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# Semester I

## *The Renaissance and Reformation*

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#### *The Age of Rebirth 1455 – 1521*

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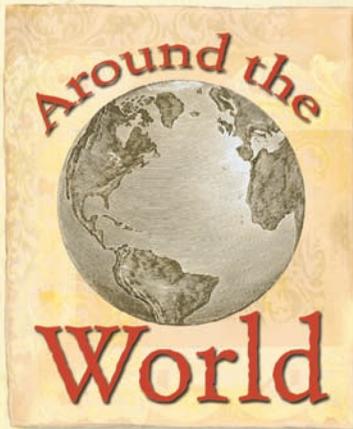
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*In School of Athens, Raphael captured the images of Plato and Aristotle, ancient Greek philosophers, strolling under Roman archways and surrounded by great thinkers, writers, and artists. This scene portrays the essence of the Renaissance, which was to glorify the classical age of the Greeks and Romans.*



## The Age of Rebirth 1455–1521

If history were a graceful landscape of valleys, hills, and winding streams, then the *Renaissance* would be a snow-peaked mountain jutting out of the horizon, begging for attention. You can't help but notice it. Compared to some parts of history, the Renaissance glitters and twinkles in places. You see, it was a rich time period when the achievements of mankind soared very high. Like a mountain stretching into the highest part of the sky, so mankind reached upward, too. What was he reaching for? What did he attain? Well, I can't reveal the whole story to you now. It will take us weeks to gaze at the accomplishments of the Renaissance. But here are a few things to note as our breathtaking scene unfolds.

First, the word *Renaissance* means “rebirth.” It refers to the rebirth of ancient Greek and Roman thought. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these thoughts triggered a surge of creativity in the arts. *Leonardo da Vinci*, *Michelangelo*, and *Raphael* studied the Greeks and Romans to produce some of the world's most beautiful works of art. It was to our benefit that these three artists lived near each other in time and place, for it resulted in their trying to outdo one another with brilliant masterpieces. In reality, they all succeeded in some areas and failed in others.

Second, it was during this time period that mankind gave birth to the exploration of the sea. Through the voyages of *Bartolomeu Dias*, *Christopher Columbus*, and other explorers, men sailed to new and exotic places. They were driven by a quest for gold, glory, and the proclamation of the Gospel. The world would be forever changed by these seafaring adventurers.

Third, while the Renaissance rose to new heights, new faith was being born, too. A fiery preacher named *Savonarola* and a monk named *Martin Luther* would seek to draw men and women into fresh faith in God. They hoped to rekindle hearts for the Holy One. In many ways, they did.

In my opinion, much of history is just that. It is the Lord breathing life into the souls of his created and rekindling hearts for Him. I hope you see that in these stories. I'm titling this quarter “The Age of Rebirth” in honor of the arts, the exploration, and the faith that flourished from about 1455 to 1521. These are the 66 years of unforgettable history that we'll be looking at in Quarter 1. I hope you enjoy it!



## *The Wars of the Roses*

**T**hough the title of our lesson might make you wonder, roses don't really have wars. We all know that. So what were the "Wars of the Roses"? Well, they were a long series of struggles between two ruling groups of families in England. We call these ruling groups "houses." For thirty years, the **House of Lancaster** fought with the **House of York** over who would be the king of England. What does this have to do with roses? It's really quite simple. The House of York used a *white rose* for their royal emblem. The House of Lancaster used a *red rose* in their coat of arms. So, the clashes between these two houses became known as the "Wars of the Roses."<sup>1</sup>

Before I get into the details of these wars, I'd like to review the history of England with you. (Some of you have already studied this information in other volumes of *The Mystery of History*. If you didn't, don't worry. I'll get you caught up very quickly! Younger Students may opt to skip this review.)

### *A Brief History of England*

For such a small island, England has had a great influence on our world. Its people are a melting pot of great cultures. Going far back in time, you would find that England was occupied by the amazing people who built **Stonehenge**. England was settled later by the **Celts** (Keltz) — until **Julius Caesar** brought over the **Romans**. The Celts and the Romans lived side by side in England until 476 when the Roman Empire collapsed. With that collapse, the Romans left England. They left the Celts stranded against the invading tribes of the **Angles**, the **Saxons**, and the **Jutes**. Those were the legendary days when **King Arthur** and his knights fought the Saxons to protect their homeland.

But worse than the invading Saxons were the **Danish Vikings**.

As a reminder of history, ancient Roman ruins like these can still be found in the English countryside.



During the 700s they pillaged, plundered, and attacked the coast of England to make parts of it their home. **Alfred the Great**, a Saxon king, did his noble part to keep the Vikings in one place. Alfred was a strong Christian king who tried to make peace with the Danes by telling them about Jesus. For the most part, Alfred was successful. Under his rule, the threat of the Vikings lessened and the strength of England grew.

England was just coming together as a nation under the Saxons when a powerful man from Normandy, France, decided to make it *his* home. That man was **William the Conqueror**. In 1066, he invaded England at the famous **Battle of Hastings** and crowned himself king. With him came a rush of Frenchmen into England *and* the idea of feudalism. (Feudalism is a system of rule by kings and landowners.) England was then subject to a host of kings and queens throughout the period of the Middle Ages. I'm sure you've heard of that era.

Some kings and queens were magnificent, like **Eleanor of Aquitaine** and her son **Richard the Lionhearted**. Some were ill tempered and cruel, like **King John** from whom the tales of **Robin Hood** are derived. King John was in fact so evil that the English forced him to sign the **Magna Carta** to put limits on his power. It was a concept that shaped history.

Eventually, England and France began to fight each other because the English wanted complete freedom from the French. This long and fearsome struggle was called the **Hundred Years' War**. It included the tragic death of **Joan of Arc**, a brave young girl who fought for France and was burned at the stake.

### *The House of York Takes England*

This leads us to our present study of the Wars of the Roses in England, which spanned the years **1455–1485**. Shortly after the Hundred Years' War, the House of Lancaster was ruling the nation. This house included a line of three kings named Henry IV, Henry V, and **Henry VI**. (There were a lot of kings named Henry in English history. You can keep them straight by the Roman numerals that appear after their names.) It was Henry VI who had problems that led to the Wars of the Roses. You see, Henry VI was quite feeble and from time to time showed signs of insanity. He probably suffered from catatonic schizophrenia (skitz oh FREN ee ah). Because of his condition, Henry VI really wasn't a good ruler for England.

If Henry's mental issues weren't bad enough, Henry's officials were corrupt and his queen was power hungry. With all these problems, the country grew ripe for civil war. It was then that a rival family of nobles — called the House of York — decided to take action. The House of York had hoped for years to gain control of the nation. In 1455, the first blood was shed over the matter at the small **Battle of St. Albans**. In that battle, the Yorkists defeated (meaning beat) the Lancastrians. Though they won, the House of York failed in making *their* leader, the **duke of York**, the next king. The English Parliament kept Henry VI in place as the king. They made the duke of York the "Lord Protector" of the nation. It was a sort of compromise. Though he was not made king, the duke of York had a lot of power. He more or less ran the country during Henry's episodes of mental illness.

This arrangement might have continued awhile and worked just fine had it not been for the queen. Henry's wife, **Queen Margaret**, was afraid that *her* son would never inherit

the throne of England with the duke of York having so much control. So, Queen Margaret raised up forces to fight against the duke of York. In 1460, at the bloody **Battle of Wakefield**, Queen Margaret got what she wanted. The duke of York was slain in combat! In prideful victory, Queen Margaret had his head mounted on the town gates of York. (Disgusting, isn't it?) She left his head to rot in public as a reminder that the House of Lancaster, *not* the House of York, was still on the throne of England. (Remember, I told you that the queen was power hungry!)

The message of the queen, however, wasn't as clear as she hoped. Completely against her wishes, Parliament declared that the *son* of the duke of York would be the next king of England! His name was Edward. Now, keep in mind, Henry VI wasn't dead; he was just incompetent. So, to get Henry out of the way, Edward had him locked up in the Tower of London! The queen fled to Scotland, and Edward was crowned **Edward IV**, the new king of England. He was only 19. Edward IV was, of course, of the House of York. After a few more bloody battles, the House of Lancaster was officially out. But this is still not the end of the story!

### *The House of Lancaster Retaliates*



The earl of Warwick was nicknamed "the Kingmaker."

The House of York had great confidence in their new king, Edward IV, but they greatly underestimated the House of Lancaster. The **earl of Warwick**, who was nicknamed "the Kingmaker," manipulated the royalty to put Henry VI *back* on the throne of England! Unstable and bemused, Henry VI was let out of the Tower of London to once again be the king. His rescuer, the earl of Warwick, secretly hoped to rule England through him. Poor Henry. He was being used and didn't even know it. Still suffering from mental illness, he held on to the throne for only a few months. But it was long enough for the civil war to start up all over again.

The conflict erupted again in 1471, when Edward IV declared war against Henry. In a confusing battle in the fog, the Lancastrians accidentally fought their own men! The earl of Warwick, the kingmaker, was killed. After two gruesome battles, Edward won. He immediately claimed the throne of England *again* for the House of York. To prevent Henry VI from ever being king again, Edward threw Henry back into the dark and dreary dungeon of the Tower of London and days later had him executed. The queen, who had by then returned from Scotland, was spared death, but she was kept in prison. For England, it was a soap opera that seemed to have no end — because you see, there's even more to this tangled story!

### *An Evil Plot*

If it weren't bad enough that the houses of Lancaster and York warred *against one another*, the House of York had a battle going on within itself. Edward IV of the House of York had two young sons who were in line to become king after his death. But Edward also had

a brother named Richard, who wished to become the next king. Can you see the problem? There was serious rivalry in the family.

As the story goes, in 1483, Edward IV died unexpectedly. His oldest son was immediately named king. But this was not to last long! Richard (who was Edward's brother and the boys' uncle) locked up the boy king and his younger brother in the Tower of London. They were only 12 and 9! Some would say this happened because Richard was wretched and ruthless. Others would say he was only "protecting" the boys from other rivals by locking them away. No one knows for sure, but the boys seemed to "disappear" for good, and Richard was crowned **King Richard III** of England.

As an intriguing side note, most would say that the young princes were never seen or heard from again and that they were murdered or starved to death in the Tower of London. But, in the seventeenth century, a workman found their supposed bones while repairing an old stairwell. The true fate of the boys remains quite a mystery. To add to it, a few years *after* the disappearance of the boys, a young man *claimed* to be one of the two princes who had escaped! If his story were true, it would have made *him* the rightful king of England! But most people didn't believe him. They thought he was an imposter whose real name was **Perkin Warbeck**. Most of England assumed that the poor princes were dead, and England continued to acknowledge Richard III as the king.



After the strange disappearance of his nephews, Richard was crowned the king of England.

## *The House of Tudor*

Now, after all this turmoil in the House of York, what do you think the House of Lancaster thought about Richard III? I think they were terrified of him. If Richard had been ruthless enough to lock up his own nephews for life, what else was he capable of? They couldn't afford to wait and find out. The House of Lancaster made a plan. Their plan involved none other than the *son* of Henry VI, the insane king whose reign triggered the Wars of the Roses to begin with! How very ironic. The name of Henry's son was **Henry Tudor**.

Henry Tudor first used force against Richard III in the **Battle of Bosworth Field**. Richard had a chance of winning the battle until one of his own lords traded sides in the war and joined the Lancastrians! With that turn of events, Richard III was killed in battle and that was the end of him *and* the line of York kings.

To change the lineage of kings for good, Henry Tudor went a step beyond the battle-field. Going against all Lancaster tradition, he married a woman from the House of York! His idea was to unite the feuding families once and for all. The woman he chose to marry was — believe it or not — the daughter of Edward IV and the sister of the disappearing princes! And you know what? The outrageous plan worked. The marriage *did* bring peace between the houses. Henry dropped the names of Lancaster *and* York and renamed his family the **House of Tudor**. His new title became **Henry VII**.

To help keep the peace that he created, Henry VII did something else special. He created a unique group of bodyguards to protect him from assassination. These bodyguards were named **Yeoman Warders**, but most know them as “**Beefeaters**.” Why were they nicknamed Beefeaters? There are two theories — either they really ate a lot of meat, which was their daily ration, or the name was modified from the French word for guard, which is *buffetier*. (*Buffetier* – Beefeater. I think you can hear the likeness.) Either way, the name Beefeaters has stuck for centuries. The Beefeaters still guard the Tower of London today and are known for their elaborate costumes and great knowledge of English history.



Modern-day Beefeaters educate tourists of all ages with their vast knowledge of English history.

In closing, let me tell you about one more thing that Henry VII did to help keep peace in England. He made the royal emblem of the House of Tudor a *two-color* rose. He made it both red *and* white to symbolize the new union. You will learn later in this volume that the House of Tudor, with its red and white rose emblem, gave England some of its most famous and infamous kings and queens.

## Lesson 2

1464

# *Cosimo de' Medici and the Rise of the Italian Renaissance*

**T**he rise of the Renaissance in Italy just can't be understood without knowing about **Cosimo de' Medici** (KO zee mo deh Meh DEE chee or MEH de chee). Cosimo was considered the “Father of His Country,” but many in his family were famous. Cosimo's grandson was nicknamed “the Magnificent”; three Medici men became popes; and two Medici women became queens in France. That's not bad for one family! Though eventually I will tell you more about all of them, today we will look at just Cosimo and a few of his close friends. With money, ideas, and talent, Cosimo and his friends were *all* influential in ushering in the time period known as the **Renaissance**.

Italy, just so you know, was not yet a unified country in the 1400s. It was divided into city/states that were usually ruled by rich, powerful families rather than by kings. **Florence** was one of these city/states, and it was the home of the Medici family. The Medicis were bankers. Th rough wealth and power, they ruled Florence for nearly three centuries.

As for Cosimo, he was the second Medici to rule Florence. Cosimo was not only rich and powerful, he was brilliant and *loved* to learn. He particularly enjoyed studying ancient texts written by the Greeks and Romans. Because he was rich, Cosimo could afford to buy these texts from scholars who had escaped Constantinople after it was overrun by the Turks.

Being not far from Greece, scholars in Constantinople had for centuries preserved ancient Greek manuscripts. I'm talking about books written by ancient Greek philosophers like **Plato** and **Aristotle**. Do you remember them from your past studies? Cosimo spent a fortune collecting and reprinting their old books and other classics. He invested in thousands of books written in Latin as well as in Greek. Cosimo was generous enough to share these rare books with the scholars of Italy. In fact, just to ensure that others had access to the writings of Plato, Cosimo started the first **Platonic Academy** in 1445.

The men who studied these old classic texts in their original languages were labeled "**humanists.**" They were called this for studying *umanita* (ooh ma NEE ta), or "the humanities." A humanist, as the name implies, favors the study of mankind. Some humanists of old so favored the study of mankind that they left God out. Others didn't and tried hard to integrate their faith with Greek philosophy. Either way, *most* humanists of the Renaissance promoted the greatness of mankind above all else. This greatness was particularly noticeable in the achievements of the Renaissance.



Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher, lived about 400 years before Christ.

## ***Brunelleschi the Architect***

What were mankind's achievements during the Renaissance? They were too numerous to describe here. But I will tell you about four of Cosimo's friends who achieved a great

deal. The first was **Filippo Brunelleschi** (Fuh LEE po Broo nayl LAYS kee). Brunelleschi was an architect. (That means he designed buildings.) It seems that he, like other Renaissance architects, didn't care at all for the Gothic style of building that had once been popular across Europe. They thought Gothic cathedrals like Notre-Dame were a bit "overdone" with all their dainty detail, flying buttresses, and pointy spires. For inspiration, Brunelleschi looked instead to the bold, columned structures of he



Gothic architecture was intricately designed to rise and climb so that it might draw one's attention toward heaven.

ancient Greeks and Romans. Are you beginning to see why Brunelleschi and Cosimo were great friends? They both admired ancient Greek and Roman works.

For a time, Brunelleschi moved to Rome to observe the old ruins there. From that experience, he was inspired to build his most famous work, the **dome of Santa Maria del Fiore** in Florence. (This cathedral dome is more commonly known as the Dome of Florence.) A story is told of Brunelleschi that to get hired to build the dome, he challenged other architects to make an egg stand on its end. None of them could do it. Brunelleschi bragged that he could. He then broke an egg, took the empty blunt end of it in his hand, and successfully stood it on a table. The other architects argued that Brunelleschi cheated, but his cleverness got him the job. He was hired to build the great dome — though it was, of course, far more difficult than getting an egg to stand on its end!

It took Brunelleschi 14 years to build the Dome of Florence. Few to this day stand more perfectly. So marvelous is this dome that not even Michelangelo wanted to compete with it. When he was asked to build a similar dome at the Vatican, Michelangelo protested that he would make one larger but *not* more beautiful.



This replica of the Parthenon is in Nashville, Tennessee, and testifies to the bold, classic look that inspired Renaissance architects.

