

ALEXANDER

MAKERS OF HISTORY SERIES

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FOREWORD.

THIRTY-THREE years is a short time to live, but it was long enough for one man to change the world forever. The ancient empires of Babylon, Egypt, and Persia and the heights of the famed Greek city-states dominated history for centuries, but this man came from a more obscure region. We know his earthly parents, but the claim arose that he was the offspring of a human and a deity. Long before he was born, prophecies of his life appeared in the Old Testament, and his vision of a unified kingdom stretching over the whole world lasted well beyond his years.

We know this man as Alexander the Great. His vision has inspired conquerors and philosophers down to our day. The territories he conquered and ruled from 334 B.C. to 323 B.C. have been the scenes of wars and rumors of war ever since his death. The spread and diffusion of Greek language and thought that followed his conquests

resulted in the culture known as Hellenism. Alexander's tactics on the battlefield have impacted generals from the time of Hannibal to the present. Alexander reigned for a mere twelve years but changed history forever.

History is full of unintended consequences. Battles are fought over forgotten pieces of ground, vacant thrones are contested bitterly, and nations rise and fall. The ultimate results, or the ripple effects of history, are far beyond the intentions or imaginations of those who act in brief scenes upon history's stage. Yet it is not the actors, but the Director who controls the story: The purposes of God are fulfilled in history.

Alexander had an unquenchable thirst for conquest. He once feared that his father, Philip of Macedonia, would not leave him any lands to conquer. After his father died Alexander's chance came, and he took down the Persian Empire and surrounding territories, and then pressed further east toward India. His troops, having been molded into the best army in the world, longed for their homelands and rebelled against further incursions. Alexander reluctantly agreed, but soon died, leaving numerous cities bearing his name throughout his far-flung kingdom.

After decades of warring against each other, Alexander's heirs would yield to Roman military force. Roman legions brought political unity and united the riches of the East with the political order of the West. But it was the Greek language that provided the means for a greater unity—a cultural unity. God used that cultural unity of the Greek language to universalize His message, first in the Septuagint and then in the New Testament writings.

Paul of Tarsus, a Jew well-skilled in that Greek language, wrote, "When the fullness of time had come,

God sent forth His Son” (Gal. 4:4). That fullness resulted from a convergence of historical forces—Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Jewish—when Jesus Christ was born in the land that was once part of Alexander’s empire.

In short, the conquests of Alexander the Great paved the way for the spread of the Christian message. Alexander’s vision of a united kingdom coincided with Daniel’s vision of a kingdom that would fill the whole earth and last forever.

Daniel quite poetically prophesied Alexander’s conquests. He wrote, “[S]uddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground” (Dan. 8:5). He goes on to describe how this goat had a “notable horn between his eyes” which he used to defeat a ram with two horns (which represented the Persian Empire). When the goat’s horn was broken (meaning after Alexander died), four horns came up, representing the division of Alexander’s empire by his successors.

Alexander ranks high in the annals of history both for his military gifts and his leadership skills. His well-trained, finely-honed army defeated larger forces repeatedly. Using a military formation called a phalanx—tightly-grouped spearmen marching with their shields interlocked—and fast-moving cavalry units on the wings, Alexander’s army was unbeatable. However, it is never just tactics or technology that wins wars; with Alexander, it was audacity and boldness. Alexander, like all generals in ancient warfare, fought in the forefront of battle.

Alexander’s wisdom as a leader fostered loyalty in his troops and willing submission from his defeated

enemies. For he granted special privileges to his troops, wisely showed mercy to defeated foes, and attended to the logistical details of warfare. Businessmen and politicians, as well as military students, can learn from these aspects of his character.

Some of the stories recounted in this volume highlight Alexander's more noble traits. But nobility is best exemplified in marble statuary rather than flesh and blood. The Greek culture, reaching as it did to great heights in philosophy, drama, architecture, and poetry, stood waist deep in a moral cesspool typical of man in rebellion against God's law.

The lessons gleaned from Alexander's life are more often negative rather than positive. Jacob Abbott's biography displays the finer traits of Alexander, many of them known anecdotally, but reminds the reader continually of Alexander's more vicious and wicked traits. Biography reveals better than any source that those who are brilliant and wise are often also cruel and wicked. Biographies like this one unveil history not as a scientific investigation, but as moral philosophy and remind us that both aspects of Alexander's life can be examined for their usefulness.

For the Christian reader, it is clear that God used Alexander's short life to prepare the world for Christ's coming. When a dying Alexander was asked to whom he wished to leave his kingdom, he answered, "To the most worthy." A few centuries would pass before that heir, Jesus of Nazareth, would inherit the land conquered by the Macedonian.

