

3. The Egyptians

The Land of the Pharaohs

Ancient Egypt is known to be the land of pharaohs and the Great Pyramids. The pharaoh was the most powerful person in Egypt. Egyptians depended on the pharaoh to control the Nile, to protect them from invaders and govern them wisely. The pharaoh was not only a king but was also a god. The pharaoh owned all the land and was very wealthy. People paid their taxes in terms of crops or by working for him building pyramids and temples. Pharaohs lived in palaces with thousands of servants. They often had many wives and some had more than 100 children. When a pharaoh died, he passed on the right to rule to his eldest son.

One of Egypt's greatest pharaohs was Ramesis II, the mighty warrior-king. He led the Egyptian army to a number of victories over neighbouring lands, greatly increasing the Egyptian Empire.

Historical Dates

Some of Egypt's history can be discovered through biblical accounts of Moses and Josiph.

The Ancient Egyptian civilization is one of the oldest civilizations in the world, established only about 50 years after the Sumerians. Civilizations that were closer to Babel (e.g., those in the Middle East) were established earlier than civilizations farther from Babel (e.g., those in Australia or the Americas).

- Babylon (Sumer; Mesopotamia) 2234 BC
- Egypt 2188 BC
- Greece 2089 BC

Secular records may state that Ancient Egyptian civilization began about 5500 years ago but these dates are based upon a timeline written by the Egyptian priest Manetho in his work *The Aegyptiaca* (the History of Egypt). The Egyptians had no calendar like we do today. They derived periods or dated things in relation to other rulers who had died previously.

Many people who study Egyptian history are starting to believe that many of the earliest rulers were actually reigning concurrently. Specifically, two pharaohs could be ruling at the same time, one in the north, one in the south, or even in smaller regions. The number of years that these two pharaohs reigned would be therefore wrongly counted as two lifespans instead of one, making the Manetho's writings unreliable and the secular timeline for early Egyptian civilization incorrect.

Archaeological artefacts from the early dynasties are very few and cannot be relied on for making any absolute claims about dates. Therefore, secular history cannot be relied on for dates of many of the earliest kings in Egypt. The dates given below take biblical history into account.

Dynasties

Ancient Egyptian history is divided into dynasties, (or time periods).

The Early Dynastic Period (Dynasties 1 – 3)

Soon after Babel 2242 BC

Mizraim, Noah's grandson, founded Egypt around 2188 B.C., a date consistent with both biblical and secular records. The Egyptians, the Sumerians, and the Mayans all retained the technology to build pyramids. The Early Dynastic Period of Egypt was a time when Lower and Upper Egypt became one country. People called this new united land the Two Lands. During this period, the families of the rulers of the two lands were in charge.

Who was the First Pharaoh?

Manetho, the early Egyptian historian, said that Menes was the first king of the Two Lands. Menes is probably also called Narmer. Narmer is the earliest recorded king of the First Dynasty. Narmer is also the earliest king linked to the symbols of power over the two lands.

During this time the Egyptians developed hieroglyphic writing which would be important for making records and running the government.

Near the end of the Dynastic Period and the start of the Old Kingdom, the first pyramid was built.

The Old Kingdom (Dynasties 4 – 8)

about 2920 – 2770 BC

A powerful Egyptian god-king ruled the united country. Many important parts of ancient Egyptian life started to take shape then. This included their art, buildings, and religion.

Before this period, Egypt was made up of many small, separate villages. The new rulers created a government system for the whole country. Local royal governors helped run things. Early government buildings were often open-air temples. They were made from wood or sandstone. Writing, using hieroglyphs, started just before this period. We don't know much about the spoken language from that time.

Egypt had a strong central government and a prosperous economy. The Old Kingdom is most famous as a time when many pyramids were built.

The pharaoh was the head of both the government and the state religion. He was considered a god. Under the pharaoh, was his chief official, who ran many of the daily tasks of the government. Only the most powerful families gained an education and were taught to read and write. These people became the high-ranking government officials, priests, army generals, and scribes.

Pyramids

When people were scattered from the Tower of Babel, they probably took this building concept with them to places all over the world. It makes sense that many of the families that were scattered from Babel took varying ideas of the tower to their new lands and began building projects of their own. This would account for the Egyptians knowledge and expertise in building the pyramids.



