

## B.C.

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- 48,000 In Mesopotamia (Iraq), the Neanderthals, a hominid people related to modern humans, place flowers in graves, possibly indicating respect for the dead. Neanderthals may also believe in an afterlife, as indicated by the placement in graves of such useful items as tools and food. REL
- 30,000-  
-20,000 In Germany and elsewhere in Europe, modern humans make sculptures that may represent religious images. Made from stone, bone, and antler, they include animals, hybrid animal-people, and "Venuses," sculptures of exaggerated female shapes; the Venuses may function as fertility figures. REL
- 20,000-  
-10,000 In France and Spain, paintings are made on cave walls. The images of animals, abstract designs, and stenciled hands may be associated with religious belief and ritual. REL
- 10,000 In the Middle East, the dead are buried in cemeteries and under the floors of huts, often with personal articles such as necklaces and bracelets. REL
- 10,000 The oldest known solar calendar, possibly associated with seasonal rituals, is engraved on bone in France. REL
- 8000 In Mesopotamia (Iraq), agriculture is developed, along with the first large farming settlements, later to grow into cities. Civilization, with its high levels of organization, stratification, and division of labor, will follow. POL
- 7500 The earliest known cemetery in North America is dug in what will become Arkansas. Tools buried with the deceased indicate belief in an afterlife. In Africa about this time, red ocher is sprinkled on the dead in their graves. REL
- 7500 Skulls of deceased ancestors, with flesh modeled in plaster and shells in eye sockets, may be used in ancestor worship in the Levant. REL
- 7000-  
-6000 Shrines, decorated with paintings and figures of animals and women, are built in southern Anatolia (Turkey). REL
- 6000-  
-5000 At Mehrgarh, west of the Indus Valley, funerary offerings, including gems, are buried with the dead. REL

- 5900-  
-3100  
-5500      The Ubaid culture of Mesopotamia (Iraq) builds temples containing altars. REL  
By now, agriculture, with its shift to a more settled way of life than hunting and gathering, has developed independently or been introduced from outside in parts of Europe, China, South Asia, and the Americas. REL
- 5000-  
-3100      In the predynastic period in Egypt, sculptors carve monolithic figures and clay figurines of gods. Funerary offerings often include sculptures, pottery, and weapons. REL
- 4500      Communal burial places known as megalithic chamber tombs are built in northern and western Europe. REL
- 4300-  
-3100      During the Uruk period in Mesopotamia (Iraq), Sumerian city-states such as Uruk (or Erech) take shape. Relying on extensive canal systems for irrigation and on trade networks for supply of raw materials, the city-states have complex political and economic dimensions, reflected in the development of systems of accounting, law, and writing. The latter, known as cuneiform, consists of wedge-shaped signs on clay tablets. POL
- 4300-  
-3100      In Mesopotamia (Iraq), the authority of the political ruler of the city-state of Uruk is reinforced by his association with the goddess of love and war, Inanna. POL
- 4000      Temples, ritual monuments, and burial grounds are constructed in the Andes region of South America. REL
- 4000      Aborigines in Australia create rock paintings of rainbow serpents, snakelike beings believed to have created the landscape along a "dreaming track" as they traveled inland from the sea. REL
- 3100      The Egyptians invent an early form of hieroglyphics, enabling the textual recording of ideas. MISC
- 3100      Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt are unified under a single ruler as the Old Kingdom begins. The king (pharaoh) is considered divine or quasi-divine. POL
- 3000      In Egypt and Sumeria, education in reading and writing is offered to young males. EDUC
- 3000-  
-2340      Sumerian civilization flourishes in Mesopotamia (Iraq). Sumerians live in separate city-states ruled by kings; periodically, the king of one city-state establishes dominion over others. Conquering kings are believed to rule by divine right, with the gods periodically transferring the right to rule from one city-state to another. POL

