned from the Battle of Thermopylae. If he could trick the Persians into bringing their fleet into a tight spot, the Greeks could prevail. "Battling in a tight space works to our advantage," Themistocles told his men.

Themistocles docked the Greek ships in the Straits of Salamis (a *strait* is a very narrow waterway) and hid the Greek ships behind a rocky peninsula. Then Themistocles sent a spy to tell Xerxes that the Greek ships were hiding in the straits because the Greeks were scared. The spy also told Xerxes that the Greeks would surrender if they were attacked. Xerxes ordered his navy to go to Salamis to attack the Greek League. Then he set up his throne on a hill near Salamis to watch the battle. He had fallen for Themistocles's trap!

Mardonius grinned as he led the Persian ships into the straits. "Now we will destroy those Greeks!" he screamed to his men.

When the Persians sailed into the straits, they did not know the Greek ships were hiding behind the peninsula. The Greeks waited for just the right moment. Then Themistocles gave the command. The Greek ships engaged! Suddenly, the Greek fleet came into sight, ready for battle, catching the Persians off-guard and unprepared for a fight. The Greek ships slammed into them.

The Persians tried to turn their ships to fight the Greeks, but the Straits of Salamis were very narrow, and



all their boats cluttered up the water. There were so many boats that there was no room for anybody to move. The Persian ships were all stuck. The narrow straits cramped their ability to move their boats.

The Greek ships rammed into their enemies, sinking the Persian ships one after another. The Greeks set others on fire. All around could be heard the wailing of men, the clang of battle, and the crash of ships.

Xerxes watched his grand fleet being destroyed from his throne on the hill above the battle. He could not believe his mighty navy had been beaten by a much smaller force. Once again, the Greeks used the terrain to stop the Persians from benefitting by their greater numbers.

Xerxes was furious. He took a large part of his army and went back home to Persia, leaving Mardonius to deal with the Greeks. "Why did I listen to him?" Xerxes said angrily as he marched back to Persia.

Not long after that, the Greek League defeated the last Persian army in Greece at a place called Plataea. General

Mardonius was killed when a Spartan soldier hit him with a rock. This was the end of the Persian threat. The little Greeks had defeated the great Persian Empire.

Themistocles was a hero. The Greeks would praise him for his victory, and the Spartans gave him an award for his wisdom and cleverness. But Themistocles was a prideful man. He bragged frequently of his deeds, and eventually the Athenians got sick of his boasting. They began to suspect he was too powerful. Some years after the victory at Salamis, he was banished from Athens and died in a distant land.

Still, the Greeks never forgot the debt they owed to Themistocles and his “walls of wood,” which saved Greece from the Persians.

The Greeks had showed that even though they were independent, they could work together. They had bought peace, but at a high price. Athens and Sparta were now the two most powerful Greek city-states. Could they continue to work together, or would the Greek League that had defeated Persia fall apart?



## CHAPTER 17

# Lovers of Wisdom

### Greek Fables

Once, long ago in the ancient Greek city of Miletus, there was a man named Thales. Thales was fascinated by the stars more than anything else. What were they made of? What caused them to shine so brightly? Why did they twinkle? Why did their positions change between summer and winter? At night, Thales would often wrap his cloak around himself and go walking outdoors, staring up at the stars in wonder.

One night, Thales was walking along with his head tilted back, looking up at the night sky. Suddenly, Thales felt himself plummeting downward. Cold water rushed into his nose and mouth. Confused and frightened, Thales struggled to get out of the water. When he popped his head out of the dark water and looked up, he could still see the stars, but from the bottom of a well! Thales

had been so focused on the stars that he had not noticed the well right in front of him. He had walked right into it.

Soon a man came walking by. “Good sir,” cried Thales from the bottom of the well, “would you help me, please? I was walking along, studying the stars, and did not see this well. As you can see, I have fallen in and cannot get myself out!”

The man laughed at Thales and said, “What good is it to cast your eyes into the heavens if you can’t even look out for what’s in front of you?”

The story of Thales of Miletus is a famous Greek fable. A *fable* is a short story meant to teach us a lesson. What lesson does the story of Thales and the well teach us? Perhaps it teaches us that we should pay attention to what is going on around us and not get too wrapped up in things too far above our understanding.

Thales was a real person. He lived around 600 b.c., before the Persian War. Thales was a Greek philosopher. The word “philosopher” in Greek means “lover of wisdom.” A *philosopher* is a person who uses his mind to find the truth about things. Philosophers ask lots of questions about how the world works, why people do the things they do, and what the purpose of life is.

## Great Debates

The Greeks loved philosophy. They loved to ask questions about the world. No people were more curious than the Greeks. One of their favorite questions to ponder was what everything in the world was made out of. In fact, they argued about this fiercely. Let’s listen in on a spirited debate in the public square of the city of Athens around 550 b.c.:

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“I say the world is made of air!” Anaximenes demands, pounding his fist on the stone bench. The others gather around him—men young and old in white robes—arguing and shouting. “From air comes everything!” Anaximenes continues. “Thick and thin, hot and cold, fire, wind, clouds, and even water and earth. Air is the first principle!”

An older gentleman stands up and hushes the crowd. This is Thales, whom we have already met.

“No, brethren,” he says. “It is not air but water that is the source of all things. Have you not noticed that all things require water to drink and that the rain that falls from the sky gives life to the earth? Even our bodies are full of liquid. It is evident that the world is made of water!”

Many of the younger philosophers laugh at Thales. A very young man with fiery eyes stands up. This is Heraclitus of Ephesus.

“You are both mistaken, Thales and Anaximenes. Don’t you see that everything is constantly changing? Things are born, they spring up, and they die—just like fire! Fire is the principle behind everything. The earth draws its light and heat from the fire of the sun. And feel our bodies! They are warm! That’s because we have fire inside us.”

Some of the philosophers chuckle, but Heraclitus continues, “When you burn something, fire comes out of it! That’s what burning is—unlocking the hidden fire inside of everything!”

The philosophers go back and forth for some time, arguing their different theories. Some, like Xenophanes, say that everything is made out of God, who is inside everything. Another, Empedocles, says the world is made of four elements—water, wind, air, and fire—and that they

are all held together by love. Many of the philosophers nod in agreement. This seems like a very good theory.

But then another man, Democritus, steps up. His hair is wild and his clothes unkempt. He is clutching a pile of dusty manuscripts. “You are all wrong, my friends. According to my studies, the world is not made of wind or fire or any other element. Rather, everything is made of tiny little particles stuck together. I call them atoms!”

Everybody bursts out laughing at the old man. “Atoms! Really, Democritus?” they say. “What an imagination the old man has!”

But then a shadow falls over the group. Everybody falls silent and looks up. A tall, slender man in a long cloak has walked up.

“Pythagoras of Syracuse!” they whisper. Pythagoras is one of the most famous philosophers.

Pythagoras takes a seat on one of the benches. “My brothers,” he says, “long have I studied the course of the stars, the manner of the plants and animals, and the way of the world. In all things, I am always amazed by the great harmony in the world. Everything works together to make the world a beautiful and wonderful place.”

The philosophers nod and stroke their beards. This is a wise saying.

Pythagoras continues, “It is just like the harmony in math. The world is like a great math problem, waiting to be solved; a big, mysterious equation! For that reason, brethren, I propose that the substance the world is made of is numbers. Yes, numbers! Numbers bring harmony to the world. And as they are in harmony, so too should we live harmonious lives!”

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This meeting could never really have taken place. Thales, Democritus, Pythagoras, and the others were not all alive at the same time, and they all lived far away from each other. But discussions like this one certainly took place all over ancient Greece. Many of the Greek philosophers set up schools where they taught their theories and encouraged others to ask questions about the world. The different philosophical schools often argued with one another in public debates.

### Socrates

Some philosophers focused on topics more useful. One of the most famous Greek philosophers was Socrates. Socrates lived from 470 to 399 b.c. When he was a young man, he was a soldier in the Persian Wars. As an old man, he became a philosopher. Socrates was not concerned with what the world was made of. He was more interested in useful questions—like how to live a good life and what makes a law fair.

Socrates's favorite way to teach was by asking questions. He wandered around Athens talking to people from all walks of life: soldiers, teachers, politicians, and even slaves. He would ask them questions. What is justice? Where does knowledge come from? What is happiness? Socrates believed nobody was too smart to learn from somebody else. In fact, he said, “True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us.” He was a very humble man.

The authorities in Athens did not like Socrates. He made people think about their lives and how they could be better. The rulers of Athens were afraid Socrates would turn the people against them. When Socrates was an old man, they arrested him and sentenced him to die by



forcing him to drink poison. But Socrates was not sad. Before he died, he said, “Those who practice philosophy in the right way have no cause to fear death.”

## Plato

One of Socrates’s students, named Plato, wrote down all of Socrates’s teachings and added to them. Plato believed that the world was made of eternal Ideas. The things we see in the world are only copies of these eternal Ideas. For example, according to Plato, there is one perfect Idea of a tree. All the trees we see in the world are copies or images of this one perfect tree. True knowledge is learning about the perfect Ideas, not the images or shadows of the Ideas we see in the world.

Plato was very famous for his theory, but other philosophers thought he was goofy. Where did the Ideas come from? Where were they located? How did things copy them? It did not make sense to some. These philosophers

who disagreed with Plato looked for the truth in the everyday objects around them.

### Aristotle

One of these philosophers was Aristotle. Aristotle, who lived from 385 to 322 b.c., was a student of Plato. Aristotle disagreed with his teacher about Plato's Idea theory. He was more interested in studying the plants and animals he saw around him. Throughout his life, Aristotle collected hundreds of plant and animal specimens. He wrote books on how he thought their bodies worked.

Aristotle liked to teach while walking around a grove of trees in Athens as his students followed closely behind.

"The soul," Aristotle once said, "is the life-force of the body. It is what causes a thing to be and act the way it does. Different things have different souls: Plants have a very simple kind of soul and animals a more complex soul. The highest soul belongs to mankind. Man has a rational soul."

"What do you mean by this, master?" one of his students asked.

"This means that not only can humans move and eat like the animals, but we can also think rationally, which animals cannot. It is because of our rational soul that we can think."

His students would copy down his lecture hastily as he continued to walk beneath the trees. Many of Aristotle's teachings that survive came from the notes of these students.

Like Socrates, Aristotle also got in trouble with the Athenians. Some of his students asked him if he would stay and allow himself to die like Socrates.

"No," Aristotle responded confidently. "I do not want to give the Athenians another chance to sin against

philosophy.” Aristotle left Athens and continued teaching philosophy in another country.

The work of the philosophers bore good results. The questions of the philosophers led to the creation of mathematics, geometry, biology, and many other sciences. They contributed a great deal to our knowledge about the world. More than two thousand years later, people are still reading their writings to gain wisdom about the world and themselves.

The Greeks sought knowledge more than any other ancient people. They continued to be the best scientists and teachers of the ancient world long after their city-states had fallen to civil war and outside conquest. It is to this sad tale that we must now turn.

## CHAPTER 18

# Greek Against Greek

### **Conflict and Strife**

In our previous chapter, we saw how the Greek philosophers were fond of arguing with each other. Arguing was something the Greeks did well. The ancient Greeks were very independent and liked to have their own way.

Unfortunately, it was not only philosophers who argued. The city-states also argued with one another about who owned what land, who could trade with what islands, who had the right to mine what mountains, and everything else you can imagine. These arguments sometimes turned violent. In this chapter, we will see how an argument between the two city-states of Athens and Sparta led to the destruction of classical Greece.

The Greek city-states had all united during the Persian Wars. Spartans had fought beside Athenians and Corinthians beside Thebans. The Persians were such a big and powerful enemy that all the Greeks had to work together

to defeat them. After the Persians were beaten, however, the Greeks went back to bickering.

After the war, the Athenians and Spartans met together to decide what to do next. We do not know exactly what was said at this meeting, but we can imagine. Let us listen in on the discussion between Xanthippus, commander of the Athenian navy, and Archidamus, king of Sparta:

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“Well, Xanthippus,” says the Spartan king Archidamus graciously, “you should be proud. The Greeks have defeated the Persians and Greece can now rest safely.”

“But my good king,” responds Xanthippus, “the Persians are only beaten back, not defeated. Greeks in Ionia, Asia Minor, and the islands still live under Persian rule. There is still much to be done.”

Archidamus scratches his bearded chin. “But the Persian army has retreated from Greece. What more is there to be done?”

“There is much more to be done! Now we must carry the war to the islands to drive the Persians from the seas. Then who knows? We could even invade Asia Minor and take that back from the Persians too!”

Archidamus frowns. “We Spartans are not interested in islands or conquest. The enemy has been driven from our home, and that is enough. We will lay down our swords and go home.”

“Please!” Xanthippus shouts, leaping to his feet. “You may not care, but the seas and the islands are very important to us Athenians. We are traders and sailors. The Persians must be driven from the seas!”

“Why should we Spartans, who do not sail and do not trade, shed our blood to help Athenians?”

The two men and their attendants all begin shouting. “You are cowards!” yells Xanthippus. “You’re afraid to fight!”

“You don’t care about making Greece safe!” the Spartan king yells back. “You only want to take control of the islands to build an Athenian empire for yourselves! But we want no part in it. We are going home.”

Archidamus and his attendants leave the conference and return to Sparta.

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### **The Delian League**

With their return, the Spartan alliance with Athens ended. But the Athenians and their allies formed a great navy and began to attack Persian territories around the Aegean, just as Xanthippus had said. The Athenian alliance was called the Delian League. The Delian League was named for Delos, a small city-state that served as the capital of the alliance.

Each member of the Delian League was supposed to give ships, money, and soldiers to fight. This was collected by Athens, who led the navies of the league in their battles to rid the Aegean of the Persians.

The Delian League was very successful. All across the Aegean, the Persians were driven back. But not every Greek city-state was happy about this. The Athenians were very strict about collecting money from the league’s members. They were arrogant and treated their allies like servants, not partners.

“The Athenians are getting too powerful,” they began to grumble. “We have beaten the Persian Empire only to see it replaced by an Athenian Empire.” Archidamus’s warning was coming true.

Eventually, some cities wanted to break apart from the Delian League. But Athens forbade them from leaving. When the city of Naxos tried to get out of the League, the Athenians came and tore down their city walls. This scared all the other city-states.

Of course, this made Athens very powerful—and rich! They constructed very strong walls around their city and a harbor to protect it from attack. With all the tribute paid by the other cities of the alliance, the Athenians maintained a large and powerful navy. It seemed that nobody could stand up to the Athenians. They had turned the Delian League into an Athenian Empire.

### Pericles

The leader of Athens during this time was a man named Pericles. Pericles was a brilliant ruler who worked hard to make life better for the Athenians. Pericles used the money of the city to help relieve the poor. He made sure the Athenian navy was strong and that Athens was beautified by lovely buildings.

One of the beautiful buildings Pericles built was a temple to the goddess Athena. Called the *Parthenon*, it stood on the highest hilltop in Athens. It had more than seventy-five columns and contained a glistening, gold-and-ivory statue of Athena. The outside of the temple was painted in brilliant colors and carved with statues of religious processions. People said the Parthenon was the most beautiful of all Greek temples. It still stands today, though the statue of Athena is gone and all the painted colors have long since faded.

As long as Pericles lived, Athens dominated Greece. But disaster soon struck Athens. In 430 b.c., a *plague* came to Athens. A plague is a terrible sickness that spreads quickly and kills many people. The plague killed many



Athenians, including Pericles. The great age of Athenian power was coming to an end.

Around the time of the plague, the Athenians began to pick on some smaller cities that were allies of Sparta. These little cities did not want to be bullied by Athens and asked the Spartans for help. The Spartans and Athenians ended up in a war with each other. This was called the Peloponnesian War.

### The Peloponnesian War

Both sides were evenly matched. The Spartans usually won the battles on land, and the Athenians usually won the battles on the sea. Neither side could prevail. Then the Athenians had an idea. On an island far to the west, there was a powerful city named Syracuse. The Syracusans were allies with the Spartans. If the Athenians could bring Syracuse under their control, they would be in a much better position to defeat Sparta.

The Athenians sent a general named Nicias to lead an expedition to Syracuse. Nicias did not like the plan. He

thought it was foolish and would end in disaster. Still, he obeyed his orders, and his fleet sailed for Syracuse in the fall of 415 B.C.

Things went bad for Nicias and the Athenians from the beginning. Some statues of the Greek gods that were supposed to bring good luck were mysteriously destroyed. One of Nicias's generals abandoned the Athenians and offered his services to Sparta. The Athenians foolishly landed in the harbor of Syracuse at the end of fall, allowing the Syracusans all winter to prepare for battle before fighting began in the spring.

The mission was a disaster. Eventually, the Athenian navy got trapped in the harbor at Syracuse and destroyed by the Syracusans. Let us stop and relive Nicias's horrible day:

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"We are defeated! All hope is lost!" the Athenians cried in despair. General Nicias could not believe his eyes. In the harbor of Syracuse, the Athenian navy was utterly destroyed. Flames crackled, and the harbor was filled with the sound of creaking wood as the last of the Athenian boats sunk beneath the waters. Meanwhile the victorious Syracusans cheered from their ships.

"We have to retreat," Nicias cried to his commanders.

"What about the wounded?" asked Demosthenes, one of Nicias's generals.

"Leave them," Nicias said. "We must move quickly, and we have no means to provide for the wounded."

Demosthenes nodded, but then a troubling thought came to him. "Sir . . . where will we retreat to? Our ships are burned, and we are trapped on an island."

"It is desperate," replied Nicias, "but we must try to get away from Syracuse. Perhaps it will buy us some time."

Perhaps we can get reinforcements . . . or find a way home . . . or . . ." His voice trailed off as a look of hopelessness fell over him.

"Still, we must try," said Demosthenes. "I will ready the men."

The Athenian army moved out quickly. Thousands of soldiers—sick, tired, and scared—packed up what little they could carry and marched out of the Athenian camp and headed inland, away from Syracuse. Nicias and his commanders moved the Athenian troops along swiftly. But the men were tired and began to grumble. The day was hot, and Nicias urged them to march as quickly as possible.

"We can't keep this up for long," Demosthenes told Nicias. "They are thirsty."

"Silence!" Nicias commanded. "Do you hear that? Horses!"

Alarm quickly spread among the Athenians until soon they realized the men of Syracuse were pursuing them on horseback! Nicias's soldiers began to run away.

"Athenians, calm yourselves!" Nicias cried, but his men were too panicked.

The Athenian soldiers ran, panting in the hot sun. If they stopped to rest or lagged too far behind, the horsemen from Syracuse would kill them. So they ran and ran until they were parched and nearly dead from thirst. Nicias cried and shouted for them to remain in order, but they wouldn't listen.

"Demosthenes?" Nicias called out for his trusted general.

"Sir, Demosthenes has fallen behind," one of his captains told him. "We don't know his whereabouts."

*Why did we come here on this horrid expedition? Nicias thought to himself. I have doomed all these men.*

Suddenly the Athenians saw a blue ribbon winding

through the trees ahead. A river! The men began shouting and shoving one another to get to the water. They were so thirsty that they didn't care about their enemies anymore. The Athenians fought and kicked their way to the water. Those who reached the shore flung themselves on the ground and began to gulp down the water. They laid down their weapons and drank deeply.

"Stop!" cried General Nicias. "Don't you know what you're doing? The enemy is right behind us!" But the Athenians didn't care. They were too thirsty to think.

Moments later, there came a rumbling of horses. Nicias turned and saw the Syracusan cavalry appear over the nearby hill. More Syracusan troops emerged from the trees across the river.

"So this is how it ends," Nicias said to himself as he drew his sword.

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As you can imagine, the Athenians were defeated that day while they drank by the river. Those who survived were sent to work in the mines of Syracuse until they died from exhaustion or sickness. Nicias never returned home. He was captured and killed by the Syracusans.

The Athenians were devastated by the news of the defeat. They fought on for a few more years and even had the occasional victory, but the tide of the war was turning in favor of the Spartans. Not too many years after Nicias's defeat, the Spartans came and conquered Athens. They tore down her walls and took her wealth and many of her territories.

The Peloponnesian War ended in a Spartan victory. Athens had lost its independence. But the war had weakened all of Greece, and the days were coming when the freedom of all Greek city-states would be taken away forever.

## CHAPTER 19

# Alexander the Great

### **King Philip and the Macedonians**

After winning the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans made sure Athens would never trouble them again. They tore down its walls, kicked out its leaders, and took away many of its territories. The Spartans were now in control of Greece.

Unfortunately, the Spartans were better at fighting than governing. They did not know how to keep peace. Eventually they too were defeated and overthrown by the city of Thebes. Then other city-states rose up to fight against Thebes. All across Greece, city-states were fighting each other. Chaos reigned.

But north of Greece, there was a small kingdom called Macedonia. Macedonia was not rocky and hilly like Greece. It was full of broad, grassy plains, where the Macedonians farmed and raised horses. The people of

Macedonia were not as well educated as the Greeks, but they were strong and hard working.

The ruler of Macedonia was King Philip. Philip saw that the Greek city-states were weak and disunited. He gathered his armies together and marched down into Greece. Within a few years, he had forced most of the Greek city-states to submit to him. The Greek city-states were no longer independent. For the first time in centuries, the Greeks were all united under a single king.

Although Philip had conquered the Greeks by force, he loved their culture. He allowed them to rule their own cities and keep their customs. He even hired the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle to tutor his young son, Alexander. It is to Prince Alexander that we must now turn, for the fate of western civilization would be molded in the hands of this young man.

### Alexander's Youth

Even as a boy, Alexander displayed intelligence, courage, and strength. A very famous tale tells of how young Alexander used his quick wit to tame a very wild horse:

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“This horse is useless!” King Philip said to the horse dealer. “He’s so wild that nobody could possibly ride him! He is definitely not worth all the silver you want for it!”

The massive black horse reared and neighed fiercely in the dusty pen. The king’s men were afraid to go near it.

“But my lord,” said the horse dealer, “have you ever seen a beast so strong? Think of what a marvelous addition this would be to your army!” Even as he spoke, the beast bucked wildly and kicked over one the king’s servants.

“What good is all his strength if he can’t be controlled?” yelled King Philip.

But over in the royal stables stood the young Prince Alexander, his dusty blond hair blowing in the breeze. He watched with admiration at the horse's powerful muscles. *If that mighty beast could be tamed, what a steed it would make!* Alexander thought to himself. *It would be fit for a prince.*

"Get rid of it!" Philip said. "I've seen enough."

"Wait, father!" young Alexander cried, running up to his father. "Please, let me try!"

King Philip laughed. "You? Son, experienced horsemen have been unable to tame this wild creature. You think you will fare any better?"

"I beg you, father! Let me try! If I cannot tame him, I will pay the whole price for him. But if I can tame him, he will be my steed."

Philip looked at his brave little son with amusement. "Very well," he said after a long and thoughtful silence. "Let us see what you can do!"

Alexander leaped into the pen. The horse backed away in fright, but Alexander spoke soothingly to it. He noticed that the horse was turned away from the sun. He appeared to be frightened of his own shadow! Once Alexander realized this, he turned the horse into the sun so he could no longer see his shadow.

After this, the horse's nerves settled, and he became gentle. The crowd gasped in awe as Alexander jumped upon the back of the beast and trotted around the pen.

