WEEK 31

Lesson 91 — 218 B.C.

Hannibal, Elephants, and the Punic Wars

Far away from China at about the same time that Qin started the Great Wall, trouble was starting between two important cities, **Rome** and **Carthage**. The city of Rome was determined to rule over the entire Mediterranean world. Carthage, however, wasn't going to let this happen very easily.

Carthage (KAR thij), an ancient city and state located in northern Africa, was a threat to Rome because it was in an ideal location for trading. Look at the map on the next page now and find both Carthage and Rome. They were quite close to one another although they were on two different continents. Only the waters of the Mediterranean Sea separated them.

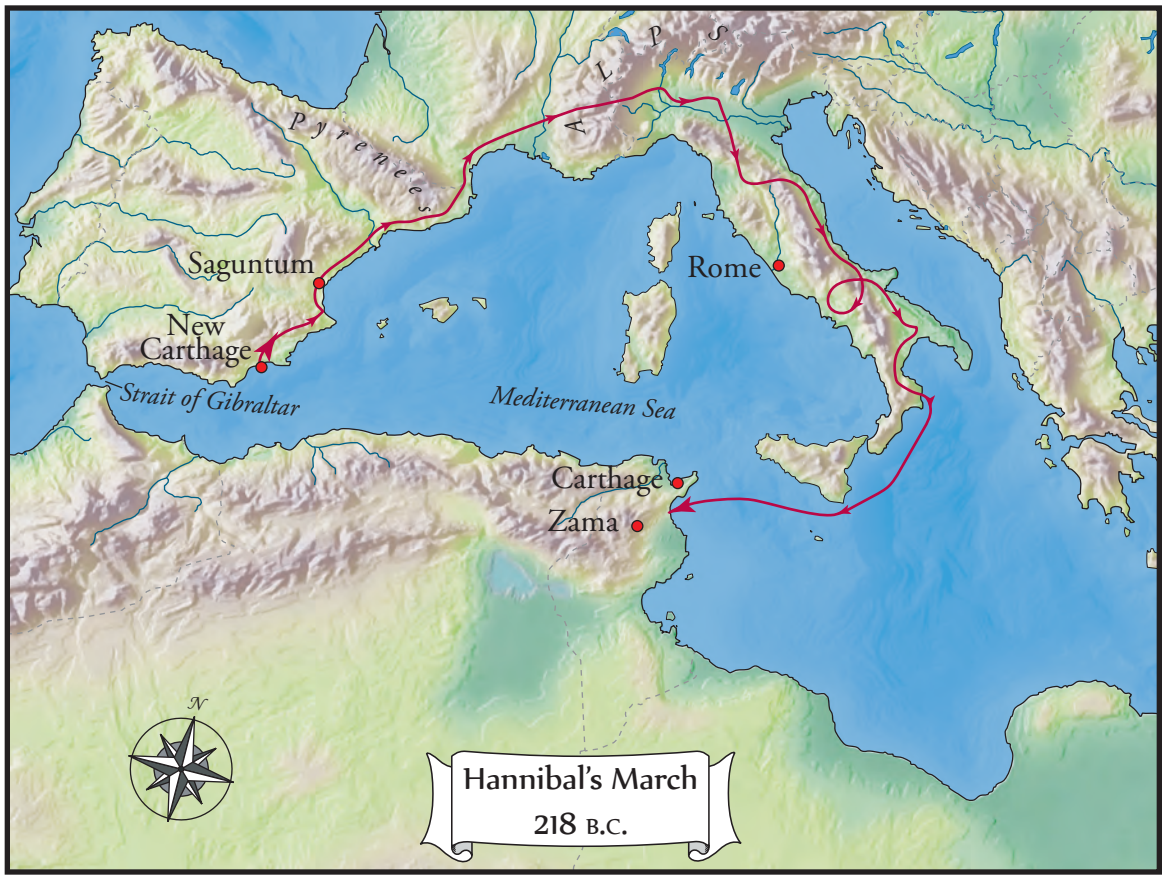
The fighting between these cities became known as the **Punic** (PEW nick) **Wars**. It was called that because the Romans used the word *Punic* for "Phoenicians." What do the Phoenicians have to do with it? Glad you asked that question. It was the Phoenicians of long ago who first settled the city of Carthage on the Mediterranean. Carthage was what we would call a "colony" of Phoenicia for many years.