- 3000-  
-2600 In China, perforated disks made of jade and hardstone are used in ritual human sacrifices as symbols of heaven. REL
- 3000-  
-2600 The dead are mummified in northern Chile, in an expression of concern for the afterlife. REL
- 3000-  
-2340 Sumerian religion, a blend of Sumerian and Semitic traditions, contains numerous deities. At the top of the hierarchy is a triad: the sky-god Anu, the storm-god Enlil, and the water-god Ea or Enki. REL
- 2550-  
-2470 As monuments to their glory and the importance of the afterlife, the kings of the Fourth Dynasty in Egypt (Khufu or Cheops, Khafre, and Menkaure) build for themselves the pyramid tombs of Giza, including the Great Pyramid. Khafre also builds the Great Sphinx at Giza, a colossal representation of a mythical man-lion associated with the pharaoh as an incarnation of the sun-god Ra. REL
- 2500 The Egyptians mummify the corpses of the wealthy and powerful. REL
- 2500 The oldest written story, the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, meditates on the themes of human mortality, civilization, and relations with the gods. REL
- 2500-  
-1700 Stonehenge in southwestern England, near Salisbury, is constructed. With its concentric circles of stones, ditches, and holes, the monument serves religious and astronomical purposes. REL
- 2465-  
-2323 Rulers of the Fifth Dynasty in Egypt build monumental temples to the sun-god Ra. REL
- 2400 In Mesopotamia (Iraq), the body organs of sacrificed animals are used to divine the future. REL
- 2300-  
-1800 The Indus Valley civilization flourishes in India and Pakistan, at such sites as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Though the Indus culture is later superseded by Aryan culture, it is possible that modern Hinduism owes some of its beliefs and images to the Indus people, including those related to the Great Goddess (Shakti) and the god Shiva. REL
- 2100 The Sumerians of Mesopotamia (Iraq) build the ziggurat at Ur. A pyramidal brick platform capped by a temple and ascended by means of zigzag ramps, a ziggurat is envisioned as a mountain reaching toward the heavens, where the gods reside. Mesopotamian reverence for the sky and high places will be a characteristic of all Middle Eastern religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. REL

- 2000 Abraham leaves Ur in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and settles in Canaan. The first Hebrew patriarch, he worships one God; their covenant is symbolized by the circumcision of his male descendants. Through his son Isaac, he is considered the father of the Jewish people; through his son Ishmael, of the Arab people. REL
- 1800- Sun worship is practiced in Scandinavia. REL  
-1600
- 1800- The myth of Osiris, god of the underworld and symbol of death and rebirth, pervades Egyptian belief in the afterlife. Osiris is slain by his brother Set, resurrected by the goddesses Isis and Nephthys, and made ruler of the netherworld, where the deceased reside for all eternity. REL  
-1700
- 1760 Mesopotamian ruler Hammurabi establishes the empire of Babylonia, with its capital at Babylon. His code of laws, one of the greatest of ancient legal codes, concerns business, property, family, labor, and personal injuries. Though relying on retributive punishments ("an eye for an eye"), it will be considered humanitarian for its time. POL
- 1760 As Babylon becomes an imperial city, its patron god Marduk (Bel) becomes the leading deity in the Mesopotamian pantheon. Mesopotamian religion includes over 2,000 deities, associated with particular places, forces of nature, abstract qualities, and deceased rulers. REL
- 1600 The Phoenicians, or Canaanites, develop the world's first purely phonetic alphabet, based on symbols for sounds rather than objects or syllables. The alphabet will be the basis for all future Western alphabets. MISC
- 1580- During the 18th Dynasty, Egyptian religious beliefs are recorded in the first collection of the *Book of the Dead*, a literature of spells, charms, and other writings to aid the deceased in the afterlife. REL  
-1350
- 1500 During the Shang dynasty (1533-1027 B.C.), the Chinese develop a system of writing. MISC
- 1500 The Aryans, a nomadic people originating in southern Russia and Turkistan, invade and conquer the Punjab region of northwest India. In subsequent centuries, Aryan and indigenous cultures will mingle, producing the distinctive religious-philosophical tradition known as Hinduism. REL
- 1500 The Aryans in India compose the *Rig Veda*, which, as a sacred text of Hinduism, will remain the world's oldest living religious literature. It consists of 1,028 hymns to be used in ritual sacrifice performed by Brahmins or priests. This early phase of Hinduism is known as Brahmanism. REL