### *Donatello the Sculptor*

Another of Cosimo's close friends was **Donatello** (Dahn uh TELL oh). He was a sculptor. And just like Cosimo and Brunelleschi, Donatello liked to study ancient works for inspiration. What better masters to study than — you know who — the ancient Greeks and Romans. In fact, Donatello traveled to Rome along with Brunelleschi to be inspired by the classical ruins there. Donatello copied the graceful, flowing look of ancient Greek sculpture but improved upon it with his knowledge of anatomy. (Anatomy is the study of the human body.) Donatello used anatomy to make his figures look even *more* lifelike than the Greeks did.

There is a humorous story about just how lifelike Donatello's work could be. It seems that one of Donatello's "not-so-attractive" customers ordered a statue of himself, but upon seeing the completed work, was insulted at how ugly it was. The customer didn't want to admit that he was unattractive, so rather than fuss about the statue's ugliness, he complained that it was too expensive. When Donatello found out, he smashed the sculpture into a thousand pieces! Seems to me they both lost on that deal.

Eventually, Donatello left Rome and moved back to Florence. Cosimo had endless money to sponsor projects for Donatello and Donatello had endless talent to complete them. His work spread all over Florence. His best works include the statue *St. George*, the *Equestrian Statue of Gattamelata* (which is a man on horseback), and the bronze statue *David*. It is the

statue of David that Donatello is probably most famous for, though Michelangelo would later outdo him.

It has been said that Cosimo took such good care of his friend Donatello that Donatello had no real need for money. Because of this, Donatello kept his money hanging in a basket in his studio. He insisted that his friends help themselves to his money *whenever* they needed it — without asking! Donatello and Cosimo were such good friends that before Donatello died, he asked to be buried next to Cosimo. The two lie side by side at the church of San Lorenzo.

## *Religious Art of the Renaissance*

Before I introduce you to two more friends of Cosimo de' Medici, I want to stop and explain something about art in the Renaissance. Although Cosimo was influencing the *scholars* of his time toward Greek philosophy and humanism, *artists* of the same time period were *s-l-o-w* to reflect humanism. Why? Well, most artists were being paid by the church to make religious scenes about God.

You see, the churches of the Renaissance weren't designed just to gather worshippers. The buildings themselves were designed to teach. Doors, arches, and ceilings — indeed, all parts of the church — were decorated to tell the stories of the Bible. Paintings, sculptures, and reliefs (which are one-sided sculptures) were carefully conceived to inspire the masses. For example, it took an artist named **Ghiberti** (Gee BEARR tee) 48 years to carve a bronze relief for the doors of a baptistery! It contained 38 panels of Bible stories from both the Old and the New Testament. Young people, old people, smart people, even those who couldn't read — all could learn from seeing the works of the artists.

Now, if the artists of the early Renaissance were Christians, or humanists, or a little of both, most of their work *was* very religious because of the role of the church. Does that make sense? It should. I'll bring this topic up again later because we will see changes in this religious theme in art.

## *Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi*

Now that I've explained the *reason* for religious art in the Renaissance, I have examples of two artists who painted the same scenes of the Bible — but for very different reasons. Both artists were monks, but one seemed to sincerely paint for the glory of God and the other didn't.

Let's start with the sincere one. His nickname was **Fra Angelico** (Frah An JELL ih ko), which means "Angelic Brother." As his name implies, he was a gentle, peaceful, humble man. Fra Angelico is said to have "painted in much the same mood in which he prayed, and he never painted without praying first."<sup>2</sup> No wonder he was nicknamed an angel.

I think you would agree, when you see samples of Fra Angelico's work, that it is inspiring. His work is delicate, gentle, and lovely in every detail. Though he was invited to live the comfortable life of an archbishop, Fra Angelico chose to remain a simple Dominican monk. He spent most of his life painting stories of the Bible in the monasteries where he lived. In every



In *The Annunciation* by Fra Angelico, the arches and columns are smaller in the background than in the foreground. Fra Angelico used this form of “perspective” to create rich depth.

situation, Fra Angelico painted his favorite scenes of Mary, Christ, the Crucifixion, and the Transfiguration.

One of the most inspiring of Fra Angelico’s paintings was made for Cosimo, who from time to time retreated to a monastery for rest. On the walls of Cosimo’s small room, Fra Angelico painted the *Crucifixion* and the *Adoration of the Kings*. We may never know how Fra Angelico touched others with the story of the Gospel, but it seemed to be his intent. Because of his strong faith, Fra Angelico is considered the last of the great medieval artists.

In contrast, there was the other monk. His name was **Fra Filippo Lippi** (Frah Feh LEE po LIP pee). Now I don’t mean to be judgmental, but he was hardly the angel that Fra Angelico was. Though his work was excellent, and in fact beautiful, Filippo Lippi seemed much more enamored with this present world than with eternity. Like Fra Angelico, he enjoyed painting numerous scenes of Mary — but it was probably because he enjoyed the pretty ladies who modeled for him! Filippo had a bad reputation for mingling with nuns and even took one to be a girlfriend. For his misconduct, Filippo had to leave his monastery, but he did keep the title of a monk for the rest of his life.

A story is told that Cosimo once locked up his friend Filippo to help keep his mind off women and on to finishing an art project. But Filippo tied sheets together from his bed and snuck out the window to visit a young lady or two. Cosimo pardoned Filippo's poor behavior and promised never to lock him up again. The church apparently pardoned the artist, too, because priests, nuns, and bishops continued to hire Filippo Lippi for his great ability to paint.

### *Pater Patriae, Father of His Country*

As for Cosimo de' Medici, his last years were tranquil ones (that means "peaceful"). When in the quiet countryside of Italy, he enjoyed his old books and close friends. When in the busy city, he enjoyed his vast collection of art and antiquities. His rule over Florence had been a good one. He raised the standard of the middle class and when he died in **1464**, both the rich and the poor grieved over his death.

Cosimo was so greatly appreciated for all he had done for Italy that he was given the title **Pater Patriae**, which means "**Father of His Country**." Indeed he was, because of his great influence. And in an unusual way, Cosimo's passion to buy and sell "old things" is still honored today. Pawn dealers (those who buy and sell used items) often display three decorative balls on their signs and in their advertisements. These three balls are an adaptation of the numerous balls on the Medici coat of arms! Check it out for yourself. I love it when history shows up in unexpected places.

## *Ferdinand, Isabella, and the Spanish Inquisition*

 You might have heard of **Ferdinand and Isabella**. They are the royal couple who sponsored Christopher Columbus on his famous voyage to the New World. We're going to look at that important event soon. But Ferdinand and Isabella are well known for something else. Unfortunately, they are also the ones who started the **Spanish Inquisition**. This was a dreadful court created to weed heretics out of the church. (I'll explain what "heretic" means later.) Sadly enough, the Inquisition grew to be one of the cruelest institutions ever set up by man. Let me explain how it came to be.

At this time in history, Spain was divided into a handful of kingdoms — each ruled by its own royal family. Ferdinand was the prince of the kingdom of **Aragon**. Isabella was the

princess of the kingdom of **Castile**. She was strong and devout in her faith. She never missed Mass or the celebration of holy days recognized by the Medieval Church.

Well, the Spanish kingdoms of Aragon and Castile were destined to merge into one. Can you guess how? Young Ferdinand and Isabella got married. They were only teenagers, but their marriage in **1469** brought together the two largest kingdoms of Spain. The wedding was a grand event that lasted six days and nights. Though their marriage was political and arranged, the teenagers seemed to genuinely care for one another. As a token of his love, Ferdinand gave Isabella a beautiful pearl and ruby necklace that had once belonged to his mother. The newlyweds grew older and within 10 years inherited the titles of king and queen of their kingdoms. They had much to accomplish in holding their union together.



Isabella is shown here wearing the pearl and ruby necklace given to her as a gift by Ferdinand. The necklace had belonged to his mother.

## ***The Reconquista***

Even before the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, the kingdoms of Spain were rich and advanced. During the Middle Ages, Spain was, in fact, in its Golden Age. It attracted merchants, scholars, and inventors from all over the world. For its prosperity, Spain was nicknamed “the Ornament of the World.” Spain was also heavily populated with Muslims, Christians, and Jews. (It is important to remember that!) It was during the *later* Middle Ages that Christians began to drive Muslims to the south of Spain during what was called the **reconquista** (rrray kon KEE sta). That word means to “reconquer,” which is what the Christians believed they were doing. They believed they were *reconquering* Spain in the name of Christ.

Under Ferdinand and Isabella, this concept of reconquering Spain was taken to the extreme. To raise money for fighting the Muslims, Isabella sold her special pearl and ruby necklace! Then, the royal couple took it upon themselves to drive out of Spain *anyone* they believed was opposed to Christianity — particularly anyone who was Jewish. They did this by instituting the Spanish Inquisition.

The Spanish Inquisition was not really a “thing.” Rather, it was a process. It was the process of putting someone on trial in a court. The name Inquisition comes from the word *inquire*, which means “to ask.” The court “asked” questions of people on trial to prove their guilt or innocence in crimes against the church.

The idea of the church placing people on trial goes back to the 300s. That is when the Roman Empire was “Christianized” by Constantine. Though Constantine freed Christians from persecution through the **Edict of Milan**, he — as a downfall — shifted much of the *authority* of the Roman government to the church. That is how and when the church first became involved in running trials. Jesus didn’t teach that the church should do such a thing, but it seemed to make sense to the Romans. They continued to use the church as a means to run civil matters long after the collapse of the Roman Empire.

I hope you can grasp that difficult concept about the church because I think it is important to understand. (You may even want to reread the last paragraph.) Some would say that the Medieval Church was in error for becoming so political. I would agree. But that’s another topic.

### *Torquemada and the Dominicans*

As for the *Spanish* Inquisition, this particular court system was patterned after one started in the 1300s by the **Dominicans**, a religious order founded by St. Dominic in the Middle Ages. I believe the early intentions of the Dominicans were good. They would claim that they were trying to protect the church from falsehood. Banners of the Inquisition carried the words “Mercy and Justice” to describe the court process. However, in promoting justice, the Dominicans got carried away. They used harsh measures to try to turn the hearts of heretics. A heretic was someone who disagreed with the teachings of the church.

Ferdinand and Isabella got carried away in the whole process of turning the hearts of heretics. They placed their court in the cruel hands of **Tomás de Torquemada** (Toe MAS day Tawr kay MAH dah). Torquemada was Isabella’s strict childhood priest. He was a Dominican friar who thought nothing was wrong with actually *torturing* people to make them confess sins against the church! A common torture device was the rack, which stretched and pulled the arms and legs of the supposed heretic.

On his behalf, some would say that Torquemada believed he was saving souls from *eternal* punishment by punishing them here on earth. Perhaps he was hoping to soften hardened hearts. Perhaps he cared so much for the souls of the lost that he would do anything for their salvation. I don’t know his exact thoughts.

Regardless of one’s opinion of Torquemada, here is an account of what occurred under his leadership as the head inquisitor in Spain. Between 1478 and 1483, the Spanish Inquisition was most often directed at Jews who *claimed* to have converted to Christianity — but didn’t. Apparently it was common for Jews in Spain to do this. To avoid persecution, they claimed to be Christians but secretly practiced their Jewish faith. For supposedly converting, they were called *conversos*.

During the Spanish Inquisition, these “secret” Jews were arrested, put on trial, and sometimes put to death. The World Book Encyclopedia states that at least 2,000 people were put to death during the 18 years that Torquemada was head inquisitor.<sup>3</sup> Other sources state that as many as 32,000 perished through the system and that perhaps as many as 341,000 people were punished!<sup>4</sup> We may never know the exact number who suffered, but most who died were strangled to death and then burned. The dirty work was performed by soldiers rather than by the inquisitors themselves. This might explain why the inquisitors grew callous toward the killings and ordered so many. They literally kept their own hands clean of the bloodshed.

In 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella made persecution even more official when they signed the **Edict of Expulsion**. This edict forced Jews to leave Spain within three months if not willing to be baptized. As a result, as many as 800,000 Jews fled Spain! They took with them their businesses, their skills, their books, and their families. Some historians believe it was a great loss to Spain. But who could blame the Jews for fleeing? This was the largest mass exodus of the Jews in Europe before the Holocaust under Adolf Hitler. The last date that most Jews left the country was August 2, 1492.

In knowing all of this, perhaps you can understand why I would call the Spanish Inquisition one of the cruelest institutions of mankind. I don’t believe Jesus ever intended for Christianity to be promoted through torture or execution. But unfortunately, the Inquisition, in one form or another, continued across Europe for centuries.

As for Ferdinand and Isabella, they continued to rule Aragon and Castile to form the nation of Spain. Their daughter would grow up to make history by marrying Henry VIII of England. Their granddaughter would grow up to be nicknamed “Bloody Mary.” (These are interesting stories to come!) Other than their harsh treatment of supposed heretics, Ferdinand and Isabella ruled wisely and had great vision for the future. That fact is probably why they are more “kindly” remembered as the king and queen who sponsored Christopher Columbus. But we’ll get to that later.



The royal flag of Spain used under Ferdinand and Isabella, and carried by Christopher Columbus, reflects the previous union of the kingdoms of Castile (“castle”) and León (“lion”) in 1230.

## *Ivan the Great*

There have been a lot of “greats” in history. Can you think of some? How about Ramses *the Great*, Alexander *the Great*, Herod *the Great*, or Alfred *the Great*? Those are just a few. Today we will add another “great” to our studies. He is **Ivan the Great** of Russia (also known as Ivan III). Let me tell you how he earned his “great” nickname.

When Ivan III was a child, Russia wasn't yet its own country. It was under the rule of outsiders called the **Tatar Mongols**. The Tatar Mongols were a ravaging group of warriors from Mongolia. They were descendants of the “great and terrible” **Genghis Khan** (GING gus Kawn) who was rumored to have eaten his captives! To say the least, the Tatar Mongols were feared. Well, it was the *grandson* of Genghis Khan who first claimed Russian lands for the Mongols. His name was **Batu Khan** (Bah TOO Kawn) and his army was the **Golden Horde**, named for their gold-colored tents that glistened in the sun along the Volga River.

Now, at the time of our story, though Russians were ruled by the Tatar Mongols, they had a prince of their own. His name was Ivan, the main character of our lesson today. Ivan was actually the prince of Muscovy, which is a region in Russia that includes Moscow. Ivan was not the least bit impressed with the Golden Horde and desperately wanted to free Russia from their harsh rule. It was expected that someone, someday would revolt against the Mongols. They had been there for 240 years! Being that Ivan was nicknamed the Great, you may be guessing already that he was the one who freed Russia. And you're right — he was.

But before we get into that, let me back up to something very significant in Ivan's personal life. You see, before Ivan freed Russia from the Mongols, he did something that gained him more power. He married a very important girl. Her name was **Sophia**, and she was the niece of the last Byzantine emperor. Why was she important? Let me stop and explain the Byzantine Empire all over again for you to understand.



The Tatar Mongols were descendants of Genghis Khan who, in the 1200s, ravaged large portions of Asia.

### *The Eastern Orthodox Church of the Byzantine Empire*

During the Middle Ages, the Byzantine Empire was actually the *Eastern Roman Empire*. This empire separated from the Western Roman Empire *and* the Western Roman Church.

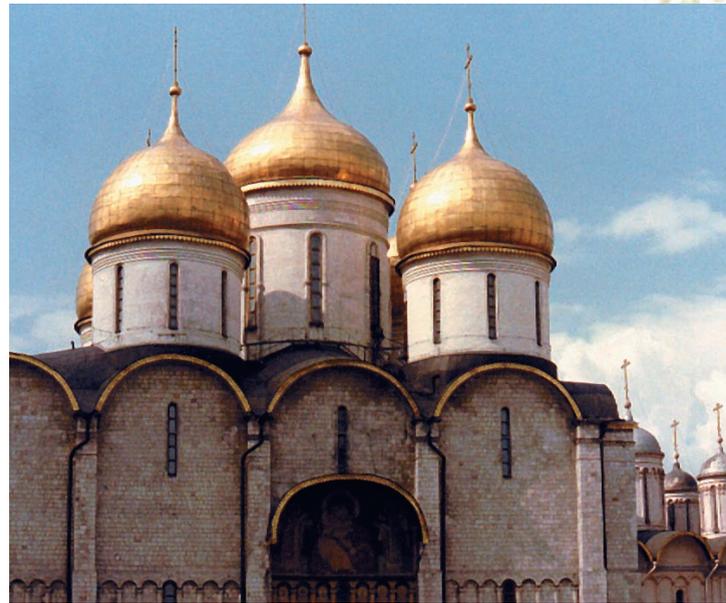
In doing so, the Byzantine Empire created its own church, the *Eastern Orthodox Church*. Though different from the Western Church in many ways, the Eastern Orthodox Church did something just like the West. It blended the power of the church and state. The leader of one was the leader of the other. We just discussed that issue in our last lesson. Though Jesus never taught this model for the church, it existed.

