

# HOE IS GOD VANDAG IN ONS WÊRELD TEENWOORDIG?



**STELLENBERG BYBELSKOOL**



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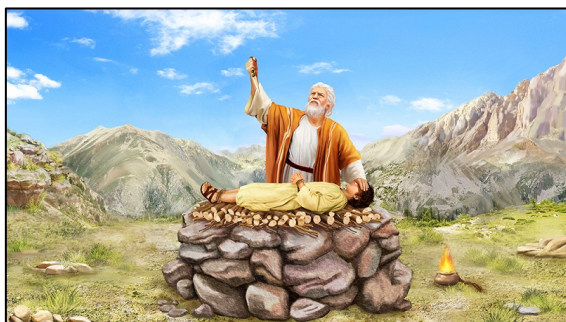
**Aanbieder: Marius Breytenbach**

## Hoe is God vandag in ons wêreld teenwoordig?

Wanneer ons aan God se teenwoordigheid dink bring dit ons by momente in die lewe waar ons God se nabyheid ervaar. God is egter in alle tye teenwoordig. In momente waar ons aanbid, werk, ontspan en ook in die momente waar ons ver van God voel. Dit is wat die Aartsvader verhale so besonders maak. Dit maak vir ons oë oop vir die wyse waarop God in die midde van politieke en ekonomiese realiteite, magsverhoudinge en konflik, gebrokenheid, familie spanning en krisis, verkeerde keuses en ekologiese rampe teenwoordig is. Kom reis in die volgende paar sessies saam met Abraham, Isak, Jakob en Josef en ontdek hoe nou verweef God in hierdie wêreld met mense meeleeft.

Die Bybelskool reeks sal weekliks op die Stellenberg-gemeente se *YouTube*-kanaal opgedateer word. Besoek ons gemeente webwerf ([Stellenberg.co.za](http://Stellenberg.co.za)) vir die skakel. Kontak my gerus by [marius@stellenberg.co.za](mailto:marius@stellenberg.co.za) of 0823766053 indien jy vrae of kommentaar het.

Wanneer 'n mens aan Genesis 12-50 dink, staan die twee verhale uit wat van kindsbeen by ons ingeprent is: Abraham wat vir Isak wil offer en Jakob wat vir Josef 'n mooi kleed gemaak het.



Wanneer ons tyd neem om die verhale in Genesis 12-50 noukeurig van 'n kant deur te lees ontdek ons verrassend meer en kry ou verhale waarmee ons grootgeword het nuwe betekenis. Mag jy dit ook so ervaar wanneer ons in die volgende paar sessies saam hierdie verhale lees.

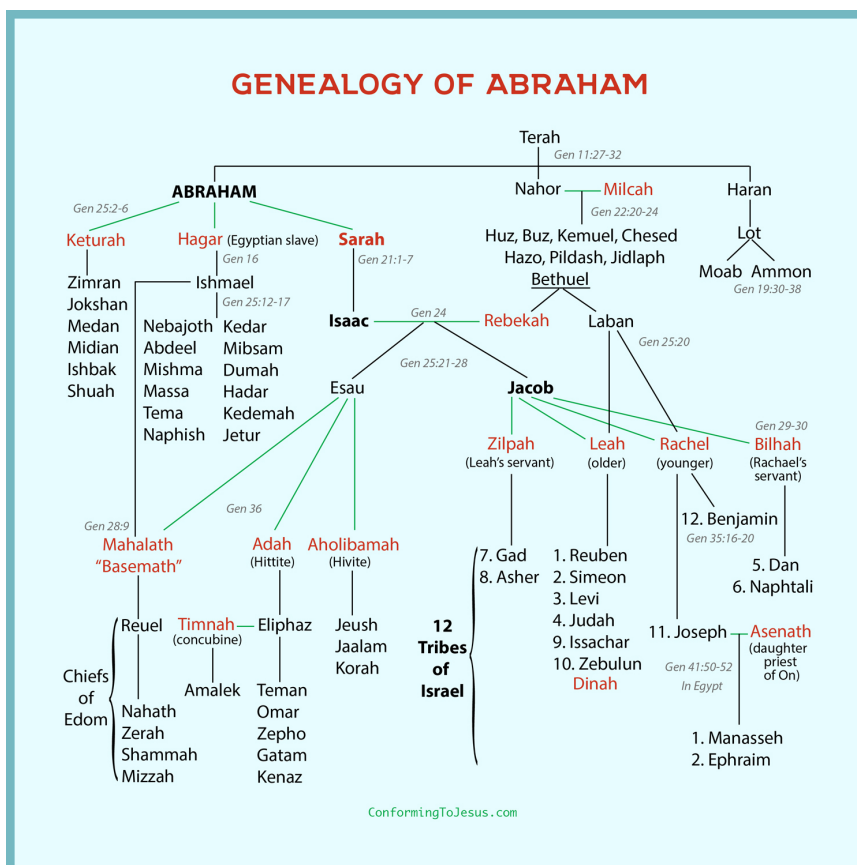
## SESSIE 1. INLEDING TOT DIE AARTSVADER VERHALE

Die Bybelboek Genesis bestaan uit 'n aantal verhale wat volgens die *toledot* formule in verskillende verhaal siklusse ingedeel is. *Toledot*, is 'n Hebreeuse term wat met "afstammeling/familie geskiedenis" vertaal kan word. Dit verdeel Genesis 12-50 dus in drie aparte verhaal siklusse wat elke in eie reg gelees en verstaan moet word en as raamwerk dien vir ons studie:

