

# **Long History of Iraq**

*For "Peoples of the Book" --- Jews, Christians, and Muslims --- Mesopotamia has been part of the Holy Land with a history dating back more than 7,000 years. Indeed, the story of the human presence in Mesopotamia, or modern day Iraq, is even longer and is as full of sorrow as it is of triumph. Here is a general timeline of the long history of Iraq.*

## **7000 BCE**

*Archeological finds indicate the areas around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers form the "Cradle of Civilization." The Garden of Eden is associated with this period, though there is evidence that its beginnings may have been as much as 3,000 years earlier.*

## **4500 BCE – the First Sumerians**

*This illustrious civilization begins with the conquest of the Shinar Plain by a people whose origins (probably Aryan) may have been from India. Between 3500-2350 these gifted people develop cuneiform writing, use sophisticated number systems, create calendars, draw maps, establish schools, and are the architects of many other intellectual, social, and political inventions. Ancient Sumerian cities include Uruk (also known as Erich), Eridu, Ur, and Babylon.*

## **2371 BCE – the Akkadians**

*Sargon establishes his empire in the Sumerian city of Babylon. This rule lasts for two centuries.*

## **2112 BCE – the Rebirth of the Sumer**

*The Sumerians recapture control and establish the "Third Dynasty of Ur." The Elamites, a Semitic people, arrive at around 2000 BCE.*

## **1894 - 1595 BCE – the Babylonians**

*Best known for the rule of Hammurabi (1792-1750). Abraham is born in the city of Ur, probably around 1700.*

## **827-612 BCE – the Assyrian Rule**

*The Assyrians have been in northern Iraq for hundreds of years and finally gain control during this period. The Assyrians are credited for establishing the first world empire as they extend their territory all the way to Phoenicia (present day Lebanon). The Assyrians build the great cities of Ashur, Nineveh, Nimrud, and Dur Sharrukin. Jonah is sent to warn Nineveh (the Assyrian capital) of its destruction, which occurs in 612.*

## **612 BCE – the Neo Babylonian Empire**

*The Chaldeans, aided heavily by the Medes (current day Kurds), capture Nineveh and set up the rule of Nebopolassar. His illustrious son, Nebuchadnezzar II rules from 605-562 BCE and sets about to restore the glory of ancient Babylon. Science and literature flourish; astrology and other sciences are developed; mathematics is advanced;*

*breathhtaking architecture and art appear, including the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon. While extending his empire, Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem in 586 BCE and deports thousands of Jews to his capital in Babylon. Among the captives are Daniel, Shadrach, Meshak, and Abednego. During these and the following years, the Hebrew Bible is written, drawing heavily on Mesopotamia narrative and experiences.*

### **539-330 BCE – The Rule of the Medes (Kurds) and Persians (Iranians)**

*Babylonia falls to Cyrus, the Great in 539 BCE (Biblical story of the Handwriting on the Wall). Other Persian kings include Darius, the Mede; Xerxes; Artaxerxes (Biblical story of Queen Esther); and others.*

### **331-129 BCE – The Macedonian Era**

*Alexander, the Great inflicts a crushing defeat of the Persians in 331, bringing Hellenistic influences to the area. Intending to make Babylon the capital of his Eastern Empire, Alexander destroys all the Persian temples and other cultural influences. It is said that he conducts the largest mass wedding in history by having 14,000 Macedonian males marry 14,000 Babylonian women!*

### **129 BCE - 234 CE – The Parthian Kingdom**

*These people from northern Persia (present day Khorassan) are challenged by the Macedonians as well as the Romans but hold rule over the territory.*

### **224-636 CE – The Sassanid Dynasty**

*The Sassanids occupy Yemen, Palestine, and Syria, and capture Jerusalem in 614.*

### **638-1258 CE – The Muslim Conquest and Period of Islamic Enlightenment**

*This is the period of the great enlightenment that accompanies the rise of Islam, whose rule extends from Spain to India. The Caliph al-Mansur is said to have built Baghdad, of which he says: "This city will surely be the most flourishing city in the world ... and shall never be ruined." Baghdad is the center of civilization for four centuries, drawing intellectuals from all over the world. Inventions and advances are made in the fields of literature, philosophy, mathematics (Arabic numerals), geography, astrology, medicine and other sciences. The schism in Islam between the Sunni and Shi'ite occurs in 661.*

### **1258 CE – The Mongols**

*Centuries of development and advancements are wiped out in 1258 by the human slaughter and utter destruction of Baghdad and the whole region by the Mongols, who are led by the grandson of Genghis Khan. For nearly a century, Mongol rule holds civilizations under ruthless control.*

