

1

00:00:00,745 --> 00:00:18,267

This series presents information based in part on theory and conjecture.

2

00:00:18,267 --> 00:00:22,788

The producer's purpose is to suggest some possible explanations, but not necessarily

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00:00:22,788 --> 00:00:25,668

the only ones to the mysteries we will examine.

4

00:00:26,668 --> 00:00:32,669

The heart of an average human being beats 72 times a minute.

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00:00:32,669 --> 00:00:35,669

These, however, are not ordinary human beings.

6

00:00:35,669 --> 00:00:37,669

They are the Mayans.

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00:00:37,669 --> 00:00:40,670

Their hearts beat only 50 times a minute.

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00:00:40,670 --> 00:00:43,670

Their teeth do not decay.

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00:00:43,670 --> 00:00:47,671

Their skull cavities are different from any other human beings.

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00:00:47,671 --> 00:00:54,672

They are the descendants of an extraordinary people who long ago created an astonishing civilization.

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00:00:55,672 --> 00:00:57,672

Then they vanished.

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00:00:57,672 --> 00:00:59,672

Where did they come from?

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00:00:59,672 --> 00:01:04,673

Why did their civilization flourish, then disappear?

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00:01:12,674 --> 00:01:16,674

The biblical story of Genesis and the theory of evolution agree.

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00:01:16,674 --> 00:01:22,675

In the beginning, out of the void came light, the great creative force.

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00:01:25,675 --> 00:01:33,676

Eventually, light separated from darkness, becoming the first day.

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00:01:33,676 --> 00:01:40,677

And from this great expanse, the sky was created and dry land emerged from the deep.

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00:01:42,677 --> 00:01:45,678

Earth, the great mother.

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00:01:45,678 --> 00:01:53,679

Giving birth to all kinds of vegetation, the marsh and mud landscape was transformed into mountains and lakes.

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00:01:55,679 --> 00:02:02,680

Finally, the expanse of sky was filled with lights, separating day from night.

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00:02:02,680 --> 00:02:10,681

The movement of the stars marked the passage of time, the recurring cycles of the days, the seasons, the years.

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00:02:12,681 --> 00:02:15,681

The waters brought forth life.

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00:02:24,682 --> 00:02:28,683

Swarms of living creatures filled the seas.

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00:02:32,683 --> 00:02:36,684

Birds and other winged life filled the skies.

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00:02:47,685 --> 00:02:51,686

All sorts of beasts and crawling things populated the land.

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00:02:51,686 --> 00:02:56,686

It was into this setting that mankind was born.

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00:03:22,690 --> 00:03:31,691

Living simply at first, mankind grappled with the problems of survival, seeking warmth and the guidance of the stars.

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00:03:34,691 --> 00:03:38,691

Building only the simplest of shelters against the elements.

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00:03:43,692 --> 00:03:49,693

In most cases, civilization developed slowly, but there appears to be an exception.

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00:03:51,693 --> 00:03:57,694

Deep within the jungles of Mexico and Guatemala, a culture emerged unlike any other.

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00:03:59,694 --> 00:04:06,695

At Tikal, the sacred heart of the Mayan world, pyramids stand as ancient links between earth and sky.

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00:04:08,695 --> 00:04:12,696

Why did this ancient people build such elaborate ceremonial complexes?

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00:04:12,696 --> 00:04:20,697

Free Colombian scholar and poet Al Orista believes the Maya to be the oldest culture in the world.

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00:04:21,697 --> 00:04:25,697

The pyramids that these people built were centers of learning.

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00:04:25,697 --> 00:04:32,698

There were places where men and women were to become creators, masters of energy, masters of matter and energy.

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00:04:32,698 --> 00:04:38,699

People who would learn in those centers how to transform matter and energy.

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00:04:38,699 --> 00:04:42,699

There were also initiatory chambers not open to everybody.

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00:04:42,699 --> 00:04:47,700

These secret societies were dedicated to the study of astronomy based on mathematics.

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00:04:48,700 --> 00:04:54,701

No evidence has been found to explain the Mayan advances in astronomy and mathematics.