Deel 1. Die familiegeskiedenis van Abraham. Genesis 11:27-25:18

Deel 2. Die familiegeskiedenis van Jakob en sy seuns. Genesis 25:19-37:1

Deel 3. Die familiegeskiedenis van Josef en sy broers. Genesis 37:2-50:26



Die genealogiese raamwerk hierbo is 'n baie nuttige sleutel om jou te oriënteer soos jy deur die verhale lees.

Voor ons by die verhale self uitkom gaan ons eers breedweg aandag gee aan twee aspekte wat ons help om die verhaal siklusse beter te verstaan, naamlik: Die wêreld agter en voor die teks.

### Die wêreld agter en voor die teks

Wanneer ons Bybeltekste, soos die Aartsvader verhale, lees is dit belangrik om rekening te hou dat daar 'n tyd gaping is tussen die gebeure van die teks en die uiteindelijke neerskryf en lees daarvan. Dit bring ons by twee verskillende wêreldes uit, naamlik die wêreld agter en voor die teks. Die volgende terme help ons om dit beter te verstaan.

VERTELDE TYD verwys na die tyd/omstandighede waarin die verhaal se ontstaan gehad het. In die geval van die Aartsvaders plaas dit ons in die wêreld van die Ou Nabye Ooste rondom 2000-1700 vC. Ons gaan in hierdie sessie redelik baie tyd spandeer om hierdie konteks beter te verstaan.

VERTEL TYD verwys na 'n later periode toe die verhaal vir 'n baie spesifieke rede in teksvorm neergeskryf is. In die geval van Genesis 12-50 geld twee verskillende tye. Die Monargale tydperk (David & Salomo se tyd) rondom 1000-900 vC en die periode na die Babiloniese ballingskap rondom 600-500 vC, toe die volk uit Babel na Jerusalem terugkeer.

Die tyd verskil tussen die vertelde tyd en verteltyd van Genesis 12-50 blyk uit die volgende **anakronismes** wat ons in die teks aantref. Alhoewel die Aartsvader verhale teen die agtergrond van die periode tussen 2000-1700 vC afspeel, is daar dus aspekte in die teks wat heelwat later dateer.

- **Kamele.** Genesis 12-50 verwys dikwels na die gebruik van kamele as pakkdiere (Gen. 12,24,30,31,32,37). Kamele in die

#### **ANAKRONISMES**

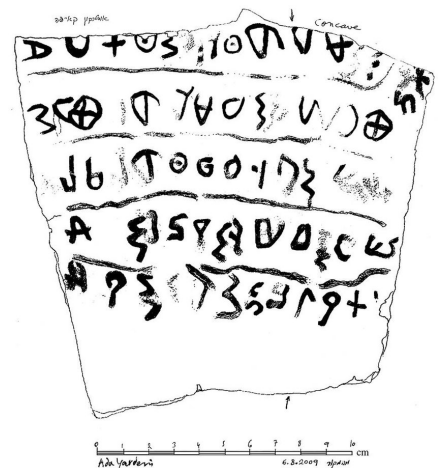
'n Anakronisme is wanneer 'n objek, persoon of idee buite die tyd van geskiedenis waarin dit geskryf is voorkom.

Voorbeeld: Volgens 'n gewilde legende sou Nero 'n viool bespeel het terwyl Rome gebrand het, maar dit is 'n **anakronisme**, aangesien hierdie instrument eers 'n duisend jaar later uitgevind is.

Ou Nabye Ooste is egter eers in die 2 de millennium voor Christus gedomestiseer waarna hulle rondom 1000 vC die eerste keer as pakkdiere gebruik is. Die bestaan van kamele handelsroetes in Arabië dateer uit die 8-7 de eeu vC toe die teks in alle waarskynlikheid neergeskryf is.

- **Filistyne.** In Genesis 26:1 ontmoet Isak die Filistynse koning Abimelek. Die Filistyne as nasie het egter eers na 1200 vC die kusvlakte van Israel bewoon.
- **Arameërs.** Die Arameërs word as 'n dominante nasie beskryf in verhaal van Jakob se huwelik met Lea en Ragel (Gen. 25, 28). Die Arameërs het egter eers vanaf 1100 vC as etniese groep in Israel bestaan.
- **Plekname.** Die plekname wat in Genesis 31 voorkom en waarin grense afgemerk word reflekteer die landskap van die 9-8 ste eeu vC. So ook die nedersettings wat in Genesis 25:12-16 genoem word.