King Philip was very impressed with his son's wisdom. Philip rushed up to Alexander with tears in his eyes.

"My son," he said proudly, "you'd better look around for a bigger kingdom. I fear one day Macedonia will be too small for you!"

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Alexander grew up to be a fine general, helping his father's army conquer Greece. Once Greece was theirs, Philip and Alexander plotted to invade Asia and make war on the Persian Empire.

But as time went by, Alexander and his father grew apart. Alexander felt that his father did not give him enough power, and King Philip did not trust Alexander or Alexander's mother. Tension boiled over when Alexander was a teenager.

One day, King Philip, Alexander, and all the nobles were attending a wedding. Everybody was drinking a lot of wine and having a merry time. But then King Philip allowed Alexander to be insulted by another noble. Alexander got angry and threw a cup at the noble's head!

"Apologize for your behavior!" the king shouted. Alexander refused. He got up and stormed out of the wedding. King Philip rose from his couch to chase Alexander, but he had drunk so much wine that he stumbled and fell over.

Alexander turned and laughed. "This is the man who is going to take you from Greece to Persia, and yet he can't even move from one couch to the next."

King Philip was embarrassed and angry. "You're banished!" he shouted at his son. "Get out of my kingdom!"

Alexander immediately left and was exiled from the Kingdom of Macedonia.

### Alexander vs. the Persians

Thankfully for him, Alexander's banishment did not last long. In 336 B.C., King Philip was killed by one of his bodyguards. Alexander returned home and became king of Macedonia in his place. It would be Alexander's job to lead the Macedonian invasion of Persia that his father had dreamed of.

Shortly after becoming king, Alexander and his armies marched from Macedonia into Asia. The Persian king was Darius III. He did not take Alexander very seriously, thinking he was just a boy who could do him no harm. Darius would regret underestimating Alexander.

Alexander defeated the Persians in every battle they fought. His Macedonians fought in a formation called a *phalanx*. A phalanx is a group of soldiers marching in a square. Each soldier has a spear—some shorter, some longer. The short spears might only be eight feet long. But the longer spears might be as long as twenty-five feet. When enemies fought the phalanx, it was like walking into a wall of spikes—or a giant porcupine!

The Persian armies could not stand up to Alexander and his phalanx. King Darius III was defeated and eventually killed. The people of Persia surrendered to Alexander and made him their king.

But Alexander did not want to rule the Persians as subjects. “Let the Greek, Macedonian, and Persian peoples all live together in peace,” Alexander said to his generals. “Let us make of Persia and Macedonia one kingdom—one empire!” Alexander married a Persian princess and had his generals marry Persian women as well. This was to symbolize the joining of his kingdom with Persia.

### Alexander’s Shortcomings

Alexander had good ideas, but sometimes he acted irresponsibly. This was especially true if he had been drinking too much wine. After conquering Persia, Alexander and his men had a huge party in the Persian palace at Persepolis. But when Alexander and his men got drunk, the party got out of hand, and they accidentally burned the palace down!



Another time when Alexander was drunk, he got into an argument with his friend Cleitus and hit him in the head with an apple. This enraged Cleitus.

“You’re not even half the man your father was!” he yelled at Alexander. “He was a greater king than you’ll ever be!”

Enraged, Alexander picked up a spear and hurled it at Cleitus. The spear thrust through Cleitus’s heart, killing him instantly. Alexander wept at what he had done. Though he was a mighty and powerful man, his pride and ego often got him into trouble.

### The Last Days of Alexander

Alexander did not stay in Persia for long. His armies swept south and conquered all of Palestine. Then he conquered Egypt and built the famous city of Alexandria, which he named after himself, on the coast of the Mediterranean. During his reign, Alexander would name more than seventy cities after himself—and even one after his horse, Bucephalus.

Alexander conquered more lands than any other conqueror before him, earning him the title “Alexander the Great.” He led his phalanxes across the known world for ten years, bringing kingdom after kingdom under his rule. He seemed unstoppable. Alexander claimed to be related to Hercules and called himself the Son of Zeus, encouraging his conquered subjects to worship him like a god.

But his Macedonian soldiers weren’t that happy with him. They had been away from their homes for a very long time. Once their armies got to India, Alexander’s soldiers decided they’d had enough. They put down their weapons and refused to fight anymore. Alexander could not convince them to go farther. When he realized he

could not go on, he sat down by a river and cried thinking about all the lands still left unconquered.

So Alexander and his Macedonians turned around and headed for home, but he stopped in the city of Babylon to rest. Here he came up with new plans. Now that Asia was conquered, all of Europe was open before him to the west. He would replenish the army and march west. What great adventures could lie ahead!

Unfortunately, it was not to be. While in Babylon, Alexander contracted a fever and became very ill. Soon it became clear that the great conqueror was dying. His generals surrounded him and said, “Your majesty, you have brought the entire world under your dominion. To whom do you leave your great empire? Who shall reign after you?”

Alexander smiled. “To the strongest,” he said. Then he turned over and died. It was June 10, 323 B.C. He was only thirty-three years old.

What did Alexander mean, “To the strongest?” To the strongest general? To the strongest of his young sons? Nobody knew. And they did not wait to figure it out! His generals met and split up the empire of Alexander between them. Now, instead of one great empire, there would be four smaller empires ruled by Alexander’s generals and their descendants.

### Alexander’s Legacy

Alexander died young, but he accomplished a great deal in his short life. His greatest accomplishment was in spreading Greek culture throughout the world. In the years after Alexander, his dream of uniting the Persians, Greeks, and Macedonians came true. Macedonians and Greeks settled all over the conquered lands, spreading Greek ideas and the Greek language.

After Alexander, all of eastern Europe, western Asia, and northern Africa were united in a single culture, language, and religious practice. The kingdom he created made it possible for Greek knowledge and philosophy to spread. In our next chapter, we will learn about some of the important people who lived in Alexander's new world.



## CHAPTER 20

# The Hellenistic Age

### After Alexander

Before Alexander, Greek culture was confined to Greece alone. But because of Alexander's conquests, Greek ideas spread to three continents. This period of the spread of Greek language and culture is called the *Hellenistic era*.

What does "Hellenistic" mean? The Greeks called themselves Hellenes in their own language. "Hellenistic" is a way of referring to the culture and ways of the Greeks that spread during and after the time of Alexander. Hellenistic culture often contained elements of local customs that were blended with Greek culture.

When Alexander died, his empire was divided among his generals. The three greatest generals were Ptolemy, Antigonus, and Seleucus. Ptolemy took control of Egypt, Antigonus took Asia Minor and Syria, and Seleucus took Mesopotamia, Persia, and India.

The three began fighting almost right away. In fact,

things got bad before Alexander was even buried. The kings debated about where Alexander should be laid to rest. After much argument, it was decided that the great conqueror's body would be brought back to Macedonia for burial.

But as the funeral procession wound its way along the dusty road from Babylon to Macedonia, a troop of soldiers stopped the procession. The soldiers were there on the orders of Ptolemy of Egypt. They shoved their way in and stole the coffin of Alexander before scrambling back to Egypt with the body! Ptolemy had Alexander buried in the city of Alexandria.

This act upset the Macedonians, who thought Alexander should be buried in his homeland. But it also made Alexandria a very important city. Back in the age of Pericles, Athens was the most important city in the Greek world. But in the Hellenistic age, Alexandria became one of the biggest and most important cities. Hellenistic Egypt became a center of great learning. Let us look a little closer at Hellenistic Egypt's first king, Ptolemy, and the dynasty he founded.

### Ptolemy

Though he was ruler of Egypt, Ptolemy was not Egyptian; he was Macedonian. But he wanted the Egyptian people to accept him. He dressed like an Egyptian in public and wore the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. He even called himself pharaoh and worshipped the gods of the Egyptians to show the people he honored their customs.

Ptolemy wanted to make Alexandria a splendid capital. His builders made a giant lighthouse in the harbor of the city. It was called the Pharos and was the first lighthouse ever built. The Pharos Lighthouse was a magnificent

structure. It was more than four hundred feet tall, the tallest building in the world at that time. Atop its limestone tower was a light produced by a furnace that burned at night. During the day, a massive mirror reflected the light of the sun.

The Pharos Lighthouse was not completed until after Ptolemy's death, but when it was finished, it was considered to be a great marvel. Its brilliant light could be seen for miles out to sea. The people stood in awe of its beauty and called it one of the wonders of the world.

### **Ptolemy Philadelphus and His Library**

The Pharos Lighthouse was a perfect symbol for Ptolemy's Alexandria: a shining light that could be seen from far abroad. Ptolemy died in 283 b.c., but his son, Ptolemy Philadelphus, continued his father's dream of making Alexandria a great city. His father had given the city its famous lighthouse, and now Ptolemy Philadelphus wanted to make Alexandria a center of learning.

Ptolemy Philadelphus built a grand library for the city. He wanted his library to have copies of all the greatest writings ever produced. The writings of the Greek philosophers, the histories of Babylon and Persia, and the religious writings of the Egyptians were just some of the things Ptolemy Philadelphus included in his library. Histories, scientific works, literature, and anything he thought was important was to be included.

But how would Ptolemy Philadelphus get copies of all these writings? In his days, there were no books and no printing. Writing was done by hand on scrolls made of animal skins or the papyrus plant. Ptolemy had to send out scribes to make copies of all the world's writings. A *scribe* was a person who was trained to copy things by



hand. The scribes of Ptolemy would go out and find old writings and patiently make copies of them for his library.

Gradually, Ptolemy's scribes collected thousands of scrolls for the library of Alexandria. All the knowledge of the ancient world was stored in this marvelous building. The library made the city a center of learning. Men and women came from all over the world to study at Ptolemy's wonderful library.

## The Story of the Septuagint

Ptolemy Philadelphus was also interested in the writings of the people of Israel. But the Old Testament Scriptures of the Jews were written in Hebrew. The king wanted them translated into Greek so that he and his people could read them.

But Ptolemy Philadelphus knew that the Old Testament was supposed to be the Word of God Himself. It was important that the translation be very accurate. Translations weren't always the same. How could the king make sure he was getting the best translations?

The tale of the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek is very fascinating. Let us drop in on the court of Ptolemy Philadelphus to see how the king handled this problem:

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Seventy Jewish scribes stood confused in the court of King Ptolemy Philadelphus. “Why have we all been summoned here?” one asked another.

“I have no idea,” the other man said, shrugging. “I was only told it was on very important business for the king.”

“I have heard it has to do with his great library!” said Eleazar, the oldest of the Jewish scribes. Eleazar was born in Jerusalem but came to Alexandria when he was a young man, so he spoke Greek in addition to Hebrew. He was the leader of a small community of Jewish scribes that served the king by copying documents.

Everyone was chattering with each other when the king was announced. The Jews bowed as King Ptolemy Philadelphus walked through the arched doorway into his throne room, surrounded by servants and advisers. He took his seat on the throne.

“My seventy friends,” he said to the Jewish scribes,

“you have been summoned to my court because you are the most renowned masters of the Hebrew language in all my kingdom. For the project I have in mind, I need the best.”

“Tell us your wish, great king,” said the Jewish scribes.  
“In what way can we be of service to you?”

King Ptolemy Philadelphus smiled. “You will find out soon enough!” He turned to his palace guards. “Guards, Lock these scribes up in the dungeon!”

The Jewish scribes panicked and protested their innocence as the guards led them away, but their pleas did them no good.

“Your majesty, what have we done?” cried Eleazar as he was grabbed and led away to his cell.

“It’s not what you’ve done,” said the king calmly, “but what you will do.”

The Jews were led into the dungeon and locked up. Eleazar was parted from his companions and thrust into a cell, by himself, at the end of a long underground passageway. Eleazar stroked his grizzled, white beard nervously, wondering what punishment the king might have in store for them—and why they were being punished.

But as he looked around, Eleazar saw that the cells were not set up for punishment. Instead of chains and rats, he saw that the cell was clean and dry. There was a mat for sleeping and a sturdy chair tucked beneath a writing desk. On the desk was a stack of papyrus rolls, an ink quill, and writing tools. Each cell was also supplied with large candles for light.

“Unusual furnishings for a prison cell,” Eleazar said to himself, running his hand over the fresh papyrus rolls. He wondered if the other Jews had these things in their cells.

“Might as well make the most of my time,” Eleazar said, again to himself.

He knelt down on the stone floor and began praying a psalm he had memorized.

“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. . . .”

Eleazar was suddenly awakened by the sound of a jailer opening his cell door. “I must have dozed off,” he said standing up. The old, wooden door creaked open, and King Ptolemy Philadelphus himself entered the cell.

“My king!” Eleazar cried out, bowing to Ptolemy. “My king, why have we been locked up like this? We are all innocent men—”

“Eleazar,” the king interrupted, “you are not in trouble. I have brought you here because I want you to translate something of great importance: the writings of Moses.”

“You want the Scriptures of our people included in your great library?”

“Yes,” replied the king, turning and calling for a servant. A moment later, the servant appeared, carrying a scroll. He laid it on the table. “Here are the writings of Moses and your prophets in your language. You will translate these writings from Hebrew to Greek for inclusion in my great library.”

Eleazar worked feverishly on the translation, filling up scroll after scroll each day. He worked slowly, knowing that the sacred writings were from the hand of God and had to be treated carefully. If he got sloppy and mis-translated even a single letter, he would rip up that scroll and start all over.

Eleazar could not have known it, but the king did the same to each of the seventy Jewish scribes he had



imprisoned. Each one was alone in a private cell, working on his own translation of the Old Testament. This was King Ptolemy Philadelphus's plan for getting the best translation.

After many weeks, Eleazar completed his work and was released. After being freed, he was surprised to find out about all the other scribes, how each one had been given the same instructions.

But that was nothing compared to what the king discovered. After releasing the scribes and comparing their work, Ptolemy Philadelphus found that every single translation was exactly the same; not a single word was out of place in all seventy translations!

King Ptolemy summoned Eleazar and told him what had happened. “How is this?” the king demanded. “It is hardly possible to get a single scribe to translate something without an error, let alone get seventy scribes to all translate it exactly the same and without any flaws. How can this be?”

Eleazar bowed his head. “This is from the Lord. God put it in the heart of each scribe to translate identically to all the others.”

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The Jews considered the translation miraculous. This Greek translation of the Old Testament became known as the *Septuagint*, which means “the seventy.” It would be the version of the Old Testament that all Greek-speaking Jews would read for centuries. The Septuagint was also the Bible used by the early Christians and was even quoted by Jesus Himself.

### More Strife and Warfare

While Ptolemy and his son Ptolemy Philadelphus were beautifying Alexandria, the other Hellenistic kingdoms were often at war. Seleucus, the ruler of the eastern part of Alexander’s empire, lost India and all of Alexander’s eastern territories. But he also conquered much of Asia Minor and took away land from Antigonus, the third Hellenistic king.

Things unfolded this way for a long time. Eventually, the first Hellenistic kings died and were succeeded by their descendants. But the fighting went on, each kingdom struggling against the others over their borders or fighting to gain control of a few cities or islands here and there.

There was a lot of strife and warfare during the

Hellenistic era. But it was not such a terrible time to live. In fact, it was also a period of great learning. We have already looked at the interests of the Ptolemies in promoting literature. In our next chapter, we will study some of the wonderful Greek scientists who lived during the Hellenistic era.

## CHAPTER 21

# Greek Science

### The Curiosity of the Greeks

Have you ever wondered how big the earth is or looked at birds in flight and wondered how they are able to move through the air? Perhaps you have struggled over a difficult math problem and wondered if there was an easier way to solve it.

The Greeks asked these questions as well. They were a very curious sort of people. In chapter 17, we introduced the Greek philosophers and the questions they asked about the world. In this chapter, we will look at the Greek scientists. Like the philosophers, the Greek scientists tried to discover the secrets of how things worked.

### Euclid

One of the most important Greek scientists was Euclid. Euclid was a follower of the Greek philosopher Plato. He

came to Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy to teach mathematics.

While in Alexandria, Euclid wrote a textbook called *Elements*. *Elements* is a book that teaches geometry. *Geometry* is the branch of math that deals with the shape, size, and position of objects. If you have ever looked at a graph or had to measure the area of a triangle, you have used the principles of geometry.

Euclid's book was very popular. It made geometry much easier for students to learn. It was also a great help to engineers who designed buildings and anybody who built things. *Elements* became so popular that it was used as a textbook to teach geometry for more than two thousand years!

Euclid became famous even during his own lifetime. According to one legend, King Ptolemy himself heard about *Elements* and asked Euclid to teach him geometry. Euclid agreed. At first Ptolemy was excited about learning geometry, but after a time, he found it too difficult. Ptolemy asked Euclid if there was some easier way to learn geometry than reading *Elements*. Euclid replied, “There is no royal road to geometry.”

### Eratosthenes

While Euclid was getting famous for his book and tutoring King Ptolemy in mathematics, another Greek scientist was working quietly in the library of Alexandria. Eratosthenes had done a lot during his life. He had studied philosophy in Athens as well as written poetry and books of history. Eratosthenes eventually made his way to Alexandria and became chief librarian of the great library. It was a very important position. He also tutored the children of the king.

While serving as librarian of Alexandria, Eratosthenes

began studying mathematics and made several important contributions to science. He is most remembered for figuring out the distance around the earth. The earth is a very big place, and nobody in the ancient world had ever gone into space to look at it. How could a librarian sitting in Alexandria in 240 b.c. possibly figure out the distance around the planet?

The Greeks knew the world was round because of the shadow it cast upon the moon. They also knew a circle was 360 degrees. Eratosthenes measured the position of a shadow cast in the Egyptian village of Syene at noon. He compared this with the position of a shadow in Alexandria cast at the same time. The difference between the two shadows was 7.12 degrees, or one fiftieth of a circle.

Eratosthenes knew that the distance from Syene to Alexandria was 488 miles. This meant that 488 miles was one fiftieth the distance around the earth. In other words, multiplying 488 by 50 would give him the distance around the entire planet! When Eratosthenes solved this math problem, he got the answer of 24,400 miles around the earth.

Was Eratosthenes right? Almost. As it turned out, his answer was incorrect but only by five hundred miles. That's a pretty good calculation from studying shadows!

Was Eratosthenes's math a little hard for you to follow? Maybe you would need to study Euclid's *Elements* to get a better grasp of it. Or maybe you'll just get it when you're older.

Eratosthenes would go on to do many other great things, including drawing one of the first maps of the world. He is remembered today as the father of *geography*. Geography is the study of the earth's surface and its features. He also correctly guessed the distance between the earth and the sun and many other wonderful things.

## Archimedes the Inventor

The greatest of all Greek scientists of the Hellenistic age was Archimedes. Archimedes lived from 287 to 212 b.c. He was born in the Greek colony of Syracuse on the island of Sicily. As a young man, he was very interested in math and science. Like many other curious Greeks, he came to Alexandria to study. There he became good friends with Eratosthenes.

No Greek scientist invented more clever devices or made more scientific discoveries than Archimedes. He built a heat ray to defend his home city of Syracuse. The ray worked by reflecting sun beams off of giant mirrors and shooting them at enemy ships, which would light them on fire. Archimedes also designed a giant crane with a hook that was big enough to pick up a ship. This too was used as a weapon. He nicknamed it “the Snatcher” because it could snatch enemy ships out of the water.

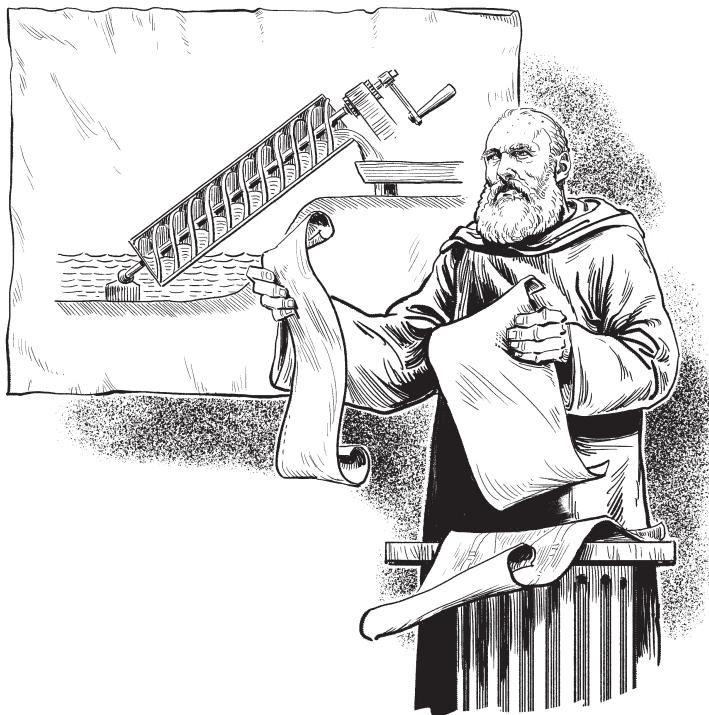
Not everything Archimedes built was a weapon. He created a device that showed the position of the sun, moon, and planets that could be used to predict eclipses. He also discovered that by putting a screw inside a water-filled pipe, water could be pushed by turning the screw. This device is called “Archimedes’ Screw” and was used by the Greeks to move water uphill. It is still used for this purpose today.

While these inventions all changed the world in one way or another, Archimedes is most well known for something he discovered quite by accident:

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One day, Hiero, the king of Syracuse, came to Archimedes with a problem.

“Not long ago,” the king told him, “I ordered a certain goldsmith to make me a crown of gold to be offered at



the temple of the gods. For this crown, I supplied a single bar of pure gold. This is the crown," he said, showing the beautifully crafted crown to Archimedes.

"It looks splendid," Archimedes offered.

"But my mind is troubled," King Hiero said, pacing around Archimedes' cluttered workshop. "I have come to suspect that this goldsmith may be dishonest. I believe he may have added silver, tin, or other metals to my crown and kept some of the extra gold for himself."

"I see," said Archimedes. "Why don't you just melt the crown back down? If there is tin or silver in it, you will easily be able to see it when you melt the gold."

"That's just the thing," King Hiero sighed. "This crown

is exquisitely beautiful. Melting it down would destroy it. I need a way to tell if there is any other metal mixed in with the gold without destroying the crown."

Archimedes furled his brow. "Hmmm . . . that is a most puzzling matter, your majesty."

King Hiero left Archimedes to think and gave him one week to come up with a solution. For days, Archimedes stayed up in his study until the late hours of the evening trying to come up with an idea. How could he discover what was in the crown without destroying it?

"Gold is much heavier than tin or silver," Archimedes said to himself. "If only there was a way to measure that."

One day, after working on the problem all morning, Archimedes got discouraged. "Maybe I'm thinking too hard," he said. "I'm going to take a bath to relax." Archimedes boiled several tubs of water, mixed them into his bronze bathtub, and hopped into the warm, frothy water.

As Archimedes lowered his body into the tub, he noticed that the bathwater rose around him. The more of his body he put underwater, the more the water rose in the tub. Archimedes was curious about this. He repeatedly lifted himself out of the water and lowered himself back down again, noticing how the water rose each time he went down. In fact, the amount the water that went up seemed to be related to how much of his body he put underwater.

Suddenly, Archimedes understood how to solve the problem with the crown. Any object that was put into the water and floated would displace an amount of water equal to its own weight!