The Old Kingdom period is most famous for building pyramids. This includes the first pyramid, the Pyramid of Djoser, and the largest pyramid, the Great Pyramid at Giza. The pyramids of Giza were also built at this time, as well as the Great Sphinx shown above.

Fall of the Old Kingdom

The central government began to weaken during the Sixth Dynasty. The governors became very powerful and began to ignore the rule of the pharaoh. At the same time, the country suffered from drought and famine. Eventually the central government collapsed and Egypt broke up into several independent states.

Then followed a time of civil war and chaos.

Interesting Facts About the Old Kingdom of Egypt

- The capital city of Egypt during the Old Kingdom was Memphis.
- The Old Kingdom is sometimes referred to as the "Age of Pyramids."
- Egypt established trade with many foreign civilizations during this period. They built trade ships to travel the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.
- Much of what we know about the Old Kingdom comes from tombs, pyramids, and temples. The cities where people lived were largely made from mud and have long since been destroyed.

First Intermediate period – (Dynasties 9 – 11) - The period in between the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom, about 2150 – 1986 BC

The Middle Kingdom (Dynasties 11 – 14)

about 1986 – 1759 BC

The Middle Kingdom was the second peak period of the Ancient Egyptian civilization. During this time all of Egypt was united under a single government and pharaoh.

Peak of the Middle Kingdom

The Middle Kingdom reached its peak under the rule of the Twelfth Dynasty. The pharaohs of the time built a powerful standing army that protected the country from outside invaders and maintained control of the government.

The 12th and 13th dynasties provide the backdrop for the stories of Joseph, the oppression of the Israelites, Moses, and the Exodus. The biblical dates for these events can provide dates for these dynasties.

The arts of Ancient Egypt continued to develop during this time. A type of sculpture called the "block statue" became popular. The block statue was sculpted from a single piece of rock. It showed a man squatting with his arms folded on top of his knees.

Writing and literature developed as well. For the first time in Ancient Egyptian history, writing was used for entertainment including writing stories and recording religious philosophy.



Fall of the Middle Kingdom

It was during the Thirteenth Dynasty that the pharaoh's control of Egypt began to weaken. Eventually, a group of kings in northern Egypt, split from southern Egypt. As the country fell into disarray, the Middle Kingdom collapsed.

Second Intermediate period (Dynasties 15 - 17) - The period between the Middle and New Kingdoms, about 1759 – 1525 BC

The New Kingdom (Dynasties 18 – 20)

about 1525 – 1069 BC

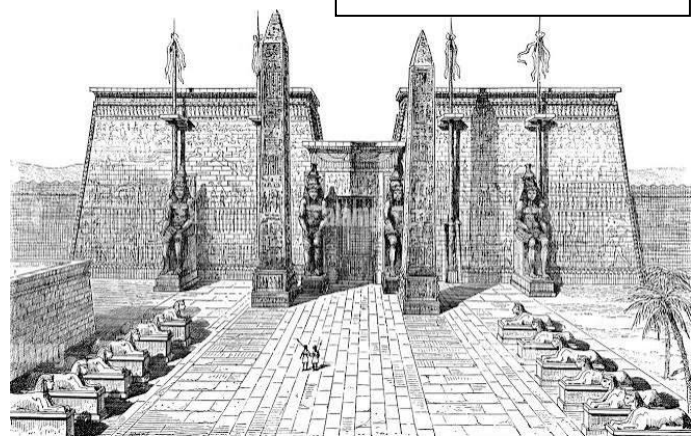
The New Kingdom was the golden age of the civilization of Ancient Egypt. It was a time of wealth, prosperity, and power. This period included some of the most famous and powerful of all the Egyptian pharaohs such as Ramses II, Tutankhamun and Akhentaten.

It was during the New Kingdom that the Egyptian Empire conquered the most lands. Pharaohs launched wide ranging expeditions taking over lands to the south (Kush, Nubia) and lands to the east (Israel, Lebanon, Syria). At the same time, Egypt expanded trade with many external nations and kings. They used gold mines in Nubia to gain great wealth and to import luxury goods from around the world.



Temples

The pharaohs of the New Kingdom used their wealth to build massive temples to the gods. The city of Thebes continued to be the cultural centre of the empire. The Temple of Luxor, (shown right), was built at Thebes. Pharaohs also built monumental burial temples to honour themselves as gods. These included Abu Simbel (built for Ramses II).



