Contents

Foreword and Acknowledgements ..................................................... 1
Introducing History ...................................................................... 5

Chapter 1 How Did It All Begin? ..................................................... 17
In the Beginning ...................................................................... 17
Men, Monkeys, and Missing Links ............................................. 23
The History of the Earth ............................................................ 29

Chapter 2 Dawn of Civilization ................................................. 39
The Fertile Crescent .................................................................. 42
The Indus River Valley ............................................................... 47
Ancient Egypt .......................................................................... 51

Chapter 3 Expanding Civilizations .......................................... 63
Egypt’s New Kingdom .............................................................. 63
The Old Babylonian Kingdom .................................................. 72
The Aegean Civilization ............................................................ 75
The Western Hemisphere ......................................................... 80

Chapter 4 Rise of Small Kingdoms ............................................. 87
The Middle East ........................................................................ 87
The Early Russians ................................................................. 94
The Greek Dark Ages ............................................................... 97
The Earliest American Civilizations .................................... 104

Chapter 5 Sunset of Mesopotamian Influence ...................... 111
The Assyrian Empire .............................................................. 111
The Chaldean Empire .............................................................. 115
The Persian Empire ............................................................... 119
The Indian Vedic Ages ........................................................... 124

Chapter 6 Classical Greece and Hellenization ...................... 133
Greek City-States and Colonies ............................................. 133
Greek Freedom Threatened .................................................. 139
The Golden Age of Greece ..................................................... 144
Spread of Greek Culture ....................................................... 149

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# Streams of Civilization Volume One

## Chapter 7 Rise of the Roman Republic .......................................... 157
- Early Beginnings ............................................................... 157
- Roman Expansion ............................................................. 163
- Fall of the Roman Republic........................................... 167

## Chapter 8 The Roman Empire ................................................................... 177
- The Pax Romana................................................................ 177
- The Germanic Tribes......................................................... 193

## Chapter 9 Christianity, Rome, and the Byzantine Empire .................. 201
- The Development of Christianity..................................... 201
- The Fall of Rome ................................................................ 208
- Influence of the Byzantine Empire................................. 213

## Chapter 10 Amazing Africa and the Mysterious East ....................... 221
- The African Continent ...................................................... 221
- The Indian Middle Ages.................................................... 227
- The Origins of Chinese Civilization.................................. 236

## Chapter 11 The Early Middle Ages.................................................... 249
- European Dark Ages.......................................................... 249
- Islam—A New Faith Emerges.......................................... 258
- Feudalism........................................................................... 266

## Chapter 12 England, the Norsemen, and the Age of Chivalry .......... 273
- The Development of England ........................................... 273
- The Norsemen of Scandinavia......................................... 276
- The Age of Chivalry........................................................... 286

## Chapter 13 The Development of the European Nations.................... 295
- Twilight of Feudalism......................................................... 295
- The Crusades—For Glory, God, and Unity ..................... 309
- European Society Changes............................................. 313
- Russia and the Golden Horde......................................... 316

## Chapter 14 The Far East and African Developments....................... 325
- China and the Mongols...................................................... 326
- Japan—Land of the Rising Sun......................................... 333
- The Muslims Conquer India............................................ 339
- Muslim Influence in Africa.............................................. 343

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Cultures began to spread from the Tigris-Euphrates Valley area about 2100 B.C. Many archaeologists and historians believe that people migrated throughout the world from this area as a result of the confusion of languages at Babel. Some civilizations came into existence and developed early in history; others took longer. This happened because of differences in geography and climate.

Egypt, overturning the foreign rule of the Hyksos, developed her civilization into one of unmatched splendor. In Mesopotamia, the early civilizations of Sumer and Akkad were replaced by the more advanced civilization of Babylon. Also, another great civilization came into existence in the Mediterranean area, called the Aegean civilization since it centered around the Aegean Sea.

Meanwhile, as civilizations spread and progressed in the Middle East, a group of sturdy hunters ventured northward. They crossed a land bridge and entered into the area known today as the Americas. In these remote areas, cut off from trade and the exchange of ideas, civilization developed slowly.