During the **First Punic War**, the Carthaginians fought with the Romans over the island of Sicily. That is the small island that looks like it is being "kicked" by the peninsula of Italy. (Archimedes was from there.) Carthage lost that battle.

Twenty years later, though, a brilliant general named **Hannibal** rose to power in Carthage. He would greatly challenge the Roman rule. While just a boy, Hannibal developed an intense hatred for Rome. His father once asked him to make an oath that he would never be friends with a Roman. Hannibal kept that oath all his life.



From childhood, Hannibal of Carthage maintained a deep loathing for the Romans—and made a lifetime career of battling against them.

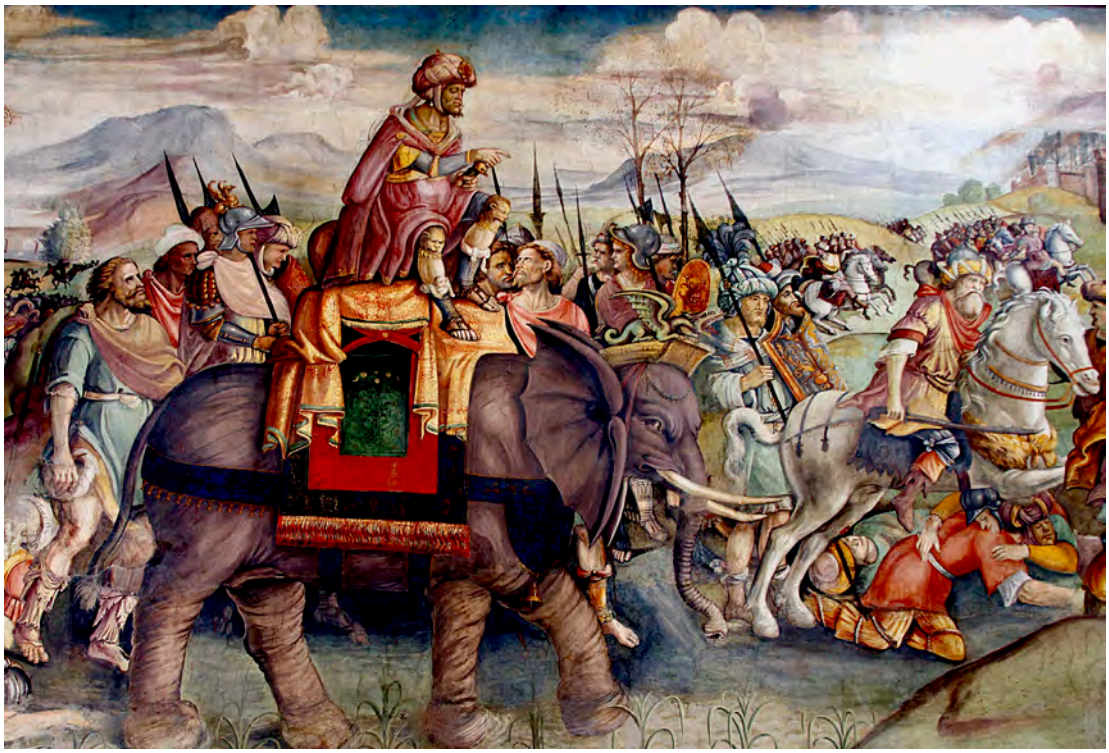


The most amazing thing Hannibal ever did was to completely surprise the Romans in an attack. To appreciate this military move, follow along on the map provided. Rather than trying to attack Rome from the south where Carthage was, Hannibal marched to Rome in **218 B.C.** by starting at *New* Carthage in southern Spain and heading east across the perilous Alps — one of the highest mountain ranges in the world!* This man and his army, who originally lived south of Rome and across a sea, attacked Rome from the northwest. It was a brilliant idea.