Valley of the Kings

One of the most famous archaeological sites from the New Kingdom is the Valley of the Kings. The New Kingdom pharaohs were buried in the Valley of the Kings for 500 years. The most famous tomb in the Valley of the Kings is the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun which was discovered largely intact. It was filled with treasure, art, and King Tutankhamun's embalmed dead body (called a 'mummy').



Fall of the New Kingdom

It was during the reign of Ramesses III that the powerful Egyptian Empire began to weaken. Ramesses III had to fight many battles including an invasion by the Sea Peoples and tribesmen from Libya. These wars, combined with severe drought and famine, caused unrest throughout Egypt. In the years after Ramesses III died, internal corruption and infighting in the central government became worse. The last pharaoh of the New Kingdom was Ramesses XI. After his reign, Egypt was no longer united.

Interesting Facts About the New Kingdom of Egypt

- There were eleven pharaohs who had the name Ramesses (or Ramses) during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties. This period is sometimes called the Ramesside period.
- Hatshepsut was one of the few women who became pharaoh. She ruled Egypt for around 20 years.
- Pharaoh Akhenaten converted from the traditional religion of Egypt to the worship of one all-powerful god named Aten. He built a new capital city named Amarna in the honour of Aten.

Third Intermediate period (Dynasties 21 – 24) - The period between the New Kingdom and Late period, about 1069 – 664 BC

The Late Period (Dynasties 25 – 30)

about 664 – 332 BC

It was a time when Egypt was united under Egyptian rulers.

The Persians Invade

In 525 BC, the Persian Empire, (*see map on next page*), invaded Egypt. They defeated the Egyptian army and took control of Egypt.

Egypt Under Persia

When the Persian Empire conquered Egypt, it was the largest empire in the world. Egypt then became a province of the Persian Empire.

Egypt prospered under the rule of the Persian King Darius I. Darius built temples and presented himself like a pharaoh to Egypt. However, later Persian leaders, such as Xerxes, treated Egypt cruelly causing much inner turmoil and rebellion.

Alexander the Great Invades

Persian rule came to an end with the invasion of the Greek Alexander the Great in 332 BC. He defeated the Persians and brought Egypt into his vast empire. After Alexander died, a Greek leader named Ptolemy I took control of Egypt and established the Ptolemaic Dynasty.

Interesting fact about the Late Period and Persian rule

During the late period, several different peoples and cultures from around the Mediterranean impacted the culture of Egypt. Immigrants from Greece, Phoenicia (modern day Lebanon), and Palestine all settled in Egypt. The Bible tells us that Darius was the king in the time of Daniel.

Ptolemaic dynasty 306 BC – 30 BC

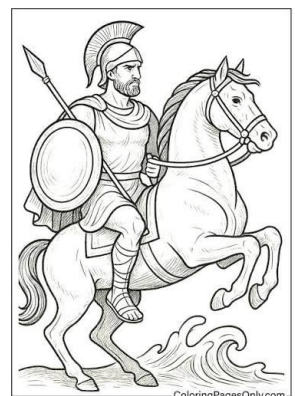
323 – 30 BC

(*pronounced tol – o – may – ic*)

In 305 BC, Ptolemy I became pharaoh and the Ptolemaic period began. Alexandria became the new capital, named after the Greek king Alexandra the Great who conquered and took control of Egypt.

Ptolemy I was one of Alexander the Great's top generals.

In 30 BC, the last pharaoh, Cleopatra, VII, died. She became queen on the death of her father, Ptolemy XII, in 51 BC and ruled successively with her two brothers Ptolemy XIII and Ptolemy XIV and her son Ptolemy XV.



Activities

1. On a piece of paper, enlarge the four boxes below to make a chart of the four periods. Draw pictures and write dot points to show some key events that happened in each period of Egyptian history. Include any Biblical events that fit into these periods.

Early Dynastic Period	Old Kingdom
New Kingdom	Late Period

2. List the countries that were in the Persian Empire in the Late Period.



Names of countries today:

Lydia = modern day Turkey

Palestine = modern day Israel and Syria

Persia = modern day Iran

Macedonia = modern day Greece

Compare the places on this map with the map of Europe on page 23.