Now, this is where Sophia became so important. When the Byzantine Empire collapsed at the close of the Middle Ages, Sophia was one of the last royal members still alive from the former empire. Her uncle, the last Byzantine emperor, was killed in battle. With his death, Sophia inherited the remaining power of her uncle, which *included* the power of the Eastern Orthodox Church! Did you follow that? The leadership of the church rested in the hands of Sophia. So, when Ivan married Sophia in 1472, the leadership of the church shifted to him. The marriage was very important.

With this marriage, Ivan appointed himself “the protector” of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Whether or not he was a sincere follower of Christ, I do not know. But I do know that Ivan took his role in the church very seriously. As the protector of the church, he took on the attitude of a crusader, aiming to take back ancient Russian lands from the Mongols, who were Muslim. Ivan also fought off Polish armies that were creeping in from the west. Ivan III had the vision of creating a free Russia — free from outside rule.



In 1453, the Christian city of Constantinople was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. In 1930, it was officially renamed Istanbul.



The picturesque domes on top of most Eastern and Russian Orthodox churches are a clear example of Byzantine style passed down through the ages.

And it happened. With the fall of Constantinople and the marriage of Ivan to Sophia, Russians began to see themselves as *the New Rome*. They claimed to be the “third” great Rome. Why the third Rome? Well, they thought the “first” Rome was the ancient Roman Empire. They thought the “second” Rome was the Byzantine Empire. That made them the “third” Rome. A Russian historian put it this way: “The Church of Old Rome fell because of its heresy; the gates of the Second Rome, Constantinople, have been hewn down by the axes of the infidel Turks; but the Church of Moscow, the Church of the New Rome, shines brighter than the Sun in the whole Universe . . . Two Romes have fallen, but the Third stands fast; a fourth there cannot be.”<sup>1</sup>

This is the proud Russia that Ivan began to lead. It was a new Russia seeing herself as Rome come back to life. Ivan put it this way: “By God’s grace we have been lords in our land since the beginning of time, since the days of our earliest ancestors. God has elevated us to the same positions which they held, and we beg him to grant it to us and our children.”<sup>2</sup> Right or wrong, Ivan carried what he believed to be his “God-given” power very effectively.

### *Ivan’s Success*

As for tackling the Mongols, Ivan started his conquest in **1480** by *refusing* to pay tribute (meaning tax money) to the Golden Horde. Sophia agreed with him on this bold move. Surprisingly, the Mongols didn’t bother to wage war over this insult. Ivan then took the city of **Novgorod** (NAHV gah rod), which had been held by the Mongols. Through these bold acts and many more, Ivan shook Russia free of the Mongols. He began to call himself the ruler of *all* Russians, not just those of Muscovy. He revised a code of laws for Russia, moved his capital to Moscow, and had buildings in the **Kremlin** rebuilt in his honor.

The Kremlin is a magnificent fortress containing palaces and cathedrals. Parts of it had been damaged by fire. Do you want to guess what kind of architects Ivan invited to rebuild the palaces? They were Italian architects — the ones who were bringing back the classic style of the Greeks and the Romans. The fit couldn’t have been more perfect since Ivan saw himself as a successor of the Romans through his Byzantine bride.

During the Renaissance, the Kremlin in Moscow was beautified by Italian architects. At dusk, it is a breathtaking sight.



In fact, Ivan behaved a lot like a Byzantine emperor. He made his seal that of the Byzantine double-headed eagle, which looks east and west to guard both Europe and Asia. He also dressed in Byzantine garb. In fact, up to 1894, all Russian tsars (zarz) were crowned with a Byzantine-style cap and clothed with a jacket of Byzantine design — all from Ivan’s influence. The term **tsar** even comes from ancient Rome as a derivative of the name *Caesar*.

### *Feudalism in Russia*

Of course, oftentimes bad comes along with good. It seems that in Ivan’s zeal to lead Russia, he abandoned the counsel of the nobility. That means he no longer asked his governors for advice. In fact, he greatly *lessened* the power of the nobility by creating another class of landowners. He gave power and land to those who would work for him in *military* service. As a result, Ivan basically started **feudalism** in Russia.

You may be familiar with feudalism from studying the Middle Ages. Under this system, peasants or serfs “work” for their lords or landowners in exchange for food and shelter. In Russia, the work of the serfs appeared more like slavery. Landowners became so powerful that they collected taxes from their own serfs and bought and traded their peasants as if they were property. It was nearly impossible for the poor to ever get out of debt. This harsh economic system lasted for hundreds of years. It wasn’t until 1861 that serfdom in Russia came to an end!

And so, the poor working class of Russia grew. While Western Europe had left the Dark Ages, Russia seemed to be entering it. The results of feudalism would haunt Russia for centuries to come. Some say they still do because Russia has a rather large, poor working class today. And, burned deep into Russian minds, was the idea of an *absolute ruler* as started by Ivan the Great.

Truly great or not, Ivan III died in 1505. We are done with our study of him for now, but we are not done with Russia. We will look at her history again when I introduce you to Ivan the Great’s grandson. His nickname was “the Terrible”! As you will learn, it was terribly fitting!

## Lesson 5

1487, 1497

# *Dias and da Gama Round the Cape of Good Hope*

**Note to Teacher:** *Students may follow this lesson more easily with a globe or atlas at their fingertips.*

**U**t would take a brave soul in the 1400s to board a rickety wooden ship and sail into the deep unknown. Some people back then still believed the earth was flat. And so sailing out to sea toward the distant horizon might mean falling off the edge of the world. If that

weren't frightening enough, there were rumors of giant sea monsters, bottomless whirlpools, and boiling oceans to scare away the timid. Sailors knew they risked their lives to fight storms, sickness, shipwrecks, and starvation. It's a wonder that *anyone* attempted to explore the world by sea. But of course, some did and their names and stories have survived. Today we will learn of two of the more daring explorers of the late 1400s. They were **Bartolomeu Dias** (Bar TOLL a mew DEE us) and **Vasco da Gama** (VAS koh duh GA muh). Both were from **Portugal**, a country on the west coast of Spain.

To appreciate the stories of Dias and da Gama, you have to know what happened to the Portuguese explorers *before* them. For 12 years, explorers tried to sail from Portugal all the way down the coast of Africa and around its southernmost tip (the tip is also called a "cape"). Fourteen different expeditions tried and failed! Not one made it even *halfway* down the coast for fear that the sun at the equator would boil them alive or that monsters would consume them from the "Green Sea of Darkness" (as the Atlantic Ocean was called). Now before I jump into the success of Dias and da Gama, let me explain why the Portuguese were so *eager* to get around the southern tip of Africa. There were three good reasons.

### *Why Round the Cape?*

*First*, the Portuguese wanted to sail around Africa because they were looking for trade routes. You see, when Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, it closed a doorway of trade between Europe and Asia. The Europeans were quite upset about this. They had begun to enjoy many things from the East, such as spices, silks, rubies, and pearls. Spices were important because there was no refrigeration back then. Meat was heavily salted to keep it fresh. Spices made meat taste much better, and it helped hide the odor of spoiled food. Pepper was especially valued for its strong flavor and was almost as valuable as gold. With trade routes closed in Constantinople, Europeans wanted to create new ones. It seemed only logical to the Portuguese that if their sailors could get *around* Africa, they could surely reach India and its eastern neighbors where spices and treasure were plentiful.

But there is a *second* reason why some Portuguese wanted to reach the East by sailing around Africa. Many of the Christians of Portugal believed it their duty to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others around the world. At least that was the case with **Prince Henry the Navigator**. Henry was the son of the king of Portugal. He was devout in his faith and part of a religious group called the **Order of Christ**. Members of the Order of Christ saw themselves much like the crusading knights of the Middle Ages. They feared the spread of Islam and sought to convert Muslims. They abhorred, or hated, the idea of taking slaves, which was common practice among other traders of the sea. Their interest in exploration had to do with spreading Christianity.



Henry the Navigator was the son of the king of Portugal and a member of the Order of Christ.

Prince Henry the Navigator was so dedicated to exploration that he invested in it personally. Though he seldom left the shores of Portugal, he made sure that the crews who did were well trained. Henry joined the smartest astronomers, shipbuilders, and cartographers (mapmakers) to make Portugal the leader of exploration in Europe.

Though more unusual, there is a *third* reason why Henry and others were drawn toward sailing around Africa. Some were trying to find the whereabouts of a mysterious Christian king named **Prester John**. Prester John, which could be translated as John “the priest,” supposedly owned kingdoms somewhere in India or Ethiopia, Africa. It was believed that Prester John sent a letter to the West asking for help because he was being overrun by barbarians. This vague but intriguing letter was translated into several languages and circulated across Europe. In the process, the stories of Prester John grew to be more and more fanciful. Some believed that the priest king was rich and a descendant of the magi who presented the Christ child with gifts! Others claimed that he had the treasures of Solomon’s Temple. Many wondered if he existed at all. Nonetheless, searching for Prester John was one more exciting reason to sail around the southern tip of Africa.

### *The Success of Dias*

As for Bartolomeu Dias, I’m not sure what his motivation was for exploring. But in **1487**, he was asked to sail around the cape of Africa by **King John II of Portugal**. The king paid for the trip, which included three of the finest ships of that day. Each ship was a *caravel*, which is a sturdy sea vessel made especially easy to maneuver because of its square- and triangular-shaped sails. The latter are called *lateens*.

Dias’s first success was that he sailed farther south than Cape Bojador near the Canary Islands. Because of fear, that is where the last 14 expeditions had stopped. But not Dias. He and his men bravely sailed down the coast of Africa, keeping their eyes carefully fixed on land. To their amazement, there were no bottomless whirlpools to engulf them. There were no sea monsters to eat them. And the oceans weren’t boiling at the equator as had been believed. Relieved and excited, they continued their way down south.

However, near the tip of Africa, a terrible storm overcame Bartolomeu Dias and his men. For two weeks it pelted and tossed and tormented them. So great were the winds that they blew Dias and all three of his ships far out into the ocean and slung them *around* the tip of Africa without their ever seeing land! Thrilled with their survival, Dias wanted to sail farther. He wanted to venture up the east coast of Africa and into the Indian Ocean. But his men weren’t so thrilled. They staged a sit-down strike, demanding that Dias turn the ships toward home. The courage of the crew had run out.

Without a crew to lead, Bartolomeu Dias gave in to his men and turned back for Portugal. But this time, he maneuvered the ships close enough to the shore that he and his men could see with their own eyes the southern cape of the huge continent of Africa. For all they had been through, Dias named it *Cabo Tormentoso* (KAH bo Tor men TOE so), meaning “Cape of Storms.”

## The Cape of Good Hope and Vasco da Gama

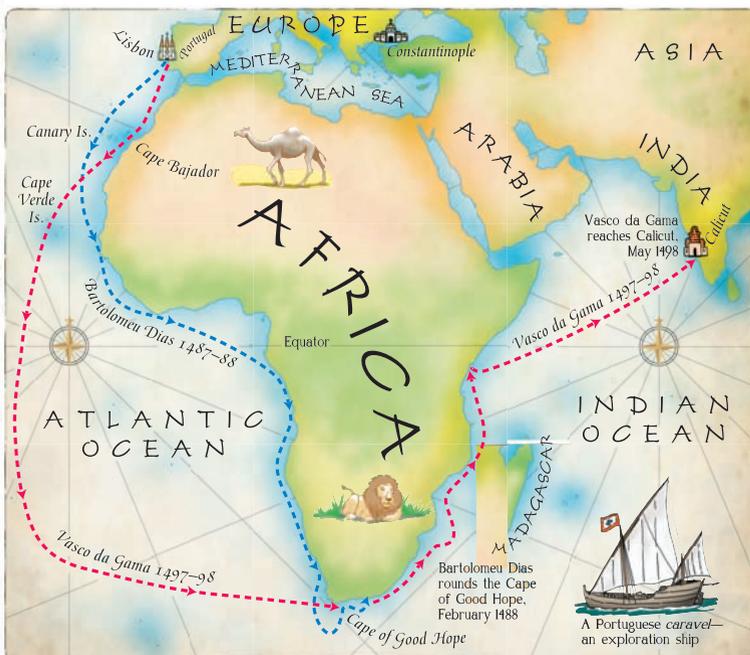
Soon after the return of Bartolomeu Dias, King John of Portugal renamed the southern tip of Africa the **Cape of Good Hope**. He thought the name was more inviting and would inspire others to return. His idea worked. Ten years later, the Cape of Good Hope lured another brave explorer to try the difficult journey. He was Vasco da Gama.

By this time Portugal had another king, **Manuel I**. He was as eager as any other king to find a successful route to the East. In **1497**, he commissioned Vasco da Gama for the job. Do you want to guess who Vasco invited to go along? It was Bartolomeu Dias, of course. It only made sense that Dias help out the new team. But for unknown reasons, Dias made only part of the journey. Upon reaching Cape Verde on the west coast of Africa, Dias returned to Portugal while da Gama continued south.

Da Gama had four ships and a crew of 170. Most of the men were former convicts. (That means they had been in jail.) Though accused of corruption, these men were tough and proved to be quite brave. To reach the cape faster, they dared to sail far into the Atlantic Ocean where they couldn't see the coastline of Africa at all. They did so to catch stronger winds that could whip them around the cape. Their plan worked! When they reached the Cape of Good Hope, they kept their momentum and kept sailing where no Portuguese had sailed before. They ventured up the east coast of Africa and headed into the Indian Ocean. With the help of a native guide, they crossed the Indian Ocean and arrived on the shoreline of India at the city of **Calicut**.



To reach India for spices and treasures, Vasco da Gama sailed all the way around the Cape of Good Hope from Portugal.



The trip had not been easy. At least 100 of da Gama's sailors suffered from **scurvy** — a disease brought on by not getting enough vitamin C in fresh food. (Fresh food is hard to keep on long sea voyages.) In fact, so many men died of scurvy that Vasco had to burn one of his four ships. There simply weren't enough men to steer all four.

Knowing this, you can only imagine the thrill of finally setting foot on the beach of India. The tired crew of former convicts had been at sea for 10 months with only a few stops in Africa.

But unfortunately, their elation didn't last long. They weren't the least bit welcome in India. Arabs had control of the trade industry there. They were threatened by the Europeans and made it impossible for them to stay. After three months, da Gama and his men headed for home with only a few spices as their reward.

Nonetheless, back in Portugal, da Gama and his band of sea-weary sailors were greeted like war heroes. Da Gama was named *Admiral of the Sea of the Indies*. For 20 years, he served as an adviser to the king. Now, you might think that this is the end of the story of Vasco da Gama, but it's not. I've a little more to tell you.

In 1503, Vasco da Gama returned to India by once again sailing around the Cape of Good Hope. This time, he went prepared to fight the Arabs because he was determined to open up a trade route. Like pirates, da Gama and his men blasted their way through the harbor at Calicut, demanding to be received. In a cruel frenzy, da Gama sank an Arab ship holding 300 Muslim pilgrims journeying toward Mecca. This unnecessary violence gave da Gama the victory he wished for. His demands were heard, and trade routes were again opened between the East and the West.

Now you may be wondering whatever happened to Bartolomeu Dias. Well, sadly enough, in 1500 he was shipwrecked and drowned on a return trip to the Cape of Good Hope. As for Vasco da Gama, he died in 1524 in India, where he was living as viceroy for the king of Portugal. (That means he was the king's representative.) I find it interesting that both explorers died at the places where they had become famous. Had they a choice in the matter, I wonder if that's exactly what they would have wanted.

## Lesson 6

1492

### *Lorenzo the Magnificent*

f all the Medici who were famous during the Renaissance, only one was called “the Magnificent.” It was **Lorenzo de’ Medici**, the grandson of Cosimo. I hope you remember Cosimo de’ Medici, the wealthy patron of classical art and literature. Well, as you might expect, Lorenzo was just like his grandfather. He also loved the classics and deeply appreciated the arts. Lorenzo was equally passionate for music and poetry. Everything about him reflected his cultural interests and genuine charm, which I’m sure is why he was called “the Magnificent.”

In his youth, Lorenzo studied Greek and philosophy. At age 19, he won first place in a war tournament. The French phrase *Le Temps Revient* (Leh TAW Reh VYEH) was etched on his armor. It means “The Age Returns.” Do you know what “age” was “returning”? It was the *Golden Age* of classic Greece and Rome. Like his grandfather, Lorenzo helped usher in the “Renaissance,” or the “rebirth” of Greek and Roman thought.

## Vivano le palle!

It wasn't easy for Lorenzo to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather. Though he was tall and strong, Lorenzo had a few serious enemies. His main enemies were members of a rival family of bankers and an archbishop of the church. Though *most* of Florence welcomed Lorenzo and his brother as leaders, his enemies didn't. These enemies plotted an assassination (meaning murder) of the Medici brothers on Easter morning in 1478. However, things didn't exactly go as planned.