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00:04:57,701 --> 00:05:04,702

The silent center-knows they left behind indicate only the methods they used to mark the passage of time.

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00:05:08,702 --> 00:05:16,703

They could easily compute the exact day of the week a given date would fall 400 million years later.

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00:05:18,704 --> 00:05:21,704

Ancient Mayans devised a unique numbering system.

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00:05:21,704 --> 00:05:28,705

They used dots to signify 1, bars for 5 and a simple stylized shell for 0.

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00:05:28,705 --> 00:05:33,705

Thus they anticipated our decimal system by thousands of years.

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00:05:35,706 --> 00:05:40,706

In 1947, Giles Healy had an extraordinary discovery.

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00:05:41,706 --> 00:05:49,707

In a small temple in a seemingly unimportant religious center called Bonampak,

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00:05:49,707 --> 00:05:55,708

Healy found a gold mine of information about Mayan ceremonial life.

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00:05:58,709 --> 00:06:06,709

In three small chambers, he uncovered a series of exquisite murals documenting the pageantry of a thousand year old religion.

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00:06:11,710 --> 00:06:20,711

The murals tell of a grand processional of music and mass dancers who appear to be impersonating mysterious gods,

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00:06:20,711 --> 00:06:23,712

perhaps in the hopes of winning their favor.

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00:06:26,712 --> 00:06:28,712

There is a raid on a nearby village.

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00:06:33,713 --> 00:06:34,713

Captives are taken.

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00:06:37,713 --> 00:06:39,714

Prisoners sacrificed.

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00:06:41,714 --> 00:06:43,714

The prisoners were killed.

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00:06:48,715 --> 00:06:54,715

Significantly there is always present one commanding figure, the priest astronomer.

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00:06:57,716 --> 00:07:03,716

The palace observatory at Palenque reveals the priests to be preoccupied with the study of the stars

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00:07:03,716 --> 00:07:06,717

and preserving the ancient sacred mysteries.

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00:07:07,717 --> 00:07:16,718

Long before Columbus, Mayan men of knowledge filled libraries with hundreds of books on their history and the complex cycles of the planets.

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00:07:18,718 --> 00:07:22,719

These books were important because the priests believed that history repeats itself.

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00:07:22,719 --> 00:07:26,719

Carefully recorded events were for them a guide to the future.

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00:07:29,720 --> 00:07:32,720

The Mayan written language is still largely undecypered.

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00:07:33,720 --> 00:07:37,721

One day it might provide answers to some puzzling questions.

63

00:07:38,721 --> 00:07:44,721

This toy crocodile is evidence that the wheel was known to the early Mayans, but they made no practical use of it.

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00:07:45,722 --> 00:07:46,722

Why?

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00:07:47,722 --> 00:07:51,722

The priest scientist directed the building of an elaborate road system.

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00:07:52,722 --> 00:07:56,723

The longest cuts an absolutely straight line 62 miles through the jungle.

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00:07:57,723 --> 00:08:04,724

One wonders about the spiritual motivation behind the construction of this complex network linking sacred cities.

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00:08:08,724 --> 00:08:13,725

One road ends at Uxmal, the oldest Mayan city in the Yucatan Peninsula.

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00:08:14,725 --> 00:08:17,725

It can be seen as a colossal monument to one thing.

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00:08:17,725 --> 00:08:18,726

The snake.

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00:08:19,726 --> 00:08:20,726

Al-Urista explains.

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00:08:21,726 --> 00:08:25,726

The basic assumptions are that the Mayan people were not afraid of the city.

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00:08:26,727 --> 00:08:29,727

They were afraid of the universe, about life in the universe.

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00:08:30,727 --> 00:08:33,727

Where that nothing is static on earth.

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00:08:34,727 --> 00:08:37,728

Everything moves and everything that moves has a measure.

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00:08:38,728 --> 00:08:41,728

And everything that has a measure moves in a spiral.

77

00:08:41,728 --> 00:08:43,729

Nothing moves in a straight line.