Find out: What is the capital of Egypt today?

Where Egypt's history interacts with Bible history

Traditional Egyptian Timeline

Period in Egypt's history	Dynasty	Dates B.C.
Old Kingdom	Dynasties 1–6	2920–2770 B.C.
Great Pyramids of Giza	4th Dynasty	2600–2500 B.C.
First Intermediate Period	Dynasties 7–11	2150–1986 B.C.
Middle Kingdom	Dynasties 12–13	1986–1759 B.C.
Second Intermediate Period	Dynasties 14–17	1759–1525 B.C.
New Kingdom	Dynasties 18–20	1525–1069 B.C.
Third Intermediate Period	Dynasties 21–25	1069–664 B.C.
Late Period (Persian)	Dynasties 26–30	664–332 B.C.
Alexander the Great		332–323 B.C.
Ptolemaic Period		323–30 B.C.
Roman Period		began 30 B.C.

Matching up Israel's history with Egypt's timeline

Biblical event	Dynasty	Dates B.C.
Abraham	4	Late 1900s B.C.
Joseph, Jacob to Egypt	12	1706 B.C.
Joseph dies	12	1635 B.C.
Moses born	12	1572 B.C.
The Exodus	13	1491 B.C.
Solomon starts temple	18	1012 B.C.

Source: Answers in Genesis

Activities

1. Write the name of corresponding period in Egyptian history for the following:

Example: Joseph corresponds to the Middle Kingdom.

- a) Abraham
- b) Joseph in Egypt
- c) Moses born
- d) The Exodus

2. Find out what connection the above Bible figures had with Egypt. In your own words, tell the stories of these people and their interaction with Egypt.

- a) Abraham – Genesis 12:10
- b) Joseph – Genesis chapters 37 – 50
- c) Moses – Exodus chapters 2 - 14

Interesting facts:

1. In the 18th dynasty, Solomon made a successful alliance with his superpower neighbour, Egypt, by marrying the daughter of the pharaoh, (1 Kings 3:1-3). As Solomon's senior wife, she lived in the City of David until Solomon built a palace for her just outside the newly extended walls of Jerusalem to the north of Mount Moriah (1 Kings 7:8 & 2 Chronicles 8:11).

2. Queen of Sheba and Hatshepsut

A mysterious Bible character emerges from the 18th dynasty. The female pharaoh Hatshepsut's trip to the land of Punt is famous, but the identity of Punt has remained a mystery despite engravings commemorating the treasures she brought home. First Kings 10 says the queen of Sheba visited Solomon, giving and receiving great gifts. Josephus identified this queen of Sheba as "queen of Egypt and Ethiopia." In Matthew 12:42 the Lord Jesus refers to the queen of Sheba as "the queen of the south." "The south" is a biblical designation for Egypt. Thus, Hatshepsut was probably the queen of Sheba.

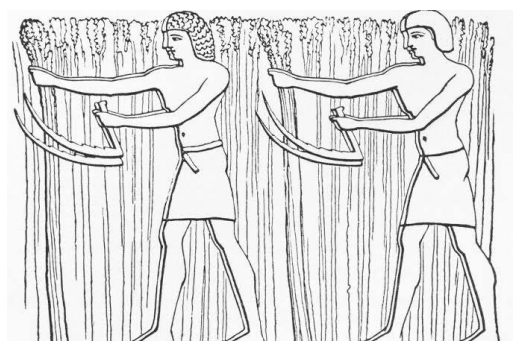
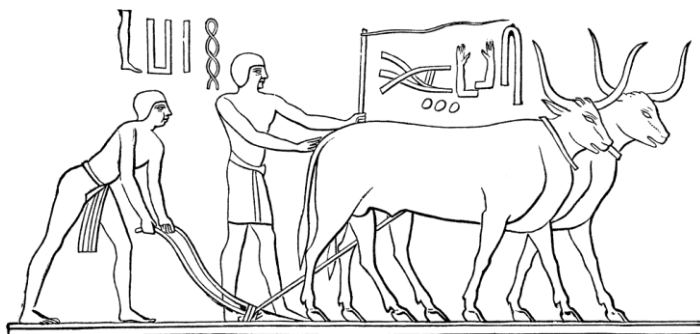
Life in ancient Egypt

Most people in ancient Egypt were farmers. They lived with their families in houses made of mud bricks that were near the Nile River.