King Hiero said the crown was made of one bar of solid gold. All Archimedes had to do was get a bar of pure gold, drop it into the water, and measure how much the water level went up. Then he would remove the bar of

gold and drop the crown in the water. If the crown made the water rise just as much as the bar, then the crown was pure gold. But if the crown did not make the water rise as much, it meant the crown must be mixed with other metals that were less heavy than gold, such as silver or tin. It was that easy!

He leaped out of the bath, shouting, “Eureka!” which means “I’ve found it!” in Greek. Archimedes was so excited that he ran right out of his bathroom and his house without getting dressed. He ran down the streets of Syracuse, yelling, “Eureka!” and waving his hands in the air.

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### The Rise of the Romans

We don’t know what Archimedes’ test revealed about Hiero’s crown, but we do know how Archimedes met his end. When Archimedes got old, his home of Syracuse was attacked by a people called the Romans, who would go on to conquer the city.

Roman soldiers were going from house to house looking for treasure. Archimedes was sitting outside, practicing geometry by drawing circles in the sand with a stick. A Roman soldier approached him and told him to get up. Archimedes ignored the man. The soldier got angry and demanded he move.

“Go away,” said Archimedes to the soldier. “Do not disturb my circles!” This infuriated the soldier. He drew his sword and killed old Archimedes on the spot.

In the past few chapters, we have learned a lot about the Greeks. We have learned about their beautiful buildings and their colorful myths, as well as their tendency to bicker among themselves. We have learned about their contributions to government, philosophy, and science.

There has never been a people quite like the Greeks. Many of their stories, ideas, and theories live on to this day. The world we all know owes a lot to the Greeks.

Archimedes lived in a time when the power of the Greek Hellenistic kingdoms was declining. The Greeks had been the masters of the world since the end of the Persian Wars—almost 250 years. But now the Romans, a new people from the west, were gobbling up land all over the Mediterranean. Soon they would displace the Greeks.

Let us now finally take our leave of Greece and fly west to the rugged land of Italy that the Romans called home.

## CHAPTER 22

### The Etruscans

#### A Sea Voyage

For the past nine chapters, we have been studying the culture and history of the Greek-speaking peoples, from the founding of the first city-states all the way up to the Hellenistic kingdoms. But while the Greeks were building their civilization, another civilization was thriving in the west.

Imagine that we are walking by the seashore in Alexandria. Beautiful buildings line the broad streets, which are crowded with people. Philosophers, soldiers, merchants, scientists, and all sorts of folk mingle together in the shadow of the great library. The docks are busy with ships unloading cargo from far-off cities—and in the distance, the great Pharos Lighthouse stands watch over the glistening harbor.

But suppose we board a ship and sail away from Alexandria, off to the northwest to the choppy waters of

the Mediterranean. After a while, we see a long, rocky island ahead of us. This is sunny Crete, which we visited in chapter 12.

But Crete is not our destination; the ship turns due west. The waters of the Mediterranean are a deep, rich blue. It is teeming with life: dolphins, seals, and all sorts of wonderful birds. Pushing west, we see other ships: Phoenicians on trading journeys, Greeks visiting their western colonies, and many others.

As we continue our voyage, the coast of Africa comes into view on our left. And before us, we see a great, broad island. This is Sicily, the island where the Athenian fleet was destroyed during the Peloponnesian War mentioned in chapter 18.

Skirting around Sicily and turning north, we come to a long peninsula that juts out into the sea. It has been a long trip—around sixty days. But we have finally arrived at our destination: the land of Italy.

### The Etruscans

Italy is a strange country. On a map, it looks like a large boot sticking out in the Mediterranean. It is a warm, fertile place with many river valleys and rich farmland. As we have learned by now, such places are where civilization tends to thrive.

A long, narrow mountain range runs down the center of Italy like a rocky spine dividing the country in half. In the north, where Italy connects to Europe, it widens out into a broad valley watered by the Po River. Beyond the Po are the rugged Apennine Mountains, whose steep, sharp peaks stand like stone guards protecting Italy's northern frontier.

To see the beginning of civilization in Italy, we have to travel back in time a few centuries to around 800 B.C.

## CHAPTER 22—THE ETRUSCANS



In the east, the Assyrians were the masters of the world. In Greece, Homer was writing his epic poems. But in northern Italy, a people called the Etruscans were spreading throughout the rich Po Valley.

We don't know much about the Etruscans. They left no histories, no tales of great warriors. We have no plays or literature, and archaeologists have never discovered the tombs of their kings. They did leave behind a few carvings, but nobody truly understands their language.

But one thing the Etruscans did leave behind was jewelry—*lots* of it! Beautiful bracelets of hammered gold that were decorated with carvings of men and animals, jewel-studded necklaces, lavishly decorated golden armbands; it seemed as though the Etruscan men and women went about covered in gold!

They also left behind their cities, wonderfully massive cities built out of enormous blocks of stone and surrounded by gigantic walls. Huge Etruscan tombs have been discovered containing beautiful sculptures of the men and women who rest there. The surviving tomb

sculptures show that the Etruscans were a simple, but proud and handsome, people.

How were the Etruscans able to make such massive buildings? Perhaps it was because, as far as anyone knows, they were the first to make regular use of the *arch*. The arch is a rounded structure that spans a space—usually a door or gate. It is a wonderful invention that allows a building to hold much more weight.

The Etruscans used the arch everywhere. They built huge, walled cities with massive arched gates. They constructed miles of underground sewers supported by arches. Public buildings and private homes were arched as well. Everywhere the Etruscans went, they left arches behind. The Etruscan arch was much sturdier than the Greek column. While almost all the Greek temples have long-since tumbled to the ground, many Etruscan arches have survived to this day and are still in use.

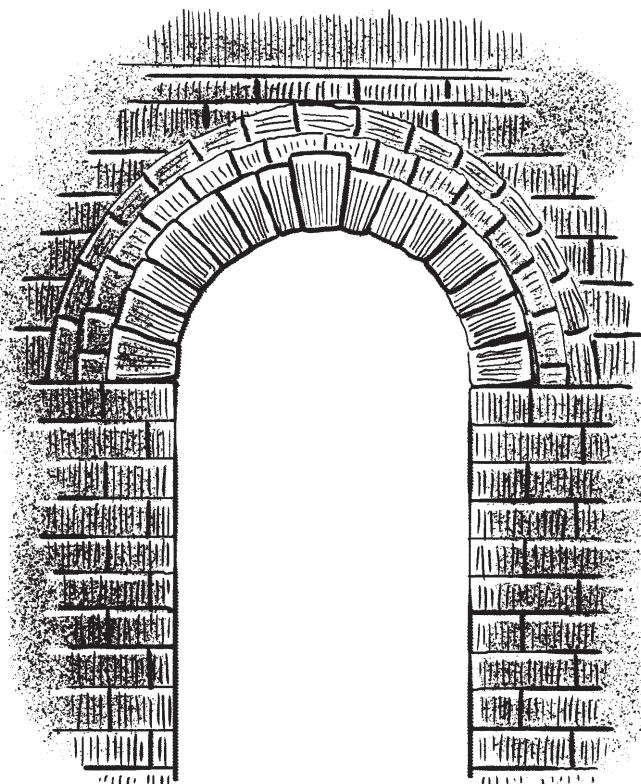
### Etruscan Funerals

Whether it was their tombs, jewelry, or buildings, the Etruscans liked to do everything on a grand scale. This was especially true of their funerals, which were known to be quite a spectacle. There was nothing quite like an Etruscan funeral anywhere in the ancient world. We know about them from frescoes in Etruscan tombs.

What was an Etruscan funeral like? Let us visit with a young Etruscan girl named Vellia. Vellia's older brother Thresu has recently died. Though stricken with grief, Vellia must act bravely to take part in her brother's funeral:

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Vellia mournfully dons a flowing, beautiful gown for her brother's funeral. She and her sisters have spent the past nine days since Thresu's death weaving the colorful



garment in sorrow. Now the fourteen-year-old Vellia slips into the funeral garment as she steps forth from the arched patio into the sunlit grass.

Across the grassy clearing lies her brother's body on a wooden table. After the funeral, it will be placed in a large coffin made of baked clay and laid in a massive underground tomb. Upon a stone pillar to Vellia's left is a dead sheep. It has recently been killed in sacrifice and its side cut open. As Thresu's eldest sister, it is Vellia's job to stick her hand inside the dead animal and remove its liver.

Vellia grimaces, but she knows her duty. It's tradition.

The people of her village watch in silence as she plunges her hand into the warm innards of the sheep. She feels around for a moment and removes the slimy liver. An Etruscan priest steps up to take the bloody liver from her hands. Vellia is happy to be rid of it.

This priest is a *haruspex*, a priest whose job is to look at the livers of dead animals to try to find messages from the gods. Vellia and the villagers watch intently while the priest examines the bloody liver over a special bronze table.

Etruscans believed everything had meaning. The patterns of birds in flight, the organs of animals, the sounds of thunder—everything in the world existed for a purpose. The job of the Etruscan priests was to study these signs and interpret messages from the gods. The Etruscans did not begin any work without first consulting the signs.

The priest has an announcement: the liver has told him that Thresu's soul will go on to eternal rest. The people cheer. Vellia sighs in relief and returns to her seat beneath the shade of the arches.

Now the boxers come forward with strips of leather wrapped around their fists. They pummel each other to the cheers of the village. Finally, they stumble off the clearing, and the chariot races begin. Vellia and her sisters momentarily forget their mourning as they watch the young men of the village speed around the field in their chariots. The young men smile and wave to girls as they pass. The girls of the village blush and giggle.

As the sun begins to set behind the distant hills, the crowd grows silent. The most solemn moment of the funeral celebration is about to begin. Vellia stands beside her father, mother, and sisters as the family pours a drink offering to the gods, imploring them to conduct the soul of their son to the next world.

As they finish, two men step into the clearing, standing near the body of Thresu. They each carry a short sword and a small, round shield. The men turn to salute Vellia's family. Her father turns to her and says, "Go ahead, Vellia. You are now the eldest. You say the words."

Vellia takes a deep breath. "The family of Thresu salutes you," she says shakily. "Now do my brother honor by your valiant deeds on this day." The men clang their swords on their shields in approval. Vellia returns to her seat. Her stomach is in knots. She knows what is coming; she has seen it many times before at other funerals.

As soon as she is seated, the men begin fighting. Sword clangs against sword, blows rattle on shields, the men grunt and huff as they thrust and dodge! The villagers cheer. One of these men will emerge victorious, but the other will die. His blood will be a sacrifice for the soul of Thresu. These men are *gladiators*, men who fight—and die—for sport or sacrifice.

After some time, one of the men gets weary. He stumbles and lets his guard down. The other is upon him in a moment, sword raised. Vellia's younger sisters close their eyes, but not Vellia. She is fourteen now. She has seen gladiators kill each other at least a dozen times.

The sword falls swiftly, and it is over quickly. The dead warrior is dragged off the field, while the winner goes to receive a jug of wine from Vellia's father. Darkness has now fallen. Torches illuminate the clearing. The Etruscan priests put on frightening masks, symbolizing the gods of the underworld. Strange drums beat in the distance. Vellia shivers, and her young sisters begin to whimper.

A train of men and women are suddenly thrust into the clearing, led by a master who drives them with a whip. There are six of them, all tied together at the wrists. These were the slaves of Thresu. They too will be taken off



and killed as sacrifices for Thresu. They stand proud and silent as they are paraded in front of Vellia's family before being marched off to death.

Vellia tries to stand tall, but her knees are weak.

"Strength, dear Vellia," her father says, putting his rugged hand on her shoulder.

"It is so cruel," Vellia replies. "Why must they die?"

"It is a sacrifice for the soul of your brother. Such has always been the custom of our people."

Vellia grimaces as the slaves are taken off into the darkness from which they will never return.

"I still don't like it," she mutters. After the slaves are

killed, the body of Thresu will be carried away by torch-light and buried in the rocky tomb.

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We do not know if Etruscan funerals happened exactly in this manner, but we know they featured boxing, chariot racing, and the killing of gladiators and slaves as sacrifices.

Perhaps you, like Vellia, find the Etruscans' taste for blood to be a little excessive. The Etruscans were a rigid, hard people who did not shrink from loss of life. But this made them strong. For many centuries, the Etruscans ruled northern and central Italy. Their ships traded in the Mediterranean, their cities dotted the Italian countryside, and their rulers imposed Etruscan ways on the cities of the smaller Italian tribes.

### **Turning to Rome**

One of these small cities the Etruscans governed was called Rome. It was populated by an insignificant little tribe called the Latins. But one day, this little city of Rome would rule the world and change the destiny of Europe. It is to the saga of Rome, the last great empire of the ancient world, that we must now give our attention.



## CHAPTER 23

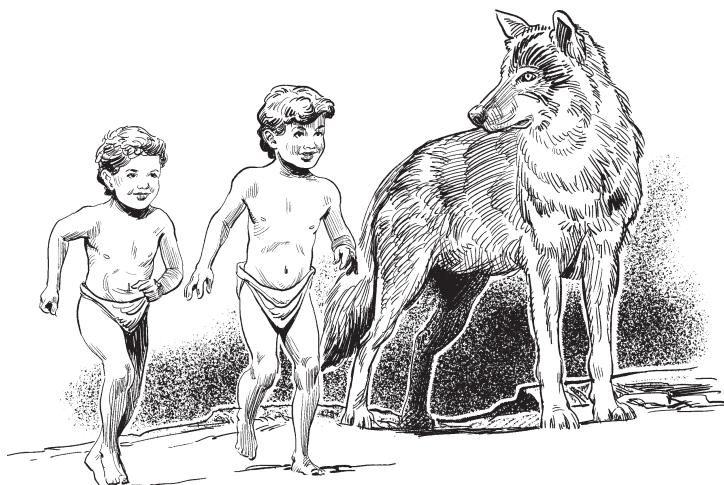
# The City of Seven Hills

### **The Origins of Rome**

While the Etruscans were ruling northern Italy, a small city was founded farther south, along the Tiber River. This was the city of Rome, which was destined to become one of the most important cities in the history of the world.

According to legend, Rome was founded by Romulus. Romulus was a prince of the small tribe known as the Latins. He was the son of the king of Alba Longa, but Romulus's evil uncle had usurped the throne of Alba Longa and left Romulus and his brother, Remus, to die by the Tiber River. The brothers were found by a wolf that would take care of them until they were adopted and raised by a shepherd.

Later Romulus and Remus set off to build cities. Each chose a hill near the Tiber River for his city, but they had an argument. In his anger, Romulus killed Remus.



Romulus named his city Rome after himself and became its first king. The traditional date of the founding of Rome is April 21, 753 B.C.

Men from all around flocked to Rome. Some were outlaws fleeing capture, others were escaped slaves or political exiles, and still others came to Rome to escape the power of the Etruscans. Rome began to prosper. Soon Romulus's city outgrew the little hill and spread to the surrounding hills. Eventually Rome took up seven hills, giving it the new name of the City of the Seven Hills.

### In Search of Wives

The Romans grew quickly in strength, and Romulus treated his people well. But all of Rome's settlers were men. After some time, the men began to grumble because there were no women to marry. Romulus sent messengers throughout all the surrounding cities, asking them to allow the Romans to marry their women.

"We Romans are strong and courageous," Romulus

told them. “Why not join your daughters in marriage to our sons?”

The response was not exactly what Romulus had hoped. Let us see how the king of Rome handled this delicate situation:

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“I can’t believe their arrogance!” shouted Hostus Hostilius, the Roman nobleman.

“What does the letter say, good Hostus?” King Romulus asked.

“The Sabines say that they would never give their daughters in marriage to any Roman!”

“What?” the king demanded angrily, rising from his throne.

“They say the Romans are too lowborn . . . that their women are too noble for our young men. Unbelievable!”

“It’s not that, dear Hostus,” said Romulus, pacing about his throne room. “They fear our power. Though we are only a new city, we are already strong. By withholding their daughters, they hope to stop us from multiplying and growing stronger. But we will outsmart them!”

Some days later, King Romulus announced that a chariot racing contest would be held in Rome. Invitations were sent out to the Sabines and all the surrounding cities.

“Chariot racing!” all the young men exclaimed. “How exciting!”

On the day of the great chariot race, all the men of the surrounding cities came to Rome. But while the races were going on, Romulus ordered a secret band of Roman warriors to the Sabine country. The Romans knew the Sabine men were at the chariot races and had left the Sabine women home alone!

The Roman men rushed into the Sabine lands and

carried off all the unmarried Sabine women. The women cried and protested, but they were no match for the powerful warriors. They carried the women off and made them their wives. Rome's shortage of women had been solved!

When the Sabine men got home and found out what had happened, they were enraged.

"All Sabine men to arms!" cried Titus Tatius, king of the Sabines. "Romulus and his Roman vermin will pay for their treachery!"

The Sabine men grabbed their spears and swords and strapped on their armor. "For our women!" they shouted as King Titus Tatius led them off to war.

Back in Rome, Romulus realized they were in great danger.

"Take a hundred men and prepare for battle," Romulus told Hostus Hostilius. "We stole these women fair and square; I'm not about to give them up without a fight!"

"They shall never take Rome!" Hostus cried, running forth from his king to take charge of the Roman guards. The Roman men said good-bye to their new wives as they took up swords to fight the Sabine men. The Sabine and Roman armies closed ranks. It looked as if there would be a bloody battle.

But as the armies were about to engage, the Sabine women ran forth and threw themselves between the armies.

"Stop! Put down your weapons!"

"Get out of the way, women!" cried Titus Tatius.

"Yes, move out the way," said the Roman Hostus Hostilius. "Can't you see we're trying to kill each other? And for you!"

"No!" the women cried. "How could we ever love you if you kill our fathers and our brothers?" they said to the Romans. Then, turning to the Sabines, "And you, our

families, we have come to love our Roman husbands, who are good and valiant men. Would you kill the husbands of your own wives and daughters and make us all widows?"

The Romans and Sabines looked to one another. Their vengeance began to fade.

"I guess they've got a point," King Titus Tatius mumbled.

"I suppose we should try to talk this out?" called Hostus Hostilius from the Roman side.

So the Romans and the Sabines put down their weapons. King Titus Tatius and King Romulus made a peace treaty, and rather than being enemies, the Sabines and Romans intermarried and became one people. Sometimes women can make things happen when men are all out of ideas!

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### **The Tarquins**

Thus there was peace. After Romulus, Rome had other kings, and each one did something to beautify the city. Some enlarged the walls, others built Rome's seaport, and some reformed the government. Rome grew bigger and more powerful.

But the Etruscans would soon get suspicious of Rome. They did not like the idea of this powerful, young city on their southern border. An Etruscan noble family called the Tarquins came to Rome, and one member of this family would take power and become king.

Under the Tarquins, Etruscan customs were introduced to Rome, such as the use of the arch but also the bloody gladiator fights. The Tarquins treated the Romans poorly. They oppressed Roman nobles and even killed those who challenged the king.

Eventually, the Romans got sick of the Tarquins.

Some Romans said Rome should have no kings. Instead, they wanted to rule themselves as was done in the cities of Greece. In 509 b.c., the Roman people rose up against the Tarquin kings and drove them out of Rome.

### A New Way to Govern

Once the Tarquins were gone, the Romans did not choose a new king but rather set up something called a *republic*. A republic is a form of government where officials elected by the people govern by the rule of laws, not the decrees of kings.

In the Roman republic, instead of a king, the Romans set up two consuls. The consuls were elected to serve one-year terms. The consuls ruled the republic together in times of peace and led its armies in times of war. In order to stop consuls from getting too much power, the Romans decreed that a person who had once served as consul could not do so again for ten years.

The laws in the Roman republic were made by the Senate. The Senate was an assembly made up of representatives of the oldest and most important Roman families. The Senate also controlled the Roman finances and had the power to declare war. It was the most powerful body in the republic.

There were many other assemblies too. The Tribal Assembly, Plebeian Assembly, and Centuriar Assembly all made various laws and elected officials to different offices. Lower officials, called *aediles*, were in charge of maintaining waterways and roads.

### Patricians and Plebeians

But not everybody in Rome was happy. Most of the land and wealth in the early republic was in the hands of the oldest and richest families, called the *patricians*.

Those who were not from old families and did not have as much wealth were called *plebeians*. In the early republic, there were many laws that were not good for plebeians. For instance, many political offices were closed to plebeians. There were also laws that prohibited plebeians from marrying patricians.

What made this worse was that only a tiny minority of Romans were patricians. Most Romans were plebeians, commoners who felt oppressed by a small minority. Why did they bother overthrowing the Tarquins, they wondered? What good is it to throw out a bad king just to be oppressed by the patricians?

Eventually, the plebeians got so upset that they rose up and walked out of Rome. They just dropped their work and left, resettling on a mountain outside Rome. The patricians didn't know what to do without the plebeians; Rome could not function without them.

The patricians sent messengers to the plebeians, promising them more rights. They also created a new office called the *tribune*. The tribune's job was to represent the interests of the plebeians in the republic. He was very powerful. The tribune had the power to stop any law from being passed if he thought it might hurt the plebeians.

The plebeians were happy with this and returned to Rome. Though it took a long time for the plebeians to win their equality, all the old restrictions dropped away, and by 287 b.c., plebeians and patricians were mostly equal.

### Military Conflicts

Not only did Rome have struggles at home between plebeians and patricians; it also had struggles with other cities and tribes. Rome was surrounded by hostile peoples and always seemed to be at war with somebody.

Rome's wars were fought by her citizens. If a war broke

out, a man would be expected to leave his farm to go fight. This made the Romans hardened warriors and gave the people a sense of pride in their country.

Sometimes the Romans suffered setbacks; in 390 b.c., a band of barbarians from the north defeated a Roman army and ransacked the city. But the Romans were organized and well disciplined, and though they may have lost an occasional battle, they always won the war. Rome eventually grew her territory—gobbling up all the surrounding tribes, absorbing the Greek cities to the south, and even gaining power over her former master, the Etruscans.

By 264 b.c., the Romans were the masters of Italy. Their victorious citizen army had brought a hard-fought peace to Italy. Meanwhile, the government of the Roman republic managed the affairs of her citizens and allies skillfully, always increasing Rome's power and reputation. The humble little hilltop town of Romulus had become the most powerful city-state outside of Greece.

In the next chapter, we will see how Rome's growing power brought it into conflict with another powerful city-state, leading to the biggest war in the history of the ancient world.

## CHAPTER 24

### The Punic Wars

#### **Carthage**

The Romans grew powerful, but they never forgot about the early wars they had fought to win their freedom. The Roman men who overthrew the Tarquins and established the republic were honored as heroes; Romulus was even worshiped as a god.

But Rome's successes brought it into conflict with other peoples: the Greeks in the south, the Gauls in the north, and the powerful city of Carthage across the Mediterranean Sea.

Carthage was a city-state on the northern coast of Africa, right across the sea from Italy. It had been founded by the Phoenicians and the Canaanites of Tyre and Sidon, whom we met way back in chapter 6. The Phoenician traders set up colonies all along the Mediterranean coasts. These colonies were trading outposts for Phoenician sailors.

Because of its excellent location halfway across the Mediterranean, Carthage became the wealthiest of these colonies. It grew to become a powerful city-state. By 300 b.c., it dominated shipping in the western Mediterranean and controlled territory from Africa to Spain.