To make the endeavor even more astounding, Hannibal took 37 war **elephants** with him! Can you imagine elephants climbing the Alps? To be honest, they didn't do a very good job. On the way, all but one died, from either the freezing conditions or falls from great heights. One third of Hannibal's men died for the same reasons, as well as from starvation, on the long and perilous journey.

Still, Hannibal was very courageous. It is said that he himself would serve as a scout—hiking or riding his horse to the next highest peak, yelling back to his men that it

*Hannibal was able to start his march to Rome from New Carthage (Cartagena, Spain) for three reasons. First, from 237 to 228 B.C., Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca, subdued southern Spain — giving the Carthaginians a foothold in mainland Europe. Second, in 227 B.C., Hannibal's brother-in-law, Hasdrubal the Fair, founded the city of New Carthage (Cartagena) — providing Hannibal a station closer to Rome. Third, in 219 B.C., Hannibal conquered the city of Saguntum, Spain (to clear his path to Rome) and back-tracked to New Carthage. From there, he strategized and launched his famous march, as our map shows.



One of Hannibal's most memorable military strategies was his use of war elephants on the long treacherous march to Rome—up and over the Alps!



Scipio, the Roman general who never lost a battle, defeated Hannibal at the Battle of Zama to end the 17-year Second Punic War.

was safe for passage. I can picture him shouting and waving. Both he and his men were subject to slippery ice, deep snow, and freezing weather. It is incredible that they made it at all.

Over the next 15 years, the brave and gallant Hannibal managed to defeat the Romans at three different battlefronts in Italy, but he had yet to meet up with the best that Rome had to offer in generals. His name was **Scipio** (SIP ee oh).

While Hannibal was in Italy far from home, Scipio moved his men to attack Carthage by way of the sea. News of that forced Hannibal to sail back home. In 202 B.C., Scipio and Hannibal finally met face to face to fight at the **Battle of Zama** (ZEE muh or ZAH muh). At stake was the fate of the Mediterranean world. The result of this battle was to shape the rest of history!

Since you've probably never heard of Carthage before this lesson, that might give you a clue as to who won this decisive battle. Hannibal and his men just couldn't do it—they could not squelch Scipio. The Romans went on to



The Romans discovered Hannibal living in Crete—after 10 years in hiding! Rather than face capture, Hannibal took his own life the same year that his rival Scipio died.

claim the final victory in the **Second Punic War**. This was just the beginning of Rome showing how strong she could be.

Hannibal, on the other hand, left the army and worked instead on rebuilding the city of Carthage. He was so successful that he again posed a threat to the Romans. They set out to have Hannibal ousted from Carthage once and for all. He had to flee far from home to save his life.

After 10 years, the Romans finally caught up to Hannibal while he was in hiding on the island of Crete. That is the same island where the Minoans once lived. Rather than suffer the humiliation of being captured, Hannibal ended his own life in 183 B.C. He supposedly drank poison that he kept stored secretly in a ring on his finger.

Some of Hannibal's last words were, "Let us now put an end to the great anxiety of the Romans, who have thought it too lengthy, and too heavy a task, to wait for the death of a hated old man."[1] Ironically, Hannibal's old enemy, Scipio, died that same year.

Both men died without the knowledge that Carthage was later obliterated by the Romans in the **Third Punic War** (149–146 B.C.). The destruction was among the worst in all of history, as the entire city was burned over two weeks and any survivors were carried away into slavery.

Legend says that the Romans, in a final act of cruelty, contaminated the burned city with salt to ruin the land for farming. The legend is under debate, but if it were true, that last destructive act against Carthage would certainly have broken Hannibal's heart.

