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Major Events in World History

This Quick Prep section provides a handy reference to key facts on a variety of topics in world history.

Time and Place	Event	Significance
40,000 B.C. Europe	Cro-Magnons appear.	Ancestors of modern humans
8000 B.C. Africa, Asia	Agriculture begins.	One of the great breakthroughs in human history, setting the stage for the development of civilizations
3100 B.C. Egypt	Upper and Lower Egypt unite.	The Kingdom of Egypt, ruled by pharaohs, began a 3,000-year period of unity and cultural continuity.
3000 B.C. Mesopotamia	Civilization emerges in Sumer.	One of the world's first civilizations
2500 B.C. Indus Valley	Planned cities arise.	Beginning of the Indus Valley civilization; many features of modern Indian culture can be traced to this early civilization.
2350 B.C. Mesopotamia	Sargon of Akkad builds an empire.	World's first empire, which extended from the Mediterranean coast in the west to present-day Iran in the east
2000 B.C. China	Xia Dynasty emerges.	This was the first Chinese dynasty. Along the Huang He, farming settlements grew into cities.
1700 B.C. Asian steppes	Indo-Europeans begin migrations.	The Indo-Europeans moved into Europe, the Middle East, and India, spreading their languages and changing cultures.
1532 B.C. China	Shang Dynasty begins.	The first Chinese civilization, which arose along the Huang He
1200 B.C. Mexico	Olmec culture arises.	Oldest known civilization in the Americas
850 B.C. Assyria	Assyria builds an empire.	Using military force to conquer and rule, the Assyrians established an empire that included most of the old centers of power in Southwest Asia and Egypt.
800 B.C. Greece	Greek city-states arise.	Led to the development of several political systems, including democracy
550 B.C. Persia	Cyrus builds the Persian Empire.	Characterized by tolerance and wise government
500 B.C. Rome	Romans establish a republic.	Source of some of the most fundamental values and institutions of Western civilization
461 B.C. Greece	Age of Pericles begins.	Democratic principles and classical Greek culture flourished, leaving a legacy that endures to the present day.
334 B.C. Greece	Alexander begins to build an empire.	Conquered Persia and Egypt; extended his empire to the Indus River in India; resulted in a blending of Greek, Egyptian, and Eastern customs
321 B.C. India	Mauryan Empire is established.	United north India politically for the first time
202 B.C. China	Han Dynasty replaces Qin dynasty.	Expanded China's borders; developed a system of government that lasted for centuries
27 B.C. Rome	Octavian rules Roman Empire.	Took the title of Augustus and ruled the mightiest empire of the ancient world; began the Pax Romana, a 200-year period of peace and prosperity; Roman way of life spread throughout the empire.
A.D. 29 Jerusalem	Jesus is crucified.	Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire.
A.D. 100 South America	Moche civilization emerges.	Built an advanced society in Peru
A.D. 100s Africa	Bantu migrations begin.	Bantu speakers spread their language and culture throughout southern Africa.
A.D. 320 India	Gupta Empire begins.	A great flowering of Indian civilization, especially Hindu culture