The awful plan was that both Lorenzo and his brother would be killed during a Sunday morning church service. In the middle of worship, Lorenzo's brother never saw his attacker coming. He was stabbed in the chest, fell to the ground, and was struck again and again by his attacker, who was one of the bankers! Lorenzo, however, was far more fortunate and received only a cut in the attack. His friends quickly surrounded him and led him safely out of the church. You can only imagine the riot that broke loose after that!

The archbishop used this opportunity to try to rouse the crowd *against* the Medici family. "Freedom!" he yelled, wishing Florence were free of the Medicis.<sup>3</sup> But in shock from the murder that so many had witnessed, the crowd chanted in *favor* of the one Medici who escaped. (That was Lorenzo, of course.) They shouted, "*Vivano le palle!*" meaning "Long live the balls!" — the symbol on the coat of arms of the Medici family.<sup>4</sup>

Having spoken in favor of Lorenzo, the rioting crowd moved quickly against the murderers. One banker and the archbishop were captured and hung. The other banker was stripped

naked and drawn by horses through the streets! Others were pushed out of windows to meet the stone-cold pavement below. By their riotous actions, the masses made it clear that they were devoted to Lorenzo.

When **Pope Sixtus IV** of Rome heard about the hanging of the archbishop, he was furious. The pope excommunicated (meaning banished) Lorenzo from the church and punished the city of Florence! If this weren't harsh enough, the pope waged war against Florence with the help of Ferrante I, the king of **Naples**. (Naples was another city/state in Italy, south of Rome.)

Well, if this story isn't interesting enough, it's about to get more interesting. In response to this crisis, Lorenzo did something very unusual — but very brave. Without weapons or a bodyguard, Lorenzo went to Naples to talk face-to-face with King Ferrante, the very king who had declared war against him with the help of the pope.



Tall, strong, and passionate toward the arts, Lorenzo de' Medici helped usher in the Renaissance in Italy.

King Ferrante would never have expected a friendly visit from Lorenzo. He could have had Lorenzo killed on the spot. But King Ferrante was intrigued with Lorenzo's courage in coming to talk to him, and so he gave Lorenzo a chance to explain his predicament with the pope and the citizens of Florence. Lorenzo's good character, charm, and intelligence must have impressed the king because for three months, Lorenzo stayed there in Naples. He wasn't there as a prisoner of war but rather as an honored guest! The king and Lorenzo grew to have great respect for one another, and so the "war" between them was canceled. Yes, canceled! Pope Sixtus eventually gave up on his "war" against Florence, too. Lorenzo returned to his home as the uncontested ruler of Florence, free from war with Naples or Rome.

### *Lorenzo the Politician*

During his lifetime, Lorenzo continued to show wisdom when it came to politics. He selected a council of 70 men to help him run the affairs of Florence.<sup>5</sup> And they did so very well. Under the **Council of Seventy**, crime went down and prosperity went up. Though Lorenzo had the power and authority of a dictator, he kept his character clean and fair. One Italian put it this way, "If Florence was to have a tyrant, she could never have found a better or more delightful one."<sup>6</sup> Lorenzo kept his good temper at home as well. He had a large family and took good care of them, just as he did the citizens of Florence. Lorenzo was well loved, crooked nose and all.

### *Lorenzo the Poet*

Lorenzo governed Florence with perhaps even more flare than his grandfather. He was a little less of a scholar and more of a socialite than Cosimo had been. Though Lorenzo once claimed he would sell off his furniture for the sake of buying books, he was quick to join every parade, sporting event, and carnival in the city. It was custom in Florence to celebrate historic events through glamorous parades with floats and colorful costumes (much like a Thanksgiving Day parade). Lorenzo so enjoyed these events that he employed special artists and musicians to make them even more spectacular. Lorenzo himself wrote carnival songs to celebrate the frolic and fun. The citizens of Florence loved him for this and performed his songs in the streets.

But Lorenzo's passion for music and poetry ran deeper than carnival songs. In Italian, he wrote love sonnets, nature poems, and sacred hymns. Though not a religious man, Lorenzo wrote biblical plays for his children. Through his many writings, Lorenzo took Italy back to the romantic language of Italian and away from old-fashioned Latin. (Cosimo would have been disappointed in that.) But the masses were fond of their native tongue and found Italian to be one of the most beautiful languages for song. For that reason, opera music is still quite often written in Italian.

### *Lorenzo the Patron*

Like Cosimo, Lorenzo had a strong influence on the artists of Florence. With his great wealth, he, too, shared his collection of Greek and Roman relics to inspire painters, architects, and sculptors. Probably none were more influenced than **Sandro Botticelli** (SAHN dro Bo tih CHEL lee). At a young age, Botticelli proved himself a masterful painter and was soon

employed by the Medici family for numerous projects. Naturally, these projects were Greek and Roman looking. Botticelli brought ancient mythology to life through paintings like *Primavera* (Spring), *Pallas and the Centaur*, and *Venus and Mars*. So graceful are the goddesses in these masterpieces that in viewing them, you can nearly feel the wind that blows their gowns and sweeps the tresses of their hair. In my opinion, they are breathtaking.

Before I get back to Lorenzo, I do want to tell you a little more about Botticelli because he is one of *my* favorite artists of the Renaissance, and his spiritual life is quite interesting. After years of painting mythological scenes for Lorenzo, Botticelli had a change of heart. A powerful preacher by the name of **Savonarola** (Sav uh nah ROLL uh) had something to do with it. Savonarola saw that Florence had become worldly and humanistic under the Medicis. As bold as John the Baptist, Savonarola preached for sinners to repent and seek the kingdom of God. Botticelli listened and responded. He quit painting anything that had to do with mythology and for the rest of his life

In *Mystic Nativity*, Sandro Botticelli used his talent for portraying movement to paint heavenly dancing angels above the Christ child.

he painted scenes of the Christian faith. His later works include *Madonna of the Pomegranate*, *Annunciation*, and *Mystic Nativity*.

It is especially noticeable in *Mystic Nativity* that Botticelli transformed the wind-swept “goddesses” of his earlier works into heavenly angels dancing above the manger of Jesus. Botticelli also painted scenes to illustrate Danté’s *Divine Comedy*, a poem describing heaven and hell. (See Volume II of *The Mystery of History*.) The themes of these works were quite different than those Botticelli once painted for Lorenzo.

### *Lorenzo’s Death*

Since Lorenzo was so well loved, I wish I could write that he lived a long life. But he didn’t. At only 43, Lorenzo fell deathly ill. On his deathbed, he called for Savonarola, the fiery preacher of Florence, to hear his final confession of sins and pray over him. On April 9, 1492, Lorenzo de’ Medici died. The entire country grieved at the sudden loss. A famous philosopher said “. . . there had never died in Florence — nor yet in Italy — one for whom his country mourned so much, or who left behind him so wide a reputation for wisdom.”<sup>7</sup> Through politics, poetry, and patronage, I believe Lorenzo did do *magnificent* things for Florence.



## Christopher Columbus Sails to an “Other World”

**Note to Teacher:** *Due to the historical significance of Christopher Columbus and the raging debates that exist over him, the content of the next two lessons is lengthier and has more detail than most lessons in Volume III. Please excuse my excessiveness and paraphrase as needed for Younger Students. All students may need more time than usual to adequately cover the next two lessons.*

 **Christopher Columbus** is quite famous for navigating the *Niña* (NEEN ya), the *Pinta* (PEEN ta), and the *Santa Maria* to the New World. A well-known rhyme tells us the date of this historic voyage. It says, “In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” Though we know a lot about the seafaring journeys of Columbus, his life is full of riddles.

For one, scholars don’t agree on the ancestry of Christopher Columbus. (That means we’re not sure where he came from.) Second, it’s unclear as to exactly *where* Columbus landed on his first voyage across the Atlantic. And third, over the course of his life, his actions would appear to contradict his faith, causing all sorts of problems. With these mysteries to consider, it will take us two lessons to study Christopher Columbus.

### *The Heritage of Christopher Columbus*

Though it might have been forged (meaning faked), Christopher Columbus wrote in a document that he was born in **Genoa**.<sup>1</sup> Some believe he was referring to the Republic of Genoa in Italy and that he was related to a family of Italian wool weavers. There seems to be a lot of evidence in Genoa to support this, and most history books claim that he was Italian.

However, some scholars believe that Christopher Columbus was Greek, a Spanish Jew, or Portuguese. Those believing he was Portuguese think he might have served as a spy to King John II of Portugal! Isn’t that an interesting concept? According to the spy theory, Columbus was actually Portuguese and sent to Spain as a decoy to lure Spanish sailors away from Portuguese trade routes around Africa. Hmmm!

Unfortunately, the name of Christopher Columbus is of no help in solving the riddle of his ancestry because it has been translated into many languages. It might even be that he changed his name while living in Portugal.<sup>2</sup> In original documents, Columbus used the name



Christopher Columbus, as he is traditionally known, was a man of many unsolved mysteries.

Cristóval (Kree STAW ball) Colón (which is most commonly written as **Cristóbal Colón**, with a “b”). Those holding to the spy theory speculate that Cristóbal Colón and Christopher Columbus from Genoa were two different people! Traditional historians disagree.

To add to our confusion, there is no known portrait of Columbus painted in his lifetime. Those that were painted later don’t necessarily match his description as a graying blond with a ruddy complexion. So, who exactly was Columbus? His signature won’t help us answer this question either. It has perplexed historians for years because it’s made up of Greek and Latin letters on four lines in the shape of a pyramid. Who signs their name on four different lines? Columbus did! Why he did so, nobody knows for sure. But the last line, *X po Ferens*, is properly translated “Christ bearer.”

A man who admired Columbus, named Bartolomé de Las Casas, wrote this about him: “He was called Cristóbal, which is to say, *Christum Ferens*, which means the bearer of Christ. And it was this way that he often signed his name, for the truth is that he was the first to open the gates of the Ocean Sea in order to bear our Savior Jesus Christ over the waves to those remote realms and lands.”<sup>3</sup>

To sum up the controversies thus far, historians don’t agree on the heritage of Columbus, his motives for sailing west, his true portrait, or the meaning of his signature. But one thing is certain — in 1492, he crossed the ocean blue! And according to Bartolomé de Las Casas, Columbus was a messenger of Christ. Putting aside all mysteries, let’s look now at how this adventure started. And from this point on, I’ll refer to Columbus as Cristóbal Colón to be true to the name that *he* used.

### ***Enterprise to the Indies***

The plan of Cristóbal Colón, or so it would appear, was to reach the East by sailing west. You already know a few reasons why Europeans were anxious to reach the East. For one, they sought spices and jewels from China, Japan, and India. They also hoped to find gold, the

whereabouts of Prester John, and to share the Gospel with other nations. For whatever reason Colón was sailing, he called his adventure his “Enterprise to the Indies.”

Cristóbal Colón wasn’t the first to come up with the idea of reaching the East by sailing west. Colón was familiar with ancient Greek thought to support the idea; he’d been on the sea since the age of 14; and he knew the minds of other navigators who had tossed the plan about for years. Furthermore, while living in Lisbon, Portugal, he and his brother **Bartholomew** made, studied, and sold maps and books on the subject. It was also in Portugal that Cristóbal was promoted to captain, married a Portuguese noblewoman, and fathered a son named Diego.

To further his research, it’s believed that Cristóbal Colón made a trip to Great Britain, Ireland, and Iceland to investigate the stories of other mariners. In particular, he studied the stories of **Leif** (Leaf) **Ericsson**, a Christian Viking nicknamed “Leif the Lucky.” Why would he study a Viking? Well, as far back as A.D. 1000, Leif “the Lucky” Ericsson *had* sailed west! What Leif found was North America, but he called it **Vinland**. Though new to the Vikings and Europeans, Vinland wasn’t really new at all. North America had been home to native peoples since before the time of Christ! Nonetheless, from a European point of view, the “discovery” of Vinland was important evidence showing that new lands could be reached by sailing west.

The next part of our story is less clear. Tradition tells us that Cristóbal Colón, while living in Portugal, sought the help of several kings to sponsor his voyage across the Atlantic. (Ships were expensive, and Colón needed money for supplies.) One of his appeals was to the king of Portugal, King John II. Supposedly, King John turned him down because he was satisfied with the trade route opened by Bartolomeu Dias. Do you remember him? By sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, Dias created a pathway for Portuguese traders to reach treasures in the East.

But there are those who wonder . . . did King John really turn down Cristóbal Colón? Did he employ him as a spy? Did he use Colón as a decoy to keep the Spanish occupied? At the time of my writing, I don’t believe it is clear enough to say. But it would appear that *without* funding from King John II, Cristóbal Colón left Portugal and moved with his son to Palos, Spain. (His wife had died by this time.)

Once in Spain, Colón was relentless in seeking the help of Ferdinand and Isabella. This famous king and queen were busy with many matters, including the *reconquista*. I’m sure you remember that from Lesson 3. Ferdinand and Isabella listened many times to the plan of Colón, but they also listened to their advisers who thought the enterprise was a bad idea. Poor Cristóbal! It would take him six years of pleading, with a lot of maps, to convince Ferdinand and Isabella to sponsor him. But finally, Isabella said yes! She was the same age as Colón and shared his zealotness. Ferdinand agreed to the plan, and the Enterprise to the Indies was made official.



Long before Cristóbal Colón sailed to the New World, the Vikings had made landfall in North America.

## First Voyage

With funds from Spain, and money from Italian investors, Cristóbal Colón acquired three ships and 90 men for his first voyage across the Atlantic. (He made four voyages in all.) At the harbor in Palos, Spain, Colón and his crew boarded their ships on August 2, 1492, and set sail the following day.<sup>4</sup> The *Niña* and *Pinta* were small caravels. With triangular-shaped sails, these ships were easy to maneuver and steer. They were captained by two brothers, **Martín Alonso Pinzón** and **Vicente Yáñez Pinzón**. The *Santa Maria* was a bigger ship called a nao. With large, square sails, it was more awkward to manage but held a larger cargo. Being no more than 70 feet long and 12 feet wide, none of the ships were very big for crossing the unknown waters of the Atlantic. But Cristóbal Colón would travel on the *Santa Maria* and be the “Admiral” (as he called himself in his journal) of the fleet.

From Spain, Colón and his crew stopped first at the **Canary Islands** just off the coast of Africa. After taking on fresh “water, wood, [and] meat,”<sup>5</sup> they left the Canaries on September 6. For three days they could still see land on the horizon behind them. But after that? It would be three *weeks* before land would be seen again! The ships were surrounded by nothing but deep blue sea. Keep in mind that as far as we know, no other European had ever sailed these waters!

Cristóbal Colón had great faith in his dream, but his crew grumbled a lot and complained. To try to keep up the spirits of his crew, Colón fibbed to his men about their progress! He told them they weren’t as far away from home as they really were. To cover the truth, he kept two journals — one fabricated for his men, and one kept accurately for himself.<sup>6</sup> On September 9, the Admiral confessed in his private journal, “I have decided to log less than our true run, so that if the voyage is long the crew will not be afraid and lose heart.”<sup>7</sup>

The false information that Cristóbal fed his crew was not enough to keep them from murmuring mutiny. After weeks at sea, the crew feared they would never see home again and begged the Admiral to turn around. The downtrodden sailors seriously considered tossing their stubborn Admiral overboard! But Colón could not be swayed. On October 10, Colón wrote in his journal, “[We have traveled] sixty-two and a half leagues in the twenty-four hours; [but] I told the men only forty-six and a half. They could contain themselves no longer, and began to complain of the length of the voyage. I encouraged them as best I could . . . I also told them that it was useless to complain; having set out for the Indies I shall continue this voyage until, with God’s grace, I reach them.”<sup>8</sup> (Words in brackets are mine for clarity.)

Strangely, sailors from the voyage would later report that there were vague sightings of land from time to time — but the Admiral would not steer toward them. Some suspect that Cristóbal Colón had a secret map that told him exactly where to sail and where not to sail! Where would he get a secret map? Had someone sailed this route before him? No one really knows. But Cristóbal was overly determined at times to sail in the direction he wanted. And his actions were strange as he maneuvered his way across the Atlantic, catching winds that he should *not* have had any knowledge of. His journal would later appear to be scrambled and out of order. Perhaps he did have secrets he was protecting! But back to our voyage.

To encourage his men to keep a good lookout, on October 11, Colón offered a gift of silk and gold to the man who would first sight land. All eyes were fixed fast on the horizon. They saw birds, but no land. Anxiety mounted and the men grew more restless. Leafy sticks were seen floating on the waters around them, but still no sight of land.

At ten o'clock that evening, Colón, who always had an eye on the sea, claimed that he saw from the *Santa Maria* a distant fire in the night — which had to mean there was land in sight! Others gazed deeply into the darkness, but the flame was only a flicker “like a wax candle rising and falling.”<sup>9</sup> For this sighting, Colón rewarded himself the promised gift of silk and gold! His men grumbled about this self-reward and questioned the stubbornness of their Admiral. What *was* driving Cristóbal so strongly? Was it his faith? Was it sheer determination? We may never know.