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00:08:44,729 --> 00:08:47,729

This is the way they conceived energy and that's why they call themselves the Chan clan.

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00:08:48,729 --> 00:08:50,729

Chan simply means snake.

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00:08:56,730 --> 00:08:59,731

In the north, the snake cult reached its greatest power.

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00:09:00,731 --> 00:09:04,731

Symbolized by a new god called Kukukan, the feathered serpent.

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00:09:07,732 --> 00:09:11,732

Mayan folklore holds that Kukukan was a bearded, light-skinned man

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00:09:12,732 --> 00:09:15,732

who brought a renaissance to citadels like Chichen Itza

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00:09:15,732 --> 00:09:19,733

and provided the Mayans with a highly advanced knowledge of engineering and astronomy.

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00:09:20,733 --> 00:09:25,734

From Chichen Itza's observatory, the Mayan priests, it was said,

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00:09:26,734 --> 00:09:29,734

read the future in the patterns of the stars.

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00:09:37,735 --> 00:09:41,736

In ancient times, Chichen Itza was a thriving ceremonial center,

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00:09:42,736 --> 00:09:46,736

a place of pilgrimage where Mayans came to worship and enjoy society.

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00:09:49,737 --> 00:09:54,737

The Mayan priests were careful to attend to their civic responsibilities.

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00:09:55,737 --> 00:09:59,738

They were forever seeking ways to provide spiritual guidance for their subjects.

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00:10:00,738 --> 00:10:04,738

To that end, Kukulkan erected a perfect calendar temple.

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00:10:09,739 --> 00:10:12,739

A pyramid with 364 steps leading up to the temple,

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00:10:13,740 --> 00:10:16,740

which represents the 364th temple of the Mayan priests.

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00:10:16,740 --> 00:10:19,740

It is said that Kukulkan was the first to come to worship the temple,

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00:10:20,740 --> 00:10:23,741

which represents the 365th day of the tropical year.

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00:10:24,741 --> 00:10:27,741

Legend has it that Kukukan understood the power of the snake.

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00:10:28,741 --> 00:10:32,742

He thus translated this power and energy into a recurring architectural phenomenon.

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00:10:33,742 --> 00:10:37,742

Twice a year on the spring and fall equinox at precisely 5 p.m.,

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00:10:38,743 --> 00:10:42,743

the sun reveals a serpent slithering down the temple's balustrade.

100

00:10:43,743 --> 00:10:47,744

Grammatically announcing the end of one seasonal cycle and the beginning of another.

101

00:10:50,744 --> 00:10:53,744

According to legend, the enlightened Kukukan disappears

102

00:10:54,745 --> 00:10:56,745

and black sorcerers come from the north.

103

00:10:57,745 --> 00:11:01,745

At the sacred well, archeologists have dredged up hundreds of human bones.

104

00:11:03,746 --> 00:11:07,746

The Mayans believed that only the most perfect children were pure enough for the gods.

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00:11:08,746 --> 00:11:11,747

Ancient Mayans played the first known team sport in history.

106

00:11:12,747 --> 00:11:14,747

For them, it had terrifying consequences.

107

00:11:15,747 --> 00:11:20,748

It was played by priests on a huge ball court linked astronomically to a map of the heavens.

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00:11:21,748 --> 00:11:27,749

Without using hands or feet, the object was to send a rubber ball through a small ring set high on the wall.

109

00:11:28,749 --> 00:11:33,749

Winning was so rare that victors were rewarded with all the spectator's possessions.

110

00:11:33,749 --> 00:11:36,750

Losing meant that the players were put to death.

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00:11:40,750 --> 00:11:43,750

Then it appears that suddenly the priests left the temples.

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00:11:44,751 --> 00:11:47,751

Did Mayan astronomers see a different age in the stars?

113

00:11:48,751 --> 00:11:50,751

Was it the end of a cosmic cycle?

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00:11:51,751 --> 00:11:53,752

No one knows for sure.

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00:11:54,752 --> 00:11:57,752

But the gods were able to make the most of the world.

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00:11:57,752 --> 00:12:04,753

The answer may be found in an incredible drama played out in an obscure place by men who served a different god.