- 1200      In the event known as the Exodus, Hebrew lawgiver Moses leads the Israelite people out of slavery in Egypt. They learn the name of God ("Yahweh"), receive the Hebrew law, including the Ten Commandments, and enter into a covenant with God. After 40 years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness, they enter and occupy the promised land of Canaan. REL
- 1100s      The earliest parts of the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, based on still older oral traditions, are written down. The oldest parts are found together with more recent material in the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. These comprise Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. *See also* 850-650 B.C., REL. REL
- 1027-  
-256      The Chou dynasty reigns in China. Dating from this period are China's oldest work of divination, *I Ching (Book of Changes)* (*see* 600s B.C., REL); oldest historical work, *Shu Ching (Book of Documents)*; and oldest poetry collection, *Shih Ching (Book of Odes)*. *See also* 600 -256 B.C., PHIL. MISC
- 1010-  
-970      David is king of Israel. The story of his life, recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 1 Chronicles, becomes part of the Old Testament. Many Psalms are attributed to him, and later messianic tradition will claim that the Messiah (or savior) will be descended from David. The New Testament will claim that Jesus is the promised "son of David," the Messiah (or Christ). REL
- 1000-  
-400      In Greece, a number of independent city-states (Greek *polis*) develop, comprising a variety of forms of government, including monarchy, oligarchy, tyranny, and democracy. POL
- 1000-  
-800      Aryan invaders occupy (Persia) Iran, bringing with them Aryan religion similar to that found in India. REL
- 800s      Greek poet Homer composes the epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, based on legendary material concerning the Trojan War (believed to have taken place about 1200 B.C.). Homer's depiction of the religious and moral beliefs of heroic Mycenaean society will long reverberate in Western thinking. REL
- 884-  
-860      The conquests of Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria inaugurate the period of Assyrian domination of the Middle East, lasting until 612 B.C. The king ensures centralized control by installing Assyrian governors in conquered lands. POL
- 884-  
-612      During the period of Assyrian domination of the Middle East, the Assyrian god Ashur is the chief deity of the pantheon, although the Assyrians borrow many gods from the religion of the conquered Babylonians. REL
- 850      In India, religious leader Jina Purshva flourishes. Like Vardhamana Mahavira (*see* 599-527 B.C., REL), who followed in his tradition, he is revered by Jains. REL

- 850-  
-650 The Yahwistic (J) and Elohist (E) strands of the Pentateuch (see 1100s B.C., REL) are composed about 850 B.C. and 750 B.C., respectively, and edited together by 650 B.C. REL
- 850-  
-650 A rationale for the subjugation of women is offered with the recounting of the story of Adam and Eve, in the book of Genesis. According to the Bible, her disobedience of God's command after being beguiled by the Serpent necessitates a painful existence for all women and submission to a husband, who "shall rule over you." REL
- 850-  
-650 In the Old Testament, the monthly act of menstruation is considered to render women and their surroundings unclean for seven days. REL
- 800 By this date in India, three collections of Vedic literature have been compiled in addition to the *Rig Veda* (see 1500 B.C., REL). They include the *Sama Veda* and the *Yajur Veda*, both of which are based heavily on the *Rig Veda*, and the *Atharva Veda*, which contains spells and incantations. Known as the *Samhitas* (collections), the four works become part of the canon of Hindu scripture. REL
- 800-  
-600 In India, the Brahmanas, prose interpretations of the Vedic hymns, are composed. As part of Vedic literature, they are considered sacred by Hindus. REL
- 700s Greek poet Hesiod writes the *Theogony*, the oldest surviving account of the origin of the Greek gods, and *Works and Days*, advice on farming and moral life. REL
- 776 The Olympic games begin in Olympia, Greece, as a festival incorporating religious and athletic elements. Held every four years, they will be discontinued in the late fourth century A.D. The modern, secular, worldwide version of the games will be established in Athens in A.D. 1896. REL
- 740-  
-701 The Hebrew prophet Isaiah preaches. His prophecies include attacks on social injustice and predictions of the fall of Judah and Assyria, along with visions of a Messianic redeemer and renewed state of Israel. Isaiah's own prophecies, as well as later ones attributed to him, will be collected in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah (see 538 B.C., REL). REL
- 722 The northern kingdom of Israel is captured by Assyria. The ten tribes of Israel are exiled to Assyria, leaving only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin (the southern kingdom of Judah). In folklore and religious belief, the ten lost tribes will be variously identified with Arabians, Indians, Ethiopians, and Native Americans. REL
- 600s The *I Ching* (*Book of Changes*), the classic work of divination, begins to take form in China. Based on ancient Chinese philosophy, mythology, and history,