But the *Pinta*, being smaller and swifter than the *Santa Maria*, sped forward into the night. Then, at two o'clock in the morning on October 12, it happened. **Juan Rodriguez**, a lookout on the *Pinta*, saw actual land and signaled back to Colón. Slowly and steadily the sailors saw white cliffs emerge in the distance and glimmer in the moonlight. After weeks on the sea, can you imagine how they felt? With surges of hope racing through their veins, I doubt that the crew slept the rest of the night while the ships pointed for shore.

Cristóbal Colón named his first place of landfall **San Salvador**, which means “Holy Savior.”<sup>10</sup> He wrote to a friend, “To the first of these I gave the name of the blessed Savior, on whose aid relying I had reached this as well as the other islands.”<sup>11</sup> With great ceremony, and excitement I'm sure, Colón first stepped ashore with the Pinzón brothers. Colón carried the royal standard of Spain, and his captains each carried a banner from their ships marked with a “Green Cross” and royal letters. They knelt and prayed, thanking the Lord for their safety and the opportunity that lay before them.

Filled with curiosity, the native inhabitants of the island came forward to greet the light-skinned newcomers. What a spectacle it must have been! I don't think we can imagine the scene properly, but it must have given an eerie sensation to all who were there. Colón wrote, “Soon many of the islanders gathered around us. I could see that they were people who would be more easily converted to our Holy Faith by love than by coercion, and wishing them to look on us with friendship I gave them red bonnets and glass beads which they hung round their necks.” He further wrote, “They go about as naked as the day they were born . . . all well built, finely bodied and handsome in the face.”<sup>12</sup>



A full-scale model of the *Santa Maria* sits on the river in downtown Columbus, Ohio, a city named in honor of the explorer.

I wonder, what did these handsome, gentle, naked people think of the sunburned sailors with their heavily armored clothes and banners blowing in the wind? Were these bearded gods or were these humans from afar? What was the meaning of the cross hammered into the sandy soil, and what words were they speaking with eyes closed and heads bowed?

The Europeans and the islanders had much to learn about one another. None knew then that they were experiencing one of the most pivotal events in history as members of the Old World stared into the eyes of the New. And just where had Cristóbal Colón and his crew of 90 landed? Believe it or not, Colón didn't exactly know and historians still disagree. But the landing of Cristóbal Colón would change the handiwork of mapmakers and the perspective of mankind toward his world. I'll tell you about this mysterious place of landfall and much more in our next lesson as we trace the rest of the voyages of Cristóbal Colón and consider his loss of reputation.

## Lesson 8

1493–1502

# *The Return of Cristóbal Colón*

s promised, we're going to pick up where we left off with Cristóbal Colón. There is so much to tell about this seafaring Admiral that it will be hard to narrow it down! But in this lesson, we'll look at where Colón most likely was when he landed in the New World — and where he thought he was. Then, we'll reflect on his varied ambitions and on how later voyages would tarnish his reputation. I'll tell you ahead of time that in the end, “discovery” wasn't that glamorous for Cristóbal Colón.

### *Cruising the Caribbean*

As mentioned before, there is great debate as to what tiny island Cristóbal Colón actually first stepped on when he reached the New World. Normally, the landfall of a ship of malodorous (meaning smelly) sailors wouldn't be so important. But the event was so historic in bringing two foreign worlds together that scholars are likely to keep arguing over it until the matter is solved. If Colón traveled as it appears in his journal, he may have landed on **Watling Island** (later named San Salvador), the **Plana Cays**, or **Samana Cay**. All are islands of the **Bahamas**, a few hundred miles from the coast of Florida.

If Cristóbal Colón scrambled his journal to protect some secrets, he may have sailed a more southern route and landed at **Grand Turk Island**. Wherever he was, it is certain that the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria* were cruising the waters of the **Caribbean Sea**. Colón would eventually touch down in the *West Indies*, *Central America*, and *South America*. Though often implied, Colón never set foot on the continent of North America.

The interesting thing about the first voyage of Cristóbal Colón is that he was lost and didn't know it! Colón seemed to believe that he had landed somewhere off the coast of Asia. Over and over in his journal, he referred to his landing in **Cuba** as *Cipango*, which is the name that Marco Polo had given to Japan! If you can picture this on a map, Colón envisioned himself in the ocean near China and Japan. He had mistakenly estimated the world to be about two-thirds smaller than it is, and he thought Asia was broader and wider than it is. He couldn't have been more wrong.

With letters in hand from the king and queen of Spain, Cristóbal sent sailors inland to search for the emperor of China. On October 21, he wrote, "I am still determined to continue to the mainland . . . and to give Your Majesties' letters to the Great Khan and return with his reply."<sup>13</sup> This means that Colón thought he was near China and he had no idea that the continents of North and South America lay *between* Europe and Asia.

Cristóbal Colón called the people he found living on these islands "Indians." Why? Because he thought that if he weren't on the coast of China, then he might be on some outlying islands of India. To this day, native peoples of the Americas are often called "Indians" — all because of this honest mistake by Cristóbal. And for the same reason, the islands he circled in the Caribbean are still called the "West Indies."

### *The Gospel and Gold*

Cristóbal Colón was at first compassionate toward the local people he encountered. (He landed on at least five islands before reaching Cuba.) He wrote in a letter, "They show greater love for all others than for themselves; . . . all understand each other mutually; a fact that is very important for the end . . . that is, their conversion to the holy religion of Christ, to which . . . they are very ready and favorably inclined . . . Let Christ rejoice on earth, as he rejoices in heaven, when he foresees coming to salvation so many souls of people hitherto lost."<sup>14</sup>

The gentle people Cristóbal Colón was describing were most likely the **Arawak** (AIR uh walk), a Caribbean group who greatly declined in number after the arrival of the white man. According to Colón, the natives were trusting, generous, and "had no god." By his writings, Colón appeared truly concerned for sharing the Gospel of Christ with the Indians. He wrote on November 27, "God willing . . . I shall have the language taught to one of my people, for I can see that so far the same language is spoken everywhere. Then it will be possible to find out which things are useful and to convert these people to Christianity. It will be easy, for they have no faith and do not worship idols; Your Majesties will have a city and a fort built here and these lands will be converted."<sup>15</sup>

But let me be clear about something else. Cristóbal Colón also wrote, without apology, that he was seeking gold and a way to profit from the new land. On October 23, while leaving one island to sail to another, he wrote, "It is only sensible to go where there is good potential for trade. To my mind there is no point in lingering when one can set off and explore a large area until one finds a country which offers profit."<sup>16</sup> On November 1, from another island, Colón wrote, ". . . more than sixteen canoes came out to the ships with cotton thread and other small items. I gave orders for none of this to be taken, so that they would know that I am seeking only gold."<sup>17</sup>

Though “seeking only gold” may sound greedy, Colón *also* wrote that his quest for gold was inspired by a crusade to the Holy Lands! He wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella that he hoped the discovery of gold mines in the East would fund further conquests of Jerusalem. (The city of Jerusalem in the Holy Lands was under Muslim control.) Colón’s journal entry for December 26 reads, “I trust in the Lord that when I return . . . I shall find . . . the gold mine and spices, and all in such quantities that Your Majesties will be able to make your preparations to go to recover the Holy Sepulcher, for Your Majesties may remember my request to you that all the proceeds of this voyage of mine should be used for the conquest of Jerusalem.”<sup>18</sup>

So, the journals of Colón reveal something of his dual ambitions. He *did* seek the conversion of the natives and he *did* seek gold for himself and the king and queen of Spain. But, as a true explorer, he also sought the thrill of discovery. He also wrote on December 26, “My constant aim has been discovery, and I was resting no more than a day in any one place except for lack of wind.”<sup>19</sup>

To piece it all together, like most adventurers, Cristóbal Colón had numerous ambitions. If he sailed for the Gospel, for gold, or as a spy, he was elated at what he discovered in the West Indies. He made endless comments in his journal on the beauty of the land and the gentle ways of the people. He recorded the trees, the terrain, and the gorgeous weather that he compared to pleasant days back home in May. He also wrote of his loss of the bulky *Santa Maria*. It hit a bank on Christmas Eve and had to be abandoned. The remaining sailors and supplies were crowded onto the *Niña* and *Pinta*, making for a difficult trip back home.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, the trip back to Spain was very difficult. Once out in open sea, both the *Niña* and *Pinta* were caught in a terrible storm and tossed out of sight from one another. The men prayed and offered themselves to holy pilgrimages if they could just make it safely back home. With the amazing navigational sense of Colón, he and his men safely reached the **Azores**, which are small islands off the coast of Portugal. Without fancy instruments, Colón depended greatly on his knowledge of the stars and the sea. Modern sailors would describe his “dead-reckoning” instincts as phenomenal.

After leaving the Azores, Cristóbal Colón made one interesting stop before heading home to Spain. He dropped in to visit King John II in Portugal — the king who turned down the opportunity to sponsor him! Many still wonder if King John was up to mischief and using Colón as a spy. For now it remains a mystery. But upon his arrival in Spain, Cristóbal Colón was given a hero’s welcome. He was given everything he had requested from Queen Isabella, which was a lot! He received a tenth of the riches he found, the title “Admiral of the Ocean Sea,” the rank of nobility, and a promise to govern newly discovered lands. He was also granted the privilege of wearing his hat in front of the king and queen because it was a sign of royal favor.

Perhaps all this reward was the beginning of the downfall of Cristóbal Colón. Perhaps fame and fortune went to his head or he was pressured to find gold and slaves. For on the next voyages of Colón, his actions would appear cruel and careless.



Upon his return from the New World, Cristóbal Colón was granted everything he requested from Queen Isabella.

## *Second and Third Voyages*

On his **second voyage in 1493**, Cristóbal loaded 1,000 settlers onto 17 ships. Under the leadership of his brother, these Spaniards started the first permanent European colony in the New World. This is historical fact. They were on the island of **Hispaniola** (which holds the modern-day countries of **Haiti** and the **Dominican Republic**). The European settlers were poorly prepared for the hardships they faced. To survive their new home, and believing that they were superior to the natives, the settlers began to make slaves of the local people. It was cruel and one-sided because the Spaniards had guns and horses to fight with. The natives didn't. They had no fair way to protect themselves.

Nevertheless, the natives did their best to turn against the Spaniards and fight for their survival. Unfortunately, Cristóbal didn't resolve the conflict peacefully. Rather than negotiate, he stepped in with weapons, and many natives were killed. And somewhere along the way, Cristóbal Colón began to *demand* gold! Taking charge over the Indians, he required the natives to bring him a payment of gold dust every three months. Those who did were marked with a bronze band. Those who didn't had arms lopped off or were killed!

After some time, Colón headed back to Spain, but his people weren't so proud of him this time. His reputation as a cruel taskmaster had spread, and the Spanish weren't quite sure

what to think of him. But, with his usual tenacity and determination, Colón left Spain for a **third voyage in 1498**. He sailed in a southerly direction and made it to present-day **Trinidad** and the coast of **Venezuela** (Ven uhs ZWAY la). (Venezuela is a country in South America.) It was there that Cristóbal said, “I believe that this is a very great continent which until today has been unknown.”<sup>21</sup> He called it an “**Other World**.”

In the meantime, a new governor was sent to Hispaniola by the order of Ferdinand and Isabella. They were concerned with the problems facing the colonists and thought new leadership might help. But when Colón landed there, he wasn't welcome. In the very colony that he first helped to establish, he was arrested and placed in chains! In humility, Cristóbal Colón was shipped back to Spain as a prisoner. Ferdinand and Isabella were alarmed to find their “Admiral of the Ocean Sea” bound like a common criminal. They immediately set him free and fired the governor of Hispaniola for having arrested their Admiral.

It was after the third voyage of Cristóbal Colón that he edited a collection of writings called the *Book of Prophecies*. In this book, he and a monk recorded verses from the Bible and wrote commentary to defend Colón's “Enterprise to the Indies.” I suppose after being in chains, he felt the need to explain himself! He might have feared, too, that his mission was on shaky ground and could be canceled at any time. Out of pages of Bible passages, here are three verses as found in his *Book of Prophecies*.<sup>22</sup>

- ◆ Sing his praise from the ends of the earth, you who sink into the sea and his plentitude, the islands and their inhabitants.” (Isaiah 42:10, as quoted in the *Book of Prophecies*, p. 189)
- ◆ “When you cross the waters, I will be with you and the floods will not overwhelm you . . . for I am the Lord your God.” (Isaiah 43:2, 3, as quoted in the *Book of Prophecies*, p. 191)
- ◆ “I will send ones who have been saved to the ocean peoples in Africa, in Lydia, the ones with arrows, in Italy and Greece; to the distant islands, to those who have not heard of me and have not seen my glory.” (Isaiah 66:19, as quoted in the *Book of Prophecies*, p. 341)

As for making mistakes, Colón admitted that he was a sinner, but he believed he was still fulfilling prophecy. He wrote, “I have greatly sinned. Yet, every time that I have asked, I have been covered by the mercy and compassion of Our Lord. I have found the sweetest consolation in throwing off all my cares in order to contemplate his marvellous [*sic*] presence. I have already said that for the voyage of the Indies neither intelligence nor mathematics nor world maps were of any use to me; it was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.”<sup>23</sup>

Considering the controversies that surround Colón as to why he sailed and for whom, I think these words are powerful. Perhaps they contain clues to the real heart and soul of the Admiral. Unless he was protecting

“I have already said that for the voyage of the Indies neither intelligence nor mathematics nor world maps were of any use to me; it was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.”

—Cristóbal Colón  
[Christopher Columbus]

his reputation, or trying to impress the king and queen, Cristóbal Colón sounds like a man on a mission for God — torn by his own selfishness. Whatever his intentions, he made one last voyage to the New World.

### *The Fourth and Final Voyage*

Ferdinand and Isabella furnished Colón with funds and supplies for one more trip. On this **fourth and final voyage in 1502**, Colón chose his 13-year-old son to accompany him to the New World. In fact, most of the crewmen were mere teenagers. They may not have had much experience, but they were a little less prone to grumble than the older sailors. The goal of this trip was to find a passage through Central America to reach the seas and the shores beyond. The young sailors scoured the coasts of **Honduras** and **Panama** looking for a shortcut that didn't exist. Colón, though wrong about this passageway, was right that he wasn't far from another great ocean. The Pacific Ocean lay just on the *other* side of Central America, which would have led him to Asia. But the difficult conditions of sea travel never allowed Cristóbal to prove he was right. This fourth voyage was the most challenging of all.



The country of Honduras is lush and beautiful, but it does not provide a shortcut to the Pacific Ocean as Colón was hoping for.

On that dreary journey, the clothes of the crew remained soaked from bad weather. They chose to eat theirhardtack biscuits at night so they wouldn't have to see the worms that had infested their supplies! Besides that, the ships stalled; the crew faced hurricanes; and the sailors had troubles with the natives. As before, this trouble led to bloodshed — lots of bloodshed. As if Colón was no longer concerned with the conversion of the Indians, thousands were killed.

Going further against his Christian faith, Cristóbal later told lies about his powers to gain the trust of the remaining natives. You see, he knew that an eclipse of the moon was coming, and he used this knowledge to appear to have supernatural powers in front of the Indians! Maybe it was self-protection because hostilities had grown out of control. Maybe it was plain deceit. I don't know the motive for his lying. But before it was all over, Colón took a tribal chief as a hostage, and his crew slaughtered *more* natives. Why? I can't explain this either. But, on these later voyages, greed and survival seemed to crowd out grace and the desire to fulfill prophecy.

Colón's final trip back to Spain was terribly rough. Worms bore so many holes through the planks of his ship that the crew was forced to sail slowly and close to the coast. For a year, they were marooned in **Jamaica** before another ship came to their rescue. By the time Cristóbal reached Spain, Queen Isabella was dying and unable to meet with him. King Ferdinand had lost interest in the "Enterprise to the Indies" and withdrew his support. The voyages of Cristóbal Colón were over!



Though the memory of Christopher Columbus draws mixed reactions, many statues have been built in his honor.

If that weren't disheartening enough, Cristóbal had other issues to face. He had trouble with his estate and he fought severe arthritis. At just 53, he died in Spain, with little if any recognition. He had no idea of the impact he had made on history. Neither did those around him.

From all of this, what would you conclude about the life of Cristóbal Colón? Is he to be admired for his tenacity and navigational genius? Is he to be scorned for his treatment of the natives and his quest for gold? Is he to be credited with discovering an "Other World"? I think it's safe to say we could admire, scorn, and credit the Admiral of the Ocean Sea. As is true for most people, his life was a mixture of good and bad. I think our views of him can be a mixture, too. Besides, until more facts are certain, there will remain a mixture of opinions about the man who dared to sail the ocean blue.

In closing, I've one last note to share. Though most credit "Christopher Columbus" with discovering the Americas, they were not named after him. **Amerigo Vespucci** (Ves SPOO chee) was given that honor. He was an Italian explorer funded by none other than the Medici family. When Amerigo identified what he believed to be a whole new continent, a German geographer used his name on a map. Thus, both North and South America were eventually named in history after an Italian, and that is an undisputed fact!