In time, Alexander's invasion of the Eastern world would be reversed with an invasion of the Western world.

And it would be a Macedonian—a man of Alexander’s home country—who would beckon Paul in a dream to carry the Gospel to Greece, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9).

BEN HOUSE
Epiphany Season, 2009



HIS CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.

ALLEXANDER the Great died when he was quite young. He was but thirty-two years of age when he ended his career, and he was about twenty when he began. It was only for a period of twelve years that he was actually engaged in performing the work of his life.

In spite of the briefness of Alexander's career, he ran through a very brilliant series of exploits, which were so bold, so romantic, and which led him into such adventures in scenes of the greatest magnificence and splendor that all the world looked on with astonishment then, and mankind has continued to read the story since, from age to age, with the greatest interest and attention.

The secret of Alexander's success was his character. He possessed a certain combination of mental and personal attraction which in every age gives to those who exhibit it a mysterious and almost unbounded

domination over all within their influence. Alexander was characterized by these qualities to a very remarkable degree. He was a handsome man and very attractive in his manners. He was active, athletic, and full of enthusiasm in all that he did. At the same time, he was calm, collected, and considerate in situations requiring caution, and thoughtful and discerning with respect to the bearing and consequences of his actions. He formed strong attachments, was grateful for kindnesses shown to him, considerate in respect to the feelings of all who were connected with him in any way, faithful to his friends, and generous toward his foes. In a word, he had a noble character, though he devoted its energies unfortunately to conquest and war. He lived, in fact, in an age when great personal and mental powers had scarcely any other field for their exercise than this. He entered in to his career with great eagerness, and the position in which he was placed gave him the opportunity to act in it with impressive effect.

There were several circumstances combined, in the situation in which Alexander was placed, to afford him a great opportunity for the exercise of his vast powers. His native country was on the confines of Europe and Asia. Now Europe and Asia were, marked and distinguished by two vast masses of social and civilized life, widely dissimilar from each other. The Asiatic side was occupied by the Persians, the Medes, and the Assyrians. The European side by the Greeks and Romans. They were separated from each other by the waters of the Hellespont, the Ægean Sea, and the Mediterranean. These waters constituted a sort of natural barrier, which kept the two populations apart. The populations formed two

vast organizations, distinct and widely different from each other, and of course rivals and enemies.

It is hard to say whether the Asiatic or European civilization was the highest. The two were so different that it is difficult to compare them. On the Asiatic side there was wealth, luxury, and splendor; on the European, energy, genius, and force. On the one hand were vast cities, splendid palaces, and gardens which were the wonder of the world; on the other, strong citadels, military roads and bridges, and compact and well-defended towns. The Persians had enormous armies, perfectly provided for, with beautiful tents, horses elegantly covered in ornaments, arms and munitions of war of the finest workmanship, and officers magnificently dressed and accustomed to a life of luxury and splendor. The Greeks and Romans, on the other hand, prided themselves on their compact bodies of troops, accustomed to hardship and thoroughly disciplined. Their officers gloried not in luxury, but in the courage, the steadiness, and implicit obedience of their troops, and in their own science, skill, and powers of military calculation. And so there was a great difference in the whole system of social and military organization in these two quarters of the globe.

Now Alexander was born the heir to the throne of one of the Grecian kingdoms. He possessed, in a very remarkable degree, the energy, and enterprise, and military skill so characteristic of the Greeks and Romans. He organized armies, crossed the boundary between Europe and Asia, and spent the twelve years of his career in a most triumphant military incursion into the very center of the seat of Asiatic power, destroying the Asiatic armies, conquering the most splendid cities, defeating or

taking captive the kings and princes and generals that opposed his progress. The whole world looked on with wonder to see such a course of conquest, pursued so successfully by so young a man, and with so small an army, gaining continual victories, as it did, over such vast numbers of foes and making conquests of such accumulated treasures of wealth and splendor.

The name of Alexander's father was Philip. The kingdom over which he reigned was called Macedon. Macedon was in the northern part of Greece. It was a kingdom about twice as large as the State of Massachusetts and one third as large as the State of New York. The name of Alexander's mother was Olympias. She was the daughter of the King of Epirus, which was a kingdom somewhat smaller than Macedon, lying west of it. Olympias was a woman of very strong and determined character. Alexander seemed to inherit her energy, though in his case it was combined with other qualities of a more attractive character, which his mother did not possess.