**Mondelinge en geskrewe tradisies.** Die tydverloop tussen die vertelde en verteltyd bring ons uit by die proses waarin mondelinge tradisies in teksvorm neergeskryf is. Dit is begryplik dat Bybel tekste eers vir 'n lang tyd in 'n mondelinge vorm bestaan het voor skrywers dit vir baie spesifieke redes versamel, geredigeer en op skrif gestel het. Skrywers het die landskap wat vir hulle bekend was gebruik om verhale uit die verlede neer te pen. Vandaar dus die



anakronismes in die Bybelteks. Hou ook in gedagte dat die skryfkuns eers in die omgewing van 3000 vC deur die Sumeriërs ontwikkel is omdat die behoefte ontstaan het om landbouprodukte aan te teken. Soos by alle ander koninkryke in die Ou Nabye Ooste, het die skryfkuns in Israel dus eers behoorlik ontwikkel met die totstandkoming van koninklike howe, wat in die geval van Israel op die vroegste by die tydperk na 1000 vC uitbring. Die oudste Hebreeuse teks in ons besit is Paleo Hebreeus wat die voorloop is van die Hebreeus in Bybelstekste en baie daarvan verskil. Die oudste Paleo Hebreeuse teks in ons besit is die *Kirbet Quiyafa ostracon*<sup>1</sup> (*skets hier langsaan*) wat rondom 1000 vC dateer (tyd van Saul/Dawid).

<sup>1</sup> 'n Ostracon is 'n potskerf waarop geskryf is.

Maak hierdie realiteit die Bybel minder relevant of waar? Beroof dit ons van God se Woord? Allermens! Inteendeel soos ons in die volgende paar sessies die tekste lees sal julle ondervind dat die tradisie waarin tekste neergeskryf is juis die Bybelse boodskap geloofwaardig en relevant maak. Ons vertekpunt is dus die volgende:

**Wat wou die skrywers van die Aartsvaders bereik deur die oordra van hierdie verhale?**

**Wat wou hulle by gelowiges tuisbring en hoe praat hierdie gedeeltes vandag met ons?**

**Hoe is hierdie tekste God se Woord in ons eie tyd?**

**Aspekte van die wêreld agter die teks wat ons help ons om Genesis 12-50 beter te verstaan?**

Ek gaan vir 'n wyle 'n wye draai gooi, omdat 'n mens selde 'n geleentheid soos hierdie kry om oor die wêreld waaruit die Ou Testament sy ontstaan het te praat. Gelowiges vind dit dikwels moeilik om Bybelse gebeure in 'n breër historiese konteks te plaas en te beoordeel. Ons begin by 10 000 voor Christus (vC) toe mense in die Ou Naby Ooste 'n belangrike transisie, bekend as die landbou revolusie, deurgaan het. Hierdie transisie het ook spoedig na 10 000 vC in ander dele van die wêreld op dreef gekom.

Alle mense op aarde het aanvanklik 'n jagter-versamelaar bestaan gevoer, waarin klein groepe mense seisoenaal agter kos en water rondgetrek het (maw 'n bestaan soortgelyk aan die San bevolking in Suider Afrika). Klimaatsveranderinge rondom 10 000 vC het skielik wêreldwyd, in geskikte areas, gelei tot die opkoms van wilde

graan wat deur mense voedselbron benut en gedomestiseer is. Hulle het met ander woorde agter gekom dat hulle dit self kan aanplant en manipuleer om beter en groter oeste te lewer. Diere, wat die landerye moes bewerk, is ook spoedig gedomestiseer. In plaas daarvan om ver te reis op soek na kos het mense gevestig geraak rondom landerye waar graan aangeplant is. Die landbou revolusie het tot die eerste gevestigde boerdery nedersettings (landbouers en veeboere) gelei en was die voorloop van die eerste dorpe, stede waarvan *Çatalhöyük*, *Göbekli Tepe* in Turkye vandag goeie voorbeelde is (sien kaart op bladsy 8). Boere het gou meer begin produseer as wat hulle self kon verbruik. Hierdie oorproduksie het op sy beurt gelei tot die eerste markte, handel en staatsbestel om dit te administreer en verder te ontwikkel. Aan die bopunt van hierdie gevestigde gemeenskappe het 'n *elite* groep ontstaan wat deur die nuwe ekonomie bevoordeel is en waarvoor hulle beheer uitgeoefen het. Dit is in kort die verhaal van die wêreld se eerste beskawings (*civilizations*) waarvan Egipte en Mesopotamië die vroegste voorbeelde was (sien kaart op bladsy 9). Beide speel 'n belangrike rol in die verloop van Genesis 12-50. Elke beskawing het 'n sterk weermag opgebou om hulle ekonomiese en politieke belange