- it is meant to be used in tandem with the casting of coins or sticks to foretell the future. It will gain adherents in China, Japan, and the West. REL
- 600s Etruscan culture develops in Italy. Etruscan religion includes a heavy emphasis on the afterlife and divination. REL
- 639-  
-559 Athenian legislator Solon lives. He revises the aristocratic constitution of Athens to make it more democratic, liberalizes the legal code, and ends serfdom. POL
- 628-  
-551 Persian religious leader Zoroaster (Zarathushtra) lives. The founder of Zoroastrianism, he is the author of the hymns called the *Gathas*. He teaches that there are two gods—a good one, Ahura Mazda, and an evil one, Ahriman—and that people must choose to follow the good one. He also foresees an apocalyptic triumph of good over evil and judgment of individuals after death. REL
- 621 Athenian legislator Draco flourishes. His code of law, which prescribes death for many crimes, will be associated with harsh punishment for minor offenses. POL
- 610-  
-547 Greek philosopher and astronomer Anaximander of Miletus lives. His cosmology is rooted in the concept of an infinite, eternal surrounding called the *apeiron*. PHIL
- 600 In Mesoamerica, the Zapotec invent a system of hieroglyphics that is the earliest known writing system in the western hemisphere. MISC
- 600-  
-400 In Greece, the pre-Socratic philosophers develop cosmologies and seek to understand the nature of reality. They include the Milesian school, the Eleatics, the Pythagoreans, Democritus, Empedocles, and Heracleitus. PHIL
- 600-  
-256 This period of the Chou dynasty (founded 1027 B.C.) in China is known as the Age of Philosophy, the period of the "hundred schools of thought." Philosophers Confucius, Meng-tzu (Mencius), Hsün-tzu, Mo-tzu, Yang Chu, Lao-tzu, and Chuang-tzu flourish. PHIL
- 600-  
-300 In India, the Aranyakas, treatises on meditation, and the Upanishads, mystical and speculative treatises, are composed. Part of the sacred Vedic literary canon, these Hindu works elucidate the spiritual significance of the Vedas. The Upanishads introduce the doctrines of *samsara* (death and rebirth), *karma* (bearing the effects of deeds done in a previous life), and *nirvana* (escape from the cycle of death and rebirth). They also speak of the identity between Brahman, the absolute reality, and Atman, the inmost soul of each individual, and advocate the practice of yoga, or spiritual and physical discipline, to attain consciousness of that identity. REL

- 500s Greek elegiac poet Theognis advises duty, moderation, and faithfulness in elegies to his friend Cyrnus. PHIL
- 500s Legendary Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu is said to found the system of philosophy and religion known as Taoism. As a philosophical system, Taoism advocates humility, simplicity, freedom from strong passions, and passivity or inaction. The term *tao* (way) refers both to the way the universe functions and the techniques used to achieve peace. Taoism will later develop into a complex religious system, with alchemical elements and a pantheon of gods. *See also* 200s B.C. and A.D. 400s, REL. PHIL
- 500s Greek teller of fables Aesop lives. His satirical and moral tales will be the subject of commentaries by later philosophers. PHIL
- 500s The Milesian school, also known as the Ionian school, is the first school of what will become known as pre-Socratic philosophers (*see* 600–400 B.C., PHIL). Centered on Miletus in Asia Minor, it develops a speculative cosmology and argues that the primary substance of the universe is water. Its adherents include Thales of Miletus (flourished 585 B.C.), Anaximander, and Anaximenes. PHIL

## The Birth of the Buddha

To Christians, the story of the signs and wonders attending the birth of Jesus are well known, and commemorated every Christmas. To Buddhists, the story of the Buddha's miraculous entry into the world is equally familiar.