One place the Carthaginians tried to control was Sicily, the large island to the south of Italy. The Carthaginians had taken over half the island; the other half was controlled by various Greek city-states, some with ties to Rome.

It became clear that either Rome or Carthage must control the whole island. Some Sicilian cities were allied with Rome; others were allied with Carthage. In 264 b.c., Rome went to war with Carthage to stop it from taking control of the whole island. Rome would fight a total of three wars with Carthage. These were called the *Punic Wars*—a term that came from the Latin word *punici*, the Roman name for the Carthaginians.

### Rome vs. Carthage

The war was long, lasting for twenty-three years! At first, the Carthaginians defeated the Romans because the Romans had no navy and were not skilled in sea warfare. The Carthaginians were led by a powerful general named Hamilcar. For a while, it seemed like Hamilcar would beat the Romans.

But one thing the Romans did well was borrow other people's ideas and improve upon them. The Romans found a Carthaginian ship washed up on the shore, studied it, and built their own ships. They tinkered with the design until the Roman ships were superior to those of Carthage.

Eventually, the war turned in the Romans' favor. In

241 b.c., the war ended, and Carthage surrendered. The Carthaginians were furious. They wanted revenge.

## Hannibal

Hamilcar had a young son named Hannibal. When he was still a boy, Hamilcar took Hannibal to the temple of the gods of Carthage and made him swear an oath that he would hate the Romans forever.

From then on, young Hannibal trained relentlessly as a soldier. He became a powerful general like his father and ruled Spain for the Carthaginians. His one mission was to destroy the Romans. He finally launched his war in 219 b.c. by attacking a Spanish city allied to Rome.

The Romans prepared for another war. They expected Hannibal to attack Rome on the sea, as his father Hamilcar had done. But Hannibal had other ideas. He gathered together a force of almost one hundred thousand Carthaginians and other mercenaries. A *mercenary* is a soldier who fights for whatever country will pay him the most. The Roman army was made up mostly of Roman citizens. The Carthaginian army, on the other hand, was made up of a mix of Carthaginians and mercenaries who were not Carthaginian. They were only fighting for money.

Hannibal's army was almost ready, but he needed one more thing: elephants! Yes, the Carthaginians fought with special battle elephants trained for war. Hannibal's grand army would contain thirty-eight war elephants. The army was ready!

Hannibal decided to attack Rome from the land instead of the sea. This meant a long march across the Alps, the mountains that guarded Italy from the north. The march would be extraordinarily difficult, but Hannibal knew the Romans would never expect an army to attack



from the mountains. He gathered his army and elephants and began the long march in 218 B.C.

The march was terrible and long; Hannibal had to fight many battles with hostile tribes before he could even get to the Alps. The crossing of the snowy mountains took many weeks. Most of Hannibal's elephants died as well as many of his men. Finally, in the fall of 218 B.C., Hannibal's army and the few surviving elephants stumbled out of the Alps to look upon the sunny Po Valley. All of Italy lay before them.

## Rome Fights Back

The presence of Hannibal's army in Italy struck fear in the Romans. The few armies they hastily assembled were beaten down by Hannibal. The Roman Senate ordered that a new army be raised and placed it under the leadership of one of the consuls: Gaius Flaminius.

Flaminius marched north to defend Rome. Let us see what became of the army of Flaminius through the eyes of two Roman children:

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Lucius and Servia are two Roman children living on a large estate outside Perusia. Their father, Servius, is an important local farmer. Perusia was originally an Etruscan city, but it came under the control of the Romans several decades before the children were born. Their grandfather bought some property in the countryside outside Perusia and left the bustle of Rome to farm olives there. The children's father was born on the estate, as were Lucius and Servia.

Today Lucius and Servia will make the two-mile walk into town to try to find word of their father. Because of the war with Hannibal, Servius was taken from his farm six months ago to serve as an officer in the Roman army under the consul Gaius Flaminius. Lucius and Servia have just heard that a battle occurred nearby. Their mother has sent them to Perusia in hopes of finding some information about the battle and whether their father is all right.

The warm Italian sun beats down on their shoulders as they follow the dusty road connecting their estate to the Perusian road. Fourteen-year-old Lucius wipes the sweat from his brow.

“June is always so hot!”

“At least you don't have it as bad as them!” says his

older sister, pointing to the rows of slaves working the olive fields. Their bare backs glisten with sweat as they pick olives from the hundreds of trees dotting the field.

As the two children come into town, they see that Perusia is bustling with excitement. People are rushing every which way. Shops are closed. Many families are packing their goods into carts and preparing to leave.

“What’s going on?” Servia calls out to a shopkeeper, who is busy packing his goods into jars.

“Have you not heard?” the man says frantically. “Hannibal has marched into Umbria! He has defeated Flaminius and the Romans up at Lake Trasimene! They could be here by nightfall!”

Servia gasps. Lucius stares open-mouthed as they both ponder what this news means for their father.

“What of the Romans?” Servia asks the man. “Are there any survivors?”

The shopkeeper looks up grimly. “Not many, young lady. Not many.”

Tears well up in Lucius’s eyes.

“But wait,” the man says. “I saw some wounded stragglers coming into town by the west gate. Your father may be alive. If he is, I’d look for him there.”

“Thank you!” calls Servia, grasping her little brother by the hand and dashing off through the crowd toward the west gate.

The west side of town has been converted into a field hospital for wounded soldiers. Every shop, sidewalk, and patch of grass is taken up by bloodied and bandaged Roman soldiers. Local women dash here and there, bringing water and fresh cloth for bandages. Others search among the crowded streets, calling for their loved ones. From the gate, Servia and Lucius can see a long, narrow

line of wounded men still flowing into the city from the hills to the west.

“Lucius! Servia!”

The children turn at hearing their father’s voice! They find him lying against the city wall near the gate. The children rush to him in a tearful embrace. His ankle is twisted, and he has a bloody bandage around his head.

“Dada, what happened?” Lucius asks, clasping his father’s hand.

“Flaminius heard Hannibal was moving south to attack Rome, so he marched us hard to catch up. It was a terrible march! We spent days in the hot sun with little time for rest. Everywhere we went, we saw the country burned and destroyed around us from Hannibal’s army.”

“What did Flaminius do?” asks Servia.

“This made him mad. He swore he would catch Hannibal and punish him. Yesterday morning we began our march along the north side of Lake Trasimene. Fog covered the water and clouded our vision. We thought Hannibal was marching south around the lake toward Rome, but he had hidden himself in the hills north of the lake.”

“Then what?” Lucius asks his father.

“Before we knew what happened, the hills were swarming with Carthaginians! We had nowhere to go. Our backs were to the lake. They . . . they just kept coming. . . .” Servius’s voice trails off.

“I’m so glad you made it home!” Servia says, lovingly stroking her father’s sweaty, matted hair. She hears Lucius sniffing and turns to see him wiping tears from his eyes. “Lucius,” she says, “I will stay with father. You run home and fetch the servants. We must get father back home quickly so mother can attend to his wounds!”

Servius was a lucky man. The majority of the Romans at Lake Trasimene did not survive. More than fifteen thousand were killed by Hannibal and the Carthaginians. Another sixty-five thousand would die only a year later in 216 b.c. at the Battle of Cannae—another disastrous defeat for the Romans.

### **The End of Hannibal**

For some time, things looked very bad for Rome. Some thought about surrendering, as it seemed like the republic was about to fall. But instead of attacking Rome, Hannibal dallied around trying to get more help from Carthage. He also tried to convince Rome's allies to desert it.

Then one Roman general and consul named Cornelius Scipio had an idea. He took a Roman army and sailed to Africa with plans to attack Carthage itself. The Carthaginians ordered Hannibal to return to Africa to protect Carthage. Hannibal reluctantly gathered the remainder of his army and left Italy, never to return.

Cornelius Scipio and Hannibal battled each other at a place called Zama, outside Carthage, in 202 b.c. Scipio defeated Hannibal's army, and the Carthaginians surrendered. Hannibal fled into exile, but the Romans pursued him. Hannibal eventually killed himself rather than be captured by the Romans. Scipio was given the nickname Africanus for his victory.

### **Rome's Revenge**

The Romans were very angry at Carthage and were determined that it should never again threaten them. They forced Carthage to pay them a very large amount of gold, took away almost all their territories, and forbade them

from making war or having a navy. These terms were humiliating for Carthage, but they had no choice except to obey the Romans.

Meanwhile, the Romans took over all the former Carthaginian lands in Spain. In the east, the Roman armies were marching into Macedonia and Greece. Rome seemed unstoppable.

Now more powerful than ever, the Roman Senate wanted Carthage done away with for good. One senator named Cato made many speeches arguing that Carthage must be destroyed.

In 149 B.C., Rome declared war on Carthage for violating the rules Rome imposed on it. Carthage had fought a war with a neighboring kingdom without Rome's permission. Rome raised an army and invaded Africa.

The Roman army was led by Scipio Aemilianus, the grandson of Scipio Africanus. The Carthaginians fought bravely, but their city was conquered in 146 B.C. The Romans burned Carthage to the ground and sold its people into slavery. Scipio Aemilianus took away all the Carthaginian lands in Africa and claimed them for Rome.

Rome had fought three wars with Carthage and had come out victorious. By 146 B.C., Rome controlled all of Italy, Sicily, Spain, northern Africa, several cities on the southern coast of Gaul (modern-day France), Macedonia, and Greece. The little city-state founded by Romulus was now an empire!

In the east, the old Hellenistic kingdoms left over from the days of Alexander the Great were still standing. But the Romans had a taste for conquest, and it would not be long before these too fell to the unstoppable might of Rome.



## CHAPTER 25

# Greece and Rome Collide

### Rome's Legions

At the end of our previous chapter, we mentioned that Rome ended up conquering Macedonia and Greece. You might be wondering how this came about.

The Greek Hellenistic kingdoms were watching the Punic Wars with great interest. After Hannibal's victories at the battles of Lake Trasimene and Cannae, many Greeks assumed Carthage would win the war. They were eager to make friends with the Carthaginians. The king of Macedonia, Philip V, entered into an alliance with Carthage and declared war against Rome.

But as we have seen, the Romans defeated Hannibal, so they then turned to fight Philip V and the Macedonians. Despite the strength of the Roman army, Philip V was confident in his victory. After all, the Macedonians had the mighty phalanx.

The Romans, however, not only defeated Philip V but

completely destroyed the Macedonians and overran their kingdom. The Romans did not fight in a phalanx. They fought in a formation called a *maniple*. A maniple was a square of 120 soldiers. Thirty maniples made a *legion*. These legions were the backbone of the Roman army.

The maniples could be moved forward or backward depending on how the battle was going. Imagine checkers moving on a checkerboard. This is how the maniples moved. This made it very easy for the legions to move and respond to changes in battle. The phalanx, on the other hand, was very slow and difficult to move. The Roman legions with their maniples easily outmaneuvered and destroyed the Macedonian phalanx.

### Rome Conquers Greece

The Romans conquered Macedonia in 168 B.C. The Greek city-states were happy to be rid of the Macedonians, who had ruled them since the time of Philip II and Alexander the Great. But they were afraid of the Romans and tried to fight them. The Romans easily defeated the Greeks in battle, burned the city of Corinth, and conquered the whole Greek peninsula. This happened in 146 B.C., the same year Roman legions were burning Carthage in the last Punic War.

The Romans were fascinated by Greece. They eagerly read Greek literature, studied Greek architecture, and identified their own gods with the gods of Greece. For example, the Roman gods Jupiter and Mars were identified with Zeus and Ares, respectively. Many Romans also studied the Greek language, and Roman generals stationed in Greece sent Greek teachers back to Italy to tutor their own children. A Roman poet named Horace said, “Captive Greece took Rome captive.” This meant

that even though the Greeks had to accept Roman rule, the Romans accepted Greek culture.

### **Antiochus III**

Macedonia and Greece were now under Roman control, but there were still two Hellenistic kingdoms left. In Egypt, the Ptolemies still reigned, though weak and dependent on Rome for support. In the east, the Seleucid kingdom continued to rule Syria and Palestine. Alexandria was still the educational and scientific center of the Greek world, but the kings who succeeded Ptolemy I and Ptolemy Philadelphus were weak men, and their kingdom slowly lost power.

The Seleucids knew that the Ptolemies were weak. The Seleucid Empire at this time was ruled by a powerful king named Antiochus III. Antiochus gathered his armies together and made war on the Ptolemies. He was victorious and took away some of their territory.

The Ptolemies were afraid of the Seleucids. Who could protect them? King Ptolemy V of Egypt decided to enter into an alliance with Rome. Rome promised to protect King Ptolemy V and his kingdom if the Ptolemies promised to be friendly to Rome and her interests.

Antiochus III of Seleucia felt good about himself after defeating the Ptolemies. He thought of himself as a great king and believed he was another Alexander. He wanted to invade Greece and free it from Roman control. Antiochus III began gathering an army and made plans to attack Greece. There is an interesting story about Antiochus's preparations.

After Hannibal was defeated by Scipio, he fled east and was staying at the court of King Antiochus III, who was by then the most powerful king in the east. Antiochus

was in the midst of making preparations to invade Greece and make war on the Romans.

Feeling puffed up about his great army, Antiochus invited Hannibal to come look over his troops. Antiochus smiled as he displayed his massive and elaborately equipped army to Hannibal.

“Well, what do you think, Hannibal? Will my army be enough for the Romans?” he asked.

“Oh yes, that should satisfy them,” Hannibal said, “although the Romans are quite hungry.”

Hannibal meant that Rome was a giant monster that ate up armies like people ate food. He predicted that the Romans would devour the armies of Antiochus just as they had devoured so many other kingdoms.

Hannibal’s prediction was correct; Antiochus’s invasion of Greece in 192 B.C. failed miserably. The Romans defeated Antiochus and took most of Asia Minor away from him.

### An Old Man vs. an Army

Antiochus III died not long after this, but he had a son named Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus IV wanted to make the Seleucid Empire great again. He decided to gather an army in hopes of confronting the Ptolemies. But the Ptolemies were allies of Rome, so they called on Rome to come to their assistance. But instead of sending an army, Rome sent an old man!

As the story goes, Antiochus IV Epiphanes rode proudly toward Palestine to make war on the Ptolemies. His army stretched far behind him in a thin line filled with an endless train of soldiers. In its ranks were spear-men with their glittering spearheads shining in the morning sun, banners blowing gustily in the wind, warriors mounted on horses, lumbering war elephants, and

hordes of mercenaries and archers, all extending back miles along the road from Palestine to Egypt. Thousands upon thousands of them marched together.

But on the dusty horizon stood a strange figure that halted their procession. Antiochus rode out with some of his generals to meet the figure. At first they were relieved when they saw the stranger was just an old man leaning on a crooked walking stick, but when he said he was from Rome, Antiochus became nervous.

The elderly man revealed himself as a Roman senator who had come in the name of the Roman Senate. He ordered Antiochus and his army to return to where they had come from and to not make war on the Ptolemies. Antiochus was so afraid of Rome's might that he obeyed the request and turned his army around!

Can you imagine being so powerful that you could send an old man to frighten an army? The Romans were so feared and respected that this was all it took—an old man with a walking stick—to turn around thousands of soldiers.

### **The Maccabees**

King Antiochus IV returned home in a foul mood. He took his anger out on the Jews. Since returning from their exile in Babylon (which we read about in chapter 11), the Jews had lived peacefully in Judea. They had served first the Persians, then Alexander, and now the Seleucids, who controlled their homeland.

But Antiochus wanted to make them act like Greeks. He forbade them from worshiping the God of their fathers, ordered that their Scriptures be burned, and forced them to sacrifice to the Greek gods and eat Greek foods—foods prohibited by the Law of Moses. He even entered the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and sacrificed

a pig to Zeus, which the Jews considered to be offensive to God.

Jews who refused to submit to Antiochus's laws were killed. The king sent his servants throughout the land to make sure the laws were being obeyed. Great fear fell on all the Jews.

But one man and his family refused to obey Antiochus. This man was named Mattathias. He and his sons refused to worship the Greek gods. They fled to the hills of Judea, taking many other Jewish men with them. These Jews started attacking the troops of Antiochus. They were led by Mattathias's son, Judas. Judas won so many victories against Antiochus that he was nicknamed "Maccabeus," which means "the hammer." His family was called the Maccabees.

God was with Judas Maccabeus and the sons of Mattathias. Eventually, Judas Maccabeus and his army captured Jerusalem. They threw out the statues of the Greek gods and rededicated the city's Temple to the worship of the true God. This was in 164 b.c.

The Seleucids did not give up, though. Several generals were sent against Judas. These events are recorded in the Bible in the Books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. Here is just one of those stories about a boastful general named Nicanor and God's miraculous deliverance of the Jews:

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There was commotion all around the Seleucid camp in Jerusalem. General Nicanor was excited. His spies told him that Judas Maccabeus and his army were lurking in the nearby hills of Samaria. He had been looking for a way to trap Judas for some time but had not been able to catch him.

"The king is starting to doubt my ability. This is a



perfect opportunity!" he said gleefully. "The men with Judas are few, and my army is great."

He called for his armor and began preparing for battle. Nicanor raised his arm and pointed his sword toward the Temple in Jerusalem, swearing, "If I do not capture this Judas, I will return and smash this Temple to the ground!"

The Jewish priests standing in the Temple trembled. With outstretched arms, they prayed for God to save them as the army of Nicanor—over forty thousand strong—marched out.

Meanwhile, word came to Judas and his little army that Nicanor was marching against them.

"We're doomed!" some of the men said. "Let's run away!" others shouted.

But Judas Maccabeus calmed his men.

"Don't lose heart. Remember how God delivered our forefathers from Egypt? Or the victories He granted to David? He will save us if we trust in Him!"

The men were still scared, but they trusted Judas and prayed to God.

That night, Judas had a dream. In his dream, a white-haired man approached. It was the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah handed Judas a golden sword, saying, "This holy sword is a gift from God. Go forth and have victory over your enemies!" Judas's men were encouraged when he told them of his dream.

On the day of battle, Nicanor and his great army approached. Nicanor had thousands of spearmen, battle elephants, and all manner of weapons. Judas uttered a prayer to God, saying, "You defended us in the past, O God. Now, once again, Lord of heaven, send your good angel to make our enemies shake and tremble with fear. With your great power, destroy these who have slandered you and who have come out to attack your chosen people!"

Then the trumpets were blown, and the armies crashed together. The Jews under Judas fought furiously with the power of God on their side. The Seleucid army fell into confusion. The Jews struck them hard, and before anyone knew what was happening, the battle was over. The Seleucid army had either fled or been destroyed.

After the battle, Judas found the body of Nicanor lying dead on the battlefield. Judas had Nicanor's arm cut off—the same arm he stretched out when pointing his sword at the Temple of Jerusalem—and showed it to the priests of the Temple. It was evidence of God's protection of the Jews. Everybody was so thankful and elated that they declared the day to be a holiday.

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Judas's faith in God had saved the little Jewish kingdom. But the Maccabees also looked for earthly allies. Judas and his brothers sent messages to the Roman Senate, asking Rome to enter into an alliance with the Jews and recognize the lands the Maccabees had taken as an independent Jewish kingdom. The Roman Senate happily made an alliance with the Jews, since they were enemies of Antiochus and the Seleucids.

Antiochus never managed to conquer the Maccabees. He caught a terrible disease and died the same year Judas Maccabeus retook Jerusalem.

In this chapter, we have seen how Rome began intervening in the affairs of the Hellenistic east. They had wiped out the Hellenistic kingdom of Macedonia and conquered Greece. They had taken away a third of the Seleucid Empire and entered into alliances with the Ptolemies and the Jews. Rome had gone from a small city-state to a world empire. In the next chapter, we shall see how this began to change the republic itself.



## CHAPTER 26

### Marius and Sulla

#### **The Harmful Effects of War**

By 146 B.C., the year the Romans destroyed Carthage, the Roman republic had been at war nonstop for 118 years. That is a long time for any country to be at war.

While Rome's wars won it more territory, they were harmful to the Roman people. Do you remember who made up the bulk of the Roman army? It was average Roman citizens—mainly farmers. They were expected to leave their farms, fight Rome's battles, and return to their farms when the war was over.

But with 118 years of war, the Roman farmers had little time for farming. They were gone from home for longer and longer periods of time. Their families could not keep up their farms without them, and many families lost their property. When the Roman soldiers eventually returned home, they often returned to nothing at all.

But you might wonder what became of these farms.

After all, the land did not just disappear. The farms themselves were purchased by senators and other wealthy Romans. Many of these senators grew rich from Rome's wars. Rome's conquests brought it a constant supply of prisoners who became slaves to the wealthy. The senators created huge farms worked by slaves. These farms were called *latifundia*.

The latifundia made it difficult for the remaining small farmers. Before long, most of the lands in Italy were latifundia owned by the rich. The Romans who had lost their lands became poor and moved to the city of Rome. They expected the Roman government to help them.

The government did try to help. They gave the poor free bread and put on games for them, like chariot racing and the gladiatorial fights we learned about in chapter 22. But these things only distracted the poor from their trouble. It did not really help them.

### Tiberius Gracchus and the Land Bill

In 133 B.C., a man named Tiberius Gracchus was elected tribune. Remember the tribune? His job was to represent the plebeians. The tribune was a very powerful office in the Roman government. Tiberius Gracchus said the republic should pass a law breaking up the large latifundia and give the land back to the poor Romans. This was called the *Land Bill*.

Many people liked Gracchus's Land Bill. It would restore property to those who had fought for Rome. But the wealthy and many of the senators were very much opposed to it. The Land Bill would take away a lot of their wealth. They also thought Tiberius Gracchus was seeking too much power.

Those who supported the Land Bill were known as *Populares*. Many *Populares*, though not all, were plebeians;

some were men of wealth who either sympathized with the lower classes or at least pretended to do so in order to become popular.

Those who were against the Land Bill were known as *Optimates*; many Optimates were patricians. The Optimates opposed Tiberius Gracchus very forcefully. Gracchus was attacked in the street by a mob of senators swinging clubs. He was eventually killed, and many of his supporters were sent away from Rome.

The plebeians were furious. Tiberius's younger brother, Gaius Gracchus, tried to take the place of his brother. He too supported the Land Bill and the reforms of the Populares. But the Optimates attacked him as well. Gaius Gracchus killed himself after losing a battle with the Optimates in 121 b.c.

The Romans had defeated countless enemies on the battlefield, but could they fix their own problems at home? The Gracchus brothers were dead, but the issues they raised did not go away. There were too many poor Romans without land, too many large farms worked by slaves, too few people owning too much wealth. All across Roman society, people took sides with either the Populares or the Optimates.

### **Gaius Marius**

One of the most important Populares was Gaius Marius. Marius came from a humble family, but he joined the Roman army and rose through the ranks. Something that happened to him when he was a teenager seemed to indicate that he was destined for greatness:

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Young Marius was exhausted. He had been hiking on the mountain all day. He sat down with his back against a

cliffside and mopped the sweat from his brow. Marius breathed deeply and took in the beautiful Italian landscape, with its rolling hills dotted with orchards and the cypress trees running along the Roman road that stretched like a white ribbon across the green terrain.

“It’s so beautiful,” Marius said to himself.