## BESKAWING

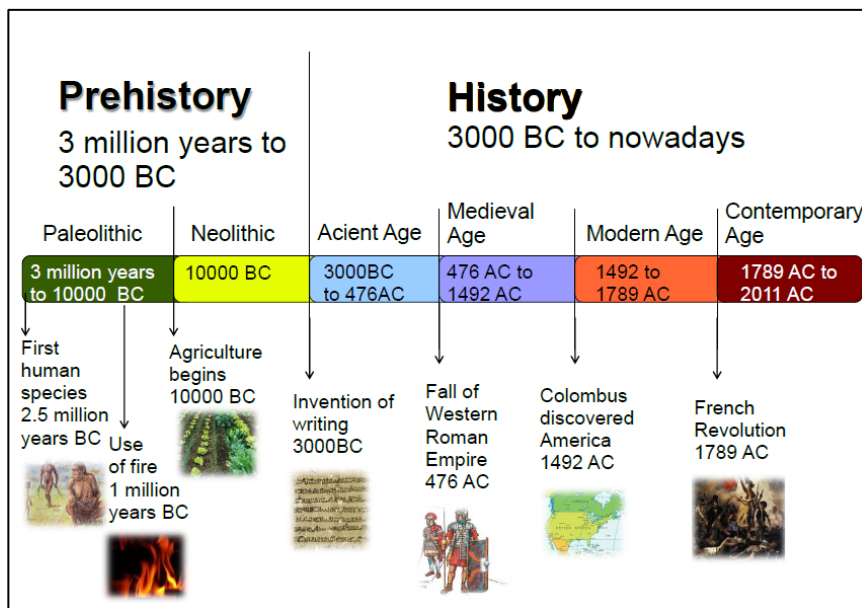
'n Beskawing is enige komplekse samelewing gekenmerk deur stedelike ontwikkeling, sosiale stratifikasie, simboliese kommunikasievorme (gewoonlik skryfstelsels), en die waargenome skeiding van en heerskappy oor die natuurlike omgewing deur 'n kulturele elite.

Histories was 'n *beskawing* 'n sogenaamde "gevoorderde" kultuur in teenstelling met sogenaamde meer primitiewe kulture. As 'n nietelbare naamwoord verwys *beskawing* ook na die proses van 'n samelewing se ontwikkeling tot 'n gesentraliseerde, verstedelikte, gestratifiseerde struktuur.

Beskawings word in digbevolkte nedersettings gegroepeer en in hiërargiese sosiale klasse verdeel, met 'n heersende elite en ondergeskikte stedelike en landelike bevolkings wat by intensiewe landbou, mynbou, kleinskaalse vervaardiging en handel betrokke is. Beskawings sentraliseer mag en oefen menslike beheer oor die res van die natuur, insluitend ander mense uit.

deur oorlog uit te brei en van ander te beskerm. Die hele Ou Testament moet teen hierdie agtergrond gelees en verstaan word.

In die tydlyn hieronder kan die verskillende tyd periodes in wêreld geskiedenis gesien word. Let op dat die onderskeid tussen die pre-historiese en historiese periodes te doen het met die ontstaan van skryfkuns en tekste rondom 3000 vC.



Die kaart hierlangsaa skets die vroegste gemeenskappe wat rondom 7500 vC deur die landbou revolusie (neolitiese revolusie) geraak is.





Die kaart van die Ou Nabye Ooste hieronder vertel van die totstandkoming van die eerste beskawings in die Ou Nabye Ooste. Let op die roete waarlangs Abraham getrek het wat op die kaart aangedui word.



Wanneer ons dus helaas die verloop van die Ou Testament teen die agtergrond van breë trekke in die Ou Nabye Oosterse lees, gaan 'n nuwe wêreld vir 'n mens oop wat 'n mens help tot dieper insigte in die teks self. Wat Genesis 12-50 betref dus die volgende:

- **Internasionale politiek.** Weens Israel se ligging was hulle gedurig vasgevang in internasionale politiek waarin groter koninkryke soos die Assiriërs, Babiloniërs, Egiptenare, Perse, Grieke en later Romeine die botoon gevoer het. Enige geringe

internasionale gebeurtenis (ekonomiese of militêr) het die inwoners van Israel ingrypend geraak en verander en gelaat met die vraag: Hoe gaan ons in hierdie nuwe omstandighede oorleef? Hierdie gebeure is oral Bybeltekste sigbaar en was veral relevant na 586 vC toe Jerusalem vernietig en die volk in ballingskap weggevoer is. Die Aartsvader verhale het gelowiges in hierdie tyd laat beseef dat God hulle nie in die tragiese verloop van gebeure verlaat het nie.

- **Ekologie.** Die impak van ekologiese krisis soos droogtes in die Ou Nabye Ooste was 'n voortdurende realiteit wat die ekonomie van die tyd en mense se bestaan daarbinne diepliggend geraak het. In Genesis vind ons verskeie verwysings daarna (Gen. 12:10; 26:1; 41:56).

- **Ekonomie en boerdery.** Die hoof handel roete wat Egipte met Mesopotamië verbind het, het deur Israel geloop en die besit van die streek gesog gemaak. Elke koninkryk wat in geskiedenis gedomineer het, het dus ook hulle stempel op Israel afgedwing. Hierdie roetes is ook gebruik wanneer een nasie teen 'n ander oorlog gemaak het. Vir die grootste deel van Israel se bestaan was hulle 'n vasaal/onderdaan van die Egiptenaars, Assiriërs, Babiloniërs, Perse en Grieke aan wie gereelde belastings betaalbaar was.