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00:12:10,754 --> 00:12:15,754

The ancient Mayans abandoned their sacred city as hundreds of years ago.

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00:12:16,754 --> 00:12:19,755

The ancient Mayans were the first to leave the city.

119

00:12:20,755 --> 00:12:22,755

The ancient Mayans were the first to leave the city.

120

00:12:23,755 --> 00:12:30,756

The ancient Mayans abandoned their sacred city as hundreds of years before the arrival of the Spanish in the New World.

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00:12:31,756 --> 00:12:41,758

When the Spaniards came, they were awed by the architectural triumph of Mayan cities and at the same time mystified by the radically different people who had built them.

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00:12:43,758 --> 00:12:48,758

The coming of the Spanish friars cemented the Spanish conquest of the Yucatan.

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00:12:52,759 --> 00:12:58,760

The conquistadores came to battle foreign soldiers. The friars came to battle foreign gods.

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00:13:05,760 --> 00:13:13,761

Gathering up all the Mayan archives, all the chronicles of this ancient wisdom, the friars came together at money.

125

00:13:14,762 --> 00:13:16,762

Alerista laments the occasion.

126

00:13:17,762 --> 00:13:26,763

The Mayan books were burned during the conquest by the religious zeal of the Christians led by Bishop Landa.

127

00:13:27,763 --> 00:13:34,764

This is a terrible catastrophe given the fact that the Mayans constitute the oldest civilization in the world.

128

00:13:34,764 --> 00:13:48,766

It's interesting to note that that religious seal, that antagonism against Mayan's knowledge was sourced in the Mayan youth of the snake.

129

00:13:49,766 --> 00:14:01,767

The Christians associated the snake with the devil and seeing that the Mayans had the snake in every single one of their sculptures, in every single one of their halls, in their clothing, in their jewelry.

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00:14:01,767 --> 00:14:12,769

They concluded that these people were children of the devil and that any information or knowledge associated with these people was obviously the knowledge of the devil that had to be destroyed.

131

00:14:12,769 --> 00:14:31,771

Now the conquest was utter and complete. The destruction of Mayan knowledge was ruthless and would forever frustrate scholars by its loss.

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00:14:32,771 --> 00:14:42,772

If there was ever a key to the mysterious hieroglyphic writing, it is gone and we are left to speculate about the strange disappearance of this remarkable civilization.

133

00:14:47,773 --> 00:14:57,774

Some scholars have suggested that the Mayan leadership was decimated by malaria and yellow fever. Yet these diseases seem to have been unknown in ancient times.

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00:14:58,774 --> 00:15:06,775

Others contend that the priests were cast out by rebellious elements within the empire, but there is no archaeological evidence to support that conclusion.

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00:15:07,775 --> 00:15:16,776

Another possible explanation is that the Mayans moved to escape a natural catastrophe, perhaps an earthquake. The area is known for them.

136

00:15:17,776 --> 00:15:34,779

Guatemala City sits on a 40 million year old fault. On February 4th, 1976, at 3.04 a.m., the earth shook with such a violence that it resulted in one of the worst disasters to ever hit the Western Hemisphere.

137

00:15:35,779 --> 00:15:47,780

90 times stronger than the quake that leveled Managua Nicaragua in 1972, it was felt along a 2,000 mile strip of Central America, right through the heart of the ancient Mayan world.

138

00:15:48,780 --> 00:15:58,781

The quake fractured the land, reducing a great city to rubble. It destroyed 20% of all buildings

and left more than a million homeless.

139

00:16:05,782 --> 00:16:19,784

In the end, 23,000 died. Yet even with such a history of earthquakes, people do not seem to have been discouraged from building and settling along this ancient fault line.

140

00:16:22,784 --> 00:16:30,785

Some believe that the Mayans abandoned their land because of crop failure. They simply depleted the soil and had to move on.

141

00:16:31,785 --> 00:16:46,787

For thousands of years, Mayan peasants have been beating back the jungle, burning out cornfields. Even today, corn makes up 80% of the Mayan diet. Crop failure is a horrendous disaster.