## *Ghana, Mali, and Songhai: Empires of West Africa*

**T**he world is a big place, and it's been here for thousands of years. As much as I'd like to, I'll never cover the history of it all! That would be impossible. But I will keep telling you stories from *all* over the world when they stand out in history for one reason or another. Today's story is about three West African empires. They are **Ghana** (GAH nuh), **Mali** (MAH lee), and **Songhai** (Song GUY). Each empire covered about the same territory in West Africa, but they arose at different times over a few centuries. Starting in the Middle Ages and lasting through the Renaissance, each stood in the spotlight of history just long enough to get some attention.

## Africa in Ancient Times

As I usually do, I first want to glance back at the early history of the land we're discussing — in this case, Africa. It will help give you a big picture of the history of this continent. Ancient Africa is most famous for the incredible accomplishments of the early Egyptians who lived along the Nile River. As you probably know, Egypt is in the far northeast corner of Africa. We remember the ancient Egyptians most for pyramids, mummies, and multiple gods. That is, except for a pharaoh named **Amenhotep IV**; his wife, **Nefer-titi**; and their son-in-law, **King "Tut."** They worshiped only *one* god, the sun god they called Ra.



Over a thousand years ago, builders in Great Zimbabwe erected impressive stone houses without the use of mortar.

Other ancient kingdoms of Africa would include the **Kush**, who lived along the southern part of the Nile River. Like the early Egyptians, the Kushites (or Nubians) were very advanced and used the great Nile as a means of trading with others. They remained prosperous for nearly a thousand years. Next in line, the peoples of the **Nok** culture stand out in Africa's ancient history. They lived south of the Sahara in present-day Nigeria. Like the Kushites, they were artistic and left interesting terra-cotta statues behind so we can know what they looked like.

Though the Sahara was once lush and green, it grew to become a vast desert. This change in climate drove people to settle farther and farther south in Africa. One of the most developed cultures of southern Africa was found in Zimbabwe. It was called **Great Zimbabwe** (Zim BOB way) during the Middle Ages because of the amazing stone structures the people built there. *Zimbabwe* means "houses of stone." Around the year A.D. 1000, large amounts of gold and other rich resources were traded through the streets of Great Zimbabwe.

So what about the rest of Africa? What was going on there? Well, of course there were tribes of people living *all* over the large continent for thousands of years. We know that these tribes were hunting, farming, trading, and fighting, but we don't have written records of the details of their lives. We don't have a record of exactly who lived where and when — except in western Africa.

In western Africa, there were special men named **griots** (GREE otz) who were chosen to memorize the history of their people. Like walking

*"We are the vessels of speech. We are the repositories which harbor secrets many centuries old; without us the names of kings would vanish into oblivion, we are the memory of mankind; by the spoken word we bring to life the deeds and exploits of kings for younger generations."*

*—Words of a griot*

history books, the griots were storytellers of the past. (Some still are.) One modern griot put it this way, “We are the vessels of speech. We are the repositories which harbor secrets many centuries old; without us the names of kings would vanish into oblivion, we are the memory of mankind; by the spoken word we bring to life the deeds and exploits of kings for younger generations.”<sup>24</sup> Isn’t that neat? Because of the griots, we do have stories of western Africa from long ago. That should help explain why we will study this area today.

## *The Ghana Empire*

As far back as A.D. 750, western Africa was home to the dark-skinned **Soninke** people. They called their ancient empire **Ghana**. (Though it was near present-day Ghana, it is not the same place.) The capital of ancient Ghana was **Kumbi Saleh**. It sat near the **Niger River** (NYEjer), which winds its way through western Africa and spills into the North Atlantic Ocean.

Now, in a smart way, this small empire grew to become very wealthy. The Soninke rulers of Ghana charged high taxes on those who passed *through* their empire with gold and salt. You see, there was a lot of gold just *south* of Ghana. And there was a lot of salt just *north* of

In the hot, dry climate of West Africa, salt was valuable in helping to prevent dehydration.



Ghana. Traders of both items had to pass *through* Ghana to sell their products. Though you would think that gold was far more valuable than salt, it wasn't. The people around Ghana would perish without salt in their diet. Salt protected them against dehydration brought on by the hot climate near the equator. So, both gold *and* salt were in great demand and sold at high prices. And the higher the prices were, the richer the empire of Ghana grew. It was good business.

To protect their treasure and wealth, the Soninke of Ghana built a large army. Because iron was plentiful too, it was easy to equip this army with strong weapons. With money and power, the Ghana Empire remained strong for over 300 years. That means it was older than the United States is today.

## *The Mali Empire*

But as we see over and over in history, empires do fall. Ghana was no exception. In 1070, it fell to Muslims of the **Almoravid dynasty**. Muslims captured the capital and defeated the army. Though the Soninke tried to rebuild, their supply of gold began to dwindle in the south. Without it, the Soninke lost their power and wealth.

In time, the Mali Empire began to take shape in the same region. The success of Mali was due in part to one thing — a *new* source of gold was discovered along the Niger River. This new gold helped boost the area back into business — *really* good business.

Gold was again so plentiful that an Arabic historian said this about the king of Mali: “He sits in a domed pavilion around which stand ten horses covered with *gold*-embroidered cloths. Behind him stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with *gold*; and on his right are the sons of vassal kings of his country, wearing splendid garments with *gold* braided into their hair. At the door of the pavilion are dogs of an excellent breed . . . around their necks they wear collars of *gold* and silver.”<sup>25</sup> (Italics are mine for emphasis.) Did you notice all the gold? There was so much there that even dogs wore it around their necks!

The founder of the Mali Empire was named **Sundiata** (Soon dee AHT ta). The griots have passed down an interesting story of Sundiata. In his early childhood, Sundiata couldn’t walk. Though he was strong, his legs wouldn’t bend properly. For seven years this condition forced him to crawl from one place to another. But legend says that Sundiata was cured by the hands of a blacksmith. By the time he was 10, he was an able hunter and a respected leader. By 18, he was a warrior and a trusted adviser to the king. In 1240, Sundiata defeated an enemy and proceeded to make the *Kingdom* of Mali into the *Empire* of Mali. For overcoming his disability, Sundiata has been remembered as the “Lion of Mali.” His story is an inspiration to others.

Seventy-five years later, another king rose to fame in Mali. He was **Mansa Musa** (MAHN sa MOO sa). He has an entirely different story than the Lion of Mali. It seems that Mansa Musa was impressed with the Muslim traders he came to know. He was so impressed with their customs that he decided to make a very big trip into the Muslim world. He chose to visit Mecca, the holy city of the Muslims, in Arabia. Thousands of Muslims make a pilgrimage every year to Mecca to visit the Kaaba, a square-shaped Muslim temple. Mansa Musa joined them.

Do you remember the vast source of gold that I told you about near the Niger River? Well, that gold is part of this story. To impress others on his journey to Mecca, Mansa Musa took lots and lots of gold with him, passing it out freely to those he met. Because of his generosity, Europeans and those in the Middle East paid great attention to Mansa Musa and the Mali Empire.

One historian recorded this about Mansa Musa: “He was a young man with a brown skin, a pleasant face, and a good figure . . . He appeared among his companions magnificently dressed and mounted, and surrounded by more than 10,000 of his subjects. He brought gifts and presents that amazed the eye with their beauty and splendor.”<sup>26</sup>

This splendid king of Mali made such an impression on others that it put him and his country “on the map.” Literally. Mali appeared on a map made in 1375, with a picture of Mansa Musa holding a large nugget of pure gold. As the map was circulated, his generous reputation spread even more. As a result, hundreds of curious tourists showed up in Mali, hoping to find more of the gold that seemed to be so abundant.

What the curious tourists found in Mali was far more than gold. They found Mali to be an amazing center of culture, learning, and trade. The city of **Timbuktu** (TIM buck too) was particularly



Though the empires of West Africa have changed since the Renaissance, the marketplaces still bustle with people buying and selling goods.

magnificent. (Younger Students: Isn't it fun to say "Tim - buk - tu"?) When Mansa Musa returned from the Middle East, he brought back with him Muslim scholars, architects, philosophers, and writers. They launched a center for learning that had never been seen before in western Africa. They built mosques, started schools, and set up courts. With strict laws in force, Mali was a safe place to live and so attracted more and more people to live there.

Oddly, Mansa Musa himself never adopted the religion of Islam. Though he admired many Muslim customs and the style of learning, he kept his traditional African beliefs. Like many Africans of that time, he had superstitious beliefs about nature and the gods. Western Africa became a strong blend of these traditional African beliefs and Islam. It remains so today.

### *The Songhai Empire*

I have yet one more empire to introduce you to, so stay with me here. First there was *Ghana*, known for trading gold and salt. Then there was *Mali*, started by Sundiata and influenced by Mansa Musa, gold, and Islam. Now, we will look at the *Songhai Empire*, which has its own particular story.

The clothing of these children reflects a blend of Islamic and African traditions that still exists in Africa today.



Though the Songhai slowly took over the empire of Mali, it was **1493** that stands out in history. That was the year that **Askia Muhammad I** (Ah SKEE uh Muh HAHM med) took control of the empire and just one year after Columbus sailed to the New World. Askia Muhammed made Songhai by far the strongest empire that western Africa had ever seen. Like the leaders before him, he kept the gold industry moving. He also continued to promote learning and education.

But Askia went a step further than most of the kings before him. He adopted Islam as his own faith and appointed Muslims to most of the government positions. Though 97 percent of the people of the Songhai Empire were NOT Islamic, the government was. The major cities would also appear to be Islamic by their architecture, courts, and mosques. It was a unique situation.

Askia Muhammed used this situation to build a very strong *central* government. He standardized weights and measures and promoted Islamic thought to connect hundreds of small cultures that existed in the region. It proved to work for centuries and create great stability for the Songhai Empire.

The city of Timbuktu itself grew to a population of 100,000. It grew so large because it was home to the **University of Sankore**, which drew students from all over the world to study law and medicine. So difficult was this school that even the brightest of Arab students were turned away. Black African students proved to be well educated and many went on to teach as professors in other high-ranking universities. Hand-copied books were of so much value at the university that I think even the Medici family would have been impressed with the library at Sankore. It was as if western Africa was experiencing its own “renaissance” during the rich reign of Askia Muhammed.

This golden age of learning lasted through the 1500s in the Songhai Empire. It’s an impressive record. While many parts of Africa were loosely organized, this region was getting worldwide attention. Historian Leo Africanus used the word “sumptuous” to describe the success of the Songhai. Sumptuous means something “luxurious, splendid, and lavish.” He said, “It is a wonder to see what plenty of Merchandize is dayly brought hither, and how costly and sumptuous all things be.”<sup>27</sup> I think Leo wrote a fitting summary of western Africa. With great wealth, strong culture, and prominent schools, it was *sumptuous* for decades to come.

## *The Death of Savonarola*

**T**here are many ways a person could be executed. Though horrible to think about, a person could be hung, burned, or stoned to death. But even worse, a person could undergo *all* those methods and then be dumped into a river on top of that. Unfortunately, that is what happened to **Girolamo Savonarola** (Jih ROLL uh mo Sav oh nuh RO luh) and two of his friends in **1498**. They were executed without any mercy. Theirs is a sad but inspiring story that unfolds in the heart of the Renaissance.

Savonarola was born in Italy of a noble family. Even as a young boy he was very serious. Rather than play sports with other boys his age, Savonarola read books. He read and reread works by Thomas Aquinas (Uh KWINE us) and Augustine, both strong men of faith. He was largely influenced by their godly lives. Savonarola went on to attend a university but found the experience disheartening. He was quickly appalled at the loose, immoral, and godless lives of many of the students. Clearly, Savonarola was different. He left school and went back home to live with his parents.

If you remember, Italy was slipping into a period of humanism during the Renaissance. Humanism, again, glorified mankind more than God. In the fifteenth century, this trend toward humanism started with Cosimo de' Medici when he brought ancient Greek thought to Italy. It was expanded through his grandson Lorenzo. Through the Medici, the Renaissance was soaring. But, as men took their eyes off God, Italy grew in immorality and excessive luxury.

Savonarola took it upon himself to straighten out his wayward countrymen. He was particularly eager to straighten out the church, which had grown terribly rich and immoral. The ambition of Girolamo Savonarola is to be admired. His pure and tender heart ached for the lost and the misguided. In hopes of making a difference, Savonarola joined the Dominican friars when he was 23 years old.

Savonarola continued to be serious minded. At the Dominican monastery, he asked only for the most menial of jobs of cooking and cleaning. But he was quickly identified as a powerful preacher. Indeed he was powerful, but when he was transferred to Florence to preach, things didn't go so well. The



Though at first Savonarola was not well received, thousands would later crowd into the city of Florence to hear him preach the Gospel.

people of Florence were not the least bit responsive to his sermons. Savonarola preached way over their heads and failed to connect with their hearts. His voice was weak and shrill. He went back to his monastery, a more humble man than before. He was about 38 years old.

I find it interesting that Savonarola experienced this kind of “failure.” It appears to me that God used this time in Savonarola’s life to better define his message. And once he did, he was unstoppable. When Savonarola returned to Florence a few years later, his preaching was amazing. Thousands packed the enormous cathedrals just for a chance to hear him. So moved were his followers that they were nicknamed “the weepers” for all the tears they shed.

What was the clearer message that made so many cry? It was the Gospel, actually. Savonarola preached straightforward truth about Jesus to the people of Florence. And they were moved. His greatest emphasis was on personal holiness through the Spirit of God. He stressed the fear and judgment of God that was to come. Savonarola preached, “You Christians should always have the Gospel with you, I do not mean the book, but the spirit, for if you do not possess the spirit of grace and yet carry with you the whole book, of what advantage is it to you?”<sup>1</sup>

### *Turning the Hearts of Florence*

Through his bold preaching Savonarola urged people to rid themselves of worldly things and to be more like Jesus. What were “worldly things” in that century? According to Savonarola, that included gambling, cursing, cards, and dice. He opposed carnivals, horse races, pagan books, sensuous art, and acrobatic events. Savonarola frowned on makeup, excessive jewelry, and any immodest clothing.

The amazing part of the story is that so many people listened and submitted to Savonarola. The poor people loved the preacher because he fussed so much at the rich. Corrupt businessmen and bankers turned over money they had gained by cheating. Famous artists like Botticelli and Michelangelo changed the themes of their artworks to better glorify God.

People of all classes collected their “vanities,” as they were called, and threw them into great bonfires built in the city’s main square. These vanities included wigs, mirrors, lipsticks, perfumes, carnival masks, and all sorts of trinkets, along with pagan books and godless works of art. Imagine these things going up in smoke!

On the downside, there were extremists. There were groups of boys known as “bands of hope” who went door to door as “moral police,” *demanding* these items for burning. Neighbors began to spy on neighbors and report one another for gambling and playing cards. Unfortunately, the zeal for holiness gave way to fear and intimidation.

According to one observer, Florence was “so full of terrors and alarms, cries and lamentations, that everyone went about the city bewildered, speechless, and, as it were, half dead.”<sup>2</sup>



Large bonfires were built in the city square of Florence where citizens burned their worldly “vanities.”

Considering how drastic the situation got, can you imagine the backlash from those who were *not* so holy? Though many listened to Savonarola and heeded his teachings, there were many who didn't. In time, it cost Savonarola his life for trying to impose his strict lifestyle on everyone.

One of the people upset with Savonarola was Lorenzo de' Medici. Naturally, he was fond of the art, the carnivals, and the literature that Savonarola so freely condemned. Lorenzo tried to bribe the preacher with gifts of gold to tone down his message. But it was a useless gesture on Lorenzo's part. With his heart set on eternal things, Savonarola couldn't be bribed with anything of this world.

After Lorenzo de' Medici died, his son followed him in office. But the masses soon overthrew Lorenzo's son and looked to Savonarola to rule and govern Florence! It was quite an experiment, to place a government in the hands of a zealous Dominican friar. It had never been done before.

Savonarola took his role very seriously. He selected a council of men to help him govern Florence. Politically, he proved wise enough to avoid a war with France. This helped others respect him as a leader. It also gave him confidence to pursue his vision. And what was Savonarola's vision for Florence? He imagined a city with Christ as its head. He imagined a city with high morals and a Christian government. He imagined a little bit of heaven on earth. In hopes of being an influence to the whole world, he proclaimed, "O Florence! Then wilt thou be rich with spiritual and temporal wealth; thou wilt achieve the reformation of Rome, of Italy, of all countries; the wings of thy greatness shall spread over the world."<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, Savonarola's grand vision had problems. You see, Christ never taught that mankind should or would establish His kingdom on earth. The Bible teaches that the kingdom of heaven is something of God that will occur in *His* timing, in *His* way, and by *His* hand. (See Matt. 25:34.) Was this kingdom to be set up on earth by one man in Florence? Was one city going to save the world? No, only Jesus can save. (See Matt. 18:11; Luke 4:43.) But Savonarola believed that he was to create a Christian utopia in Italy. Though his intentions were sincere, they were not completely biblical.