Binne Israel het twee tipes gemeenskappe geleef. Die kaart op die volgende blad help ons om 'n beter begrip te kry hoe die geografie van Kanaän aan Genesis 12-50 vorm gee. Die vrugbare kusvlakte was deur inheemse Kanaänitiese stadstate bewoon is was 'n belangrike landboustreek. Die sentrale hoogland gedeelte van Israel is weer deur migrerende veeboer gemeenskappe (nomades) bewoon. Die Aartsvaders en latere Israeliete het deel van die groep uitgemaak (sien die kaart hieronder). Ons gaan in later sessies weer hierdie kaart besoek om die reise van die Aartsvaders op die landskap te plot.

# ISRAEL

Topographical map of  
Central Mountain Range and  
Northern Galilee Region.



**Waarom was Genesis 12-50 geskryf?**  
**Waarom is hierdie verhale mondelings oorvertel en later neergeskryf?**  
**Wat wou die skrywers daardeur bereik of by mense tuisbring?**

Die boodskap van Bybeltekste het verrassend niks op sig self met geskiedenis (die beskrywing van die kronologiese verloop van gebeure) te doen nie, maar eerder met teologie (die boodskap wat die skrywers wou oordra). Bybelskrywers was dus nie primêr geïnteresseerd om 'n kronologiese verloop van gebeure aan te bied wat daaropvolgende geslagte, 'n geskiedenis sou noem nie. Historiografie/ geskiedskrywing is 'n konsep eers baie onlangs ontwikkel het.

Die Aartsvader verhale was eerder effektiewe voertuie<sup>2</sup> waardeur Bybelskrywers deurleefde kennis aangaande God en mense wou vasmaak, sodat hulle gehoor en daaropvolgende generasie daaruit kon leer en hulle lewens vir die toekoms op God kon rig. Die genre van "verhale" was 'b besondere voertuig omdat dit op 'n besondere manier appél gerig het op mense se denke, emosies en intuïsie. Dit is binne hierdie konteks dat ons vandag die Aartsvader verhale lees en betekenis daaruit kry.

### **Hoe moet ons die verhale in Genesis 12-50 benader?**

Die boodskap van verhale staan nie eksplisiet in die teks nie, maar moet deur die leser afgelei word soos wat jy in die verhaal meeleeft en dit toelaat om perspektiewe in jou los te maak. Vergelyk dit met Paulus se briewe in die Nuwe Testament waarin hy dikwels die betekenis in die teks eksplisiet vir ons uitlê en dan op grond daarvan gelowiges uitdaag of vermaan (uitleg-vermaning). Ons verwys dus na die Aartsvader verhale as **historiese narratiewe**. Alhoewel die verhale waarskynlik diep gewortel is

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<sup>2</sup> Dink daaraan dat in die afwesigheid van 'n gevestigde skryftaal narratiewe (narratiewe) die enigste manier was waarop vroeë mense hulle indrukke van gebeure kon weergee.

in gebeure van die verlede, is die fokus nie op die historiese korrektheid nie, maar eerder die kennis wat die skrywer daardeur aangaande God en mense wil oordra.

Wanneer ons dus in die volgende sessies die verhaal siklusse gaan lees (Abraham, Jakob en Josef) is dit belangrik om van die volgende kennis te neem.

**TEMA.** Elkeen van die drie verhale het 'n ander tema. Die tema is die sentrale boodskap waaroor die verhaal gaan wat nêrens eksplisiet in die teks geskryf staan nie, maar ontvou deur:

- **Karakters** in die verhaal. Let op die manier waarop die karakters in die verhaal beskryf word. Hoe word Abraham byvoorbeeld in Genesis 12-25 uitgebeeld en wat is die verskille en ooreenkomste met ander karakters in die verhaal? Dit is 'n goeie idee om na elke verhaal diep na te dink oor die hoofkarakters in die verhaal en hulle in kort te beskryf.
- Die opbou van 'n **spanningslyn** in elke verhaal. Elke Bybelse verhaal begin aanvanklik rustig en mooi waarna die interaksie tussen karakter en hulle omgewing komplikasies skep wat deel is van die plot (patroon) van die verhaal. Let op hoe elke verhaal se plot verskil, maar ook hoe spesifieke gebeure soos droogtes, onvrugbaarheid, geboortes in elke verhaal herhaal. Wat is die komplikasie in elke verhaal?
- Die **breekpunt en ontknoping** van die verhaal. waarna daar weer 'n afloop volg wat na die volgende siklus opbou. Wat is die breekpunt/ontknoping in elkeen van die drie verhaal siklusse?
- Die **transisie** aan die einde van elke verhaal na die volgende verhaal siklus waar dieselfde patroon herhaal.

### HUISWERK VIR DIE VOLGENDE SESSIE

Lees die Abraham verhaal deur in Genesis 11:27-25:18 voor jy na die volgende sessie kyk

## **VIR DIEGENE WAT MEER WIL LEES: Twee artikels oor die beskawing in Mesopotamië en Egipte.**

### **Die beskawing in Mesopotamië (artikel uit History.com)**

Sumer was an ancient civilization founded in the Mesopotamia region of the Fertile Crescent situated between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Known for their innovations in language, governance, architecture and more, Sumerians are considered the creators of civilization as modern humans understand it. Their control of the region lasted for short of 2,000 years before the Babylonians took charge in 2004 B.C.