The Nile flooded each year, leaving behind fertile soil for planting crops like wheat, barley, lettuce, flax, and papyrus. As the Egyptians learned how to move river water to their fields, they were able to grow more food, including grapes, apricots, olives, and beans.

During flood season, farmers couldn't tend their crops. So instead, some worked building pyramids, tombs, and monuments. Other people worked as scribes (people who recorded events), priests, and doctors.

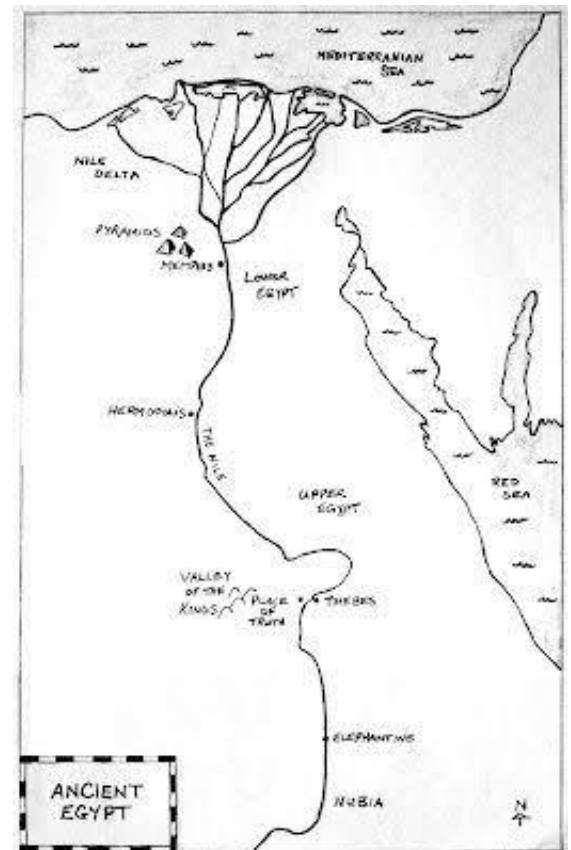
Women in ancient Egypt had more freedom than those in other ancient cultures. Like men, they could be scribes, priests, and doctors, and they usually had the same rights as men. Women could own their own homes and businesses. There is evidence that two of the pharaohs were women – Hatshepsut (Queen of Sheba) and Cleopatra.



The Nile

Egypt has almost no rain. The Nile was its only source of water and the lifeblood of the nation. It provided food such as fish, water birds, and larger animals including hippopotamuses* and crocodiles. The annual flooding occurred between July and October and brought water and new soil to the farmlands. The flood was considered a time of rebirth to the ancient Egyptians and marked the beginning of the year. The river was worshipped as a god. The Nile was Egypt's highway, carrying cargo and passengers.

*The ancient Egyptians killed and ate hippopotamuses. They hunted them for various reasons, including their meat, skin, and ivory. The killing one was seen as a demonstration of strength and power. Despite their fearsome nature, some Egyptians even survived attacks from hippos, as evidenced by ancient medical texts detailing treatments for hippo-inflicted wounds. The depiction of hunts appears in ancient Egyptian art and inscriptions



Egyptian gods

The ancient Egyptians worshipped over 2,000 gods and goddesses. Egyptians believed gods helped them in real life, too. For instance, Osiris's wife, the goddess Isis, helped cure human sickness, and the goddess Tefnut caused the rain to fall.

Animal gods – Many Egyptian gods took the form of animals. Other gods had human bodies with the head of an animal. People who killed sacred animals were executed.