### **1334-1534 CE**

*Area is ruled by the Turkomen, Kurds, and occasional other groups.*

### **1534-1915 CE – The Ottoman Empire**

*Mesopotamia is divided into three Provinces: Mosul (mostly Kurdish); Baghdad (mostly Sunni); and Basra (mostly Shi'ite). Because the Ottomans speak only Turkish and most of Mesopotamians speak Arabic, the Ottomans cede most powers to local governors. Three key elements of the Ottoman Empire which impact modern times are:*

- (1) The formation of an elite military known as the Ottoman Sixth Army which offers education and other benefits to the best and brightest of only Sunni males. This practice stays in place even after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.*
- (2) The attachment of Kuwait to the Ottoman Province of Basra by the Ottoman Governor of Baghdad in 1871. Later Saddam Hussein uses this annexation as rationale to reclaim Kuwait as part of Iraq.*
- (3) The developing use of oil as an economic resource.*

### **1920-1932 CE – The British Mandate**

*The Ottoman Turks side with Germany/Austria-Hungary during World War I. This gives cause for the British to enter Iraq declaring: "We have come to liberate you!" As the Ottomans weaken, the Turkish speaking areas of the Empire become Turkey; the Arabic-speaking areas are parceled out to France (which became Syria and Lebanon), and Britain acquires Iraq, along with Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan. (No decision for the Kurds!) Britain attempts to balance Iraqi and British interests by establishing a monarchy. King Faisal is crowned in 1921 and British Gertrude Bell is sent to Iraq as "British advisor."*

### **1932-1958 CE – Iraqi Independence**

*King Faisal dies in 1933; his son, Ghazi succeeds him, but dies in an automobile crash in 1939. His 3-year old son, Faisal II succeeds him but is assassinated at age 18.*

### **1958 CE – Iraq Declares a Republic**

*Young military officers rally support for a revolution and capture Baghdad on July 14. Members of the royal family are all executed. Abd-al-Karim Qasim becomes Prime Minister and declares Iraq a Republic.*

### **1963 CE – Rise of the Ba'ath Party**

*Arab nationalism is revived and the Revolution Regime collapses. Qasim is ousted and Muhammad Arif becomes President. Arif dies in a helicopter crash in April, 1967 and his brother (also Arif) succeeds him. In 1968, a Ba'athist led coup ousts Arif, and Gen. Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr becomes President.*

### **1979 CE – Rule of Saddam Hussein**

*On July 16, President Al-Bakr resigns and is succeeded by Vice-President Saddam Hussein. The Iran-Iraq War begins in 1980 and continues for eight years. More than a million people die. In **August, 1990**, Iraq invades Kuwait and is condemned by the United Nations Security Council. The Gulf War takes place in 1991; the Iraqi army is all but destroyed in the 6-week conflict. Sanctions are placed on Iraq by the United States and other Allies in 1995.*

### **March 2003**

*American-led military forces sweep into Iraq declaring: "We have come to liberate you!" (Where did we hear this before?) Tragically, more than 120,000 Iraqis and nearly 3,000 American troops have been killed; hundreds of thousands more (including 40,000 Americans) have been wounded; and unimaginable values in properties have been lost ... including the destruction of thousands of years' old relics from the world's very first civilizations.*

### **2013**

*Ten years following the U.S. invasion, Iraq has been labeled a "failed state" by the Global Policy Forum; Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy magazines; The New York Times; The Washington Post; Al Arabia News; and a number of other organizations. Hostilities between Iraq's ethnic and religious groups continue to take thousands of lives, with more than 6,000 this year alone. Al-Qaeda, which was never in Iraq until 2003, has established their base as "Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and the Islamic State of Iraq." and have recently extended their reach into the civil war in Syria.*

*Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki runs his Shi'a led government from the seven square mile "Green Zone" in the center of Baghdad, which also served as the United States base of government until the withdrawal of troops in 2011. Iraq's elected President Jalal Talibani has been hospitalized in Germany since suffering a stroke in November, 2012, thus further complicating the political complexities of the country.*

*Though Iraqis live in a continuing state of fear and uncertainty, they struggle to maintain some sense of their culture and identity. Thousands of Iraqis now live outside the country, many of whom await a chance to return. Wherever in the world they are today, Iraqis boast of their proud past, struggle to survive their present, and hope to return to a secure and peaceful future.*

***Johnnie Hicks - 03/24/14***