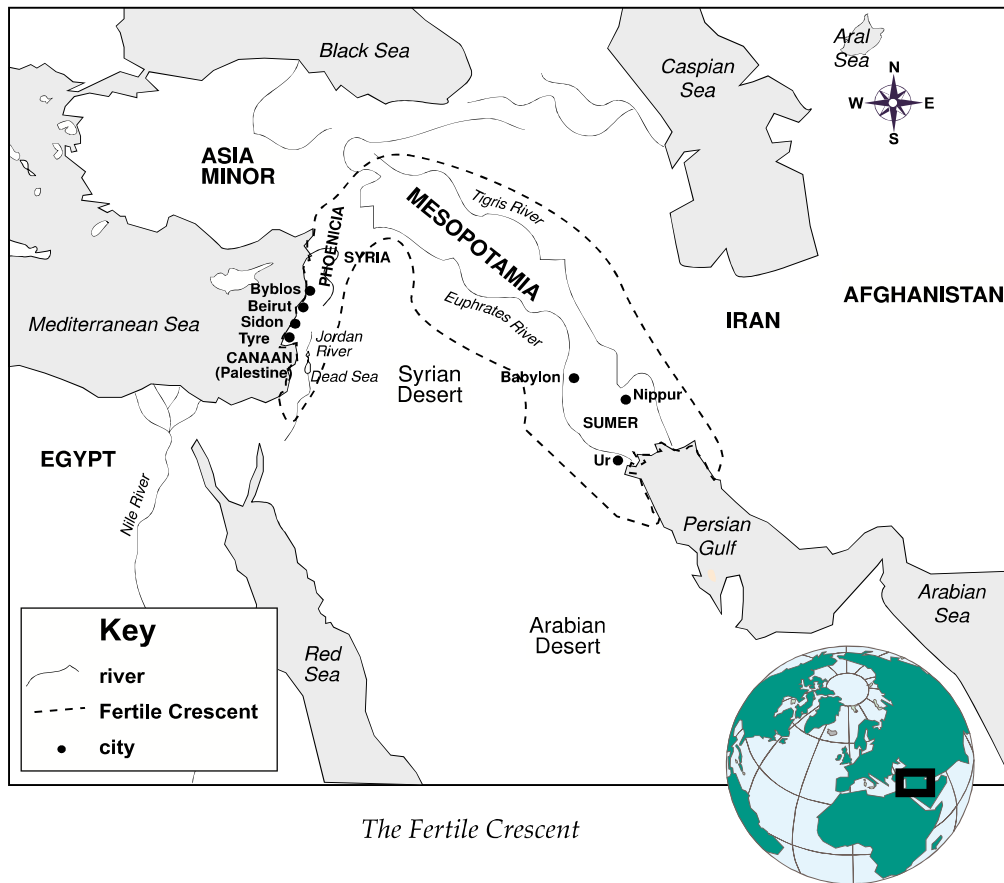


## Early Civilizations in the Fertile Crescent (3500 B.C.-539 B.C.)

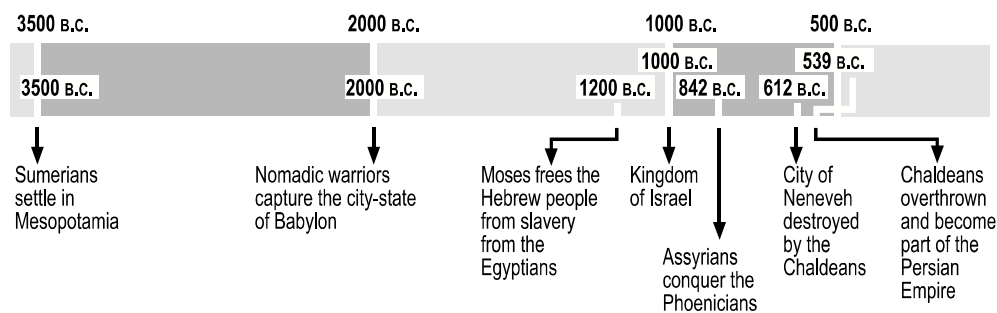
### The Middle East

While the Egyptian civilization was developing in northeastern Africa, other civilizations were settling in an area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Southwest Asia. **Mesopotamia**, the *land between the rivers*, is a region of the Middle East where the first great civilizations developed. Mesopotamia was also part of the **Fertile Crescent**. The Fertile Crescent is an area of land that stretched from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. It was called the Fertile Crescent because of its rich soil and half-moon shape. This land provides the best farming in Southwest Asia.



In the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent, the Mesopotamian valley provided fertile soil and an abundant supply of water from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The waters of these rivers, along with the fertile soil, encouraged people to settle and to farm. The settlers of this region built dikes to control floods and canals to irrigate their farms. The Tigris-Euphrates rivers flooded Mesopotamia at least once a year. As the floodwaters receded, they left behind a thick layer of mud called **silt**. This soil allowed farmers to plant and harvest large amounts of grain.