The Han Dynasty

When you think of images of ancient China, what comes to your mind? Do you picture bustling streets, ornate palaces, and beautiful works of art? I hope so because all of these are part of China's rich past. Much like the Greeks in Athens, the Chinese experienced a time period during which their cultural achievements greatly blossomed. It was during the **Han dynasty** that the more creative side of the Chinese emerged.



Emperor Wu Di, the seventh emperor of the Han dynasty, reigned from 141 to 87 B.C., making his 54-year reign one of the longest in China's history.

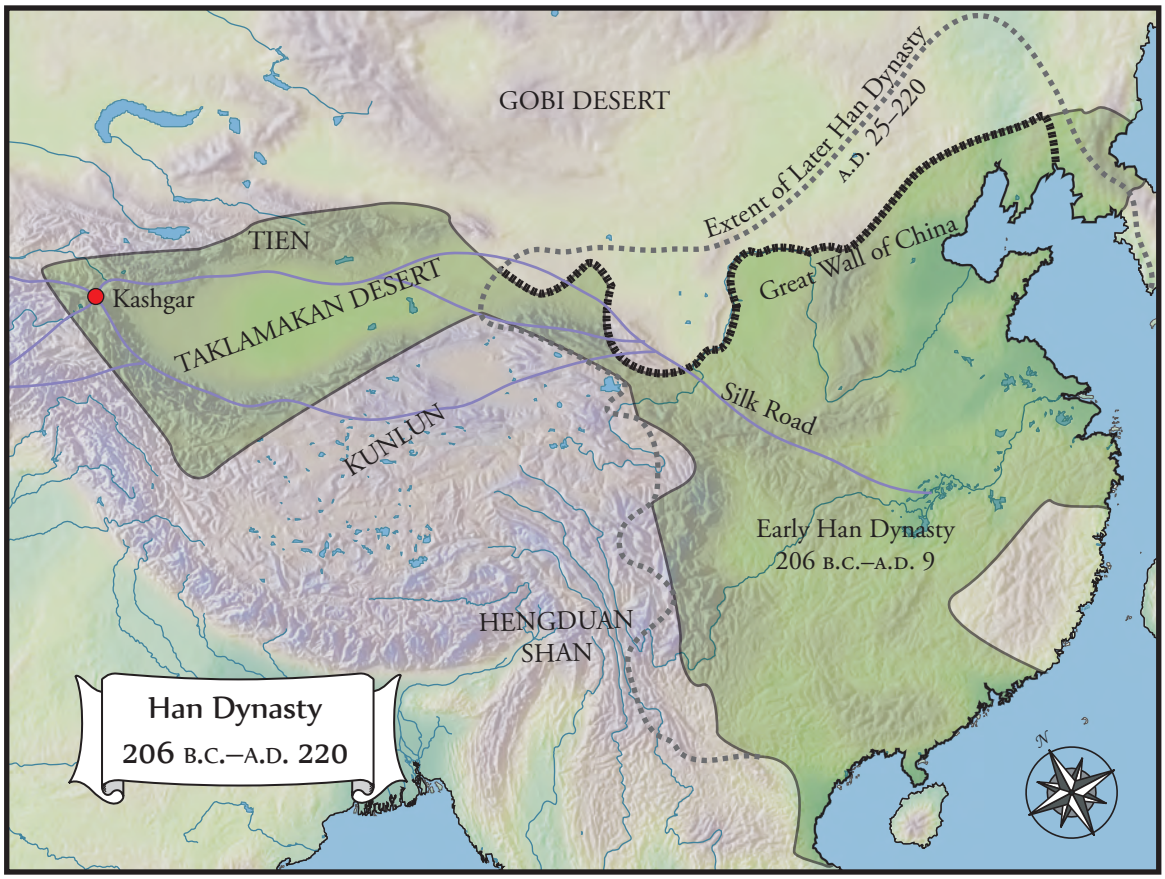
In review, the Qin dynasty was rather short. It lasted just a few years beyond the life of Shi Huang Ti, who oversaw the building of the Great Wall of China. After his death and a few years of civil war, the Han dynasty ruled over China from **206 B.C. to A.D. 220**. That is more than 400 years!*

If you remember, the Qin dynasty unified the warring states of China into one big country. This is the land that the Han dynasty inherited. They made it even bigger under **Emperor Wu Di** (woo dee), who ruled from 141 to 86 B.C. He added parts of central Asia and the southeast coast of China, and conquered the Medong Valley. **Chang'an**, the bustling capital city during this time period, was second only to Rome in size and magnificence.