**Egypt’s New Kingdom**

Egypt’s New Kingdom officially began in 1546 B.C. During this time huge palaces, monuments, and temples once again were erected throughout Egypt. A campaign of foreign conquests followed, and Egypt became a world power for many centuries.

Many historians believe that it was during the New Kingdom that the Hebrew people, Jacob’s descendants, were removed from their homes to serve the Egyptians as slaves. Certainly, there was a need for slaves because of the massive building programs. Later, also during the New Kingdom, Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt in what is known as the Exodus.

Egypt was recovering from the Exodus when a pharaoh tried to introduce a new form of worship to the Egyptians. This almost destroyed the country, and shortly afterwards Egypt was conquered by the Assyrians. In 670 B.C., the New Kingdom came to an end.

**Egyptians Regain Their Freedom**

After some 125 years of Hyksos domination, a young Egyptian prince named Ahmose I (reigned c. 1570–1546 B.C.) drove the Hyksos from Egypt. They retreated in a northeasterly direction out of Egypt and were never heard from again.
Nationalism—A Love of Country

Nationalism, a word we often hear about in the news, means "a great love of country" and a desire for self-rule by the people of a nation. Those fighting for nationalism are usually under the government of a foreign ruler.

We usually think of nationalism as a relatively modern idea, something unique to Africa or Asia. Today, however, we recognize that people have loved their countries from earliest times. The first known nationalists were the Egyptians who fought against the Hyksos. Time and again we will see how nationalism played an important role in the affairs of nations.

Nationalism and Anti-Foreign Policy. Once Ahmose I set up his rule, he began to remove all foreigners from public office. All of Egypt was filled with a spirit of nationalism. This means they wanted to rule themselves and to be free of all foreign influences.

When Amenhotep I (reigned c. 1546-1528 B.C.) became pharaoh, he further erased traces of foreign domination. All positions of authority were taken away from foreigners and given to trustworthy Egyptians. Non-Egyptian owners of business and industry were stripped of their hard-earned savings, and all non-Egyptian ideas and influences were suppressed.

A Period of Rebuilding and Growth

Ahmose I and his son Amenhotep I spent most of their time rebuilding Egypt. The next pharaoh, Thutmos I (reigned c. 1528-1508 B.C.), concentrated on invading and conquering other countries. Egypt soon controlled most of the Middle East to the north, including much of the area that is now Syria.

Apparently, the unfortunate effects of brothers marrying their sisters appeared in Thutmos I's family. Although the royal couple had sons, none of them were mentally capable of being rulers. With the support of the major nobles and the priests, Thutmos I had his daughter Hatshepsut crowned queen before he died.

Queen Hatshepsut. As a child, Queen Hatshepsut (reigned c. 1504-1483 B.C.) wore the short, pleated skirt of a prince and attended the temple school—usually attended by only boys. She was trained to rule Egypt. Portrayed in a statue carved during her reign, she wore the traditional beard always worn by the pharaoh.

While Thutmos I was alive, Hatshepsut was co-ruler with her father. At his death, she married one of her half-brothers, Thutmose II. Hatshepsut and Thutmose II had a daughter named Neferure. After her father died at an early age (c. 1504 B.C.), Neferure fulfilled the religious and ceremonial duties traditionally fulfilled by the queen in the government and the temples.
Thutmose III, the son of a concubine of Thutmose II, was selected to rule after him, but he was still a child. Consequently, Hatshepsut did something no other queen of Egypt had ever done before. Claiming that the sun god, Ra, had commanded her to rule Egypt, Hatshepsut declared herself pharaoh. She even appeared in public with the mace and royal collar and wore the false beard of the pharaoh.

Under Hatshepsut’s rule Egypt prospered. Her reign is considered one of the most successful in Egypt’s history. She maintained order, encouraged trade, and for most of her rule kept Egypt at peace. As queen and pharaoh, Hatshepsut ruled Egypt well for more than twenty years.

A Bitter Prince Becomes Pharaoh. As Thutmose III (reigned c. 1483–1450 B.C.) passed from his teens to adulthood, he began to worry about becoming pharaoh. Although he led Egyptian armies on many successful campaigns, “Pharaoh” Hatshepsut still maintained control of the kingdom. She included him in public ceremonies, but he was forced to remain in the background. His bitter resentment grew into hatred over the years.