#### **Sumerian Civilization**

Sumer was first settled by humans from 4500 to 4000 B.C., though it is probable that some settlers arrived much earlier. This early population—known as the Ubaid people—was notable for strides in the development of civilization such as farming and raising cattle, weaving textiles, working with carpentry and pottery and even enjoying beer. Villages and towns were built around Ubaid farming communities.

The people known as Sumerians were in control of the area by 3000 B.C. Their culture was comprised of a group of city-states, including Eridu, Nippur, Lagash, Kish, Ur and the very first true city, Uruk. At its peak around 2800 BC, the city had a population between 40,000 and 80,000 people living between its six miles of defensive walls, making it a contender for the largest city in the world. Each city-state of Sumer was surrounded by a wall, with villages settled just outside and distinguished by the worship of local deities.

#### **Sumerian Language and Literature**

The Sumerian language is the oldest linguistic record. It first appeared in archaeological records around 3100 B.C. and dominated Mesopotamia for the next thousand years. It was mostly replaced by Akkadian around 2000 B.C. but held on as a written language in cuneiform for another 2,000 years. Cuneiform, which is used in pictographic tablets, appeared as far back as 4000 B.C., but was later adapted into Akkadian, and expanded even further outside of Mesopotamia beginning in 3000 B.C. Writing remains one of the most important cultural achievements of the Sumerians, allowing for meticulous record keeping from rulers down to farmers and ranchers. The oldest written laws date back to 2400 B.C. in the city of Ebla, where the Code of Er-Nammu was written on tablets. The Sumerians were considered to have a rich body of literary works, though only fragments of these documents exist.

#### **Sumerian Art and Architecture**

Architecture on a grand scale is generally credited to have begun under the Sumerians, with religious structures dating back to 3400 B.C., although it appears

that the basics of the structures began in the Ubaid period as far back as 5200 B.C. and were improved upon through the centuries. Homes were made from mud bricks or bundled marsh reeds. The buildings are noted for their arched doorways and flat roofs. Elaborate construction, such as terra cotta ornamentation with bronze accents, complicated mosaics, imposing brick columns and sophisticated mural paintings all reveal the society's technical sophistication. Sculpture was used mainly to adorn temples and offer some of the earliest examples of human artists seeking to achieve some form of naturalism in their figures. Facing a scarcity of stone, Sumerians made leaps in metal-casting for their sculpture work, though relief carving in stone was a popular art form. Under the Akkadian dynasty, sculpture reached new heights, as evidenced by intricate and stylized work in diorite dated to 2100 B.C. Ziggurats began to appear around 2200 B.C. These impressive pyramid-like, stepped temples, which were either square or rectangular, featured no inner chambers and stood about 170 feet high. Ziggurats often featured sloping sides and terraces with gardens. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

### **Sumerian Science**

Sumerians had a system of medicine that was based in magic and herbalism, but they were also familiar with processes of removing chemical parts from natural substances. They are considered to have had an advanced knowledge of anatomy, and surgical instruments have been found in archeological sites.

One of the Sumerians greatest advances was in the area of hydraulic engineering. Early in their history they created a system of ditches to control flooding, and were also the inventors of irrigation, harnessing the power of the Tigris and Euphrates for farming. Canals were consistently maintained from dynasty to dynasty.

Their skill at engineering and architecture both point to the sophistication of their understanding of math. The structure of modern time keeping, with sixty seconds in a minute and sixty minutes in an hour, is attributed to the Sumerians.

### **Sumerian Culture**

Schools were common in Sumerian culture, marking the world's first mass effort to pass along knowledge in order to keep a society running and building on itself. Sumerians left behind scores of written records, but they are more renowned for their epic poetry, which influenced later works in Greece and Rome and sections of the Bible, most notably the story of the Great Flood, the Garden of Eden, and the Tower of Babel. The Sumerians were musically inclined and a Sumerian hymn, "Hurrian Hymn No. 6," is considered the world's oldest musically notated song.

### **Gilgamesh**

The very first ruling body of Sumer that has historical verification is the First Dynasty of Kish. The earliest ruler mentioned is Etana of Kish, who, in a document from the

time, is credited as having “stabilized all the lands.” One thousand years later, Etana would be memorialized in a poem that told of his adventures in heaven.

The most famous of the early Sumerian rulers is Gilgamesh, king of Uruk, who took control around 2700 B.C. and is still remembered for his fictional adventures in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the first epic poem in history and inspiration for later Roman and Greek myths and Biblical stories. A devastating flood in the region was used as a pivotal point in the epic poem and later reused in the Old Testament story of Noah.

### **Die beskawing in Egipte (artikel uit History.com)**

For almost 30 centuries—from its unification around 3100 B.C. to its conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.—ancient Egypt was the preeminent civilization in the Mediterranean world. From the great pyramids of the Old Kingdom through the military conquests of the New Kingdom, Egypt’s majesty has long entranced archaeologists and historians and created a vibrant field of study all its own: Egyptology. The main sources of information about ancient Egypt are the many monuments, objects and artifacts that have been recovered from archaeological sites, covered with hieroglyphs that have only recently been deciphered. The picture that emerges is of a culture with few equals in the beauty of its art, the accomplishment of its architecture or the richness of its religious traditions.

