Selected Important Events in Pre-Islamic Middle East

5th Century BCE  
Achaemenid Persian Empire conquers much of Asia Minor but is stopped at Marathon (490) and Salamis (480)

4th Century BCE  
Early in this century (Issus 333) Alexander (the Great) annexes the entire Persian Empire, including essentially all of the Middle East, including Egypt; Hellenism penetrates society & culture in the Middle East, including Palestine; following Alexander’s death (323) his empire is divided among his generals Seleucius (based in Syria, included Palestine and Asia Minor), Ptolemy (Egypt and surrounding territories) and Antigoni (Macedonia and parts of Greece)

2nd Century BCE  
Romans begin to expand their empire in Asia Minor

1st Century BCE  
(65 BCE) Romans make contact with the Nabateans, whose capital at Petra controlled north-south trade routes, achieve friendly relations with them; by 30 BCE, Rome is in control of most of Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt; attempts to move into SW Arabia (23 BCE) but is unsuccessful in staying there, however, “Arabs, impressed by Rome’s show of strength, accepted friendship with Rome and abandoned their monopoly of the straits at the south end of the Red Sea” (History of Rome, 291*)

1st Century CE  
Rome annexes Judea (6 CE), however, Jews occupy “a privileged position among Rome’s subjects, being exempted from military service and the obligation of the imperial cult” (History of Rome, 311); Jews rebel in 66 CE, Jerusalem destroyed four years later; Jerusalem destroyed and Jewish population of Judea scattered; Jews subjected to yearly head tax of two denarii each, payable to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, in consideration of which they enjoyed their previous immunities” (History of Rome, 312); subsequently, Jews suffer persecution in the Empire, as do Christians as Christianity spreads throughout the eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor, as well as to Ethiopia (Abyssinia), extending even to Rome itself
**4th Century CE**  
Roman “senior Augustus” Galerius issues *Edict of Toleration* (311), giving Christians the right to practice their religion and rebuild their churches, providing they not offend public order. In 313, co-emperors Constantine and Licinius implement a policy (so-called *Edict of Milan*) granting Christians unrestricted freedom of worship and restoring confiscated properties to the respective church communities. In 324, Constantine defeats Licinius (324) and becomes sole Roman emperor; in **330** he establishes his new capital at Byzantium, renames it **Constantinople**.

(325) **Council of Nicea** officially resolves the issue of the relationship between God the Father and the Son; disagreeing Christian groups are expelled from the “orthodox” church.

(397) Council of Carthage accepts/approves canonized

New Testament

**5th Century CE**  
(circa 405) Jerome produces a Latin Bible of Old and New Testament ("*Vulgate Bible*"); during the century Vandals, Huns and Ostrogarths invade the western part of the Roman Empire, by century’s end this part of the Empire is no more; the Empire in the East continues to thrive

**6th Century CE**  
(537) Eastern Roman/Byzantine Emperor Justinian dedicates the Church of the Holy Wisdom (*Haghia Sophia*); Christianity, though of several sects, has spread across the Middle East, as have the Jews

From late 6th century onward Byzantine Empire engages in almost continuous warfare with the Sasanid (Persian) Empire, thus weakening both empires

(circa 570) **Muhammad is born in Mecca**