



THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION

VOLUME I: THE ANCIENT WORLD

FROM THE DAWN OF HISTORY TO THE CONVERSION OF CONSTANTINE

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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:

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.