According to scripture, Siddhartha Gautama (c. 563–483 B.C.), who would grow up to become the Buddha, the Enlightened One, was born of an unusual conception. His mother, Queen Maha-Maya, dreamed that a white elephant circled her three times, then entered her. This elephant was the Future Buddha.

Ten lunar months later, in a grove called Lumbini, the queen gave birth while standing up and clutching a tree. Angels brought a golden net to catch Siddhartha, who descended like "a preacher descending from his preaching-seat" and spoke these words: "The chief am I in all the world." At his birth, as at his conception, 32 "prognostics," or signs, were apparent, including these: a brilliant light flashed throughout the 10,000 worlds; the blind saw; the deaf heard; the dumb talked; the lame walked; prisoners were freed; diseases ceased; musical instruments spontaneously played; the weather became fair; and all flowers bloomed.

Unlike Jesus's mother, Siddhartha's did not live to see her son grow up. Scripture says she died seven days after his birth, because a womb that has been occupied by a Future Buddha "can never be occupied or used again."



- 500s The great temple to Apollo at Delphi, Greece, is built. It houses the oracle sacred to the gods Apollo and Dionysus. The authoritative advice of the oracular messages, spoken by a priestess in trance, is sought by people all over Greece. REL
- 500s Greek lyric poet Sappho, born in Lesbos, leads a group of women devoted to music and poetry. She will be a model for later feminists. SOC
- 599-  
-527 Indian religious leader Vardhamana Mahavira lives (alternatively, his dates may be 540-468 B.C.). Revered by Jains, he is considered the last of 24 legendary and historical saints who attained liberation and whose teachings help others do the same. Jainism rejects the Brahmanic institutions of Hinduism and advocates asceticism and nonviolence as a path to liberation. REL
- 586 The Babylonians destroy the Temple of Jerusalem and exile the Jewish people to Babylon. *See also* 538 B.C., REL. REL
- 582-  
-507 Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras lives. He is the founder of a religious society whose doctrines include transmigration of souls. The Pythagoreans also teach that the basis of music and the universe is numbers, and that the heavenly bodies produce music (known as the harmony of the spheres). PHIL
- 570-  
-475 Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon lives. He argues for the existence of a single, eternal God rather than anthropomorphic deities. PHIL
- 563-  
-483 Indian religious leader Siddhartha Gautama, founder of Buddhism, lives. Known as the Buddha (Sanskrit, "Enlightened One"), he preaches the "eight-fold path" to escaping suffering and attaining *nirvana* (transcendence). Emphasizing meditation, monasticism, and right action, Buddhism will eventually spread throughout Asia and the world, developing into many forms within two principal traditions, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. REL
- 551-  
-479 Chinese philosopher Confucius lives. His political and ethical teachings emphasize humanity, reverence for ancient sages and ritual, and personal virtue in government. Aimed at establishing a just and peaceful society, his views are embodied in the *Analects (Lun-yu)*, a collection of sayings and anecdotes compiled by his disciples. Confucianism will be a dominant strand in China's intellectual and spiritual history. PHIL
- 550-  
-333 By the Achaemenid period in Persia (Iran), the Zurvanite sect has grown out of the Zoroastrian faith. Zurvanites believe that both God and the devil emanate from an undifferentiated One, a divine being named Zurvan who exists beyond duality. Meanwhile, Zoroastrianism exerts a powerful influence on both official and popular religion in Persia (Iran). REL