#### **Predynastic Period (c. 5000-3100 B.C.)**

Few written records or artifacts have been found from the Predynastic Period, which encompassed at least 2,000 years of gradual development of the Egyptian civilization. Did you know? During the rule of Akhenaton, his wife Nefertiti played an important political and religious role in the monotheistic cult of the sun god Aton. Images and sculptures of Nefertiti depict her famous beauty and role as a living goddess of fertility.

Neolithic (late Stone Age) communities in northeastern Africa exchanged hunting for agriculture and made early advances that paved the way for the later development of Egyptian arts and crafts, technology, politics and religion (including a great reverence for the dead and possibly a belief in life after death). Around 3400 B.C., two separate kingdoms were established near the Fertile Crescent, an area home to some of the world’s oldest civilizations: the Red Land to the north, based in the Nile River Delta and extending along the Nile perhaps to Atfih; and the White Land in the south, stretching from Atfih to Gebel es-Silsila. A southern king, Scorpion, made the first attempts to conquer the northern kingdom around 3200 B.C. A century later, King Menes would subdue the north and unify the country, becoming the first king of the first dynasty.



### **Archaic (Early Dynastic) Period (c. 3100-2686 B.C.)**

King Menes founded the capital of ancient Egypt at White Walls (later known as Memphis), in the north, near the apex of the Nile River delta. The capital would grow into a great metropolis that dominated Egyptian society during the Old Kingdom period. The Archaic Period saw the development of the foundations of Egyptian society, including the all-important ideology of kingship. To the ancient Egyptians, the king was a godlike being, closely identified with the all-powerful god Horus. The earliest known hieroglyphic writing also dates to this period. In the Archaic Period, as in all other periods, most ancient Egyptians were farmers living in small villages, and agriculture (largely wheat and barley) formed the economic base of the Egyptian state. The annual flooding of the great Nile River provided the necessary irrigation and fertilization each year; farmers sowed the wheat after the flooding receded and harvested it before the season of high temperatures and drought returned.

### **Old Kingdom: Age of the Pyramid Builders (c. 2686-2181 B.C.)**

The Old Kingdom began with the third dynasty of pharaohs. Around 2630 B.C., the third dynasty's King Djoser asked Imhotep, an architect, priest and healer, to design a funerary monument for him; the result was the world's first major stone building, the Step-Pyramid at Saqqara, near Memphis. Egyptian pyramid-building reached its zenith with the construction of the Great Pyramid at Giza, on the outskirts of Cairo. Built for Khufu (or Cheops, in Greek), who ruled from 2589 to 2566 B.C., the pyramid was later named by classical historians as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus estimated that it took 100,000 men 20 years to build it. Two other pyramids were built at Giza for Khufu's successors Khafra (2558-2532 B.C) and Menkaura (2532-2503 B.C.).

During the third and fourth dynasties, Egypt enjoyed a golden age of peace and prosperity. The pharaohs held absolute power and provided a stable central government; the kingdom faced no serious threats from abroad; and successful military campaigns in foreign countries like Nubia and Libya added to its considerable economic prosperity. Over the course of the fifth and sixth dynasties, the king's wealth was steadily depleted, partially due to the huge expense of pyramid-building, and his absolute power faltered in the face of the growing influence of the nobility and the priesthood that grew up around the sun god Ra (Re). After the death of the sixth dynasty's King Pepy II, who ruled for some 94 years, the Old Kingdom period ended in chaos.

### **First Intermediate Period (c. 2181-2055 B.C.)**

On the heels of the Old Kingdom's collapse, the seventh and eighth dynasties consisted of a rapid succession of Memphis-based rulers until about 2160 B.C., when the central authority completely dissolved, leading to civil war between provincial governors. This chaotic situation was intensified by Bedouin invasions and accompanied by famine and disease. From this era of conflict emerged two different kingdoms: A line of 17 rulers (dynasties nine and 10) based in Heracleopolis ruled Middle Egypt between Memphis and Thebes, while another family of rulers arose in Thebes to challenge Heracleopolitan power. Around 2055 B.C., the Theban prince

Mentuhotep managed to topple Heracleopolis and reunited Egypt, beginning the 11th dynasty and ending the First Intermediate Period.

### **Middle Kingdom: 12th Dynasty (c. 2055-1786 B.C.)**

After the last ruler of the 11th dynasty, Mentuhotep IV, was assassinated, the throne passed to his vizier, or chief minister, who became King Amenemhet I, founder of dynasty 12. A new capital was established at It-towy, south of Memphis, while Thebes remained a great religious center. During the Middle Kingdom, Egypt once again flourished, as it had during the Old Kingdom. The 12th dynasty kings ensured the smooth succession of their line by making each successor co-regent, a custom that began with Amenemhet I. Middle-Kingdom Egypt pursued an aggressive foreign policy, colonizing Nubia (with its rich supply of gold, ebony, ivory and other resources) and repelling the Bedouins who had infiltrated Egypt during the First Intermediate Period. The kingdom also built diplomatic and trade relations with Syria, Palestine and other countries; undertook building projects including military fortresses and mining quarries; and returned to pyramid-building in the tradition of the Old Kingdom. The Middle Kingdom reached its peak under Amenemhet III (1842-1797 B.C.); its decline began under Amenemhet IV (1798-1790 B.C.) and continued under his sister and regent, Queen Sobekneferu (1789-1786 B.C.), who was the first confirmed female ruler of Egypt and the last ruler of the 12th dynasty.

