World history timeline

69 turning points in seven chapters, from the first writing (c. 3200 BCE) to 9/11 (2001).

● Event ◆ Person ▲ Conflict ○ Period

01 The ancient world

c. 3200 – 1046 BCE

c. 3200 BCE ● **Writing is invented in Sumer** · Mesopotamia
Cuneiform on clay tablets begins as accounting — and ends up preserving the first literature.

c. 3100 BCE ○ **Upper and Lower Egypt are unified** · Egypt
The Nile valley becomes a single kingdom, beginning three millennia of pharaonic rule.

c. 2560 BCE ● **The Great Pyramid of Giza is completed** · Egypt
Paid crews raise 2.3 million blocks — the tallest structure on Earth for 3,800 years.

c. 1792–1750 BCE ● **Hammurabi codifies Babylonian law** · Mesopotamia
One of the earliest surviving legal codes, carved on a basalt stele for all to see.

c. 1600–1046 BCE ○ **The Shang dynasty rules the Yellow River** · East Asia
China's first dynasty confirmed by archaeology, and the origin of Chinese writing.

02 Classical antiquity

551 BCE – 476 CE

551–479 BCE ◆ **Confucius teaches in a fracturing China** · East Asia
A minor official's ideas on duty and virtue outlast every kingdom of his era.

508 BCE ● **Athens invents democracy** · Greece
Cleisthenes' reforms hand political power to citizen assemblies for the first time.

490 BCE ▲ **The Battle of Marathon** · Greece
Outnumbered Athenians stop a Persian invasion — and a runner's 42 km becomes legend.

461–429 BCE ◆ **Pericles leads Athens at its height** · Greece
The Parthenon rises; so does the rivalry that will destroy the Greek world.

431–404 BCE ▲ **The Peloponnesian War** · Greece
Athens and Sparta bleed each other for 27 years; Greece never fully recovers.

336–323 BCE ◆ **Alexander conquers the Persian Empire** · Greece
Thirteen years, three continents, no personal defeat — then death at 32 in Babylon.

264–146 BCE ▲ **Rome and Carthage fight the Punic Wars** · Mediterranean
Three wars, Hannibal's elephants over the Alps, and the total erasure of Carthage.

206 BCE – 220 CE ○ **The Han dynasty opens the Silk Road** · East Asia
Chinese silk reaches Rome; ideas, religions and diseases travel the other way.

15 March 44 BCE ● **Julius Caesar is assassinated** · Italy
Sixty senators, 23 wounds — a plot to save the Republic that created the Empire.

30 BCE ◆ **Cleopatra dies and Egypt becomes Roman** · Egypt
The last pharaoh chooses death over Octavian's triumph; 300 years of Ptolemies end.

27 BCE – 476 CE ○ **The Roman Empire** · Italy
Augustus ends the Republic; Rome rules the Mediterranean world for five centuries.

4 September 476 CE ● **The Western Roman Empire falls** · Italy
Odoacer deposes the last emperor — quietly. The East survives another thousand years.

03 The Middle Ages

8th century – 1453

8th–13th century ○ **The Islamic Golden Age** · Middle East
Baghdad's House of Wisdom preserves and advances Greek science, algebra and medicine.

25 December 800 ◆ **Charlemagne is crowned emperor** · Europe
A Frankish king is made 'Emperor of the Romans' — Europe reimagines itself.

1206–1227 ◆ **Genghis Khan unites the Mongols** · Central Asia
From abandoned child to founder of the largest contiguous land empire in history.

15 June 1215 ● **The Magna Carta is sealed** · Britain
English barons force King John to accept that the king is not above the law.

1337–1453 ▲ **The Hundred Years' War** · France
England and France fight for 116 years over a disputed French crown.

25 October 1415 ▲ **Henry V wins at Agincourt** · France
English longbowmen destroy a far larger French army in a muddy field.

1429–1431 ◆ **Joan of Arc turns the Hundred Years' War** · France
An illiterate 17-year-old breaks the siege of Orléans, crowns a king, and burns at 19.

04 The Renaissance

14th – 17th century

c. 1440–1455 ● **Gutenberg builds the printing press** · Europe
Books stop being copied by hand — and Europe's information economy is rebuilt.

14th–17th century ○ **The Renaissance** · Italy
Florence, then Europe, rediscovers classical learning and reinvents art.

1452–1519 ◆ **Leonardo da Vinci** · Italy
Painter, anatomist, engineer — the definitive case that curiosity is a discipline.

1475–1564 ◆ **Michelangelo** · Italy
The Sistine ceiling, the David, and a temper to match the talent.

05 The early modern world

15th – 18th century

12 October 1492 ● **Columbus reaches the Americas** · America
Four voyages open an exchange of crops, people and disease that remakes both worlds.

15th–17th century ○ **The Age of Exploration** · Global
European ships map the oceans, and empires follow the trade routes.

31 October 1517 ● **Martin Luther publishes the 95 Theses** · Europe
Printed and spread across Europe in two months — the Reformation goes viral.

19 May 1536 ◆ **Anne Boleyn is executed** · Britain
The queen Henry VIII broke with Rome to marry lasts a thousand days.

1558–1603 ◆ **Elizabeth I rules England** · Britain
Forty-five years of survival politics, the Armada, and a golden age of theatre.