About 1483 B.C., Hatshepsut died and Thutmose III was pharaoh in his own right. Many historians strongly suspect that Thutmose III had her murdered so he could rule in her place. His hatred for her was so extreme that he did not allow her to be buried in the tomb that was prepared for her. To the Egyptians, this was a terrible act because it cut her off from any possibility of an afterlife. Archaeologists are still searching for the place where she was buried. This search is more difficult because Thutmose III had her name removed from all monuments.

With Hatshepsut out of the way, Thutmose III showed his anger to her supporters. He defaced the tombs of those already dead. Those living were in danger of losing their lives.

Military Expansion. Thutmose III’s reign was marked by great military campaigns. He began his rule by suppressing a Hittite rebellion at Megiddo. During the rest of his reign, he conducted seventeen campaigns in the Euphrates River Valley. He defeated all the kings in the Fertile Crescent, making them pay tribute and accept his rule. In these newly conquered territories, called satellites, he always left strong fortresses under the leadership of Egyptian soldiers and governors. Thutmose III developed a strong army, as well as a large navy.

About 1450 B.C., Amenhotep II (reigned c. 1450–1421) became pharaoh. He continued fighting against the Hittites in Syria, and Egypt became even more powerful. The next pharaoh was Thutmose IV (c. 1421–1412). Very little is known about this ruler, although it is believed that Egypt’s beliefs and power were severely shaken during his reign. He left the throne to his brilliant son, Amenhotep III (reigned c. 1410–1377 B.C.).
Under Amenhotep III’s leadership, Egypt reached the peak of her splendor. By 1390 B.C., the capital of Thebes was one of the most magnificent of its age. Tribute poured into the country from all over the known world. This was all lost, however, when Amenhotep IV (reigned c. 1377–1366 B.C.) became pharaoh. He not only failed to provide leadership, but also tried to change Egypt’s religion.

**Cultural Growth.** Under the dynamic leadership of Egypt’s New Kingdom pharaohs, the people and the country prospered. Egypt became the center of trade in art and luxury goods.

In addition to the building programs of the New Kingdom, beautiful works of literature appeared. Many proverbs, hymns, stories of heroic adventures, and tales of life at sea were also written. In order to encourage writers, the government helped to support them while they worked. Such government payments are known as subsidies.

Spacious villas and artificial lakes were built by the upper classes, providing magnificent surroundings. A favorite form of entertainment for the noble’s family was the lavish banquet with many guests. Both the noble and his wife dressed in pleated, white linen skirts. They wore broad collars set with semiprecious stones, gold bracelets, and heavy, perfumed black wigs. Egyptian nobles also spent their time hunting on their large estates.

Egyptian women used many cosmetics, such as rouge, perfume, and eye makeup. They painted their eyelids with a black powder called kohl, which made their eyes look bigger. It also protected them from the brilliant glare of the sun. They used highly polished copper mirrors for grooming.

Merchants from every country crowded the streets of ancient Thebes, where life was interesting and active. There the buildings surpassed anything in the known world at that time.

**Challenges to Egypt’s Religion**

Egyptians were greatly influenced by their religious beliefs. In fact, they were almost controlled by them. They worshiped animals, bugs, the Nile River, their ruler, and hundreds of other gods and goddesses.

During the New Kingdom, the power of the Egyptian gods was challenged in two ways. One was by the God of the Hebrew people as Egypt was struck by ten destructive plagues. The other challenge came from Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, who tried to introduce a new religion to the Egyptians.

**The Hebrew Challenge.** After Joseph brought his family to Egypt, his people multiplied rapidly under God’s blessing. Later, when Joseph was gone, a pharaoh arose who forgot how Joseph had helped Egypt and became fearful of the Hebrews’ increasing numbers. In an attempt to reduce the large Hebrew population, the Pharaoh sent out orders for them to work overtime at their construction sites. When this failed, another harsh law was passed. Women who helped in childbirth were ordered to kill all Hebrew boys at their birth.

These harsh laws only united the Hebrews in thought, faith, and purpose. They looked for a leader to rescue them from slavery. They wanted to
When Did Moses Live?