### **Second Intermediate Period (c. 1786-1567 B.C.)**

The 13th dynasty marked the beginning of another unsettled period in Egyptian history, during which a rapid succession of kings failed to consolidate power. As a consequence, during the Second Intermediate Period Egypt was divided into several spheres of influence. The official royal court and seat of government was relocated to Thebes, while a rival dynasty (the 14th), centered on the city of Xoïs in the Nile delta, seems to have existed at the same time as the 13th. Around 1650 B.C., a line of foreign rulers known as the Hyksos took advantage of Egypt's instability to take control. The Hyksos rulers of the 15th dynasty adopted and continued many of the existing Egyptian traditions in government as well as culture. They ruled concurrently with the line of native Theban rulers of the 17th dynasty, who retained control over most of southern Egypt despite having to pay taxes to the Hyksos. (The 16th dynasty is variously believed to be Theban or Hyksos rulers.) Conflict eventually flared between the two groups, and the Thebans launched a war against the Hyksos around 1570 B.C., driving them out of Egypt.

### **New Kingdom (c. 1567-1085 B.C.)**

Under Ahmose I, the first king of the 18th dynasty, Egypt was once again reunited. During the 18th dynasty, Egypt restored its control over Nubia and began military campaigns in Palestine, clashing with other powers in the area such as the Mitannians and the Hittites. The country went on to establish the world's first great empire, stretching from Nubia to the Euphrates River in Asia. In addition to powerful kings such as Amenhotep I (1546-1526 B.C.), Thutmose I (1525-1512 B.C.) and Amenhotep III (1417-1379 B.C.), the New Kingdom was notable for the role of royal

women such as Queen Hatshepsut (1503-1482 B.C.), who began ruling as a regent for her young stepson (he later became Thutmose III, Egypt's greatest military hero), but rose to wield all the powers of a pharaoh.

The controversial Amenhotep IV (c. 1379-1362), of the late 18th dynasty, undertook a religious revolution, disbanding the priesthoods dedicated to Amon-Re (a combination of the local Theban god Amon and the sun god Re) and forcing the exclusive worship of another sun-god, Aton. Renaming himself Akhenaton ("servant of the Aton"), he built a new capital in Middle Egypt called Akhetaton, known later as Amarna. Upon Akhenaton's death, the capital returned to Thebes and Egyptians returned to worshipping a multitude of gods. The 19th and 20th dynasties, known as the Ramesside period (for the line of kings named Ramses) saw the restoration of the weakened Egyptian empire and an impressive amount of building, including great temples and cities. According to biblical chronology, the exodus of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt possibly occurred during the reign of Ramses II (1304-1237 B.C.).

All of the New Kingdom rulers (with the exception of Akhenaton) were laid to rest in deep, rock-cut tombs (not pyramids) in the Valley of the Kings, a burial site on the west bank of the Nile opposite Thebes. Most of them were raided and destroyed, with the exception of the tomb and treasure of Tutankhamen (c. 1361-1352 B.C.), discovered largely intact in A.D. 1922. The splendid mortuary temple of the last great king of the 20th dynasty, Ramses III (c. 1187-1156 B.C.), was also relatively well preserved, and indicated the prosperity Egypt still enjoyed during his reign. The kings who followed Ramses III were less successful: Egypt lost its provinces in Palestine and Syria for good and suffered from foreign invasions (notably by the Libyans), while its wealth was being steadily but inevitably depleted.

### **Third Intermediate Period (c. 1085-664 B.C.)**

The next 400 years—known as the Third Intermediate Period—saw important changes in Egyptian politics, society and culture. Centralized government under the 21st dynasty pharaohs gave way to the resurgence of local officials, while foreigners from Libya and Nubia grabbed power for themselves and left a lasting imprint on Egypt's population. The 22nd dynasty began around 945 B.C. with King Sheshonq, a descendant of Libyans who had invaded Egypt during the late 20th dynasty and settled there. Many local rulers were virtually autonomous during this period and dynasties 23-24 are poorly documented. In the eighth century B.C., Nubian pharaohs beginning with Shabako, ruler of the Nubian kingdom of Kush, established their own dynasty—the 25th—at Thebes. Under Kushite rule, Egypt clashed with the growing Assyrian empire. In 671 B.C., the Assyrian ruler Esarhaddon drove the Kushite king Taharka out of Memphis and destroyed the city; he then appointed his own rulers out of local governors and officials loyal to the Assyrians. One of them, Necho of Sais, ruled briefly as the first king of the 26th dynasty before being killed by the Kushite leader Tanuatamun, in a final, unsuccessful grab for power.