1564–1642 ◆ **Galileo turns a telescope to the sky** · Italy
Jupiter's moons end the idea that everything orbits the Earth — and put him on trial.

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1650–1800 ○ **The Enlightenment** · Europe
Reason, rights and scepticism become political forces, not just philosophy.

1760–1840 ○ **The Industrial Revolution** · Britain
Steam, coal and factories change how humans work more than anything since farming.

06 Revolutions and world wars

1760 – 1945

1762–1796 ◆ **Catherine the Great expands Russia** · Russia
A German princess becomes Russia's longest-reigning empress and a patron of the Enlightenment.

1765–1783 ▲ **The American colonies revolt** · America
A decade of taxes, troops and broken trust ends in a new republic.

4 July 1776 ● **The Declaration of Independence** · America
Thirteen colonies put a philosophical argument for revolution on paper.

14 July 1789 ● **The Bastille is stormed** · France
Parisians seize the fortress after hours of fighting; seven prisoners are freed.

1803–1815 ▲ **The Napoleonic Wars** · France
One general reorganises Europe by force, and Europe unites to undo it.

1814 & 1815 ◆ **Napoleon is exiled — twice** · France
Elba wasn't far enough. After Waterloo, they chose a rock 2,000 km from anywhere.

1837–1901 ○ **The Victorian era** · Britain
Empire, railways, reform and deep inequality, all under one long reign.

1853–1856 ▲ **The Crimean War** · Russia
The first war covered by telegraph and photography — and Florence Nightingale's proving ground.

1820–1910 ◆ **Florence Nightingale reinvents nursing** · Britain
Statistics, sanitation and stubbornness cut military death rates dramatically.

1861–1865 ▲ **The American Civil War** · America
Four years, ~620,000–750,000 dead, and the end of slavery in the United States.

14 April 1865 ◆ **Abraham Lincoln is assassinated** · America
Five days after the war ends, a famous actor shoots the president at Ford's Theatre.

1867–1934 ◆ **Marie Curie discovers polonium and radium** · Europe
Two elements, two Nobel Prizes in two sciences — and the radiation that killed her.

18 January 1871 ● **Germany is unified** · Europe
Bismarck assembles an empire in the Hall of Mirrors — and reshapes the balance of Europe.

1879–1955 ◆ **Albert Einstein rewrites physics** · Europe
Four papers in 1905, written by a patent clerk, undo Newton's universe.

1914–1918 ▲ **The First World War** · Europe
An assassination, a rigid alliance system, and 17 million dead in four years.

1917 ● **The Russian Revolution** · Russia
Tsarist Russia collapses; the Bolsheviks build the world's first communist state.

1919–1939 ○ **The interwar years** · Europe
Versailles, the Depression, and the slow normalisation of the unthinkable.

1933–1945 ◆ **Franklin D. Roosevelt** · America
The New Deal, four elections won, and America's entry into a world war.

1 September 1939 ▲ **The Second World War begins in Europe** · Europe
Germany invades Poland; in Asia the war had already been running since 1937.

1874–1965 ◆ **Winston Churchill** · Britain
A career of spectacular failures, then the speeches that held Britain together.

6 June 1944 ● **D-Day** · Europe
156,000 Allied troops cross the Channel to open the Western Front.

07 The world since 1945

1945 – today

1945–1975 ○ **Decolonisation across Africa and Asia** · Global
Dozens of new nations emerge as European empires retreat, often violently.

1947–1991 ○ **The Cold War** · Global
Two superpowers, 60,000 warheads, and 45 years of never fighting each other directly.

1950–1953 ▲ **The Korean War** · East Asia
A proxy war that ended in stalemate — and never in a peace treaty.

1 December 1955 ◆ **Rosa Parks refuses to move** · America
A trained NAACP activist triggers a 381-day boycott that breaks bus segregation.

1955–1975 ▲ **The Vietnam War** · East Asia
A Cold War proxy conflict that reshaped American politics and cost millions of lives.

1962–1990 ◆ **Nelson Mandela's 27 years in prison** · Africa
Rivonia, Robben Island, refused release — then president four years after walking out.

20 July 1969 ● **Apollo 11 lands on the Moon** · Global
Armstrong lands with seconds of fuel left — and leaves mirrors we still use today.

1970s–today ○ **The Digital Age** · Global
Microprocessors, the internet and smartphones compress distance and attention alike.

9 November 1989 ● **The Berlin Wall falls** · Europe
A bungled press conference opens the most fortified border in Europe. No shots fired.

1990–1991 ▲ **The Gulf War** · Middle East
A coalition of 35 nations reverses Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in six weeks.

born 1997 ◆ **Malala Yousafzai** · Middle East
Shot for going to school at 15; the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate at 17.

11 September 2001 ● **The 9/11 attacks** · America
Nearly 3,000 people killed in a single morning; two decades of war follow.

Try this

1. Count the turning points before 500 CE, then the ones after 1450. Why might a timeline of 5,000 years be so crowded at the end?
2. Pick a **person** and a **conflict** from the same century. Write two sentences on how one shaped the other.
3. Find three entries on three different continents, all within 100 years of each other. What was each place like at that moment?

Online at histiaapp.com/timeline, many entries open an explainer or a five-minute narrated story.

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