## *Pope Alexander VI*

Savonarola's greatest threat turned out to be **Pope Alexander VI**. Oddly enough, the pope (who was voted into the "holiest" of offices) wasn't the least bit holy himself. Pope Alexander VI was probably one of the most immoral men to ever fill the papacy. Though he never married, Alexander fathered five children and supported the use of murder to get things he wanted! He was hardly a saint. When Savonarola began to preach to the pope, it wasn't a pretty scene. When he spoke of the church, Savonarola quite boldly said, "O prostitute Church, thou hast displayed thy foulness to the whole word, and stinkest unto heaven."<sup>4</sup>

In 1495, Pope Alexander VI pressured Savonarola to stop preaching. The pope certainly didn't want to hear Savonarola refer to the church as foul and stinky! For about a year, Savonarola heeded the pope's wishes and toned things down a bit. But when the season of Lent came around, Savonarola returned to the pulpit with more authority than ever. He again



Pope Alexander VI offered Savonarola the high position of cardinal in the church, but Savonarola turned it down to preach.

stirred the crowds to burn their “vanities” in a massive bonfire in the heart of Florence. The fire was 60 feet high and 240 feet around. It was huge, to say the least, and drew a great amount of attention to the preacher who started it.

The pope then tried to bribe Savonarola to pipe down. He offered him the high position of a cardinal (where the pope could keep a closer eye on him and keep him busy with church affairs). Savonarola wanted no part of it. Pope Alexander then concluded that the only way to shut up Savonarola was to excommunicate him. (That means to cut him off from the church entirely.) This caused a great deal of confusion among Savonarola’s followers. Why would the pope condemn a man of God? The masses wondered if maybe Savonarola wasn’t the man of God they thought he was.

Savonarola appealed to leaders in other countries for help. He pleaded with them to take the pope out of office. He called the pope, “a Devil” and “a monster” presiding over a “harlot” church.<sup>5</sup> No one joined in on his cause. I think Savonarola knew that his own life was in danger for warring against the pope. But I also think he was prepared for it. On numerous occasions he predicted that he would die a martyr’s death. I suppose it was evident by the strong message he preached that he would draw enemies. And he did.

### *Trials and Tests*

One group of Savonarola’s enemies was the Franciscans. They regularly bickered with the Dominicans over petty matters. On one occasion, they challenged Savonarola to a ridiculous test. They proposed that he be set on fire in the city square along with one of their friars! This test was called an “ordeal by fire.” It was believed that the most “innocent” man would be spared by God. Savonarola took on this challenge and predicted that he would win — but he changed the rules and allowed a friend to stand in for him!

Of course, this switch made Savonarola appear to be a coward. His followers were more confused than ever. Where was the faith of their powerful preacher? A debate went on throughout the day as to whether or not the two men should really be set on fire and what the rules would be. Finally, after rain fell and both sides grew weary of arguing, the ordeal by fire was canceled. The disappointed crowd raised a ruckus and then returned to their homes.

When the pope found out about the ordeal by fire, he was furious. Apparently Savonarola had a reputation for making prophecies and predictions. Some came true and some didn’t. It appeared to the pope that this fire incident was one more failed prediction of the preacher — though it was the Franciscans who had started the debate! This time, the pope had Savonarola arrested and taken to Rome.

In Rome, Savonarola was at the complete mercy of the pope. Be he godly or not, Pope Alexander had great power. Savonarola was put through the court of the Inquisition with two

other friars and told to admit that he was a liar and a blasphemer — or suffer the consequences of torture! He chose torture, as did his friends.

Though Savonarola was sincere in his faith, physical torture *did* get the best of him. Several times, he broke under the pain and confessed things he really didn't believe. When the tortures ceased, Savonarola took back his words and the process started all over again. It was inhuman.

Though weakened beyond our imagination, Savonarola (who was then 45 years old) ultimately withstood the torture of the Inquisition and held to his beliefs. His beliefs were that he was teaching the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was teaching personal holiness at the very height of the Renaissance and in an era of humanism. In doing so, he and his fellow friars knew that they would be declared heretics and die. I just don't think they knew how deplorable their deaths would be.

On May 23, 1498, Savonarola and the two friars were dragged into the same town square where, ironically, the large bonfire of vanities had been set. The men were publicly stripped of their garments all the way down to their shoes. While one of the friars sang hymns, a mean group of boys gathered and threw stones. In his last words, Savonarola simply stated, "The Lord has suffered much for me."<sup>6</sup> After the men were hung and strangled to death, their bodies were burned. After they were burned, their ashes were collected and thrown into a river.

I can't grasp the mind-set of those who performed these extreme executions. The only way I can make sense of it is to remember that there is a dark enemy opposed to the Gospel. The Bible says, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." (See John 10:10.) Such seems to be the case with Savonarola and the friars who died that day in May. They were killed and their bodies destroyed. On their behalf, a bronze plaque was later erected in the square of Florence.

The good news is that death isn't the end for those who believe in Jesus. It is just the beginning of spending an eternity with Him. Destroying the body of a saint doesn't give the enemy the upper hand. Though tragic, the death of Savonarola wasn't the end of his message. Many would follow in his footsteps with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

*"The Lord has  
suffered much  
for me."*

*—Savonarola*

## Lesson 11

1501

# *The Safavid Empire of Persia*

**L**ong, long ago there was a land called **Elam**. This land existed so long ago that it was named after the grandson of Noah! That's right. Elam was one of Noah's many grandsons. The land of Elam was just east of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers — otherwise known



About 500 years before Christ, Darius organized Persia into 20 provinces called "satrapies" and started one of the first postal services.

as Mesopotamia (Mess uh po TAME ee uh). By 2000 B.C., the Elamites were overrun by the Medes and the Persians, and the land of Elam grew to be called **Persia**.

In later centuries, mighty men such as **Cyrus the Great**, **Darius**, and **Xerxes** (ZERK sees) ruled Persia. Xerxes is the king in the Old Testament who married **Esther**, meaning she had a hand in the history of Persia, too. In later times, **Alexander the Great** and **Genghis Khan** each took a turn ruling over Persia. Are you impressed? You should be. Persia has a long and amazing history. (Much of it is recorded in the Bible.) Today, Persia is renamed the **Islamic Republic of Iran**. But we're not ready for that story. Right now, we're going to look at one of the strongest Persian empires that ever existed. It was the **Safavid** (Sof fa veed) **Empire**.

### *The Sunnis and the Shiites*

In order for you to grasp the importance of the Safavid Empire, I need to introduce you to two groups. They are the **Sunnis** (SOO knees) and the **Shiites** (SHEE ites). You may or may not have ever heard of them before, but they are the names of two divisions of Islam. Why are there two? It seems that right after Mohammed (the founder of Islam) died, a great debate arose among his followers as to who was going to lead the movement of Islam. This debate was so great that it eventually split Mohammed's followers into the Sunnis and the Shiites.

The Sunnis believed that the next Islamic leader should be the closest, wisest *friend* of Mohammed. The man who best fit that was his friend and father-in-law, **Abu Bekr**. When Mohammed died, Abu Bekr claimed to be the next Islamic leader. The highest leader in Islam is called a **caliph** (KAY liff).

The Shiites, however, believed the next leader or caliph should be a *relative* of Mohammed. His closest relative was **Ali**, the husband of one of Mohammed's daughters. When Mohammed died, Ali wanted to be the next caliph. It didn't work out right away, but he waited his turn and served as the fourth caliph. After that, the two groups fought bitterly over their differences, and in time each claimed its own leaders.

Can you imagine the problems this created? Over the years, there have been wars and assassinations between the Sunnis and the Shiites over their beliefs. The two groups *still* haven't settled their differences. And so, there are two "brands" of Islam so to speak. One way to better understand this is to consider the differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Though both consider themselves Christians, they hold to some very different views. In the same way, the Sunnis and the Shiites both consider themselves Islamic but hold to very different views. (In reality, the differences between all these groups are very complicated. My short comparison here is simply for your better understanding.)

Despite the differences between the Sunnis and the Shiites, Islam spread like wildfire. It was first introduced to the Persians in the 600s. Before Islam, many of the Persians held to



Before Islam, Persians held to the religious beliefs of the ancient Babylonians.

old Babylonian beliefs or were followers of **Zoroaster**. Zoroastrians believed in one god and the presence of good and evil. But they didn't know the one God of the Bible or the god of Mohammed. One reason that Islam may have spread easily to the Persians is that it was more than a religion. Islam was a form of government, too. To oppose it was difficult. To accept it was to bring unity and strength to Persia. And so it did.

But which brand of Islam was to unite Persia? Would it be the Sunni brand of Islam or the Shiite brand? Believe it or not, some debate still exists over which group got things started in Persia. But it is clearly the Shiites who won the battle. Their domination officially started in **1501** under the leadership of a young man named **Ismail I**. So, let's get to know him.

### *Ismail I*

Ismail was born of a very important family. His ancestors were leaders of a religious order. When Ismail was a boy, he received a special education. His education is an important part of the history of Persia because he was tutored by a Shiite. From that experience, he became very strong in his Shiite beliefs. And it was his Shiite beliefs that shaped the Safavid Empire, which eventually shaped Iran.

It's important to know that the Shiites view their leaders very differently than the Sunnis view theirs. The Shiites believe that their *first* 12 leaders (who are called **Imams**<sup>7</sup>) had supernatural abilities. They believe the Imams were without sin and that they could intervene between Allah and man. (Allah is believed to be God in Islam.) Why only the first 12? Well, the 12th Imam had no sons and so the supposed chain of "supernatural leadership" stopped after him. Furthermore, Shiites believe that the 12th Imam didn't completely die and will one day return to give knowledge and direction to the Shiites.

Now, I've shared a lot of new information with you. Most of you are not familiar with these details of Islam. I suggest you review the last paragraph to absorb it. Once you've done that, continue on. As you do, remember that according to the Bible, Jesus was the only sinless man because He was Divine. That means He claimed to be God. (See 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; John 8:19, 10:30, 12:44–45.)

When Ismail was only 13, he made some important decisions. Unlike his ancestors, he wanted to be more than the leader of a religious order. He wanted to be the *king* of an empire. And so he claimed himself to be the **shah**, which means king. He named his empire Safavid after one of his ancestors, Safi od-Din. Know this though — in becoming the shah,



Ismail wasn't claiming to be one of the special Imams. He wasn't claiming to be without sin or to have supernatural abilities. He believed, like other Shiites, that one day an Imam would return who had those special abilities. But, in the meantime — as the shah of Persia — Ismail believed that he was the *highest* spiritual and political leader of the land.

This new style of leadership changed Persia forever. With a *spiritual* king, it became a true **theocracy**. A theocracy is a government that is completely based on a religion. For example, the courts of the land were run by religious men known as *clerics* of Islam. And the brand of Islam was clearly Shiite. To this day, Iran is 89 percent Shiite and 10 percent Sunni. Though many Shiites live around the world, Iran is presently the *only* country in the world that is a theocracy based on the Shiite faith.

So, did Ismail make an impact on Persia? Yes he did. But unfortunately, he wasn't very gentle about it. Apparently there were still many Sunnis in Persia when Ismail took over. Some were killed and others were forced to convert to Shiism. Despite this harshness, Ismail proved to be a capable military leader as well as a strong spiritual leader. His warriors wore red hats to represent their loyalty to him. Because of their hats, they were called the **Qizilbash** (KEE zil bash), which means "red-heads" in Turkish.

Some members of the Qizilbash (also spelled Kizilbash) army had so much confidence in Ismail that they didn't wear any armor in battle! They believed that Ismail's spiritual power would protect them. With the help of the loyal Qizilbash, Ismail easily expanded the borders of Persia to include most of Mesopotamia; he made **Tabriz** (Tah BREEZE) the



In modern-day Baghdad in Iraq, an abandoned army truck sits in front of a mosque. It is a sober reminder of war in the twenty-first century.

capital of Persia; and he captured the most important city of his enemies — who I am about to introduce.

Ismail's enemies were the **Ottoman Turks**. The important city he captured was **Baghdad**, which is in present-day **Iraq**. Why were the Ottoman Turks his enemies? The answer is simple: The Ottomans were Sunnis. To the Shiites, the Ottoman Empire was a 300-year-old enemy. So, in 1508, when Ismail conquered Baghdad, he made quite a reputation for himself. (We will learn more about the Ottomans later.) Ismail was also successful in conquering the **Uzbeks** (OOZE beczk) to the east. And you know what? The Uzbeks were also Sunnis! Considering the fact that Sunnis

surrounded Persia on *every* side and dominated most of the Islamic world, Ismail and his fellow Shiites were turning history upside down.

### *Abbas the Great*

But, as we often see in history, Ismail's sons and grandsons weren't as capable or victorious as he was. One son was nearly blind; one was too young to rule well; and one was insane and, on top of that, switched his loyalties to the Sunnis. With that instability, the Ottomans eventually took back their beloved Baghdad, and the size of the empire shrank.

However, there was *one* descendant of Ismail who proved to be remarkable. His name was **Abbas** (Ah BOSS or AH boss). As Abbas I, he came to power in 1587 when he was only 17 years old. For his abilities, he has been remembered as **Abbas the Great**. One of the smart things he did was move the capital city from Tabriz to to **Isfahan** (Is fuh HAHN). This city was centered in the heart of Persia and far from the borders of his enemies. Abbas turned Isfahan into a work of art. He adorned it with fine architecture, magnificent palaces, and enormous mosques. The arts grew and prosperity rose. The making of Persian rugs and tapestries became more widespread. As a result, Abbas opened trade with the English, selling them Persian tapestries. These beautiful tapestries are still popular around the world today.

But Abbas was far more than a man of fine taste. In a great victory, Abbas took Baghdad back from the Ottoman Turks in 1603. By 1629, he returned the borders of Persia to where Ismail had first pushed them.

Later on, it would appear that one flaw led to the downfall of the legacy of Abbas the Great. He was terribly paranoid and insecure. He was fearful that his own sons would overthrow him, as he had his father. So, Abbas had his eldest son killed in 1615 and left his other sons to be raised in a harem. The boys never received the education they needed to be good

leaders. It is speculated that he had one of them blinded. For these reasons, the Safavid Empire was short-lived compared to others. By 1722, the Persians were overrun by their neighboring enemies. But nonetheless, the Shiite empire, in its glory, shaped the future of Iran.

## Lesson 12

1503

# *Leonardo da Vinci Paints the Mona Lisa*

**Note to Teacher:** *This is one of the longest lessons in Volume III and may need to be broken up for younger audiences.*

**W**hat is it about the *Mona Lisa*? Is it her timid smile, her mysterious eyes, or just the pleasant look on her face? For centuries, art lovers have asked themselves these questions about the most famous painting in the world. I don't think I can explain it. But I can tell you a lot about the genius who painted her. He was **Leonardo da Vinci** (properly pronounced LAY oh NAR do).

Leonardo was born on April 15, 1452, in a small village near Vinci, Italy.<sup>8</sup> (April 15 happens to be my birthday, too!) His early years were unstable because his mother never married his father. Being poor, she gave Leonardo up to be raised in the home of his wealthy father. For awhile he lived with his grandparents and spent time with an uncle who cared a great deal for him. Despite the ups and downs of moving around, Leonardo was charming and attractive in every way, according to what those who knew him have written. A friend of his named Vasari wrote, "The radiance of his countenance, which was splendidly beautiful, brought cheerfulness to the heart of the most melancholy."<sup>9</sup>

Leonardo was also a genius. In school he excelled in math and music. With intense curiosity, he was always drawing something with great detail. Supposedly when he was just a boy, Leonardo brought dead lizards, toads, and snakes into his house as models for sketching. He was so absorbed in the details of his drawings that he never noticed the rotten smell of his subjects as they decayed!

### *Life in Florence*

Leonardo's father eventually moved him to Florence to expose him to much better opportunities. I'm sure you remember from other lessons what Florence was like in those days. Lorenzo de' Medici — just three years older than Leonardo — was in power and opportunity was everywhere.

When Leonardo was about 15, his father arranged for him to become an **apprentice** in the shop of **Andrea del Verrocchio** (Vair RAWK kyoh). Andrea was a master goldsmith, painter, and sculptor. As in medieval times, an apprentice was someone who learned a trade under a master. Rather than being paid, an apprentice was given food and lodging for learning a trade. This arrangement between Leonardo and Verrocchio must have been a good one because it lasted 13 years.

Though it may or may not be true, an interesting story has been passed down about Verrocchio. It seems that when Leonardo was about 18, he was asked by master Verrocchio to paint one of the two angels that appear in *The Baptism of Christ*. (His angel is the one on the left.) Supposedly, Leonardo's angel was so superb, so mystifying, and so perfect compared to his master's, that Andrea del Verrocchio said he would never paint again! Whether he ever did make this statement or not, I think Verrocchio realized that his finest pupil was going to surpass him. And the truth is, he did.