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527 Constantinople	Justinian I becomes Byzantine emperor.	Recovered and ruled almost all the former territory of the Roman Empire; created a body of civil laws called Justinian's Code; built beautiful churches
600 Central America	Maya civilization thrives.	Built spectacular cities and developed the most advanced writing system in the ancient Americas
618 China	Tang dynasty begins.	Created a powerful empire, improved trade and agriculture, and restored the civil service bureaucracy
622 Arabia	Muhammad leaves Mecca.	The hegira (emigration) of Muhammad marked the founding of Islam, now the world's second-largest faith.
800 North America	Anasazi civilization develops.	Ancestors of the Pueblo peoples
800s-900s West Africa	Empire of Ghana thrives.	Built its wealth on the trans-Saharan gold-salt trade
814 Western Europe	Charlemagne unites much of Europe.	Established the Carolingian Empire
960 China	Sung Dynasty begins.	China became the most populous and advanced country in the world.
1095 France	Pope Urban II issues call for First Crusade.	Stimulated trade, weakened the power of the pope and feudal nobles, and left a legacy of distrust between Christians and Muslims
1192 Japan	Kamakura Shogunate begins.	First shogunate, which set the pattern for military dictators, called shoguns, to rule Japan until 1868
1200s Mexico	Aztec civilization begins.	Built the greatest empire in Mesoamerica
1200s Peru	Inca Empire begins.	The largest empire in the Americas
1209 Mongolia	Genghis Khan begins Mongol conquests.	Built the largest unified land empire in world history
1215 England	King John agrees to Magna Carta.	The Magna Carta contributed to modern concepts of jury trials and legal rights.
1235 Africa	Sundiata founds Mali Empire.	Became a powerful center of commerce and trade in West Africa
1279 China	Kublai Khan conquers Sung Dynasty.	Completed the conquest of China and encouraged trade; Chinese ideas then began to influence Western civilization.
1300 Italy	Renaissance begins.	Revival of classical studies, revolutionized art, literature, and society
1337 France	Hundred Years' War begins.	Ended the Middle Ages
1347 Italy	Bubonic plague spreads to Europe.	Killed nearly one-third of Europe's population and disrupted medieval society
1368 China	Ming Dynasty begins.	Ended Mongol rule of China and made China the dominant power in the region
1453 Turkey	Constantinople falls to Turks.	One of the most influential cities of the 15th century, Constantinople became part of the Ottoman Empire, and its name was changed to Istanbul.
1492 Americas	Columbus sails to Hispaniola.	Opened the way for European settlement of the Americas
1517 Germany	Martin Luther begins Reformation.	Led to the founding of Protestant churches
1526 India	Babur founds Mughal Empire.	Brought Turks, Persians, and Indians together in a vast empire
1529 Anatolia	Suleiman the Magnificent rules Ottoman Empire.	The Ottoman Empire reached its greatest size and grandeur.
1603 Japan	Tokugawa Shogunate begins.	Unified Japan and began a 200-year period of isolation and prosperity
1607 North America	English settle at Jamestown.	England's first permanent settlement in North America

Time and Place	Event	Significance
1644 China	Manchus found Qing dynasty.	The Manchus ruled China for 260 years and brought Taiwan, Chinese Central Asia, Mongolia, and Tibet into China.
1700s Europe	Enlightenment thought develops.	Philosophers promoted ideas about representative government and individual rights that helped to spur democratic revolutions.
1775 North America	American Revolution breaks out.	American revolutionaries threw off British rule and established a successful republic—the United States.
1789 France	French Revolution begins.	The French Revolution ended the Old Regime and brought on the Reign of Terror.
1805–1812 France	Napoleon conquers most of Europe.	Built the largest European empire since the Roman Empire
1821 Mexico	Mexico declares independence.	Mexico and many other Latin American countries fought colonial rule and gained their independence about this time.
1848 Europe	Revolutions sweep Europe.	A system of nation-states became established in Europe.
1854 Japan	Treaty of Kanagawa gives U.S. access to two ports.	Japan ended its isolation from the rest of the world.
1865 United States	Civil War ends.	The United States remained one nation and slavery ended.
1871 Germany	Franco-Prussian War ends.	The final stage in the unification of Germany
1884–1885 Germany	Berlin Conference takes place.	European powers divided among them almost the entire continent of Africa, which remained largely colonized until the 1960s.
1911 China	Qing dynasty is overthrown.	Ended thousands of years of imperial rule and made China a republic under Sun Yat-sen.
1914 Europe	World War I begins.	Became the largest war the world had ever seen
1917 Russia	Russian Revolution occurs.	Ended the rule of the czars and ushered in the first communist government
1939 Europe	Germany invades Poland.	The beginning of World War II, which caused more death and destruction than any other conflict in history
1945 Japan	United States drops atomic bombs.	Japan surrendered, and World War II ended.
1945 United States	United Nations charter is signed.	With 191 member nations, the UN is now the world's leading peacekeeping organization.
1949 China	Chinese Communists take over China.	China split into two nations, one on the island of Taiwan and one on the mainland. On the mainland, Communist China expanded its territory and reshaped its economy based on Marxist socialism.
1957 Vietnam	Vietnam War begins.	The war continued until 1975, deeply divided Americans, and ended with North Vietnamese Communists taking over South Vietnam.
1990 Germany	Berlin Wall falls.	Germany became unified again.
1991 Soviet Union	Soviet Union breaks up.	The Cold War ended.
2001 United States	September 11 Terrorist Attacks	Terrorists attacked the United States, crashing planes into strategic targets, killing thousands of civilians.