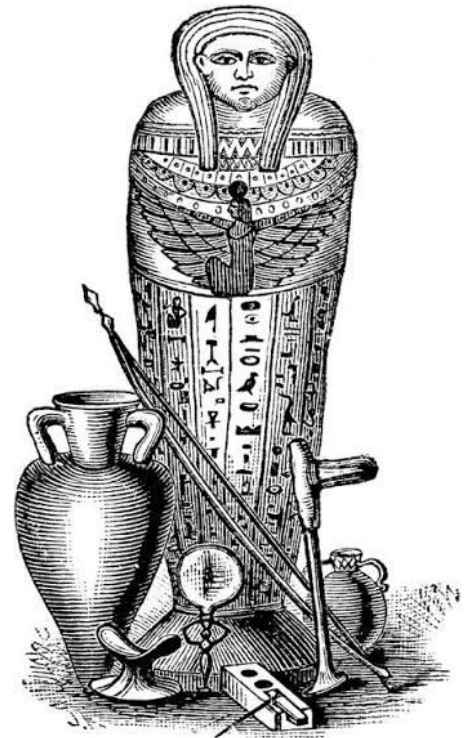
The Afterlife

The afterlife was an important part of Ancient Egyptian culture. One of the ways they prepared for the afterlife was to try and preserve the body as long as possible. They did this through a process called embalming. These embalmed bodies are called mummies.

The Egyptians went through an elaborate process to preserve the body and keep it from decaying. The main thing they did was try to get all the water and moisture out of the body. It was water that caused much of the decay.

The Egyptians started out by covering the body with a salty crystal substance called natron. The natron would help to dry out the body. They would also take out some of the organs. With the body covered and stuffed with natron, they would let the body dry out for around 40 days. Once it was dry, they would use lotions on the skin to preserve it, reinforce the empty body with packing, and then cover the body in wraps of linen. They would use many layers of strips of linen wrapping, covering the entire body. Resin (sap from trees), was used to glue the layers of wrap together. The total process could take up to 40 days.

Once the body was all wrapped up, it was covered in a sheet called a shroud and placed in a stone coffin called a sarcophagus.



Why did they care so much about the dead bodies?

In the Egyptian religion, the body was needed in order for the soul or "ba" of the person to unite with the "ka" of the person in the afterlife. The body was an important part of the afterlife and they wanted to preserve it forever.

Being mummified—the process of preserving a body—was an important part of how Egyptians believed their soul would enter the afterlife. So were tombs. These burial chambers were filled with things a person would need there: food, games, and even underwear!

Did everyone get the opportunity to be embalmed?

Only the very rich could afford the best embalming. It was important to everyone, though, so they got the best that they could pay for and most of the dead were made into mummies. It is estimated that 70 million mummies were made in Egypt over the 3,000 years of the ancient civilization.

There are still mummies of some of the ancient Pharaohs that exist today. Both Tutankhamun and Rameses the Great were preserved and can be seen at museums.

Interesting Facts about Egyptian Mummies

The heart was left in the body because it was considered to be the centre of intelligence. The brain was thrown away because it was thought to be useless.

Sometimes the mummy's mouth would be opened to symbolize breathing in the afterlife. It is probably this custom that led to the superstition that mummies come back to life.

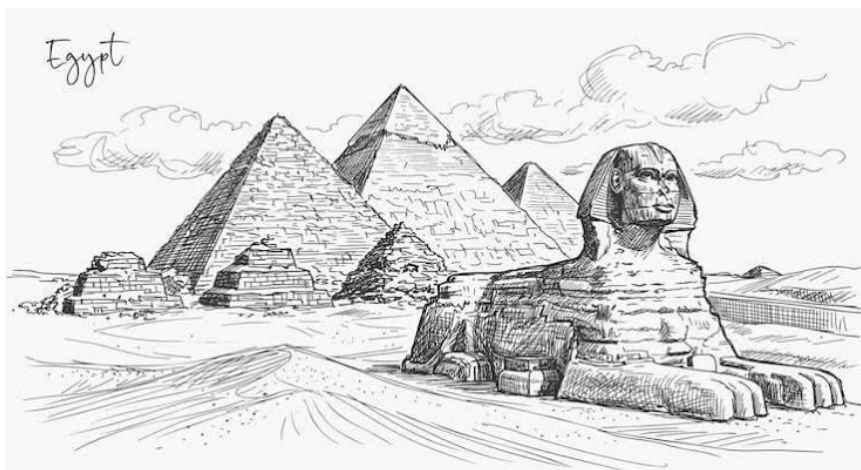
Mummies are studied by scientists without unwrapping them by using CAT scan and X-Ray machines.

Activities

1. Explain the importance of the Nile to the ancient Egyptians?
2. What is the meaning of a river delta?
3. Which sea does the Nile flow into? (Look at the map)
4. Why was it so fertile and therefore good for growing crops?
5. What were some of the gods from nature that the Egyptians worshiped?
6. Describe and draw the Sphinx.
7. Describe some of the man-made gods that they worshiped?
8. What are mummies and how what was their purpose?
9. Compare the Egyptians understanding of the afterlife to the Christian understanding.