142

00:16:47,787 --> 00:16:54,788

But Alarista is unconvinced. He dismisses such easy explanations as earthquake and crop failure.

143

00:16:54,788 --> 00:17:02,789

The pre-scientists were able to predict earthquakes as well as the kind of weather conditions that would be propitious for a specific kernel of corn.

144

00:17:03,789 --> 00:17:10,790

And there were 28 kernels of corn developed for specific weather conditions.

145

00:17:11,790 --> 00:17:23,792

These people had developed a socialist, a communistic society where everything that was raised by the people was distributed to the people according to their needs.

146

00:17:24,792 --> 00:17:39,794

Others have suggested that changing climate could account for the sudden disappearance of the ancient Mayans. Alarista also believes this unlikely.

147

00:17:40,794 --> 00:17:54,796

They also use psychic energy in order to attract clouds in the event of drought so that the idea of rain dance is not really a very far out idea if you understand it in terms of psychic energy.

148

00:17:55,796 --> 00:18:14,798

The Mayans had a very good reason for building their pyramids on these energy grids because this enabled them to awaken psychic energy within initiates that came to these art centers.

149

00:18:15,798 --> 00:18:22,799

The Maya inside disappeared mysteriously but they did not leave the earth.

150

00:18:23,799 --> 00:18:30,800

They simply concluded a cycle of civilization and took off to the east.

151

00:18:31,800 --> 00:18:42,801

The journey to the east starts right here in the peninsula of Yucatán. It is from this peninsula that they cross the sea, stop in Egypt into the Red Sea, go up towards Amnival.

152

00:18:42,801 --> 00:18:48,802

It was there that they started their second cycle of civilization.

153

00:18:56,803 --> 00:19:06,804

One of the colonies of the Maya Isaias was to be found at the foot of the Dead Sea where the monastery of the Essenes was located.

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00:19:06,804 --> 00:19:11,805

It was there that Jesus learned about the philosophy of the world.

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00:19:11,805 --> 00:19:14,805

Alarista offers a startling conclusion.

156

00:19:15,805 --> 00:19:28,807

The last words of Christ on the cross were not Aramaic words. They were stylized Mayan words and

they did not mean, oh God, why have I forsaken me?

157

00:19:28,807 --> 00:19:33,808

They meant, at last I sink in the dawn of your presence.

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00:19:36,808 --> 00:19:45,809

Today little survives of the old practices and beliefs.

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00:19:45,809 --> 00:19:54,810

For a civilization once first among all those in the world, there remains only ruins and a cave, an ancient house of worship.

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00:19:54,810 --> 00:19:59,811

A priestly knowledge contained is lost, forgotten.

161

00:20:06,812 --> 00:20:23,814

Perhaps the ancient Mayans anticipated this when they wrote long ago, all moons, all years, all days, all winds take their course and pass away.

162

00:20:24,814 --> 00:20:36,815

The ancient Mayans, men of knowledge, conceived their time on earth, their cycle of civilization to

be 5,200 years.

163

00:20:36,815 --> 00:20:51,817

Beginning their calendar August 12, 3113 BC, they predicted that on December 24, 2011 AD, a cataclysmic earthquake would terminate their cycle of civilization.

164

00:20:52,817 --> 00:20:59,818

New men of knowledge would then appear to fight the forces of evil and lead the people to create a world government.

165

00:21:01,818 --> 00:21:10,819

If the Mayan men of knowledge were right, in just 34 years we may learn the answers to some of the ancient Mayan mysteries.

166

00:21:21,821 --> 00:21:28,822

The past in search of continues with an investigation of why Montezuma surrendered the Aztec Empire to Cortez.

167

00:21:28,822 --> 00:21:34,822

Then 20th century with Mike Wallace traces the life of the Kennedys from Camelot to Chappaquidde.

168

00:21:34,822 --> 00:21:43,823

And later tonight, Histories Mysteries investigates the enduring mystery of Britain's great Stonehenge, here on the History Channel where the past comes alive.