He was, of course, as the young prince, a very important person in his father's court. Everyone knew that at his father's death he would become King of Macedon, and he was consequently the object of a great deal of care and attention. As he gradually advanced in the years of his boyhood, it was observed by all who knew him that he was gifted with extraordinary qualities of mind and of character, which seemed to indicate, at a very early age, his future greatness.

Although he was a prince, he was not brought up with luxuriousness and softness. This would have been contrary to all the ideas which were entertained by the

Greeks in those days. They had then no firearms, so that in battle the combatants could not stand quietly, as they can now, at a distance from the enemy, coolly discharging musketry or cannon. In ancient battles the soldiers rushed toward each other and fought hand to hand in close combat with swords, or spears, or other weapons requiring great personal strength, so that headlong bravery and muscular force were the qualities which generally carried the day.

The duties of officers on the field of battle were very different then from what they are now. An officer now must be calm, collected, and quiet. His business is to plan, to calculate, to direct, and to arrange. He has to do this sometimes in circumstances of the most imminent danger, so that he must be a man of great self-possession and of undaunted courage. But there are very few occasions for him to exert any great physical force.

In ancient times, however, the great business of the officers, certainly in all the subordinate ranks, was to lead the men and set an example for them by performing deeds in which their own great personal prowess was displayed. Of course it was considered extremely important that the child destined to be a general should become robust and powerful in physical characteristics from his earliest years and that he should be accustomed to hardship and fatigue. In the early part of Alexander's life this was the main focus of his attention.

The name of the nurse who had charge of our hero in his infancy was Lannice. She did everything within her power to give strength and courage to his character, while, at the same time, she treated him with kindness and gentleness. Alexander acquired a strong affection

for her, and he treated her with great respect as long as he lived. He had a tutor, also, in his early years, named Leonnatus, who had the general responsibility of his education. As soon as he was old enough to learn, they appointed an instructor also to teach him the skills as were generally taught to young princes in those days. The name of this instructor was Lysimachus.

They had then no printed books, but there were a few writings on parchment rolls which young scholars were taught to read. Some of these writings were extensive written documents on philosophy; others were romantic histories narrating the exploits of the heroes of those days—of course with much exaggeration and embellishment. There were also some poems, still more romantic than the histories, though generally on the same themes. The greatest productions of this kind were the writings of Homer, an ancient poet who lived and wrote four or five hundred years before Alexander's day. The young Alexander was greatly delighted with Homer's tales. These tales are narrations of the exploits and adventures of certain great warriors at the siege of Troy—a siege which lasted ten years—and they are written with so much beauty and force, they contain such admirable sketches of character, and such vivid descriptions of romantic adventures, and striking scenes that they have been admired in every age by all who have read them.

Alexander could understand them easily, as they were written in his mother tongue. He was greatly excited by the narrations themselves, and pleased with the flowing smoothness of the verse in which the tales were told. In the latter part of his course of education he was placed under the charge of Aristotle, who was one of the

most eminent philosophers of ancient times. Aristotle had a beautiful copy of Homer's poems prepared expressly for Alexander, taking great pains to have it transcribed with perfect correctness and in the most elegant manner. Alexander carried this copy with him in all his military operations. Some years afterward, when he was obtaining conquests over the Persians, he took, among the spoils of one of his victories, a very beautiful and costly box, which King Darius had used for his jewelry or for some other rich treasures. Alexander made use of this box as a safe place to store his beautiful copy of Homer, and he always carried it with him, in this manner protected, in all his subsequent military operations.

Alexander was full of energy and spirit, but he was, at the same time, like all who ever become truly great, of a reflective and considerate disposition. He was very fond of the studies which Aristotle led him to pursue, although they were very difficult to understand. He made great progress in metaphysical philosophy and mathematics, by which means his powers of calculation and his judgment were greatly improved.

He displayed early in his life a great degree of ambition. His father Philip was a powerful warrior and made many conquests in various parts of Greece, though he did not cross into Asia. When news of Philip's victories came into Macedon, all the rest of the court would be filled with rejoicing and delight; but Alexander, on such occasions, looked thoughtful and disappointed and complained that his father would conquer every country and leave him nothing to do.

At one time, some ambassadors from the Persian court arrived in Macedon when Philip was away. These

ambassadors saw Alexander and had opportunities to converse with him. They expected that he would be interested in hearing about the splendors of the Persian monarchy. They had stories to tell him about the famous hanging gardens, which were artificially constructed in the most magnificent manner on arches raised high in the air; and about a vine made of gold, with all sorts of precious stones on it instead of fruit, which was suspended as an ornament over the throne on which the King of Persia often gave audience; of the splendid palaces and vast cities of the Persians; and the banquets and fêtes and magnificent performances and celebrations which they had there. They found, however, to their surprise that Alexander was not interested in hearing about any of these things. He would always turn the conversation from them to inquire about the geographical position of the different Persian countries, the various routes leading into the interior, the organization of the Asiatic armies, their system of military tactics, and, especially, the character and habits of Artaxerxes, the Persian king.