While in Florence, Leonardo painted something peculiar that began to reflect the mind of this genius. Leonardo began a scene titled *The Adoration of the Magi* (MAY jie). In it, the artist experimented with breaking the rules of perspective. "Perspective" in art is the science of making objects appear their real size. A good example of this is drawing things smaller when they are far away because that is how our eyes see them. Well, Leonardo enjoyed playing mind games with perspective. In *The Adoration of the Magi*, he drew stairs that lead to nowhere, horses larger than life, and the mother of Jesus as if she were suspended in time and space. In awe of her Son, she appears unaware of all kinds of chaos around her.

According to the artist himself, Leonardo was using "abundance and variety" to spice up *The Adoration of the Magi*. He continued to make abundance and variety one of his distinguishing traits. (You might want to remember that fact for tests!) He once said, "He is but a poor master who makes only a single figure well."<sup>10</sup> Even in serious portraits of his patrons, he added real and imaginary landscapes to the background. Though distant and hazy, they were full of detail. Again, he was using perspective to create depth. (You will want to hunt for depth and fine details when studying any of Leonardo's paintings.)

Unfortunately though, Leonardo never finished *The Adoration of the Magi*. This too became one of his distinguishing traits! It took him years and sometimes decades to finish his projects, if he finished them at all. In most cases, Leonardo was either too much of a perfectionist to consider his works "done," or he was too easily distracted by all the things on his brilliant mind to finish what he started.

So what was on the brilliant mind of this genius? The list is long and his notebooks were full. Leonardo filled over 7,000 pages in notebooks of drawings, sketches, and notes. Some were only random thoughts, which give us snapshots into Leonardo's thinking. Incidentally, his notes were all written backward — from right to left! It may be that it was easier to write this way because he was left-handed. (Moving his hand from right to left prevented him from smudging the ink.) Or it may be that his "mirror-image" handwriting helped protect his notes from being read and stolen.

Regardless, it is from these backward notes and endless drawings that we know what preoccupied Leonardo. He wrote of weapons, geometry, fabulous machines, the movement of

water, and the anatomy of the human body. He illustrated levers, cameras, parachutes, bicycles, flying devices, water canals, cross-bows, flying saucers, and helicopters — which he cleverly referred to as “air screws.” Just for fun, the artist and scientist even wrote down a few jokes.

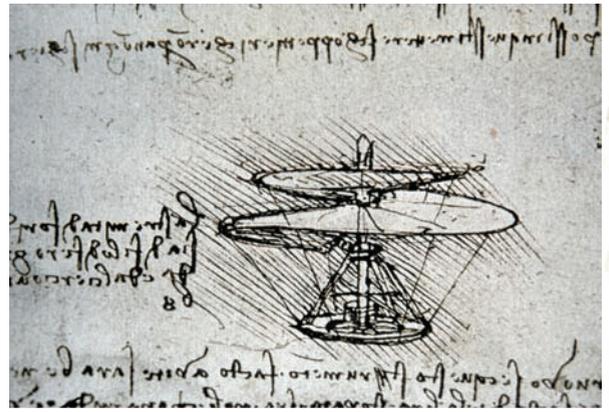
Besides that, Leonardo also conceived the idea of cars, tanks, and two-tiered cities. He wrote, “These cars take the place of elephants . . . one may put carabineers in them to break up every company.”<sup>11</sup> He envisioned machine guns, mechanical chariots, and water mechanisms to prevent floods —

or to create them in times of war. Leonardo was equally fascinated with plants, architecture, rock formations, and grotesque deformities. (Though the church frowned on it, the scientist cut open dead bodies to draw the insides!) In other words, just about everything visual that the world had to offer ran across Leonardo’s mind, through his pen, and onto his paper. When that ran out, he used his own imagination to invent things to draw! And though it didn’t happen in his lifetime, the writer in him hoped to be published. The name for one of his nature books was going to be *Of the Sky and of the Earth*.

Besides that, Leonardo had a knack for designing jewelry, costumes, banquet decorations, and music machines. Does that surprise you? Let me elaborate on this lesser-known fact. For several years, Leonardo worked exclusively for the duke of Milan, who hired him not only to work as an engineer and an architect, but also to create stables, carnival props, and dresses and girdles for his wives. Though it may sound strange to us to find this brilliant man designing a woman’s wardrobe, it might have been just one of many creative outlets for the artist. He worked for the duke for 17 years.

## *Life in Milan and The Last Supper*

Of course, while in Milan, Leonardo also started some bigger-than-life projects. Some were so big that, as you might expect, he didn’t finish them. The best example of this was the building of a 26-foot bronze statue of a horse. Leonardo spent over 10 years just crafting the clay model of it! Even unfinished, it was lovely. Poets wrote of it and visitors flocked to see it. The clay horse was elegant enough to decorate the wedding procession for the niece of the duke of Milan. Unfortunately, though, the bronze for the horse statue was never cast. Eventually enemy soldiers destroyed the clay horse when they invaded Milan in 1499. In complete disrespect, the soldiers used it for target practice! The original was never seen again. In 1999, however, an American used Leonardo’s sketches to construct the horse exactly as Leonardo had designed it. It was presented as a gift to the city of Milan — 500 years after the disaster. I think Leonardo would have been delighted!



Though these items were not yet invented, Leonardo illustrated parachutes, flying saucers, and helicopters — which he cleverly named “air screws.”



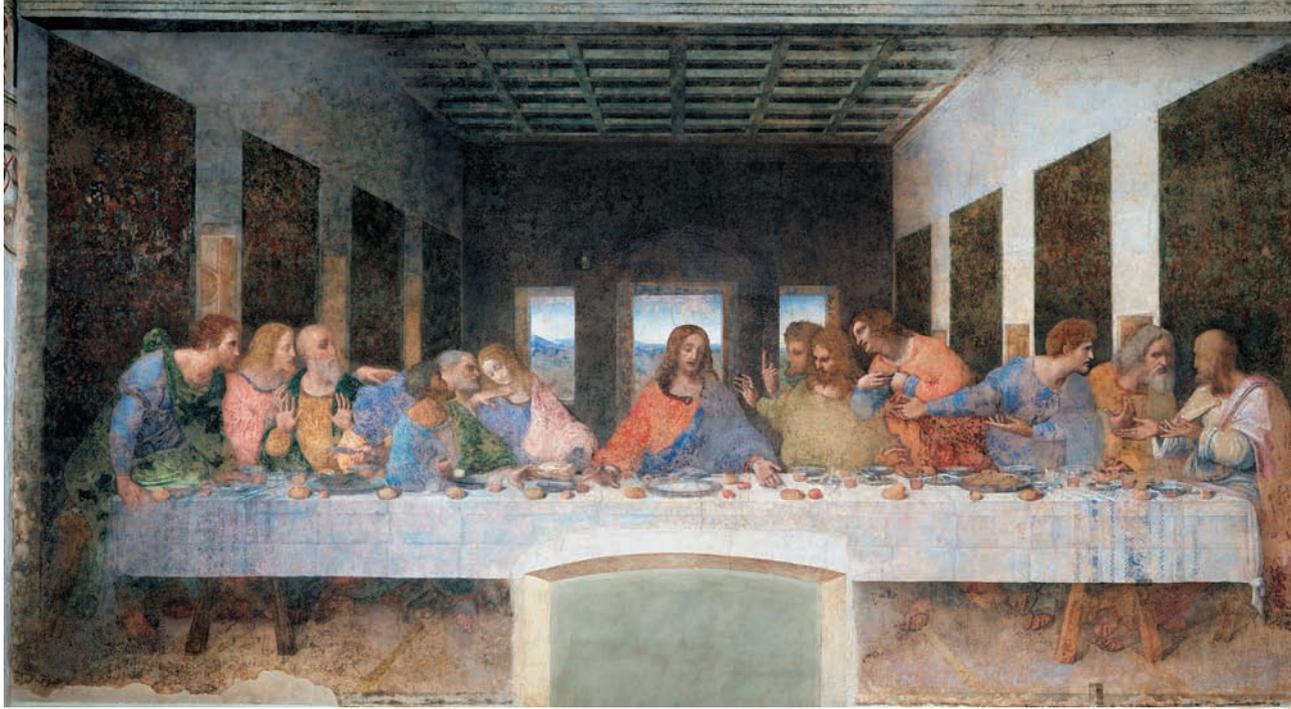
It took Leonardo da Vinci 20 years to complete two paintings of *The Virgin of the Rocks*. This lovely version is found in the National Gallery in London.

I'll mention here, too, that before Leonardo left Milan, he started two versions of *The Virgin of the Rocks*. It took him 20 years to complete, but at least he did. In the version that is located today in London, Leonardo captures the baby Jesus in the position of blessing John the Baptist, also depicted as a baby, while his mother and an angel gaze peacefully nearby. Behind them, in awesome detail, lies a rugged world that would soon mistreat both the Messiah and his messenger. The delicate smiles and the tender lighting of the characters are clearly the touch of Leonardo.

But soldiers and his own slowness weren't the only obstacles that Leonardo faced. One of his most famous works was destroyed by his own experimentation. Before Leonardo even completed painting *The Last Supper*, it began to erode! The artist had experimented with tempera paints and varnish to try to achieve a substance easier to use than plaster paints. (Plaster paints dry quickly, which was a terrible problem for the s-l-o-w-working Leonardo.) Despite the

near-complete loss of *The Last Supper*, it has remained one of the greatest masterpieces of the Renaissance. So that you can fully appreciate this work of art, let me tell you more about it.

First of all, in *The Last Supper*, Leonardo again broke the rules of perspective. It would have been impossible for the 12 disciples to have clustered on one side of a table in the posture in which the artist painted them. But he did so for a reason. Using his mathematical mind, Leonardo positioned the disciples in groups of three. Each group is alive with expression as they react to the moment that Jesus announced that one of them would betray him.



The use of perspective and the addition of background detail are undeniable characteristics of Leonardo da Vinci's work found in *The Last Supper*.

A story is told that Leonardo sorted through the faces of countless citizens of Milan for the proper models to capture the expression of each of the disciples. Hunting a model for Judas was particularly difficult but finishing the face of Jesus was supposedly the most difficult task of all. It may even be the work of another artist. In the end, the look on Jesus' face is a calm one as He appears to accept his coming fate. And the background? It is unmistakably the work of Leonardo da Vinci because it is filled with details to mystify the viewer. The geometric perfection of the room draws the viewer both to Christ in the center and to the world beyond Him that waits for salvation. *The Last Supper* is a true masterpiece.

## ***The Mona Lisa***

In 1499, Leonardo left Milan. With his distinctive long hair and flowing beard, he traveled for awhile, enjoying the countryside where he was free to create, dream, and capture nature on the pages of his notebooks. In time, Leonardo returned to Florence — after Savonarola had died. (I don't think the two would have mixed well. Leonardo possessed far too many "vanities" and fancy clothes for the approval of Savonarola.) It was there, in **1503**, that Leonardo began his most famous work, the painting of *Mona Lisa*. There is so much to say about this work of art.

Art historians would praise the *Mona Lisa* for many things. As a great example of lighting, the fair skin of the model radiates almost three dimensionally from the darker background. But the change is gradual, giving the edges of the portrait a smoky look. Leonardo named this technique *sfumato* (sfoo MAH toe), meaning "smoke-like" in Italian. And of course, the background is filled with an "abundance and variety" of natural structures.



Leonardo da Vinci painted the *Mona Lisa* with a *sfumato*, or smoke-like, hue radiating from the calm, gentle face of Madonna Elisabetta.

In case you weren't sure, most historians think that Mona Lisa was a real person. Most likely she was **Madonna Elisabetta**, the third wife of **Francesco del Giocondo** (Joe KAHN doe). In Italian, the portrait is called *La Gioconda* (La Joe KAHN da) — after the feminine version of Elisabetta's married name. Francesco asked Leonardo to paint the picture of Elisabetta, or Lisa. The request came perhaps after the couple had lost a child. The odd thing about the portrait is that Leonardo kept it in his possession for years. Every once in a while he would add a layer of paint here and a layer of paint there to give it more depth or less depth — or whatever Leonardo desired. Over the course of three years, the artist called Lisa back and forth to pose in his studio. Legend says Leonardo hired clowns and jesters to keep Lisa smiling. It may be that she was still grieving the loss of her baby and needed a little help in making that famous smile.

After that, it's believed that Leonardo carried the painting with him and slept with it by his side. Perhaps the genius in him *was* pleased and knew he had created a masterpiece. Perhaps he felt he had captured the broken heart of a mother in mourning. The story is not fully known. But, many, many years later, the *Mona Lisa* made it into the hands of Napoleon, who hung it in his

own bedroom! Fortunately for us, it was retrieved and now hangs in the **Louvre** (Luuve) — a very large and beautiful museum in Paris. The painting is heavily guarded behind bulletproof glass where millions can admire it. (I saw it once myself. To my surprise, it's not very large.)

One of my favorite paintings by Leonardo da Vinci is called *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist*. There are two versions of this scene, which Leonardo painted as an altarpiece for a group of monks. One was never finished, but in simple brown ink it still remains beautiful. One historian wrote, "men and women, young and old, flocked for two days to see it, as if in festival time."<sup>12</sup> In this cartoon sketch, Mary sits on the lap of her mother while doting over baby Jesus. A young John the Baptist is nearby and Saint Anne (Mary's mother) points toward heaven. The print is famous for the "Mona Lisa-looking" smiles on the women and the interesting position of their feet. (It's hard to tell whose feet are whose.) Geometrically, Leonardo used the shape of a triangle to draw perfect attention to Jesus.

In another version of the same scene, John the Baptist is replaced with a symbolic lamb. The heads of Anne, Mary, and Jesus line up to direct the viewer to the lamb, which

represents the coming sacrificial death of the Messiah. The background was finished with creative details as was typical of Leonardo. The portrait was finished properly by Leonardo and to this day remains vibrant with color.

Unfortunately, one of Leonardo's other works from this time in his life doesn't remain with us at all, but it has an interesting story behind it. It seems that Leonardo and his greatest rival, Michelangelo, were each asked to paint a large fresco in memory of a battle in Florence. The patriotic murals were to be across from each other in the new city hall. (The city hall was built to house Savonarola's large council.) Now, these two artists — Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo — were *not* friends at all. As true rivals, they worked in separate studios, each trying to outdo the other. The public cheered on their favorite artist as if the two were in some kind of sporting match. Many would say that Leonardo's rough sketch was the most lifelike battle scene of the two. It was greatly admired. But something awful happened!

On the day that paint was applied, there was so much moisture in the air that it ruined Leonardo's mural! In his own words, Leonardo said, "I was just picking up my brush when the weather took a turn for the worse . . . and the cartoon began to come apart, and water went everywhere."<sup>13</sup> Poor Leonardo! After working on the sketch for a year and a half, it began to disintegrate right before his very eyes. He tried to repair it but eventually gave up. Michelangelo didn't finish his mural either. (All of Florence was upset with these finicky artists!) Others did their best to duplicate the masterpieces. **Peter Paul Rubens** was the most successful in re-creating Leonardo's mural, which is titled *The Battle of Anghiari*.

### *Later Years*

Some of Leonardo's last years were spent in Rome. He and his rivals Michelangelo, Raphael, and Bramante, were all invited by the pope to live there. They spent most of their time beautifying the Church of St. Peter and other buildings at the Vatican. (This was when Michelangelo painted the famous ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which is our next lesson.) Even in Rome, Leonardo continued to pour his fascination with science into his work. In his leisure, he created a robotic lizard with flapping wings! He used quicksilver to power it.

But Leonardo's final years were spent in France. The king of France offered him the life of a prince if he would move there. I suppose that was an appealing offer. In his official contract, Leonardo was hired as a painter, engineer, architect, and mechanic of the state.



Though never painted, the brown-ink sketch of *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist*, by Leonardo da Vinci, captures tenderness and reverence for the Christ child.

He enjoyed it all. Leonardo settled in at the castle of Cloux near Amboise for the last three years of his life. At an old age, he said, "As a day well spent makes it sweet to sleep, so a life well used makes it sweet to die."<sup>14</sup> Leonardo died in France on May 2, 1519. He was 67 years old.

**(Middle and Older Students)**

In closing, let me share these further comments. I referred to Leonardo da Vinci as a "genius" five times in this lesson. I hope by now you would agree. But being a genius doesn't make one perfect. Twice in 1476, Leonardo and a few other young men were arrested in Florence for practicing homosexuality, an act that is forbidden in the Bible. (See Lev. 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9.) The charges were dropped, but Leonardo was insulted over the matter and probably left Florence because of it. It is doubtful that the issue of immorality was ever resolved for Leonardo. He never married and surrounded himself with male companions throughout his lifetime.

Because of all the religious works Leonardo painted, I would conclude that he knew of the Savior. But outwardly, he did not appear to *follow* the Savior. In many ways his lifestyle failed to demonstrate one who was called and saved by Christ. In my opinion, that would be all the more reason to view Leonardo da Vinci as the epitome, or true example, of a Renaissance man.