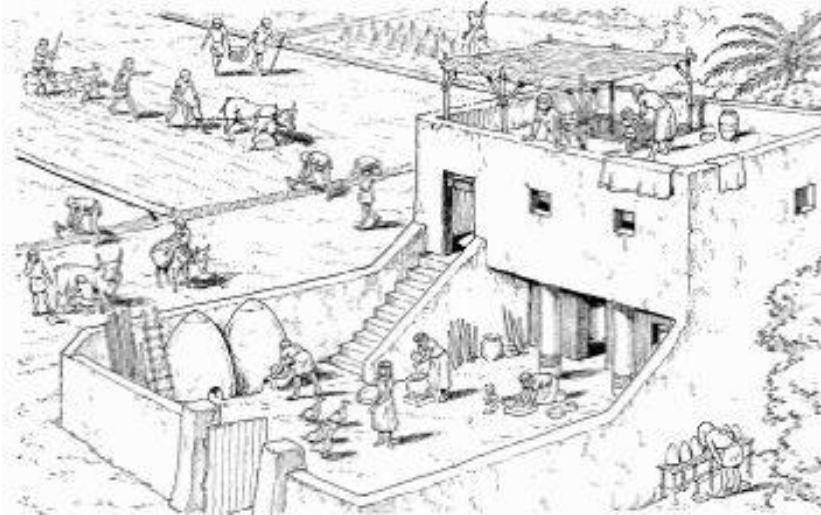
The Pyramids

The pyramids of Giza, including the Great Pyramids, are massive structures, built as tombs for the pharaohs. The largest pyramid, the Great Pyramid, stands about 148 metres high. That's as tall as a fifty-storey sky scraper with a base covering almost five football fields. It was built from 2,300,000 granite blocks each at least 2.5 metres long and 2 metres high by 1.5 metres wide and weighing an average of 2.5 tonnes. They are still standing today.



Where did they live?

The average family lived in a village of sun-baked mud houses. The houses were fairly small with few windows or furniture. They had flat roofs. The people would sleep on the roofs in the summer when it was too hot inside.



What did they eat?

The main staple of the ordinary people was bread. They also had fruits, vegetables, lamb, and goats for food. They had clay ovens to cook in and usually used dishes made of clay. The main drink was beer made from barley.

What kinds of jobs did they have?

Ancient Egypt was a complex society needing people doing many different tasks and jobs. Some of the jobs they had included:

Farmers - most of the people were farmers. They grew barley to make beer, wheat for bread, vegetables such as onions and cucumbers, and flax to make into linen. They grew their crops near the banks of the Nile River where the rich black soil was good for crops.

Craftspeople - There were a wide variety of craftsmen jobs. They included carpenters, weavers, jewellers, leather workers, and potters. How skilled a craftsman was would determine his success.

Soldiers - Becoming a soldier was an opportunity for a person to rise in society. Most of the soldiers were foot soldiers. However, horses and chariots were also used. We know this from the Exodus, when the Egyptian army pursued the Israelites on their horses. See Exodus 15:1. There was a well-defined hierarchy in the Egyptian army. In peacetime, soldiers would help with government projects such as moving stone for a pyramid or digging a canal.

Scribes - Scribes were important people in Ancient Egypt as they were the only people who knew how to read and write. Scribes came from wealthy families and took years of training to learn the complex Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Priests and Priestesses - Priests and Priestesses were responsible for the temples and held religious ceremonies.

Activities

1. What is the name of the most famous pyramid?
2. Find out which other cultures around the world use symbols or pictures for words. (There is a clue on page 14.)
3. What expensive metals were used for jewellery?
4. Cloth was made from linen. Find out what linen is, and explain why this was a good source of raw material for making cloth.
5. Draw 3 people wearing typical clothing: a woman, a man and a slave.
6. Write 5 things that the picture on page 42 can tell you about early Egyptian life.
7. What similarities are there between these houses and the houses in Jesus' day? (This about the story of the man through the roof, Luke 5:19-26.)
8. How do we know that Egyptian soldiers used horses?
9. If you lived in early Egyptian times, which job would you like to do and why?