There are no records that give the exact dates when Moses lived. However, 1 Kings 6:1 states that "in the four hundred and eighty year after the sons of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, ... he began to build the house of the Lord" (NASB). Since Solomon's reign began in 970 B.C., his fourth year would have been 966. Four hundred and eighty years before 966 comes out to 1446 or 1445 ... . This would have been early in the reign of Amenhotep II, who according to the usual estimates reigned between 1447 and 1421."*

There are two factors that support the theory that Moses lived during the above time period:

1. We know that Moses was eighty years old when he led his people out of Egypt. Going back eighty years from 1446 B.C., we come to the time when Thutmose I ruled Egypt. Moses was born during his reign.
2. The Hebrews, led by Moses, wandered in the wilderness for forty years before entering Canaan. Add this forty-year period to 1446 B.C., and this would be at the beginning of Amenhotep III's rule. It was during the end of his reign that records claim a people called "Hapiru" invaded Canaan. Many historians believe Hapiru actually means "Hebrews."

... go back to the land of Canaan, where their ancestor, Jacob, had lived so many years before.

A Leader Is Born. The Hebrew record tells of one child, later called Moses, who was not killed at birth. His mother had placed him in a basket and put it in the Nile River. Then, while bathing in the Nile River, a daughter of pharaoh found the basket among the papyrus plants on the banks of the river. The child was taken to the palace to be raised as her son. His real mother, a Hebrew slave, learned where the baby had been taken and offered to act as his nurse.

Moses was trained to help govern Egypt along with the other children of the royal family. His schooling included astronomy, literature, architecture, mathematics, agriculture, military skills, business, and trade economics. In addition, he mastered all the known languages of his day.

As a member of the Egyptian government, Moses served as an overseer of building projects in the Nile Delta. While there, he killed an Egyptian. Moses then fled to the Sinai Peninsula where he found refuge for forty years.

Egypt and the Ten Plagues. Moses became an Israelite leader. According to the Hebrew record, one day Moses stood before pharaoh, demanding that the Hebrew slaves be set free. When Pharaoh refused, ten plagues struck Egypt, one after another, almost destroying the country.

* This is cited from the Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties by Gleason L. Archer, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983, p. 191. Note that there is disagreement among scholars on who the actual pharaoh was during the Exodus. In addition, some date the Exodus in the thirteenth century B.C. Liberal scholars claim that there is no evidence for the Exodus; it is merely a "charter myth."

The Ten Plagues. According to the Hebrew record, the ten plagues were a series of supernatural signs brought against the Egyptian people as a result of pharaoh's refusing the Israelites the freedom of worship. Each plague was related to nature, the source of all Egyptian deities, and would seem to be a direct attack on their gods. The fact that Egyptian magicians were unable to imitate the plagues proved the power of the true God. The ten plagues, in order of their occurrence, are depicted from top to bottom on the obelisk illustrated above.
Sand Fly Necklace. Sand flies were among the many creatures of nature worshiped by the Egyptians. Their likenesses were made into necklaces, such as this one from the eighteenth dynasty.

Mary Stanton Collection

To this day, historians debate who the pharaoh of the Exodus was. Those who favor Amenhotep II do so for two reasons. First, we know that Amenhotep's tomb was never finished, probably because he died suddenly. The Hebrew record explains this. It states that the pharaoh who opposed Moses drowned with his army while pursuing the Hebrews when they left Egypt.

The second point indicating that Amenhotep was the ruler at this time is that Amenhotep II's son and heir never ruled Egypt. We know from the records that he had a son, but nothing has been recorded about his life. Since the last plague to strike Egypt called for the death of the oldest son of every family, this would explain what happened to Amenhotep II's son. He probably died at a very young age.

Few records have been found of Egyptian history following the plagues. During this time, Thutmose IV became the eighth pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt, but he only ruled for a short ten years. Perhaps he succumbed to the terrible destruction of the plagues.

The Heretic Pharaoh. Until this time all the pharaohs worshiped the same Egyptian gods. They claimed to be deities, the sons of the sun god, Ra. As a result, Egypt's government was a theocracy. This means the people believed their rulers were guided by their gods in decision-making. Usually a theocracy is governed by priests.

Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (reigned c. 1377–1366 B.C.), the son of Amenhotep III, was different. He disagreed with the officially accepted reli-