That’s when he noticed something tucked into the nook of the rocks on the cliffside. It looked like a brown bundle. Marius stood up and tried to jump, but the object rested about fifteen feet above him, far too high for him to reach. He found footholds in the rock to climb, and a moment later, he was scaling the cliff face.

After a few minutes, Marius pulled himself up onto the ledge where he could see clearly into the nook. The brown object was a very large nest made of sticks and moss.

“An eagle nest!” Marius exclaimed. “The sacred bird of Jupiter, king and father of the gods and the Roman people!”

Inside the nest were seven eggs. Marius gasped. It was rare to find even three eagle eggs in a single nest; to find seven was miraculous.

“What can this mean?” he asked himself. Marius stayed for a while and pondered the meaning of what he’d found. Eventually, he bowed his head in reverence and climbed back down.

Marius continued on his hike, deep in thought.

“This is a sign from Jupiter,” he said. “But what can it mean? Seven eggs?”

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Marius would grow up to become one of the most important men in Rome. As for the seven eggs, Marius would later serve as consul seven times. He never forgot the nest. When he was consul, he made the eagle the official symbol of the Roman republic and army.



Marius was the greatest general of his day, winning wars in Africa and Germany. He was extremely popular with the army. Because of his popularity, he was allowed to be consul many times in a row, which was illegal under the Roman constitution. But his supporters did not care.

When Marius was consul, he reformed the Roman

army. He knew that Rome needed more soldiers to help control its large empire. Marius made it easier for poor people to serve in the army. This gave Rome access to more soldiers and helped relieve the poor, who had no other way to make a living.

Marius also supported giving more land to Roman veterans. This upset the Optimates. Many senators started to oppose Marius.

“Nobody should be consul so many times,” they said. “He has too much power.” They all began to grumble about how to get rid of him.

### Rome Marches on Rome

Their chance came in 88 b.c. when Rome went to war against King Mithridates of Pontus, a powerful little kingdom in Asia. Marius wanted to command the Roman armies in this war. But the Senate gave command to another general, Cornelius Sulla. Sulla was an Optimatus and a friend of the Senate. Marius was furious. He declared that he would lead the war anyway. The makings of a *civil war* loomed on the horizon. A civil war happens when a country fights among itself instead of against another country.

Sulla gathered six Roman legions—almost thirty thousand men—and marched on Rome. No Roman general had ever marched a Roman army into the city of Rome before. Marius was unprepared and ran away. Sulla took over the city of Rome and killed some of Marius’s friends. Once he was sure he was in charge, Sulla took his armies east to fight King Mithridates.

By this time, Marius was seventy-one years old. Did he give up? No! Once Sulla left, it was Marius’s turn to march on Rome. He gathered his faithful armies together and marched into the city. Now it was Marius who killed

the supporters of Sulla. He had himself appointed consul again. But it did not last; Marius would die only a few weeks afterward.

Meanwhile, Sulla returned from war victorious. King Mithridates was beaten into submission. The supporters of Marius prepared to defend Rome, but with Marius dead, they had no great leader. Sulla and his army defeated the Populares when he again marched into Rome in 82 B.C.

### Sulla as Dictator

The Senate appointed Sulla *dictator*. A dictator was an office under the Roman republic that allowed one man to have extraordinary powers. It was only used in the case of emergencies. As dictator, Sulla's word became law. He was like a king but without the title.

Sulla was unforgiving toward the supporters of Marius. He executed anybody who had anything to do with Marius and the Populares, as well as many who didn't. He may have killed as many as nine thousand people; nobody knows for sure. He once told the people, "I have executed everybody I can think of. Those I have forgotten about, I will execute at some time in the future."

After Sulla had killed enough Populares, he decided his job was done. He resigned from the office of dictator in 81 B.C. Then he retired to his mansion to write a story about his life. He died peacefully a few years later.

The Romans nicknamed Sulla "Felix," which means "the happy." Sulla had risen to the pinnacle of power, destroyed all his enemies, obtained riches and honor, and died peacefully in his bed. For the Romans, worldly honor, power, and a peaceful death were what made a man happy. We shall soon see how the ancient world will

be transformed by a new idea of happiness not based on power and wealth.

### **The Dawn of Rome's Demise**

Between 146 and 81 B.C., the republic began to break down. The Roman people split up into two groups. Arguments over land led to violence and the first civil wars in Rome. This is never good for a country.

Roman armies had marched on Rome itself, and men like Marius and Sulla ruled by force and killed any who opposed them. Sulla thought he had restored the republic, but in the next chapter, we shall see how disputes between the Populares and the Optimates led to the total destruction of the Roman republic.

## CHAPTER 27

# The Rise and Fall of Julius Caesar

### Pompey the Great

The Gracchus brothers, Marius, and Sulla were all dead. But the conflict between the Optimates and Populares was not over.

With Sulla dead, the new leader of the Optimates was a general named Gnaeus Pompeius, but people called him Pompey the Great. In Pompey's time, the Mediterranean Sea was full of pirates. These pirates attacked Greek and Roman ships and made it difficult for merchants to trade goods across the sea. The Senate gave Pompey command of the Roman navy to rid the Mediterranean of pirates. His campaign was a success, and for this, he was considered to be a great hero.

Pompey also had other military victories. He finally did away with the Seleucid kingdom, which was still hanging on in the east. In 64 b.c., Pompey marched from Asia Minor down through Syria, sweeping away all

the remaining independent kingdoms. The weak Seleucid kings were kicked out, and Syria became a Roman territory.

Pompey also conquered Jerusalem. Although he let the Jews have some independence, he made their kingdom dependent on Rome. When Pompey returned to Rome in 62 B.C., he was given a huge parade called a *triumph*. Triumphs were only given to conquering generals. Pompey's conquests made him fabulously wealthy, and he was soon the most powerful man in Rome.

### **Julius Caesar**

But the Populares had their champions as well. Back when Sulla was busy killing all the supporters of Marius, a young nephew of Marius was brought before him. His name was Julius Caesar. Sulla wanted to kill Caesar, but people said, "He is just a boy! He can't do any harm." Sulla agreed to spare Caesar's life but warned that he saw the spirit of Marius and his followers within the young boy.

Like Pompey, Caesar also became an important general. He led his armies up into Gaul (modern-day France) and spent many years conquering this vast land. Gaul was thickly forested and inhabited by fierce, wild barbarians. But they were no match for Caesar's armies. By 50 B.C., Caesar had conquered all of Gaul and even invaded Britain.

When Caesar returned home, he was a military hero, and he celebrated his own triumph. He also wrote a popular book about his conquests. Caesar was well liked by the plebeians and the common people especially. He built Rome a new harbor, improved public buildings, and even gave money to the people. Caesar also offered the poorer class free land in Rome's newly conquered territories

overseas. All this made Caesar extremely well liked, and with popularity came power.

Do you know where this is going? If you guessed that one day Caesar and Pompey would go to war, you are right! In 49 b.c., Caesar gathered his armies together by the Rubicon River in northern Italy and marched on Rome. The two generals battled for four long years. But Caesar was more cunning than Pompey and eventually drove him out of Italy.

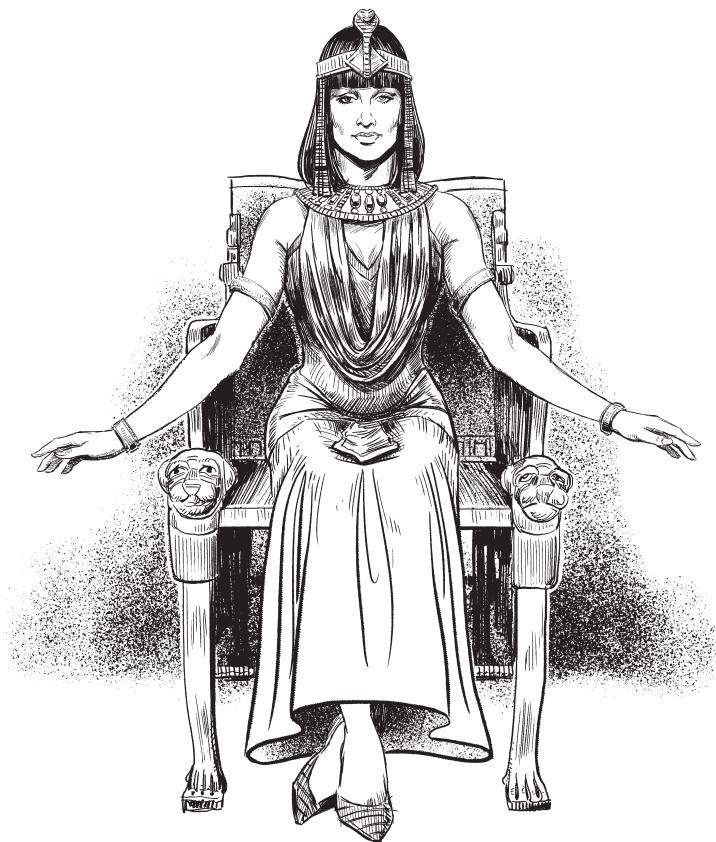
Pompey sailed to Egypt, to Alexandria, where he had allies. The ruler of Egypt was Ptolemy XIII. The Ptolemies had always been friendly to Rome and Pompey hoped Ptolemy XIII would help him. But Ptolemy was afraid of Caesar and wanted to please him. As soon as Pompey stepped off the boat in Alexandria, the servants of Ptolemy stabbed him to death.

Julius Caesar followed Pompey to Alexandria, but when he arrived, he learned of Pompey's death. Even though Pompey was his enemy, Caesar had him buried with respect and allowed a statue to be built in Pompey's honor. Julius Caesar was now the most powerful man in the Roman Empire.

While in Alexandria, Caesar fell in love with King Ptolemy XIII's sister, Cleopatra. This was a wicked thing, since both Cleopatra and Caesar were already married to other people. But Caesar cared more about power than anything else.

Cleopatra wanted to rule Egypt alone and knew she could get Caesar to help her. Together with Caesar, they overthrew King Ptolemy XIII and killed him. Cleopatra became the sole ruler as queen of Egypt.

From Egypt, Caesar went on to defeat the last of Pompey's supporters in Spain and Africa. He returned to Rome with his triumphant armies in 45 b.c. All the



senators were afraid. They remembered the wars of Marius and Sulla and thought Caesar would start killing his enemies.

But to their surprise, Caesar pardoned everybody who had supported Pompey. Caesar wanted the war between the Optimates and the Populares to end. He knew the killing had to stop. Many of the men he pardoned were so impressed by his generosity that they became his friends. Others, however, still mistrusted Caesar, even after being spared by him.

In 44 b.c., Caesar had appointed himself dictator for life. Caesar intended to reform the Roman government to make it better, and he needed the power of a dictator to do it. The Roman republic was founded when Rome was only a small city. Now it ruled the world. Caesar wanted to update Rome's laws and customs to make it better able to govern its new territories. He appointed many important men to help him in this work. Caesar's most trusted friend was Marc Antony, but he would soon find that not all his friends were as loyal as him.

### **Caesar's Murder**

Things seemed to be going well for Caesar, and the future looked promising. But there was discontent. Many of the senators, especially those sympathetic to the Optimates, hated Caesar. They suspected that he would make himself king, though he was already king in all but title. Some of the senators hatched a plot to kill Julius Caesar. Let us pause for a moment to witness how this most famous murder took place:

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Tears welled up in Calpurnia's eyes. "Don't go, dear husband!" she pleaded to Caesar, grasping the hem of his toga. "I have had a terrible dream that something dreadful will happen to you today. Please stay home!"

"Nonsense, my sweet dove," the great Caesar said, patting his wife's hand.

"I will not let you go!" said Calpurnia.

Just then, Brutus, Caesar's friend and one of the Roman senators, walked up. "What's this, Caesar?" he asked laughing. "Allowing yourself to be swayed by a woman's dreams!"

"Of course not," chuckled Caesar. "Unhand me, wife!

The senators await my arrival." Caesar pulled himself away from his tearful wife and walked off toward the Senate house, chatting happily with Brutus and leaving Calpurnia heartbroken on her doorstep.

Caesar was led into the Senate chamber by Brutus and sat down upon his chair. One of the senators, Lucius Cimber, ran up to Caesar with a letter.

"Great Caesar!" he cried. "My brother has been exiled from Rome! Please allow him to return!"

Before Caesar could read the letter or consider the request, other senators crowded around him, asking him to grant Cimber's petition. Caesar was surprised at how passionately they cared about this matter. Cimber then reached out and yanked Caesar's shirt, pulling him up off his seat.

"Cimber! Where is this aggression coming from?"

But Cimber tugging on Caesar's shirt was just a distraction. Behind him, another senator, Publius Casca, drew forth a dagger and thrust it at Caesar. Other senators surged forward, also pulling daggers from their togas. Only too late did Caesar realize his danger.

The senators stabbed him many times. He tried to run but couldn't; he was too wounded. Caesar fell to the ground. More than sixty senators attacked him like beasts pouncing on their prey. One of them was Brutus, the man Caesar thought was his friend. When Caesar saw Brutus coming at him, he pulled his toga over his head. Brutus and the others stabbed Caesar again and again. In only seconds, the great Julius Caesar was dead.

"Rome is free!" the senators cried. They ran forth from the Senate chamber to tell the Roman people what they had done. Caesar's body, meanwhile, lay bloody and alone for some time. Only later would three slaves come and quietly carry it away.

Julius Caesar was killed in 44 B.C. His killers thought the people of Rome would be happy about his death. But they were very wrong. Caesar was extremely popular with the people. He had done many good things for them. Average Romans were enraged about Caesar's death.

### **After Caesar**

Who would lead Rome now? Who would carry on Caesar's legacy? Marc Antony, Caesar's friend, thought he should. But Caesar had left a *will* stating that his work should be carried on by his young nephew, Gaius Octavian. A will is something a person writes that explains how he wants his property and wealth to be handled after his death. Caesar's will left everything to Octavian.

This upset Marc Antony, but he and Octavian agreed to work together to avenge Caesar's death. They took Caesar's armies and pursued the senators who had killed their leader, chasing them all the way to Asia Minor. There the armies under Octavian and Antony fought a battle with the armies of Brutus and the other senators. The senators were ultimately defeated, and Brutus killed himself.

Caesar had been a very forgiving man and had pardoned his enemies. But Octavian and Antony were not so forgiving. They killed the men who had opposed Caesar—even those who begged for mercy. They wanted to get even for Caesar's death.

After their victory, Octavian and Antony agreed to share the empire between them. To seal the alliance, Antony married Octavian's sister, Octavia. Antony went off to rule the east, while Octavian stayed in Rome.

But Antony had never liked Octavian, and things turned sour very quickly. While in the east, he acted as

if he were the sole ruler of Rome and spoke poorly of Octavian to others. His behavior offended many of the Roman senators.

What made things worse was Cleopatra. Caesar had loved her and made her queen of Egypt. Antony fell in love with Cleopatra and lived with her in Alexandria. He divorced Octavian's sister and announced he was marrying Cleopatra. Octavian's sister was ashamed and heartbroken, but Octavian was furious. He began planning the destruction of Antony.

Meanwhile, Antony and Cleopatra ruled Egypt together. They made grand plans about the future. If Octavian were out of the way, Antony and Cleopatra could unite Rome and Egypt the way Alexander had united the Greeks and Persians. Perhaps the capital could be moved from Rome to Alexandria; there were so many possibilities!

But while Antony dallied his time away with Cleopatra, Octavian raised a navy and sailed to Egypt. Antony and Cleopatra gathered their men and ships and went out to fight Octavian. The two navies met at a bay called Actium outside Greece. At this battle, the navy of Antony and Cleopatra was destroyed. This was in 31 b.c.

Cleopatra and Antony fled back to Egypt with Octavian in pursuit. Antony killed himself when he realized they were finished. Cleopatra, however, thought that she could make Octavian fall in love with her, as she had done with Caesar and Antony. She dressed herself up pretty, put on makeup, and went out to meet Octavian.

But Octavian looked at her sternly and told her he was not interested in her affections. She was to come to Rome as his prisoner. Then he sent her away to be guarded until they returned to Rome. He told her that Egypt was now

a Roman province and that the reign of the Ptolemies was over.

Cleopatra would not allow herself to be so humiliated. According to legend, one of her maids brought her a cobra hidden in a basket. Cleopatra let the cobra bite her and died from the poison.

### **Augustus Caesar**

The civil wars were over. The fighting that had begun with Tiberius Gracchus more than a hundred years earlier had finally exhausted itself. There was nobody left to contend with except Octavian.

When Octavian returned to Rome, the Senate offered him the titles *Princeps* (“First Citizen”) and *Augustus* (“Revered One”). Octavian accepted these titles happily, and from 27 b.c. on, he was known as Augustus Caesar. He governed the Roman Empire with the Senate, but Augustus made all the important decisions. He would reign for forty-eight years, mostly in peace.

The Senate declared Augustus’s murdered uncle Julius Caesar to be a god. Augustus referred to himself as the “son of god” and allowed his subjects to worship him. Augustus, of course, was not really divine or the son of god. But in the next chapter, we shall see how something happened during the reign of Augustus that the Romans did not expect: the appearance of the real Son of God on the earth.



## CHAPTER 28

# The Coming of Christ

### **The World Thus Far**

What does it mean to live a good life? What is happiness? Where did the world come from? And what happens when we die?

By the time of Augustus, men had been pondering these questions for thousands of years. As we have seen in the case of Sulla, the Romans thought happiness consisted of attaining wealth and power. Many of the kings of Persia, Babylon, and the other kingdoms thought the same.

As to the origin of the world, the purpose of life, and what happens when we die, the nations all had only the faintest ideas: The Babylonians thought the world was fashioned from the body of a sea monster; the Egyptians thought it was created from a gigantic flood; the Greeks, Persians, and others all had their own stories. Some, like the Egyptians, thought men could live forever

if their bodies were preserved in elaborate tombs. Others, like the Greeks, thought the souls of dead men departed to a shadowy underworld forever.

The fact was that nobody knew because God had not yet revealed Himself to men except in the tiny little kingdom of Israel, where God chose to make Himself known through Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. Yet still, God remained mysterious. The Israelites knew there was only one God and that He was all powerful, but much about Him remained unknown.

But the great empires, like Persia and Rome, paid no attention to the God of tiny Israel. Their goal was to conquer land, enrich their own kingdoms, and wield as much power as possible. The civilizations before Christ had come a long way and done some marvelous things, but in the end, each kingdom was sustained by war and conquest. No doubt, by now, you have noticed our history so far is one long string of kings, conquerors, and battles.

God was not pleased with this. And He was not pleased that men lived in ignorance of Him and His laws. Therefore, when the time was right and Augustus had put an end to all the warfare in the Roman Empire, God came down to make Himself known to men.

### **The Incarnation**

In the little territory of Judea, in the thirty-first year of the reign of Augustus Caesar, a Jewish woman and her husband came into the city of Bethlehem, tired after a very long journey. They had come from Nazareth, obeying the orders from Augustus to return to the place of their ancestors so that a census could be conducted.

The woman, Mary, was ready to give birth, and Joseph, her husband, struggled to find a safe place for his wife to rest. He had to settle on a small cave where shepherds

kept their animals. He gently led Mary in and laid her down on the straw. There she gave birth to her son, whom they would name Jesus.

Jesus was no ordinary man, and Mary was no ordinary mother. You see, Jesus was God as well as man, and Mary was a virgin. In Jesus, God became flesh when the Holy Spirit had descended upon Mary nine months earlier. Jesus came down from heaven and became a person, just like you and I, but without ceasing to be God. The act of God becoming man is called the *Incarnation*. Incarnation comes from two Latin words that mean “to become flesh.”

The Incarnation was the most important event that ever occurred in the history of the world. It is the only time God has ever visited earth in the flesh to speak to man. People today all over the world measure their time from the Incarnation. The years before the Incarnation are called “B.C.” (“Before Christ”), and those years after Jesus’ birth are called “A.D.” (“Anno Domini,” Latin for “year of Our Lord”).

Have you noticed that the years up until this point in our story go backward? For example, Alexander the Great reigned from 336 to 323 B.C. The year 323 comes *after* 336, even though it is later than 336. That’s because before Christ, we count years backward. We are counting *down to* the Incarnation. After Christ, we count forward, counting the years *since* the Incarnation.

### **The Messiah**

Mary and Joseph were very special parents. Joseph was descended from the royal house of King David of Israel. He would be a good and just foster-father for Jesus. Mary was a pure maiden, born sinless by a special grace of God.



She would share in her Son's mission and suffering most intimately.

In chapter 8, we learned that the Israelite prophets were awaiting the coming of a Messiah who would save His people from their sins and usher in the Kingdom of God. Jesus is that Messiah. Because of this, He is called Jesus Christ. *Christ* is Greek for "Messiah." The Messiah is the Son of God.

Jesus grew up during the reign of Augustus and in many respects was like any other Jewish boy. He lived a silent, humble life, working as a carpenter with Joseph. But all those years, He was preparing Himself for the mission God had entrusted to Him.

## Jesus Begins His Ministry

When Jesus was thirty years old, He began preaching in Galilee, a Roman province in northern Palestine. But His preaching was not like that of the prophets. Jesus did not tell men to wait for the coming Messiah. He told them He *was* the Messiah and that the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Him.

This preaching upset the Jews. “How dare this man claim to be the Messiah!” they grumbled. But Jesus did not just preach; He acted! He healed the sick, cleansed lepers, cast out demons, and raised the dead. He did this by the divine power He possessed by His divine nature. These miracles made men stop and think twice.

“How can this man do these things?” they marveled.

Jesus called on twelve men to be His followers. He did not choose powerful warriors, learned scholars, or eloquent speakers. Instead, He chose humble fishermen, despised tax collectors, and other ordinary men. He wanted those who followed Him to be simple and modest so that they would learn to depend on God. These men were called His twelve *apostles*. The word “apostle” means “messenger” in Greek. These twelve men would carry the message of Jesus to the world.

Jesus traveled all over Palestine and Judea, preaching to the immense crowds of thousands who came to hear Him. All were deeply moved by His words.

Jesus told them that God was like a Father who cared for them. But when people commit evil, they separate themselves from the love of God. God then seeks after them, like a shepherd seeking a lost sheep.

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. My sheep hear My voice and follow Me.” He said He was the shepherd sent to lead mankind back to God.

Jesus also taught that the Kingdom of God would not

be built with violence and bloodshed, as the Romans had done. One day, He heard His apostles arguing over who would be the greatest in God's kingdom.

"I'll be the greatest!" said one. "No! I'm much greater than you!" argued another.

Jesus was upset at this silly dispute. He called them together and said, "You know, the kings of the nations lord it over their people. They rule with a heavy hand. But it shall not be so among you! With you, whoever would be great must be the lowest, and whoever would rule should serve. For I did not come to be served but to serve."

In this, Jesus taught that it was not pride and power but gentleness and humility that were pleasing to God. The Kingdom of God would be built not with legions of soldiers and great battles but with the spirit of service. "Blessed are the meek," He taught one day, standing atop a mount.

This was a very good teaching. But not everybody liked Jesus' words. When Jesus came to Jerusalem, He upset the priests of the Temple. One group called the Pharisees especially disliked Jesus. Jesus' teaching that He was the Messiah offended them. The Pharisees wanted to get rid of Him. They were always trying to trip Him up, like in this famous story from the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of Mark:

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Once the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus.