The ambassadors were very much surprised at such evidences of maturity of mind and of the foresight and reflective powers of the young prince. They could not help comparing him with Artaxerxes. "Alexander," said they, "is great, while our king is only rich." The truth of the judgment which these ambassadors formed in respect to the qualities of the young Macedonian, compared with those held in highest estimation on the Asiatic side, was fully confirmed in the subsequent stages of Alexander's career.

In fact, this combination of a calm and calculating thoughtfulness with the fervor and energy which

formed the basis of his character was one great secret of Alexander's success. The story of Bucephalus, his famous horse, illustrates this in a very striking manner. This animal was a war-horse of very spirited character, which had been sent as a present to Philip while Alexander was young. They took the horse out into one of the parks connected with the palace, and the king, together with many of his courtiers, went out to view him. The horse bounded forward a very furious manner and seemed entirely unmanageable. No one dared to mount him. Philip, instead of being gratified at the present, was rather displeased that they had sent him an animal of so fiery and apparently vicious a nature that nobody dared to attempt to subdue him.

In the meantime, while all the other bystanders were joining in the general condemnation of the horse, Alexander stood quietly by watching his motions and attentively studying his character. He realized that a part of the difficulty was caused by the nervousness which the horse experienced in so strange and new a scene and that he appeared, also, to be somewhat frightened by his own shadow, which was cast very distinctly on the ground. He saw other indications, also, that the high excitement which the horse felt was not viciousness but the excess of noble and generous impulses. It was courage, eagerness, and the consciousness of great nervous and muscular power.

Philip decided that the horse was useless and gave orders to have him sent back to Thessaly, from where he came. Alexander was very much concerned at the prospect of losing so fine an animal. He begged his father to allow him to try to ride him. Philip at first refused,

thinking it very presumptuous for such a youth to attempt to subdue an animal so vicious that all his experienced horsemen and grooms condemned him; however, he soon consented. Alexander went up to the horse and took hold of his bridle. He patted him on the neck and soothed him with his voice, showing, at the same time, by his easy and unconcerned manner that he was not in the least afraid of him. A spirited horse knows immediately when anyone approaches him in a timid or cautious manner. He looks with contempt on such a master and is determined not to submit to him. On the contrary, horses seem to love to yield obedience to man when the individual who exacts the obedience possesses those qualities of coolness and courage which their instincts enable them to appreciate.

At any rate, Bucephalus was calmed and subdued by the presence of Alexander. He allowed himself to be stroked. Alexander turned his head in such a direction as to prevent him from seeing his shadow. Quietly and gently Alexander removed his cloak and sprang on the horse's back. Then, instead of attempting to restrain him and worrying and checking him by useless efforts to hold him in, he gave him the rein freely and encouraged him with his voice so that the horse flew across the plains at top speed, the king and the courtiers looking on, at first with fear and trembling but soon afterward with feelings of the greatest admiration and pleasure. After the horse had satisfied himself with his run it was easy to rein him in, and Alexander returned with him in safety to the king. The courtiers overwhelmed him with their praises and congratulations. Philip commended him very highly: he told him that he deserved a larger kingdom than Macedon to govern.

Alexander's judgment of the true character of the horse proved to be correct. He became easily controlled and docile, yielding a ready submission to his master in everything. He would kneel on his fore legs at Alexander's command, in order that he might mount more easily. Alexander maintained possession of him for a long time and made him his favorite war horse. A great many stories are related by the historians of those days of Bucephalus' acute discernment and feats of war. Whenever he was equipped for the field with his military trappings, he seemed to be highly elated with pride and pleasure, and at such times he would not allow anyone but Alexander to ride him.

What became of him at last is not actually known. There are two accounts of his end. One is that on a certain occasion Alexander got carried too far into the midst of his enemies on a battle field and that after fighting desperately for some time Bucephalus made the most extreme efforts to carry him away. He was severely wounded again and again, and though his strength was nearly gone, he would not stop but pressed forward until he had carried his master away to a place of safety, and then the horse dropped down exhausted and died. It may be, however, that he did not actually die at this time but slowly recovered; for some historians relate that he lived to be thirty years old—which is quite an old age for a horse—and that he then died. Alexander had him buried with great ceremony and built a small city on the spot in honor of his memory. The name of this city was Bucephalia.