Even with all this new land, China remained somewhat isolated from the rest of the world. The Chinese didn't really need anything from the Western world except horses. These animals didn't breed well in China and had to be imported. Otherwise, the Chinese had their own natural resources and plenty of farmland for food. But the Western world sure wanted something that China had. And that was silk!

Remember learning about the simple little silkworm that the Chinese learned to harvest? I told you that they kept the worm a secret for about three thousand years. They were very smart to do that. The art of making silk was a mystery to the people of Rome, Greece, and other countries. That made the demand for silk great and the price of it exorbitant.

*The Chinese divide this long span into two major time periods, the Former (or Western) Han from 206 B.C. to A.D. 9 and the Later (or Eastern) Han from A.D. 25 to 220. The name change reflects the move of the capital city from Chang'an (in the west) to Luoyang (in the east).



The desire for silk was so great that a group of roads from China to Syria was later nicknamed the "Silk Road." The Silk Road trade routes stretched for 2,500 miles and basically connected the East with the West. It has been said that the value of silk was so high in Rome that it was equal to gold. No wonder men were willing to travel over mountains and through deserts to trade this fine cloth.

Within China itself, travel became more interesting during the Han dynasty as many villages were connected by long canals or waterways. Some families lived on houseboats to make a way of life out of moving goods from village to village. It was not uncommon to see the babies and toddlers who lived on the houseboats wearing bamboo floats to protect them should they fall overboard.



Silent and vacant today, the Dunhuang watchtower was built along the Silk Road of China during the Han dynasty.



This sculpted bronze horse, captured in motion, reflects the exquisite craftsmanship of the Han dynasty.

Culturally, many beautiful things were built during the Han dynasty, though few remain intact. Art was becoming more appreciated for its beauty. The Chinese became famous for their delicate pottery that we still call "fine china" today. It refers to a type of porcelain made from fine white clay. As for inventions, it was during the later Han dynasty that paper was invented by the Chinese. It is hard for us to believe that paper, as we know it, didn't come into existence until about A.D. 100!

The Chinese are also responsible for inventing the first seismograph, a device that detects and measures earthquakes. Though the first seismograph looked like an ornate toy in comparison to today's version, the Chinese were thinking way ahead of themselves.

The Han dynasty was not known only for silk trading, porcelain, and inventions. The emperors of this era took China back to some of its former roots. Remember when Shi Huang Ti burned the ancient history books and teachings of Confucius? He couldn't really burn them all. The writings of Confucius were rediscovered under the Han rule and brought back into the arena of Chinese politics.

One of the principles of Confucianism was the idea that men should be appointed to rule based on their abilities, not on their birth, so people who wanted to serve in the government in China had to take a test that showed they understood politics. This rule,

however, did not apply to emperors. There were, at times, babies who inherited the throne. In those cases, their mothers were often the real rulers.

Overall, though, the Han dynasty was good for the people of China. For four hundred years, the Chinese were prosperous and stable. In the course of history, that is a long time. When we get to the study of Jesus Christ and the early church, remember that the Han dynasty would still have been ruling over China.



This replica Chinese seismograph shows four dragons facing north, south, east, and west. Sensing vibrations in the ground, the dragons were designed to drop a ball in the mouth of the nearest frog figurine—to indicate the direction of an earthquake!

The Maccabean Revolt

At about the time the Han dynasty was being established in China, the Lord was at work protecting His people in Judea* from a very cruel man. The history of the Jews never ceases to amaze me. Over and over again, God kept His hand on the Jews in order to bring about His plan to send Jesus Christ.