"How can we get Him in trouble?" they wondered and plotted. They talked among themselves until they hatched a plan that would pose a trick question to Jesus—one that would get Him into trouble no matter how He answered.

The Pharisees found Jesus sitting and teaching a crowd of people by the Temple.

“Tell us, good master,” they said to Him, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” The crowd fell silent and looked at Jesus, waiting for Him to answer.

This question was a trap. The Pharisees knew the Jews hated living under Roman oppression. If Jesus said yes, it would make Him look like a friend of the Romans and He would lose the support of the people. On the other hand, it was a crime under Roman law to tell people not to pay their taxes. So if Jesus said no, the Romans could charge Him with a crime and arrest Him. Either way, He would be in trouble.

But Jesus would not fall for that. He knew all things. He knew men’s hearts and knew what the Pharisees were trying to do.

“Give me a coin,” Jesus said. A man from the crowd rustled around in his pouch and produced a coin, giving it to Jesus.

“Tell me,” said Jesus, “whose picture and inscription are here on this coin?”

“Caesar’s!” said all the people.

“Then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give God what belongs to God.” Then He returned the coin to the man. The Pharisees were silent. Jesus had evaded their trap.

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Jesus had taught something revolutionary here. In saying “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God,” Jesus taught that the political authority and the religious authority were separate. In all the other ancient kingdoms we have studied, religion and the government were very closely tied. Rulers were often priests of the state gods.

But Jesus said that the Kingdom of God was not of

this world. Certainly the religious authority and political authority could work together, and if Caesar ever tried to claim what was God's, God must be obeyed over the state. This made the Church that Jesus would found unique in that it would not be subject to an earthly prince or kingdom.

### The Crucifixion of Jesus

Although Jesus had gained many followers, the Pharisees wanted Him dead. They were threatened by Him and resented His teachings. When Jesus was in Jerusalem with His followers celebrating the Jewish feast of Passover, the Pharisees paid one of Jesus' followers, Judas, to betray Him.

The night Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and wine and gave it to His apostles and said, "Take and eat; this is My Body. Take a drink; this is My Blood." In doing this, Jesus was instituting the *Eucharist*. In the Eucharist, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. In receiving the Eucharist, Jesus nourishes His followers with His divine life. Whenever the Eucharist was celebrated, Jesus Himself would again become present to His people.

After this, Judas handed Jesus over to the Pharisees. They condemned Him to death because they believed He was teaching people to disobey the Law of Moses. They did not believe He was the Messiah and did not know He was the fulfillment of the Law of Moses.

But the Jews could not execute anybody. That was reserved for the Romans who governed Judea. The Pharisees handed Jesus over to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. They told Pilate that Jesus was a traitor and a danger to the Roman State. Pilate did not understand and would have let Jesus go, but the Pharisees demanded His

death, and Pilate feared an uprising from the angry mob who was shouting, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Finally, Pilate relented and ordered that Jesus be crucified.

Jesus was whipped and then made to carry His cross to a place outside Jerusalem called Golgotha, which means “place of the skull.” It was a hill that today is more commonly known as Calvary. On this hill, Jesus was crucified between two thieves. God had become man to teach men about God. But men did not want to hear; instead, they put Him to death. The traditional date of Jesus’ death is 33 A.D.

Jesus had done many wonderful things during His life.



He had multiplied food, walked on water, healed the sick, and even raised the dead. But His death on the Cross was the most important thing He ever did. “For this purpose, I was born,” He said to His apostles shortly before going to His death. Why is this?

Jesus was God and man. By dying on the Cross, He paid the penalty for all the sins of the world. He opened the way for mankind to again hear from God and become God’s children. And to make sure God’s voice would always be heard on the earth, He founded His Church and established the Apostle Peter as its head on earth.

It was a sad Friday afternoon when Jesus’ dead body was taken off the Cross. His mother Mary wept at His feet, as did the Apostle John. Such good He had done! Such promise He had! But now He was cold and lifeless. The family and friends of Jesus carried His body off, quickly sealed Him up in a stone tomb nearby, and then went home tearfully.

Fortunately, that was not the end of the story.

## CHAPTER 29

### Fishers of Men

#### The Resurrection

Jesus Christ was dead and in His tomb. But something was about to happen that would change the history of the entire world:

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“Marcus, come quickly!”

“What is it, Quintus?” Marcus said, puffing as he ran up the hill to his fellow soldier.

“The tomb is empty!” Quintus exclaimed.

Marcus stared blankly. Quintus was right. The stone had been rolled away from the tomb. The body of Jesus Christ was gone.

“His followers must have come and stolen it in the night!” Quintus offered.

“Impossible! We were here the whole time.”

“You must have fallen asleep on your watch!”

“Oh! Now it’s my fault? Come to think of it, I believe *you* were asleep!”

Two more guards came running up. “Marcus! Quintus! You will not believe what we have just seen!”

“Ah, here are Gaius and Piso,” said Quintus. “Maybe they can shed some light on this.”

“Perhaps you two were the ones who fell asleep and let them steal the body?” Marcus asked angrily.

“Listen!” demanded Piso. “We were standing guard at the tomb on the third watch, as commanded. Then shortly before dawn—”

“We saw an angel!” Gaius broke in. “An angel in white, shimmering like the sun, came down and rolled away the stone. The body was gone. We could not believe our eyes!”

“Yes, and we couldn’t do a thing!” Piso continued. “We just stood there like dead men. I . . . I believe we even lost consciousness for a moment.”

“An angel?” Marcus asked skeptically. Quintus was skeptical too, but he could see that both men were shaken. They had clearly seen *something* out of the ordinary.

“Well, I still say you both were sleeping!” Marcus snorted.

“Listen!” Gaius said angrily. “I’ve fought for the empire on three continents. I’ve been a soldier my whole life. I am not easily frightened. But I tell you, I’ve never seen anything like this. An angel came down, rolled away the stone, and the body was gone. That’s all there is to it!”

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The Roman guards might have gone on like this for some time, trying to figure out where the body of Christ went and how it had vanished. The guards assigned to watch the tomb of Jesus did not know, but some humble women did.

On the third day after Jesus' crucifixion, Mary Magdalene and some of the women who followed Jesus came to His tomb to anoint His body with spices. They found the tomb just as Marcus and Quintus had. But they also saw angels sitting around the tomb who told them Jesus had risen from the dead. They ran off in excitement to tell the apostles.

But on the way back, they encountered Jesus Himself, risen from the dead and glorified! He told them that He would meet the apostles in Galilee.

After appearing to His apostles many times to prove He was truly risen, Jesus Christ led His followers to the Mount of Olives, where He ascended into heaven. But before returning to His Father, He said to His apostles, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Then He told them to wait in Jerusalem until the giving of the Holy Spirit.

### Pentecost

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact of history. It occurred at a specific time and place and was witnessed by many people. The appearances of Jesus to His followers proved to them that He truly was the Son of God. He told them to go take this news to all the nations. From that moment on, all peoples, not just Jews, would be called to become God's children. How did God empower His children? It happened like this:

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The apostles went to Jerusalem to pray. Nine days after Jesus rose into heaven, while the apostles and the Virgin Mary were gathered in the room where Jesus had shared

the Last Supper, a great wind suddenly flooded the building. The apostles were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.

At that time, Jerusalem was filled with Jews from all over the Roman world. They were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast of Pentecost. They heard the apostles telling of the glory of God, each in his own language.

“How is it that we each understand these men in our own language?” they marveled. Others thought the apostles were drunk.

St. Peter stood up and explained that they were not drunk. The Lord Jesus, who was crucified and risen, had sent the Spirit to give the Church the power to preach in His name.

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of your sins!” Peter told the Jews.

Many Jews were moved by Peter’s sermon. The Bible tells us that about three thousand people were baptized that day! This was the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles.

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## The Church

St. Peter was the head of the apostles. Jesus had said to him, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I shall build My Church. And the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.” In saying this, Jesus taught that Peter was the head of the Church on earth and that the powers of darkness would never overcome the Church of Christ. To this day, the Church of Christ remains united under the leadership of Peter’s successor, the bishop of Rome, also called the *pope*.

From Jerusalem, the apostles and early believers spread



out to carry the message of Jesus to new lands. Soon, the believers were called “Christians,” which means “Christ-like.” Each Christian is meant to be like Jesus by sharing His love and message. Some of the first apostles had been fishermen, but each Christian is called to be a fisher of men, catching souls for the Kingdom of God.

Where did the apostles go? All over! For example, St. Peter preached in Antioch and then went on to found a church in Rome. St. Andrew went to Greece. St. Thomas traveled to the Greek colonies in India that were left over from the days of Alexander the Great. St. John went to Asia Minor. Everywhere the apostles went, they founded little communities of Christians. These Christians were baptized, kept the Lord’s teaching, celebrated the Mass, and preached the Gospel to others. The number of Christians grew and grew.

### **St. Paul**

One of the most important of the apostles was St. Paul, but he was not one of the first twelve; in fact, in the beginning, he hated Christians and tried to kill them. But one day, the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Shining amid a blaze of light, Jesus told Paul that he was to take the Gospel to the nations and their kings.

At first, the apostles did not trust Paul; they knew him only as a persecutor of Christians. But when he told them how the Lord appeared to him and how he had even been beaten for his belief in Jesus, they accepted him. While the other apostles preached mainly among Jews, Paul preached to the non-Jews. He traveled all over the Roman Empire, from Jerusalem to Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, Italy, Malta, and even as far away as Spain.

## CHAPTER 29—FISHERS OF MEN



Everywhere he went, men and women listened to the Gospel eagerly and became Christians.

But not everybody was happy with this. Some thought that Christians also had to keep all the Laws of Moses. St. Paul said this was not true. He said that Jesus Christ had created a new people—neither Jew nor Greek nor Roman but Christian. There was a bitter argument about this.

### Calling All Peoples

Eventually, around 50 A.D., the apostles all gathered together in a council in Jerusalem to discuss this. After hearing from all sides, St. Peter said that Christians did not need to keep the Laws of Moses. He and the other apostles taught that Jesus had freed men from these obligations. That is why, to this day, Christians do not observe the dietary or ritual laws of the Old Testament.

This was a very important decision. Until the coming of Christ, every person on this earth identified themselves by what kingdom he belonged to: Egypt

for the Egyptians, Babylon for the Babylonians, Greece for the Greeks, Rome for the Romans, and so on. A person's highest loyalty was to his kingdom. The Romans could think of no greater service than service to the state; similarly, the Greeks had taught that loyalty to one's city was the highest form of service a man could offer.

Jesus changed all that. The Church He created was not identified with any one nation. It was made up of men and women called from many nations—a whole family of believers. After the Council of Jerusalem, it became clear that even though the Church began with Jews (Jesus, Mary, and all the apostles were Jews), it would not remain so. Jesus called *all people* to His Church, and the call of God was higher and bigger than that of any one nation. It would become a large family made up of all sorts of people.

This is why the Church was soon called *Catholic*. The word "Catholic" means "universal." The Church is Catholic because all people are called to join themselves to it. A person follows Jesus by entering the family of God, the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is the Church that is united to Peter and his successors.

### The Early Church and Her Martyrs

Eventually the apostles and the whole first generation of Christians died. Sometimes they died violently. Most of the apostles were *martyrs*. A martyr is someone who dies for the sake of a belief, and these martyrs died for Jesus. Why were early Christians dying for Jesus?

The Romans mistrusted the Christians because they refused to worship the gods of Rome. They only worshiped one God. The early Christians thought the gods of Rome were demons. The Romans, who were very superstitious, thought their gods would be angry if they

permitted this. So the Roman authorities often arrested Christians and killed them if they refused to worship the gods of Rome.

Martyrs were looked up to. By giving up their lives for the truth, they imitated the Lord Jesus. Christians always remembered the martyrs and honored their memory by celebrating Mass at their tombs every year on the anniversaries of their deaths.

What was it like living as a Christian in the early Church? There were no church buildings. Wealthy Christians often converted their houses into places of worship; Mass was said in these house-churches.

Christianity spread fastest in the cities. The Church in each city was governed by a *bishop*. A bishop is the chief pastor of a particular church and the successor of the apostles. Unlike today, most Christians would have known their bishop personally.

The bishop would sometimes ordain other men to help him in his ministry. These men were called presbyters, or *priests*. *Deacons* were also ordained for the purpose of distributing money to the poor and helping sick members of the church.

Christians formed tight-knit little communities in each city. Everybody knew one another, and everyone was careful to not let outsiders know too much, lest the Roman authorities find out they were Christians and arrest them. It was a faith that spread in secret.

By 100 A.D., around the time the last apostle died, most cities throughout the Roman Empire had Christian churches in them. The Catholic Church was governed by bishops in each city, all in union with the successor of Peter in Rome. The churches were small, and most kept to themselves, but they were slowly growing. Even

occasional persecutions did not halt their growth; in fact, persecution often led to more people converting.

In this chapter, we have studied the life of the early Christian Church. In the next chapter, we shall see what life was like for the average Roman living during the reign of Augustus and his successors.

## CHAPTER 30

### Life Under the Julio-Claudians

#### The First Roman Emperor

After defeating Marc Antony and Cleopatra and restoring peace to Rome, the Senate gave Octavian the titles *Princeps* and *Augustus*, as we discussed in chapter 27. They gave him other titles too, such as *Pater Patriae* (“Father of the County”) and *Divi Filius* (“Son of God”). But his most important title was *Imperator*, meaning “He who holds power.” It is where we get the English word “emperor.” Augustus Caesar was the first Roman emperor.

Augustus tried to act humble. He dressed like any other Roman senator and did not demand special treatment from the people. But in reality, Augustus held all the power. He personally controlled most of Rome’s armies. He also controlled some of the most important provinces directly and had control over vast sums of personal and public money. The offices of the republic still existed, but

after Augustus, it would always be the emperors who ran things.

### The Julio-Claudians

Augustus married a woman named Livia from the important Claudian family. The family of Augustus and Livia were known as the Julio-Claudians. The Julio-Claudians ruled Rome from 31 B.C. to 68 A.D.

Augustus had a long and prosperous reign, proving to be a good and competent ruler. He restored peace to the Roman world and built so many grand buildings throughout Rome that he boasted, “I found Rome a city of brick; I left it a city of marble.” Augustus finally died in 17 A.D. after a reign of forty-eight years.

Unfortunately, Augustus’s family was not so great. His successor and step-son, Tiberius Caesar, was a cruel man who spent most of his reign away from Rome. Tiberius made it a crime to speak badly about the Roman emperor. Many senators and Roman citizens were killed by Tiberius. It was also during the reign of Tiberius Caesar that Jesus Christ was crucified.

The people of Rome rejoiced when Tiberius died in 37 A.D. But those who followed were not much better. Tiberius’s grandnephew, Caligula, who reigned from 37 to 41 A.D., was actually insane. He once ordered an entire Roman army to go to the beach and made them pick up seashells. He even tried to get his favorite horse appointed consul! Caligula also wanted a statue of himself erected in the Jerusalem Temple for divine worship. To no one’s surprise, he would not rule for long. Caligula was killed by one of his guards after only four years as emperor.

Caligula’s uncle, Claudius, became the next emperor. Claudius reigned from 41 to 54 A.D. Claudius did not even want to be emperor at first. He was a quiet, studious

man who did not like politics. After Caligula was killed, some guards found Claudius cowering behind a curtain in the imperial palace! But they proclaimed him emperor, and that was that.

Claudius was not a terrible emperor. He ruled justly and conquered Britain for Rome. But he did not have such good luck with wives. He went through four of them. One of his wives was an alleged murderer, while another plotted to overthrow him and was executed. Claudius's final wife, Agrippina, actually succeeded in killing Claudius by feeding him poisoned mushrooms. Agrippina killed him in order to give the throne to her own son, Nero, from a prior marriage. To do this, she also killed Claudius's natural son, Britannicus.

### Nero

Nero Caesar was only seventeen years old when he became ruler of the Roman Empire. Maybe all that power went to his head; like Caligula, he was partially mad—and also very cruel. He killed many members of his family, including his mother and wife!

There are many stories about Nero. He believed he was an excellent poet and used to force people to listen to him sing for hours. According to legend, his singing was so bad that people used to pretend they were dead in order to get carried out of his concerts!

Nero also persecuted Christians. In 64 A.D., a great fire broke out in Rome. Nero blamed the Christians for the fire. He had many arrested and crucified or thrown to wild beasts. According to tradition, both St. Peter and St. Paul were killed in this persecution. Peter was crucified upside down, and Paul was beheaded.

Under Nero, Rome lost several battles on its frontiers. The Roman legions grew restless, and the Roman people



groaned under his oppression. In 68 A.D., a Roman general from Spain named Galba revolted and marched on Rome. Nero's guards and supporters deserted him. Nero fled to a stable outside Rome, where he killed himself. The Julio-Claudian line ended with the death of Nero.

### A Day in the Life

What was life like in the Roman Empire during the ninety-nine years of Julio-Claudian rule? Let us examine this question through the eyes of Pomponia, a well-to-do

Roman girl living during the reign of Claudius who is spending time on her family's *villa*, or country farm:

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Nineteen-year-old Pomponia reclines upon her couch beneath the stately columns of the balcony. The balcony is part of her family's large villa in the city of Ostia, a resort town on Italy's western coast. Many of Rome's rich spend their summers here to get away from the bustle of the capital. Her family, the Pomponii, has owned this villa and several nearby fields for over a generation.

"I love our summers in Ostia!" she says, gazing out at the deep blue sea to the west. "So peaceful and calm! Lydia!" she says clapping. "Attend to me!"

A slender slave girl emerges from the door of the villa with a tray of brushes and combs. She sits down on a stool behind Pomponia and begins working with her hair.

Lydia is one of the many slaves who attend to Pomponia's family. Lydia is Pomponia's personal slave, following her wherever she goes. The slaves of the Ostia villa, however, stay here year-round and work the fields of the Pomponii. Slaves are the property of their masters. If they do not obey their masters, they can be punished or even killed.

"Ah, that sea breeze feels good," Pomponia says to Lydia, who gently brushes her mistress's hair. "I can't imagine what it's like in Rome right now."

Rome is miserable in the summer. The stench of animals and garbage in the streets, as well as the smell of tens of thousands of sweaty people milling about or crowded in the circus for the shows, is overpowering.

"Eww," Pomponia shuddered to herself.

And the heat! That's why Pomponia and her family spend their summers in Ostia. The common people, of

course, cannot retreat to places like Ostia. They live in small, brick apartments called *insulae*. The *insulae* become terribly hot in the summer, like brick ovens.

Pomponia's summer at Ostia is meant for relaxation, but that does not mean it is dull. A stream of visitors constantly comes to see her father, Gaius Pomponius.

"He's an important man—a magistrate!" Pomponia says to Lydia. "His clients need his help."

Most people in Roman society were either *clients* or *patrons*. Patrons were important men like Pomponia's father. They had money, power, and influence in society. Clients, like those coming to Pomponia's villa throughout the summer, were less well-off people who needed the help of their patrons. Patrons and clients assisted one another; patrons helped their clients with their difficulties, and clients often ran errands for their patrons.

After some time, another servant comes and summons Pomponia to the afternoon sacrifices.

"Come, Lydia!" Pomponia commands, getting up and heading into the house. "I shall need your attendance at supper, and then you may retire for the evening." Lydia nods and silently glides after her mistress as they enter the villa.

Pomponia and Lydia enter a small room inside the villa. Gathered also are Pomponia's father, mother, and other members of the family, as well as the chief slaves. At a niche in the wall is a crude statue of Jupiter as well as a small human head made out of clay. The head represents the Manes, the spirits of dead family members. Another female figure represents Vesta, goddess of the home. A few tiny wooden figurines stand between these larger statues. These are the Lares, spirit guardians of the property of the Pomponii.

Speaking by the light of a flickering candle, Gaius

Pomponius recites by memory a series of prayers to the gods represented by the statues. At the name of each god, he tips a bit of wine from a large chalice onto the ground. This spilled wine is a sacrifice.

After this, he picks up some incense from a nearby tray and throws it onto a censer of coals. The smoke of the incense fills the room.

“May the genius of the divine Emperor Claudius protect the lands of sacred Rome! Continued health and prosperity to the divine Claudius!”

The rest of the room echoes the refrain, “To the divine Claudius!”

After the sacrifice, the large family moves on to the dining room, known as the *triclinium*. Pomponia does not sit in a chair to eat. Rather, she and her family recline at couches set up around a long table. Slaves bring the hot dishes of food out to the family. Lydia too carries trays of food. The slaves eat when the family finishes its supper.

“Yum! Snails and roast pheasant!” Pomponia exclaims.

“With asparagus, cheese, and your favorite spiced fish sauce,” her father says lovingly, patting Pomponia on the shoulder.

Pomponia licks her lips and prepares to feast. “I love Ostia!”

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As you can see, Roman society was a mixture of various classes of people living together with different roles and obligations. As long as there was peace, people got on fairly well together. In the next chapter, we will see how, after the end of the Julio-Claudians, Rome enjoyed a great period of peace and prosperity that lasted more than a hundred years.



## CHAPTER 31

### Five “Good” Emperors

#### Vespasian and His Sons

What makes a good ruler? Can a ruler be good in some ways and bad in others? In this chapter, we will have a chance to answer these questions as we learn about the fate of Rome after the fall of the Julio-Claudian family.

After Nero’s death, the empire fell into chaos. Four different men claimed the imperial throne in a single year, beginning with Galba, the man who revolted against Nero. After the year was over, a new man had taken power; his name was Vespasian, and he was from the Flavian family. Vespasian and his sons would rule Rome from 69 to 96 A.D.

Vespasian was a general. He was well liked by the army and was a kindhearted man. He restored dignity to the imperial office and did not do any of the bad things Nero, Caligula, or Tiberius had done. He built the people of Rome a giant amphitheater called the *Colosseum*. The Colosseum was used for racing and gladiatorial fights; it

could also be flooded to stage pretend ship battles. The Colosseum is still standing today in Rome, though many portions of it have crumbled away.

As soon as he took power, Vespasian had to deal with a revolt in Judea. The Jews were sick of Roman rule. They had been under Roman control for more than a hundred years. All across Judea, Jews took up arms. They hoped to win their independence like they had in the days of the Maccabees. The Jews fortified Jerusalem and prepared for war with the Roman legions.

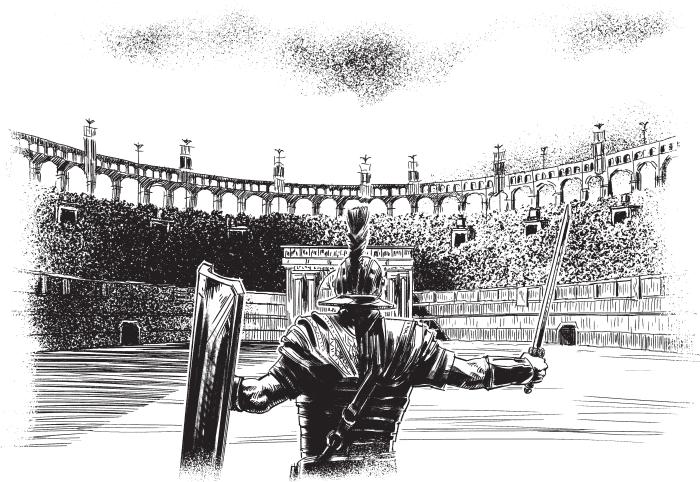
Vespasian sent his son, Titus, to Judea with the Roman legions. Titus laid waste to the countryside and then surrounded Jerusalem. For seven months, Titus and the Roman legions built ramps and scaffolds to get into the city. Finally, in August of 70 A.D., the Roman legions broke through the walls and conquered Jerusalem. The fighting was very fierce. The Romans burned down the Temple of Jerusalem. Almost one hundred thousand Jews were carried off into slavery.