Alexander matured rapidly, and he began very early to act the part of a man. When he was only sixteen years

of age, his father, Philip, made him regent of Macedon while he was absent on a great military campaign among the other states of Greece. Without doubt Alexander had, in this regency, the counsel and aid of high officers of state of great experience and ability. He acted in this high position, with great energy and with complete success; and, at the same time, with all modesty of conduct and careful consideration for the officers under him—who, though inferior in rank, were yet his superiors in age and experience—which his position rendered proper, but which few persons so young as he would have displayed under the same circumstances so well.

Afterward, when Alexander was about eighteen years old, his father took him on a campaign toward the south, during which Philip fought one of his great battles at Chæronea in Bœotia. In the arrangements for this battle, Philip gave the command of one of the wings of the army to Alexander, while he reserved the other for himself. He felt some concern in giving his young son so important a charge, but he made every effort to guard against the danger by putting the most able generals on Alexander's side, while he reserved those on whom he could place less reliance for his own. Thus organized, the army went into battle.

Philip soon ceased to feel any concern for Alexander's part of the duty. Boy as he was, the young prince acted with the utmost bravery, coolness, and discretion. The wing which he commanded was victorious, and Philip was obliged to urge himself and the officers with him to greater efforts, to avoid being outdone by his son. In the end Philip was completely victorious, and the result of this great battle was to make his power supreme over all the states of Greece.

Notwithstanding, however, the extraordinary discretion and wisdom which characterized the mind of Alexander in his early years, he was often haughty and headstrong, and in cases where his pride or his resentment were awakened, he was sometimes found to be very impetuous and uncontrollable. His mother Olympias had a haughty temperament, and she quarreled with her husband, King Philip; or, perhaps, it ought rather to be said that he quarreled with her. Each is said to have been unfaithful to the other, and, after a bitter contention, Philip repudiated his wife and married another lady. Among the festivities held on the occasion of this marriage, there was a great banquet at which Alexander was present, and an incident occurred which strikingly illustrates the impulsiveness of his character.

One of the guests at the banquet, in saying something complimentary to the new queen, made use of expressions which Alexander considered to be disparaging to the character of his mother and of his own birth. His was immediately angry. He threw the cup from which he had been drinking at the offender's head. Attalus, for this was his name, threw his cup at Alexander in return; the guests at the table where they were sitting rose and a scene of uproar and confusion ensued.

Philip, incensed at such an interruption to the order and harmony of the wedding feast, drew his sword and rushed toward Alexander, but by some accident he stumbled and fell to the floor. Alexander looked at his fallen father with contempt and scorn and exclaimed, "What a fine hero the states of Greece have to lead their armies—a man that cannot get across the floor without tumbling down." He then turned away and left the palace.

Immediately afterward he joined his mother Olympias and went away with her to her native country, Epirus, where the mother and son remained, for a time, in a state of open quarrel with the husband and father.

In the meantime Philip had been planning a great expedition into Asia. He had arranged the affairs of his own kingdom and formed a strong alliance among the states of Greece by which powerful armies had been raised, and he had been designated to command them. His mind was intently engaged in this vast enterprise. He was in the prime of his years and at the height of his power. His kingdom was in a very prosperous and thriving condition, and his domination over the other kingdoms and states on the European side had been fully established. He was excited with ambition, and full of hope. Philip was proud of his son and was relying on him to aid in his schemes of conquest and greatness. He was looking forward to a very brilliant career considering all the deeds that he had done and all the glory which he had acquired as only the introduction and prelude to the far more distinguished and conspicuous part which he was intending to perform.

Alexander, in the meantime, ardent and impetuous, and eager for glory as he was, looked on the position and prospects of his father with some envy and jealousy. He was impatient to be monarch himself. His taking sides so promptly with his mother in the domestic quarrel was partly owing to the feeling that his father was a hindrance and an obstacle in the way of his own greatness and fame. He felt within himself powers and capacities qualifying him to take his father's place and reap for himself the harvest of glory and power which

seemed to await the Grecian armies in the coming campaign. While his father lived, however, he could be only a prince; influential, accomplished, and popular, it is true, but still without any substantial and independent power. He was restless and uneasy at the thought that, as his father was in the prime and vigor of manhood, many long years must elapse before he could emerge from this confined and subordinate condition. His restlessness and uneasiness were, however, suddenly ended by a very extraordinary occurrence, which called him with scarcely an hour's notice to take his father's place on the throne.