On one side, this silver coin bears the face of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. On the other side it proclaims in Greek, "King Antiochus, image of God, bearer of victory."

In Judea, the Jews were being seriously oppressed by a man named **Antiochus Epiphanes** (an tee OCK us eh PIFF uh neez), or Antiochus IV. He was the eighth ruler of the Seleucid (suh LOO suhd) dynasty. Do you remember the Seleucids? They were one of the four families we studied earlier who gained part of Alexander the Great's empire after he died.

Antiochus Epiphanes was a ruthless man. He had no respect for the beliefs of the Jews. He wanted them to adopt the Greek way of life. This is called **"Hellenization,"** the term given to the practice by many nations of adopting Greek ideas, style, and customs after the spread of Alexander's empire.

Antiochus Epiphanes was so cruel that at one point he took over the Jewish Temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar to mock the Jews. He also put up a statue of the Greek god Zeus right there in the Temple. You can imagine the rage and the hurt of the Jews to have the house of the Lord defiled in that way. This was the same Temple that Zerubbabel had worked so hard to restore.

Furthermore, Antiochus IV forbade circumcision, and he destroyed as many copies of Old Testament Scripture as he could find. The Jews who opposed him were killed.

God was watching, though. He raised up a man named **Judas Maccabee** who was able to stop the tyranny of Antiochus IV, but it wasn't easy.

*The Greeks and Romans referred to the former Kingdom of Judah as Judea.



Mattathias, a Jewish priest, was first in leading the Jews to rebel against the Seleucid dynasty. His son, Judas Maccabee, completed the revolt and gained control of the Jewish Temple.

Judas Maccabee was the son of a priest named **Mattathias** (mat uh THIGH us). It was Mattathias who first led a rebellion against Antiochus. Mattathias refused to give sacrifice to a pagan god and was forced to flee for his life to the hills. He died shortly after that, so Judas, his son, took his place in leading an all-out revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes. This has become known as the **Maccabean Revolt**.

Interestingly, Judas had far fewer men and probably fewer weapons than his enemy had, yet time and time again, he was victorious in defeating Antiochus. In fact, Judas earned the name *Maccabee*, which means "hammerer," from this series of victories. It is apparent to me that the Lord was on their side for the three years they fought.

Finally, in **165 B.C.**, Judas Maccabee gained control of the sacred Temple. The Jews immediately went to the task of cleaning up the mess the intruders had made. The **Talmud** (TAHL mood), a special collection of Jewish writings, tells an amazing story that happened during the cleanup.

The Talmud says that during the Temple rededication, the Jews found only one small bottle of oil with which to light holy lamps for what was probably a belated celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (when the Jews remembered their temporary dwelling in the wilderness).*

*The Feast of Tabernacles is also called the Feast of Booths or Sukkot. See Leviticus 23:33–44. See also in the Apocrypha: 1 Maccabees 4:52–59 and 2 Maccabees 10:6.

Miraculously, the oil that should have lasted only one day lasted for eight! It was as if the Lord extended the life of the oil just long enough for the Feast of Tabernacles and rededication of the Temple.

It is from this meaningful event that the custom of **Hanukkah** was started. The word *Hanukkah* means "dedication." To this day Jewish people remember the eight days of worship and the burning of the oil lamps. In the Book of John in the New Testament, it is called the "Feast of Dedication." (See John 10:22.)

In the celebration of Hanukkah, Jews light one additional candle each night on a lampstand called a "menorah." By the eighth night, all the candles are lit together, and the Scripture is recited: "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD." (Zech. 4:6) The Jews also give gifts to one another and to the poor on this special holiday that falls near Christmas.

Judas Maccabee himself died in battle just a few years after the Temple rededication. His brothers, however, carried on the tradition of fighting for the Jews' independence. How little did they know Who was soon to come to bring His message of peace to the whole world!



At Hanukkah, an eight-day celebration, Jewish families light candles on a menorah to remember the miraculous provision of lamp oil during the rededication of the Temple following the Maccabean Revolt.