Though Vespasian ruled well for ten years, the people were not as happy with his son, Domitian. In 96 A.D., Domitian was killed and Rome was again without an emperor. Who would rule the mighty Roman Empire?

### The Five Good Emperors

The Senate came together and did something that had never been done before: selected one of their own to be the emperor—a senator named Nerva. But Nerva was old, childless, and soon grew sick. If he died without an heir, the empire might again fall into chaos.

Nerva did not want this. He chose a Spanish general named Trajan to be his successor. He adopted him as his son in 97 A.D. before dying the next year, leaving the throne to Trajan.



With Nerva began the reigns of those who are called the “five good emperors.” The five good emperors were Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. None of them were related to each other. As Nerva had adopted Trajan, each one adopted his successor. They reigned from 98 to 180 A.D.

Why are they called “good emperors”? Under these rulers, Rome conquered even more territory and expanded its power further. Trajan, a popular general and mighty warrior, conquered parts of Mesopotamia and what is now Romania. Hadrian pushed his conquests farther into Britain. He built a magnificent wall in northern England that separated Roman Britain from the barbarian north. This wall is still standing today.

They were also called “good” because they were good at governing. Rather than satisfy their own pleasures or rob the people, they worked tirelessly to make the Roman Empire a better place to live. They cared very much about law and justice, and thus, there was peace for a long time.

Antoninus Pius, who ruled from 138 to 161 A.D., had such a peaceful reign that hardly anything was recorded while he was emperor. One of the few things we do know about his reign was that the Romans celebrated the nine-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the city of Rome. What a marvelous party that was! It lasted many days and featured a spectacle in the Colosseum, with thousands of exotic animals and gladiators all fighting.

Marcus Aurelius spent his long reign fortifying the borders between Rome and Germany to the north. Rome's northern borders were the long, winding Rhine River in Gaul and the Danube River in Germany. On the other side of these rivers were thousands of hostile German barbarians.

For the Romans, a *barbarian* was someone from outside the Roman Empire who did not have Roman culture. In the time of the five good emperors, these barbarians were constantly trying to invade Rome. Marcus Aurelius fought them tirelessly and built many fortresses along Rome's frontiers.

### **Christian Persecution**

The five good emperors gave Rome the longest period of stability and peace the empire had ever known. But despite their name, from the Christian point of view, they were not all "good."

For example, it was Trajan who first advised Roman governors to arrest Christians and have them put to death. In fact, in 108 A.D., during the reign of Trajan, the following scene unfolded in Syria:

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"The emperor has returned!" the joyous crowds shouted.  
People of every rank and age thronged through the



streets of Antioch, hoping to catch a glimpse of the great Trajan. He had just returned from his victorious conquests on the frontiers and had chosen Antioch as the place to celebrate his victory.

"There he is!" cried some boys. "It's Trajan!"

The emperor and his soldiers came parading down the main thoroughfare. There stood Trajan, tall and mighty in his golden chariot, followed by his victorious legions marching on foot.

The emperor's procession stopped in the main square of the central plaza of Antioch. Stepping forth from his chariot, the armor-clad emperor climbed the steps of the massive Temple of Apollo. This temple was built almost four hundred years ago by Seleucus, the general of Alexander the Great. Trajan raised his mighty hand, and the crowd quieted down.

"My fellow citizens and people of Antioch!" he began in a deep, booming voice.

"The gods of Rome have granted me victory over the Scythians, Dacians, and barbarians of the north. Wealth and slaves pour into Rome. The vast lands of the Dacians are ours!"

The crowd erupted in frenzied cheers.

Trajan again raised his hand for silence. "To commemorate this great victory, I order that all subjects of the empire offer sacrifice to the gods of Rome in honor of this triumph!"

The people cheered again.

"But your imperial highness," a magistrate from Antioch said, coming forward, "there are those among us who would deny the worship of Rome's gods! By their refusal to sacrifice, they bring the anger of the gods upon us!"

"Who are those who would dare to do such a thing?"

"They call themselves 'Christians'! They refuse the worship of our gods and pray to one known as Jesus, a carpenter crucified during the time of Tiberius."

Trajan frowned. "Let it be known that if these Christians refuse to sacrifice, they will be put to death!"

The crowd cheered in approval of his decree. Moments later, a scuffle erupted in the crowd.

"What's that?" Trajan asked. A man was shoved forward and thrown at Trajan's feet. The man was old, with a grey beard and a white tuft of hair upon his head.

"This is their leader!" said the magistrate pointing excitedly. "Ignatius! He is the chief of the Christians here."

"Is it true that you will not worship the gods of Rome to commemorate my victory?" asked Trajan, scowling down at the old man.

"You have spoken rightly," replied old Ignatius, rising to his feet. "We know only one God, the Lord Jesus. It is He who is above every kingdom and power."

"Even my kingdom?" Trajan snorted. "And what of Rome's gods?"

"The gods of Rome are demons, your highness," answered Ignatius calmly. "Turn from their empty worship to the worship of the true God, He who died and rose again."

The magistrate covered his mouth in shock at hearing this. Trajan's face turned red. "Arrest this old buzzard!"

The guards came forward and grabbed Ignatius.

"Shall we kill him?" asked the guards.

"Not yet," Trajan responded, grinning. "Have him shipped back to Rome. We'll toss him to the beasts when I return for my triumphal celebration in a few months."

Ignatius, hands clenched in prayer, was bound and shuffled off to be shipped to Rome.

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This was none other than the famous St. Ignatius of Antioch, a bishop and man who had once known St. Peter. He was sent by ship to Rome, where he was eventually

fed to wild beasts. But St. Ignatius met his death with faith and courage.

"I am the wheat of God," he wrote while awaiting his execution. "I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found to be the pure bread of Christ."

This sort of thing happened under the reign of Hadrian as well as Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. All of them persecuted Christians.

So we can see that sometimes whether or not a ruler is "good" depends on who is writing the story of history. From the point of view of pagan Rome, these men were good and upright rulers. But from the point of view of God and His Church, they were persecutors and opponents of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. They opposed the Kingdom of God because they were jealous for their own kingdom and their own power.

Marcus Aurelius, the last of the five good emperors, died in 180 A.D. He left the empire to his son, Commodus. Commodus fouled up everything that his predecessors had built. By the time Commodus died in 192 A.D., the empire was again in a state of chaos. And there was even more to come.

In our next chapter, we shall see how the stability and prosperity built patiently by the five good emperors was destroyed in a century of violence and disorder that almost brought the Roman Empire to an end.

## CHAPTER 32

# Collapse

### The Horrid Fate of Roman Emperors

In our previous chapter, we learned how after the death of Marcus Aurelius, things began to go badly for the Roman Empire. Various emperors came and went, some with better luck than others. One emperor, Septimius Severus, reigned for eighteen years and reformed the Roman military. Others, such as Caracalla, were tyrants and were eventually killed.

It was becoming more and more important for an emperor to have the support of the army. A general could be proclaimed emperor by his enthusiastic troops, or a reigning emperor could be killed by his troops if they lost confidence in him. The army made and unmade emperors.

This meant it was dangerous to be the Roman emperor during this time. From 235 to 285 A.D., Rome had around fifty emperors. The average reign of these emperors was six months; almost all of them died violently,

either killed by rivals or murdered by the Roman army when the soldiers got sick of them.

### **Barbarian Invasions**

With the emperors and the Roman legions fighting each other, it became very difficult to defend the empire. Hordes of German barbarians began flooding across Rome's borders. The barbarians also came from the east, from Asia, wanting Roman lands to live on.

What was a barbarian invasion like? Let us visit a small farm of colonists on the Roman frontiers to get a better idea:

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“Ludovicus, what’s that noise?” Martialis calls out to his older brother. A deep, spooky thudding seems to be coming from the forest on the far end of the family’s farm.

“I don’t know,” Ludovicus says warily, scanning the trees with his eyes. Martialis huddles close to his big brother. Ludovicus is sixteen years old; Martialis is twelve. The boys and their father, Verus, are peasant farmers on the frontiers of Pannonia, a Roman province on the banks of the Danube River in Eastern Europe.

It is spring of 268 A.D. All month, their father has been hearing rumors of Gothic warriors roaming the countryside, pillaging towns and villages. Verus has tried to hide this troubling information from the boys, but Ludovicus has heard bits and pieces of the news. He senses something is wrong.

The boys listen intently. Their father runs from a nearby barn.

“Father!” calls Martialis. “What is it?” The thudding happens again, this time louder and closer. “It sounds like drums!”



“It’s not drums,” their father says grimly. “It’s feet—the stomping of thousands and thousands of feet!”

“Goths?” Ludovicus asks.

“Who knows? There are so many armies tramping around the empire these days that one can never be sure.

Still, we'd better play it safe. Ludovicus, fetch the horses from the barn, and get them to cover on the mountain-side. They are the most valuable thing we have. Martialus, go with your brother. I'm going to grab a few things from the house. Meet me on the slope in twenty minutes. Go!"

The two boys run off to the large, stone barn. Verus saunters off to the house. He quickly stuffs some dried fruit and salted pork into a sack. He grabs a few cloaks and then rummages around in the straw of his sleeping cot. He pulls out a small pouch containing a handful of gold coins. This tiny pouch of gold is all the money Verus has. He stuffs it into his trouser pocket.

Verus comes crashing out the back door of his cottage and tears off across his field toward the mountain looming to the south. He can see Ludovicus and Martialus some ways ahead with the horses.

"Good," Verus says to himself. "They'll make it to the mountain soon."

Not a moment too soon, as it turns out. Just as Ludovicus and Martialus drag the horses into the brush on the mountainside, a massive throng of men comes surging out of the woods on the other end of the farm. These are certainly not the well-disciplined armies of Rome. These are Goths—thousands of them. Clad in animal skins and wearing long, wild beards, they pour out of the forest by the thousands. They wave axes and spears and are hungry for plunder.

A moment later, Verus comes plunging into the thicket on the mountainside.

"We barely made it," he pants.

"Father," says Ludovicus, "let us move some way up the mountain and take shelter in the caves and boulders. We're too exposed here."

"I agree," says Verus. "Let's move quickly."

“Papa, I’m scared!” says Martialus. The Goths have moved out into the fields and have sighted the family farm. Martialus sees them surging toward their home. He can hear their frightening battle cries.

“Up the slope quickly. Stay behind the rocks. Good, yes, hurry now,” Verus tells them. The two boys struggle up the rocky, bramble-covered slope, dragging the horses and trying to stay as hidden as they can.

Verus catches his breath and then begins the climb. He turns back to look out across his farm one last time. The cottage and barn are now in flames. Black smoke chokes out the sun as the hordes of Goths jeer and wave their spears. They are angry that they did not find any loot.

Verus chuckles. “Not today, lads,” he says, patting the little pouch of gold in his pocket. He then turns to the mountain. “I’m coming, boys!”

---

Verus, Ludovicus, and Martialus got away but at a great price. Their farm was destroyed, and they lost everything they had except for the few animals and coins they could get away with. Whenever barbarians passed through the land, everything was thrown into disorder.

There were many German barbarian tribes. The most important were the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Franks, Alemanni, Saxons, and the Lombards. These tribes poured into Roman lands from the north and east. To make matters worse, in the east, a revived Persian Empire began taking Roman lands in Mesopotamia. Rome was under attack from all over.

The emperors of this age were constantly on the move, marching here and there to fight a rival or defend the frontiers against barbarians. With all the war and invasion, it

was difficult for people to make a living. Farming was disrupted, as we saw in the story of Verus's family. Trade was more difficult. Money became scarce, and the prices of things such as food and cloth went up. It became very hard to get by, and many people throughout the empire grew very poor.

### More Persecution and Turmoil

Sounds like a tough time to live through, doesn't it? Some of the emperors tried to blame the Christians for all the empire's problems. In 251 A.D., the Emperor Decius ordered every single citizen of the empire to sacrifice to the pagan gods or be executed. Christians in Africa and Italy were especially targeted, and many were killed, such as Pope St. Cornelius. But the persecution was short lived; Decius died in battle in 253 A.D., and the persecution ended.

Another emperor, Valerian, tried to persecute the Christians again in 257 A.D. This short persecution gave the Church many martyrs, such as the great bishop St. Cyprian of Carthage. This persecution ended when Valerian was defeated in battle and captured by his enemies. St. Cornelius and St. Cyprian are both mentioned in the Eucharistic prayers of the Mass to this day.

Of course, the persecutions did nothing to help the empire; in fact, they probably made things worse by harming Christians, who were among the most hard-working and honest of all the empire's citizens. And they did not stop Christianity from spreading either. In fact, during this time, Christianity continued to grow despite the persecutions.

Some people took advantage of the empire's troubles to take power for themselves. One of these was Zenobia, a noble woman from the Syrian city of Palmyra. She

claimed to be descended from Cleopatra. Her husband had been an important Roman general in Palmyra. When he died, Zenobia ruled Palmyra like a queen.

Zenobia knew Rome was too weak to do anything about her. She sent her armies to conquer parts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. She broke these territories away from Rome and set up her own kingdom centered in Palmyra.

In Gaul, a Roman general named Postumus did the same thing. Barbarians kept attacking Gaul, but the Roman emperors could not defend it. So Postumus broke Gaul and Britain away from Rome and ruled it as his own little kingdom. Postumus was an active leader who defended Gaul and kept the barbarians out.

### **Aurelian**

In 270 A.D., a man named Aurelian became emperor. Aurelian had served in the military under three prior emperors. Like most other emperors of the day, Aurelian took power by overthrowing the previous emperor.

Aurelian was a strong man and a good leader. He knew the empire was in trouble and had a plan for restoring it. Aurelian won several important victories over the barbarians. This made him popular. Then he was able to recapture Gaul. He also defeated the armies of Zenobia and took back all the lands under Palmyra. Though he had conquered her, he was kind to Zenobia; he allowed her to retire in peace to an Italian villa.

Aurelian also built massive walls around the city of Rome. Rome had not had walls since the days of the kings. But the world was getting more dangerous, so Aurelian wanted to make sure the capital was defended. Aurelian's huge walls around the city of Rome are still standing today.

Aurelian believed the empire needed unity more than

anything else. He worshiped the sun under the title *Sol Invictus* (“Unconquerable Sun”) and ordered all the people in the empire to worship Sol Invictus. Aurelian wanted only one faith for the empire and organized persecutions against Christians who would not worship the sun.

Aurelian was happy with the way things were going. Gaul and Palmyra had been returned to the empire and the barbarians had been defeated. He had managed to stay on the throne longer than any other emperor of that period. Aurelian decided the time was right to attack Persia. He began marching east in 275 A.D. but never arrived. His soldiers murdered him on the way, and the empire was again plunged into chaos.

By 275 A.D., Rome had been in a state of civil war and chaos for forty years. Many citizens alive during this period could not remember a time when Rome had not been this way. It seemed as if the Roman Empire were about to collapse.

Little did anyone know that the empire was about to change. It would, in fact, live on for another two hundred years in the west and much longer in the east.

## CHAPTER 33

# The Growth of the Catholic Church

### **The Old and the New**

Have you ever been in the woods and noticed that some trees are healthy and strong while others are weak and dying? Sometimes an old, dying tree can be standing side by side with a growing sapling. The newer, smaller tree may even grow up in the shade of the larger, older one. Things that are living and things that are dying often live together. Gradually, the young grows up and replaces the old.

The relationship between the Catholic Church and the Roman Empire was similar. By 275 A.D., the Roman Empire was old; the victories over Hannibal and the conquests of the east were almost five centuries in the past. The republic was a dim memory. The once unstoppable empire of Rome had grown up and now began to totter with old age. And as it did, the barbarians sensed its weakness and swept in.

But the Catholic Church was young, fresh, and full of strength. Christianity was growing day by day, like a young tree. Jesus Himself compared the Church to a tree that started from a tiny seed but grew until it became the greatest tree. God was with the Church, and while Rome began to wither, the Church continued to grow. In this chapter, we will look at the growth of Christianity in the second and third centuries of the Christian era.

### **The First Christian Apologists**

From the time of Nero on, the Roman government had persecuted the Christians. They believed Christians were disloyal to Rome because they refused to worship the emperor or the gods of the state. The Romans viewed Christians as traitors to their country.

Many Romans spread terrible lies about Christians. They accused them of murder, theft, and all sorts of immoral things. They said the Christians had secret meetings where they ate flesh and blood. Of course this was a misunderstanding of the Christian Eucharist, where the true Body and Blood of Jesus are eaten under sacramental signs. But the Romans did not understand this. They thought the Christians were strange and deserved punishment.

But the Christians did not take this without protest. Some of the Christians started writing letters explaining their teachings and defending themselves against their enemies. These letters were sometimes addressed to the emperors themselves. They were called *apologies*, and those who wrote them were called *apologists*. In ancient Rome, an apology did not mean saying “sorry”; an apology was an explanation. Apologists were writers who tried to explain Christianity to the pagans.

The greatest apologist was St. Justin Martyr. He wrote

during the time of Emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius. He explained that the Christians did not do any of the evil things people said they did and that they were among some of the most loyal subjects in the empire. He argued that the emperors should change the laws against Christians.

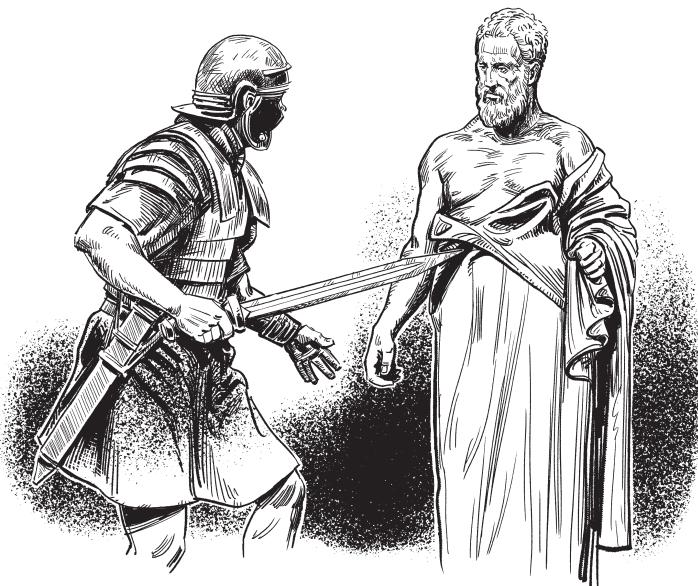
St. Justin also offered one of the earliest written records of what Christian worship was like: On Sundays, Christians gathered together, read the writings of the prophets and apostles, then heard a homily. Then prayers were made, a collection was taken up, and after this, bread and wine were brought out. After being prayed over by a priest, they were received no longer as bread and wine but as the Body and Blood of Christ. Then, after the service, each Christian went his own way.

We should of course recognize this as the Mass. Though the Mass has changed in some respects over the centuries, at its heart still remain all the same parts described by St. Justin almost 1,900 years ago.

But St. Justin's apologies did not convince the emperors. He was handed over to the authorities and beheaded around 167 A.D. Luckily, other apologists would take up his work. Men like Athenagoras, Tatian, and Tertullian continued to compose letters to the emperors defending their faith and asking for the laws against Christians to be changed.

### **Christian Theology**

As Christians explained their faith to pagans and discussed it with each other, their ideas developed. This was the beginning of Christian *theology*. Theology is the science or study of God and His revelation. Those who studied and wrote about Christian theology were called *theologians*. Some theologians were also apologists, some



were bishops, and others were just lay people with a passion for writing and speaking about God.

But what happened when bishops and theologians disagreed about questions of theology? For example, if Jesus was divine, was He equal to God the Father or less than God? Could the Church's ministers absolve people of every sin, or were there some sins that were so bad that the Church could not absolve them? Was baptism valid if it was done by someone other than the Church's ordained ministers? Catholics often disagreed on these questions, sometimes bitterly.

Theologians would write letters making arguments for their side. Some of the great theologians of the early Church were St. Justin Martyr, whom we already mentioned, St. Cyprian of Carthage, and St. Irenaeus of Lyons. These theologians would search the Scriptures

and the traditions of the Church to discover the answers to theological questions. They proclaimed what the true teachings of Christ and the Church were.

If an argument was particularly fierce, the bishops of an area would gather together to discuss the matter. This was called a *synod*; a synod is a meeting of bishops from a particular region where questions of theology and discipline were discussed. Whatever the bishops agreed upon was the teaching the Christians of that region had to accept.

Some bishops were more important than others because their churches were bigger or older. The most important bishops were those of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome. The bishop of Rome was the most important. The Church in Rome was founded by Peter, and it was in Rome, under the reign of Nero, that St. Peter and St. Paul were put to death. The bishops of Rome were the successors of Peter. Just as Peter was the head the apostles, the successor of Peter was (and is) the head of the bishops. The bishops, in union with the Church of Rome, decided what was and was not part of the Christian faith.

## Heresies

What happened when some denied the teaching of the churches? Teachings other than those accepted by the Church were called *heresy*. “Heresy” is a Greek word that means “wrong thinking.” Wherever Christianity spread, there were always heresies challenging its teachings. Heresies damage the faith and unity of the Church by drawing people away from the truth.

There were many heresies. For example, the Donatist heresy taught that some sins could never be forgiven. The Sabellians taught that it was not only God the Son who became man but the Father and Holy Spirit as well. The

Marcionites believed that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament were two different gods. The Gnostics taught that the human body and all matter were evil.

These are just a few examples, but there were many more. Whenever heretical groups popped up, the Church's bishops acted vigorously to warn the faithful about them and preach the correct teaching. Bishops were the backbone of the Church; they preached the Faith, defended it against attacks, and led Christians in holy living through their example.

### **St. Cyprian**

A wonderful example of a strong and holy bishop was St. Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage in North Africa. We briefly mentioned him already, but his story is worth telling.

Cyprian led the Christians of North Africa through two periods of persecution and helped settle controversies about how to bring lapsed Christians back to the Church. He wrote scores of letters and treatises defending the Christian faith and encouraging his people to be strong. Churchmen from all over the West sought his advice.

Eventually, however, he was captured by the authorities during the persecution of Valerian and sentenced to death. Let us visit the site of Cyprian's execution and witness how the great bishop met his end:

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"Can you see what's going on, Lucius?" Crispus stood on his tiptoes, straining to see over the stone wall separating Cyprian's villa from the street.

"They are bringing Bishop Cyprian out of the house now," said Lucius, who was propped up in the branches

of a tall cypress tree, gazing at the scene unfolding within the wall.

“Oh, I wish I could see!” Crispus pouted. “Tell me everything!”

“He is dressed in some kind of white robe. The soldiers are leading him down the steps and out on to his patio. There’s a big crowd of people in there; it’s really packed.”

The other cypress trees surrounding the villa were also filled with spectators, who, like Lucius and Crispus, had come to watch the execution of the famous Christian bishop.

“What now?” asked Crispus.

“Now he’s kneeling down. The judge is reading the charges against him. He is calling him the standard-bearer of a hated sect and an enemy of the gods. The judge says that his death will restore discipline and teach Christians a lesson!”

“Well, he’s getting what he deserves,” shrugged Crispus. “Filthy Christians!”

“He’s tying a blindfold around his head,” Lucius relayed. “He looks very calm and peaceful.”

“I’d never be calm if I was about to be beheaded!”

“Quiet!” Lucius reprimanded his friend. “The executioner is coming! He’s got a sword in his hand. He . . . he . . .”

“What?” demanded Crispus, trying in vain to see over the wall.

“The executioner is trembling,” said Lucius quietly. “He doesn’t want to do it.”

“C’mon, do it!” shouted Crispus.

“Cyprian is encouraging him. Oh! Here it comes!” said Lucius excitedly.

The whir of a blade and a dull chopping sound were heard, and the blindfolded head of Cyprian went tumbling

into the dust. The crowd was silent. The bishop of Carthage was no more. Friends and Christians moved in slowly to gather his body and take it away lovingly for burial.

A look of puzzlement suddenly came over Lucius.

“What is it?” his friend asked.

“He went so peacefully,” he answered. “How could a man go so willingly to his death?”

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St. Cyprian suffered in 257 A.D. There were many others like him who bravely went to their deaths. Often they died in peace, knowing they were dying for Jesus. As we saw in this story, this confused, and even inspired, many of the very people who were persecuting the Christians.

### The Church Spreads

Despite these persecutions, the Church grew. By 275 A.D., there were public church buildings built in many places throughout the Roman Empire. In the east, where Christianity was strongest, entire cities had become Christian.

Christians were found in every walk of life. Tertullian, writing around 210 A.D., said, “We are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled all the places that belong to you—cities, islands, forts, towns, exchanges, the military camps themselves, tribes, town councils, the palace, the senate, the market-place; we have left you nothing but your temples.”

Despite this phenomenal growth, Christians were still in the minority. By 275 A.D., probably only one out of every fifteen people in the Roman Empire had embraced Christianity. And they were subject to constant danger if an emperor decided to begin a persecution. In our next chapter, we shall see how the Roman Empire tried one last time to exterminate Christianity before things began to change.

## CHAPTER 34

# The Empire Divided

### **Diocletian**

After the death of Emperor Aurelian in 275 A.D., there was more chaos in the Roman Empire for the next ten years. Multiple generals all claimed the empire for themselves and fought constantly. The Roman economy continued to get worse, and more and more Romans fell into a life of poverty. Meanwhile, barbarians continued to press in around the frontiers.

In 285 A.D., a Greek military officer named Diocletian became emperor. Diocletian came from a humble background; his family had once been slaves, and some said even Diocletian himself was once a slave. Nobody knows for sure. Diocletian rose through the ranks of the army and by 285 A.D. had enough power to kill his opponent and proclaim himself emperor.

Diocletian succeeded where many other emperors had failed. He realized the problem with the Roman Empire

was that there were too many powerful men who all wanted a part in ruling. To solve this problem, Diocletian divided the empire in half: east and west. He ruled the east, and his coemperor, Maximian, ruled the west.

Diocletian also realized that the empire had no stable plan of succession. When one emperor died, there was no way to tell who should succeed him. Instead of fighting over succession, Diocletian said that each emperor should appoint a successor while he was still alive. Diocletian and Maximian both chose other men to be under them who were to be their successors. Now more people had a part in ruling, and the succession of power was more stable. Finally, the civil wars ended.

Diocletian was friendly to Christians, at least at first. In his hometown of Nicomedia, he had a Christian church right across the street from his house. But Diocletian's successor, a man called Galerius, hated Christians. He tried to convince Diocletian to start a persecution against them. Diocletian initially was not interested.

Then, in the fall of 302 A.D., when Diocletian was offering sacrifices to the Roman gods, he was interrupted by a deacon named Romanus. Romanus proclaimed that the pagan gods were demons. Diocletian was furious and had Romanus executed. Galerius spent the winter with Diocletian trying to convince him to attack the Church.

Soon after, Diocletian's palace caught fire. Diocletian and Galerius blamed the Christians, and a decree of persecution was issued in February of 303 A.D. This would be the start of the Great Persecution, the biggest and most terrible of all of Rome's persecutions of the Church.

### The Great Persecution

What did the decree of persecution say? It ordered that all Christian churches be destroyed and that all copies of

the Bible were to be handed over and burned. Christians were forbidden from gathering for worship. All bishops and clergy were to be imprisoned (many were killed or exiled), and all persons throughout the empire had to sacrifice to the gods or face arrest.

The persecution was not carried out the same everywhere. It was very fierce in the eastern provinces, which were ruled by Diocletian and Galerius. In the west, Maximian and his successor, Constantius Chlorus, essentially left the Christians alone. Still, there were many martyrs—perhaps more than in any other persecution.

One of the most famous of the martyrs killed by Diocletian was Sebastian. Sebastian was a Christian army officer from the city of Milan. He had served Diocletian faithfully for some time but was eventually discovered to be a Christian. Diocletian brought the Christian officer to him, laden down with chains:

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“Sebastian, how could you betray me like this?” demanded Emperor Diocletian angrily.

“It is not I who betray you, my lord,” Sebastian replied calmly, “but you who betray the true God by worshiping idols and unjustly persecuting His people.”

“Do you all hear this arrogance?” mocked Diocletian. The officers and advisors surrounding the emperor stood silently, eying Sebastian with disapproval. “Don’t you know I have the power to have you put to death?”

“Do as you will,” replied Sebastian. “I serve a king greater than you, one whose rule is without end. He will receive me unto Himself.”

“Priscillianus!” Diocletian called. A captain came and knelt before the emperor. “Have our archers from Mauretania arrived yet?”

"Yes, emperor," Priscillianus replied. "The company has only yesterday arrived in the city."

"Good," Diocletian said with a crooked smile. "Take our friend Sebastian out to them. Tell them I've sent a new target!"

Priscillianus bowed, and a moment later, Sebastian was whisked away.

A half hour later, Numantius, captain of the Mauretanian archers, questioned Priscillianus.

"What has this man done?" he asked, gesturing to the officer being tied to a tree just beside the shooting range.

"He is a Christian," replied Priscillianus. "The emperor is purging all Christians from his service. He wants to make an example of this one."

"Fair enough," Numantius shrugged. The African captain turned to his archers. "Company! Our divine emperor Diocletian wants us to show this Christian how well the archers of Mauretania shoot."

The men pulled out their arrows and fixed them to their bow strings.

"Draw!"

They drew back and took aim. Sebastian stood silent and resolute, murmuring a prayer to Jesus to receive his spirit.

"Fire!"

A hail of arrows whirled through the morning air and pierced the skin of Sebastian. His head immediately drooped before he fell into unconsciousness.

Priscillianus walked over and cut Sebastian loose. His lifeless body collapsed to the wet grass. Priscillianus summoned slaves to lay Sebastian down near the road. Priscillianus then sent a servant to fetch the friends of Sebastian to come and bury the body.

Night fell over the land. A widow called Irene and her two daughters arrived at the shooting grounds of the



imperial palace to remove the body and bury it, as directed. She and her daughters wept as they gathered up Sebastian's body. Irene's late husband was a companion of Sebastian, and Sebastian had been like a second father to Irene's daughters.

"Oh, Sebastian!" Irene sobbed, looking at the many arrows protruding from Sebastian's body.

"Mama!" one of the girls said. "He's moving!"

Irene gasped. It was true! Though Sebastian had been pierced by many arrows, none of them struck any vital organs. He was still alive!

"Quickly girls, gather him up carefully and bring him back to our home."

The girls and their mother lifted the wounded man and got him to safety as quickly as they could.

Irene and her family spent the next month nursing

Sebastian back to health. After some time, he began to walk about, stretching his muscles and regaining his strength.

*His wounds are deep, but they will heal,* Irene thought. *Praise God he is still alive.*

When she thought Sebastian well enough to travel, Irene said to him, “We must get you out of the city before the emperor hears you are alive.”

“I will not flee,” Sebastian said resolutely. “In fact, it is my intention to see Diocletian again.”

“Are you mad? He will kill you!”

“I must bear witness to the truth before the emperor.”

“Sebastian, you *have* born witness! And God spared your life. Is it right to so recklessly throw it away? Please, have pity on us!”

Irene began to cry.

“Peace, Irene,” Sebastian said, comforting the widow. “God’s will be done.”

Not many days after, Emperor Diocletian and Galerius stood reviewing some soldiers outside the imperial palace. The emperor, flanked by scores of attendants and guards, passed up some steps. It was then that a familiar voice rung out loud and clear.

“Diocletian!”

The emperor turned. Sebastian stood at the foot of the steps, draped in a white cloak and leaning on a cane.

“Repent of your wicked deeds! Confess your sins, and end this unjust persecution of the Church!”

Diocletian growled. “How many lives do you have, Christian? You want it to end? Very well!” The emperor gave a nod. His bodyguards rushed Sebastian, drawing their heavy wooden clubs.

“Lord Jesus,” Sebastian called out, “do not hold this against them! Receive my spirit, Lord!”

The guards attacked Sebastian with their clubs, pummeling him viciously. Diocletian looked away and continued on with his review as the thuds and grunts faded into the distance. Sebastian soon passed into death, this time with no return.

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Not all martyrs were men; in fact, many were women. One of the most famous martyrs of Diocletian was the young girl Agnes. Agnes had pledged to remain a virgin her whole life for the love of Christ. She was revealed to be a Christian when she refused to marry a wealthy Roman nobleman. Agnes was turned over to the judge, who had her killed for her faith. Both Sebastian and Agnes were venerated as saints and martyrs immediately after their deaths.

### **After Diocletian**

In 305 A.D., after twenty years of rule and at the height of the persecution, Diocletian and Maximian resigned from office and left the empire to their successors, Galerius and Constantius Chlorus. Each of these men, in turn, was to select a new successor. This was the first time any Roman emperor had ever voluntarily left office. Diocletian retired to his palace in Croatia to enjoy the quiet life and farm cabbage.

Diocletian was a success and a failure. On the one hand, he ended the fifty years of civil war and chaos that had almost destroyed Rome. He broke up power by dividing the empire into parts and allowing other important men to share in governing it. He established a stable plan of succession and won victories over barbarians.

On the other hand, Diocletian failed to help the Roman economy. He ruled more like a king than any

emperor before him; the Senate and other institutions became useless under Diocletian and his successors. Above all else, he began the longest and worst persecution of Christians in ancient Rome. And as we shall soon see, his succession plan failed to preserve Rome from civil war.

But those wars that would come after Diocletian's resignation would pave the way for the conversion of the empire to Christianity. It is to this marvelous story that we must turn as we bring our study of the ancient world to a conclusion.

## CHAPTER 35

### In This Sign, Conquer

#### **Constantine**

Diocletian left the empire to two new emperors, who in turn were supposed to appoint two new successors. But it did not work out the way Diocletian had hoped. Instead, the emperors all fought with one another. Rome was again torn apart by civil war.

One of the new emperors sent a messenger to Diocletian, begging him to come out of retirement and take power again. But Diocletian was not interested. He told the messenger, “If you could show the cabbage that I planted with my own hands to your emperor, he definitely wouldn’t dare suggest that I replace the peace and happiness of this place with the storms of a never-satisfied greed.”

Of all the men striving for control, the most energetic was the young commander Constantine, son of the recently deceased emperor of the west, Constantius

Chlorus. Upon the death of his father, he was made emperor of Britain, Gaul, and Spain. His hard work, military skill, and building projects soon won him the admiration of his subjects.

But the west was in chaos. In Italy, a usurper named Maxentius had seized power and was mocking Constantine. The other emperors in the east did not recognize Maxentius, but they were too weak to confront him. Constantine saw in Maxentius an opportunity to strengthen his own power and get rid of an unwanted tyrant.

In the winter of 312 A.D., Constantine began assembling his army to march against Maxentius the following year. As soon as spring came, Constantine led his army of forty thousand men from Gaul into Italy, climbing over the towering Alps. He must have seen the same sights as Hannibal's army, who passed that way almost five hundred years earlier.

Constantine had success in winning some Italian towns and cities over to him, but Maxentius remained in Rome with a very large army. Rome was considered impregnable; Aurelian had built massive walls around it, and the city hadn't been conquered since the early Roman republic. Faced with the choice to either assault Rome or try to surround the city and force his enemy's surrender, Constantine and his army set up camp in the plains outside Rome in October of 312 A.D. There the emperor tried to come up with a plan.

### The Dream That Changed the World

A Roman emperor fighting a rival was certainly nothing new. But at this point, something quite unexpected happened—something that would change the course of Roman history as well as the history of the entire world:

“Any report, Commander Fulvius?” asked Constantine nervously.

“Yes, lord. The legions of Maxentius are formed up on the banks of the Tiber, just across the Milvian Bridge.”

Constantine stood up and paced about his tent. He was a big man, towering above most of his soldiers. His brow was furled in thought. His shoulders heaved in discouragement.

“That’s a strong position,” he finally said. “He’s put the bridge and the river between us. It’s suicide trying to march an attacking army over that narrow bridge. All he has to do is hold firm.”

“What shall I tell the men?” asked Fulvius.

“Tell them to hold fast. I will sleep on it and come to a decision in the morning.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Fulvius departed from the spacious tent to leave Constantine alone with his thoughts. Constantine sat deep in thought for some time, speaking to himself as he determined his plan.

“The future of the empire hinges on what happens tomorrow. Either I or Maxentius must win. I must do something . . . but what?”

He gazed up at the idol to Sol Invictus standing on a small stool near his bed. The Unconquerable Sun, the god he and his father before him had worshiped piously for decades. But the idol was silent, leaving Constantine to his doubt.

Finally the great emperor collapsed onto his bed of furs, drifting off into a troubled slumber. It was then that a strange dream came to him.

Constantine stood at the head of his troops, who were

spread across the broad plain before the Tiber. The sky was red and hazy. Suddenly, a mass of clouds came piling up from the east like a great storm. Flashes of lightning tore apart the sky, followed by booming thunder. It was far greater than any storm Constantine had ever seen.

Then the clouds burst apart, revealing a magnificent blaze of light that drenched the land in color from east to west. It was so bright that Constantine could not look directly into it; he was forced to cast his eyes to the ground. But the light began to take form; it was now two Greek letters denoting a single symbol, the chi-rho.

“The chi-rho,” Constantine said to himself. “But that’s the symbol of the Christian God.” It looked like the letter *X* with the letter *P* over it. These are the first two letters of the word “Christ” in Greek.

Constantine noticed other words appearing on the symbol, now in Latin. Emblazoned across the symbol was the phrase *In hoc signo vinces*, meaning “In this sign, conquer.” The symbol grew and grew until it took up the whole sky. Constantine stood upright, staring at the vision.

“In this sign, conquer,” he whispered to himself. “In this sign, conquer.”

Moments later, Constantine awoke in a sweat, lying on his bed, his heart thumping against his chest.

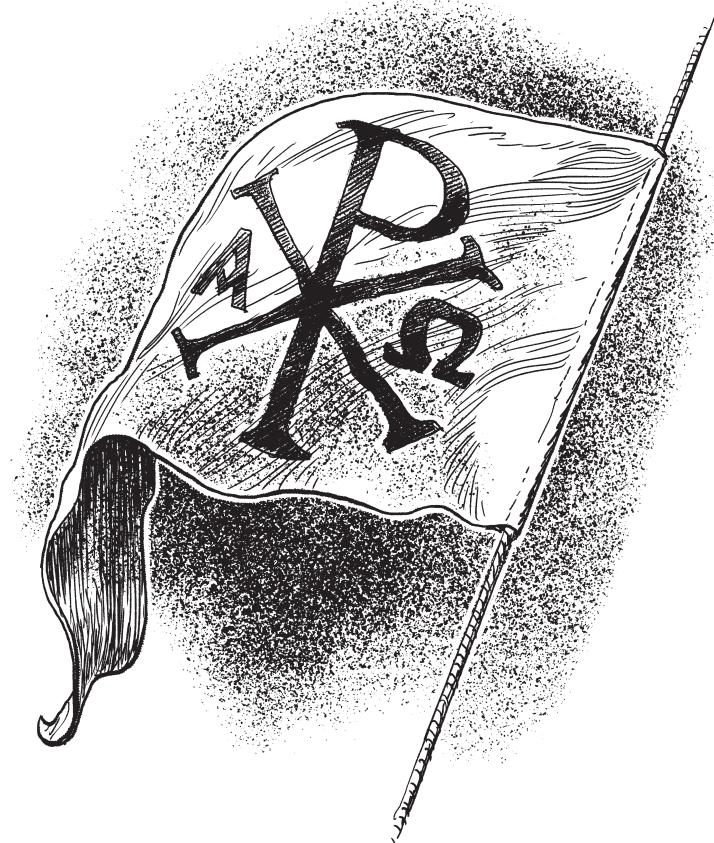
“Fulvius!” he shouted, leaping out of bed. “Fulvius! Come immediately!”

The officer rushed into the tent. “Yes, emperor? Is everything all right?”

“Fulvius, form up the men. You know the Greek letters chi-rho? Order each man to paint this symbol on his shield.”

“The sign of the Christian God?”

“Yes! He has appeared to me in a vision. In His name,



we will achieve this victory. Each man shall paint the chi-ro on his shield and be ready for battle by midmorning. Now go; do as I command! Tonight we will dine in Rome!"

Fulvius rushed out, excited but somewhat confused. Constantine strode about his tent with confidence. He gazed over at the idol of Sol Invictus on the table. He gave the table a hard kick and sent the idol falling to the ground, where it shattered into many pieces.

An hour later, Constantine emerged from his tent dressed in full battle armor, with his sword in hand and a red cape flowing down his back.

“General Constantine!” shouted Commander Fulvius, running toward Constantine. “Amazing news!”

“Well, Fulvius, have the men painted the symbol on their shields as I commanded?”

“Yes, my lord, but something much more wonderful has happened!”

“Well, don’t keep me in suspense. What?”

“Come see for yourself!”

Fulvius and Constantine dashed through the camp, running past the thousands of soldiers who all hailed their beloved general. Everywhere Constantine looked, he saw the chi-rho symbol painted on the shields of his men.

Fulvius led Constantine to the brow of a small hill that served as the lookout point. Constantine could not believe what he saw.

“Fulvius! He’s moved his army across the bridge!”

Indeed, the entire army of Maxentius, which only the day before had an excellent position on the other side of the bridge, had moved over the bridge and was now lined up with their backs to the river.

“Why would he make such a movement?” asked Fulvius. “That’s a terrible position!”

Constantine grinned and slapped Fulvius heartily on the back. “Because God wills his doom and my triumph. Come, let us make the attack!”

Constantine’s words proved true. The army of Constantine, with the Christian symbol on their shields, charged across the plain and smashed into the legions of Maxentius. Their opponents could not stand the shock

of the first attack, but they had nowhere to go, with the Tiber River to their backs.

They began to panic; some tried to flee across the bridge, but most plunged into the river. Many drowned, dragged down by their heavy armor. Constantine fought furiously, swinging his bitter, sharp blade left and right with his massive arms. The army of Maxentius fell apart, fleeing across the bridge or falling into the river. Very few escaped.

Eventually, the sun set behind the hills of Rome, casting long shadows over the battlefield. A red hue blanketed the land.

“Just like in my dream,” Constantine mused as he sat down on a rock. His battle tunic was dirty and his cape torn, while his shield was splattered with blood. His body ached from the battle, but the day was won.

Fulvius and a troop of soldiers approached Constantine, dragging something in a thick tarp. They laid it at Constantine’s feet, and Fulvius threw the tarp open. There lay the body of Maxentius, soaking wet and still in his battle armor.

“He tried to flee across the river and was drowned,” Fulvius told Constantine. “Maxentius is dead. You are sole emperor of the west and of Rome, Lord Constantine.”

The men all kneeled before their general.

“Hail, Caesar! Hail, Constantinus Augustus!” Cheers erupted throughout the camp as the men acclaimed their emperor.

Constantine smiled and looked up at the sky, red with the setting sun. The buildings of Rome could be seen a little ways off across the river.

“*Deo gratias*,” he whispered, uttering his first prayer to the God of the Christians. But there would be many

more. “Now, Fulvius, gather the men. The city of Rome awaits her new master.”

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### The Dawn of a New Day

When Constantine came into Rome, he refused the Senate's invitation to offer sacrifices to Jupiter and the state gods. The pagans were shocked. It slowly dawned on them that their new emperor was a Christian. A Christian! He was a member of that hated little sect that was still technically being persecuted. How could such a thing be?

But it was true. Constantine had abandoned paganism and embraced the Christian faith. One of the first things he did was end the persecution in the west. In February of 313 A.D., he issued the *Edict of Milan*, which legalized Christianity once and for all and restored Christian property to those from whom it had been taken. It was finally safe to be a Christian.

Constantine surrounded himself with Christian bishops and saints. Christians came out of the shadows and began to worship Jesus Christ publicly, giving glory to Him and thanks for the goodness of Constantine. Constantine, in turn, honored the Church, donating much land and wealth to build churches and monasteries. Large, lavish churches began to pop up all over the empire.

One of the greatest churches was built on a piece of land that had once been the circus of Nero. This was the place where St. Peter had been crucified during Nero's persecution. Constantine gave this land to Pope Sylvester I, the bishop of Rome. Sylvester, using money donated by the emperor, had a splendid church built on the site and dedicated it to St. Peter. This was St. Peter's Basilica, the



home of the pope—the bishop of Rome and successor of St. Peter.

It's hard to believe how far we have come. On the very place where St. Peter was put to death by the evil Emperor Nero now rose the Christian cross. The emperors, who used to attack Christianity, now supported it and encouraged its growth. Christianity was still small—maybe only one in ten people were Christians in 313 A.D.—but that would soon change. Constantine's reign marks the end of the pagan world and the beginning of the Christian empire.

### **The Journey Continues**

What a marvelous journey. From the first civilizations and the pyramid builders through Greece and on to Rome, we have seen the struggles and glories of the ancient world. But with the Incarnation of the Son of God

and the triumph of the Church, something truly new had emerged upon the earth.

In our next book, we shall take a journey through this new civilization built on the Christian faith and the knowledge of the true God—a civilization we call Christendom.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phillip Campbell holds a BA in European history from Ave Maria University and a license in secondary education from Madonna University. He teaches middle school history and Sacred Scripture for the St. Augustine Home-school Enrichment Program as well as high school history for Homeschool Connections. Mr. Campbell is the editor of *The Complete Works of St. Cyprian of Carthage* (Arx Publishing) and has self-published several books through his website, Cruachan Hill Press. His writings have also appeared in such publications as the *St. Austin Review* and *The Distributist Review*. Mr. Campbell served as the mayor of his hometown of Howell, Michigan, from 2011 to 2015 (the youngest to ever hold the office). Mr. Campbell and his wife reside in southeast Michigan, where they homeschool their five children. He is a regular speaker at homeschool conferences around the United States.