### Timeline of Early Civilizations in the Fertile Crescent



## Peoples of Early Mesopotamia

### Sumer and Its People

The earliest people of the Fertile Crescent were the Sumerians. At about 3500 B.C., the people called *Sumerians* settled in the southern part of Mesopotamia in the region called Sumer. The Sumerians built many large **city-states** along the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers. Even though these cities shared the same culture, they developed their own independent governments. Each city-state had its own ruler who ruled the city and the surrounding farmland. The Sumerian city-states acted very much like independent countries today. The people believed that each city-state belonged to a god or gods. The priests managed the gods' land and interpreted the will of the gods for the people.

Sumer's city-states grew wealthy and powerful from surplus food produced on their farms. The city-states traded with each other and with the peoples of other cultures exchanging extra food and other goods for goods that they needed. As contact with the outside world continued, the Sumerians came into contact with other peoples and their ideas. The Sumerians adopted the ideas and beliefs from neighboring cultures. The process of spreading new ideas from one culture to another is called **cultural diffusion**.



## Sumerian Culture

The Sumerian culture was as advanced as Egyptian culture. As their civilization progressed, great differences between groups in their society began to develop. This was the beginning of what is called *social classes*. At the top were the priests and kings. Wealthy merchants were next. The majority of Sumerians worked in the fields as farmers or as **artisans** and craftsmen. At the lowest level of Sumerian society were the slaves. Some of the slaves were foreigners captured in war. Other slaves were Sumerians sold into slavery to pay the debts of their family.

### Social Classes of Sumerian Culture

- |                       |                                    |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| • priest and kings    | <i>highest social class</i>        |
| • wealthy merchants   | <i>second highest social class</i> |
| • farmers or artisans | <i>majority of society</i>         |
| • slaves              | <i>lowest level of society</i>     |

## Sumerian Religion

The Sumerians, like the Egyptians, were **polytheistic**. They believed in many gods. Sumerians described their gods as having human qualities and personalities. They believed that their gods were immortal and all-powerful. Their gods were identified with the forces of nature. The Sumerians believed that disasters, like floods or **famine**, were the result of the gods being angry. In each city, they built large pyramid-shaped temples known as **ziggurats**, which means *mountain of god*. These temples contained storage areas for grains, precious gems, and woven cloth, all offerings to the city-state's god.

Temple priests acted as go-betweens with the gods. They made daily animal sacrifices to their gods to keep them happy. The Sumerians worked hard to earn their gods' protection throughout their life. They believed that the success of their crops depended upon the blessings of the gods.

Although the Sumerian people believed in an afterlife, they did not believe that it was a reward for living well. An **epic** or long poem describing the deeds of legendary heroes called *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, was one of the world's earliest written works. This epic contains the religious beliefs of the Sumerian people. The story about creation as well as stories about key figures in Sumerian history are very similar to stories found in the Old Testament.

## Sumerian Contributions to Civilizations

### Writing

The Sumerians developed a writing system that looked very different from the Egyptian writing. Their system was known as **cuneiform** writing. Sumerian **scribes** or record-keepers used a sharp-pointed instrument called a **stylus** to make wedge-shaped markings on soft clay tablets. These clay tablets were then allowed to dry until they were hard or baked. The Sumerian alphabet consisted of over 600 characters or shapes. Cuneiform tablets contained some of the oldest written records of scientific knowledge. One of the first known maps was made on a clay tablet. Archeologists have found whole libraries of cuneiform tablets among Sumerian ruins.

#### Examples of Cuneiform Writing



cuneiform M



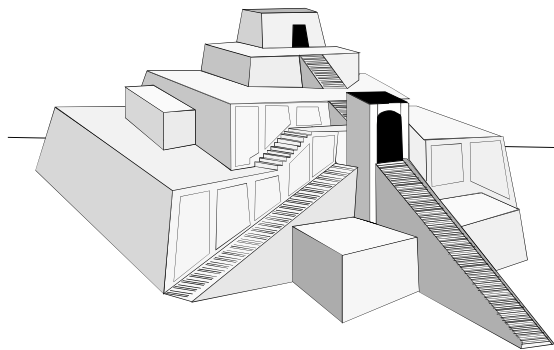
cuneiform H



cuneiform J

### Architecture, Engineering, and Science

While the Egyptians used large stones to build their temples and pyramids, the Sumerians used sun-dried bricks. The Sumerians invented the arch and built temple towers, or ziggurats. A ziggurat was a pyramid-like structure that was built in layers, each one smaller than the one below. It had stair-step floors that were usually seven stories. The highest was a shrine to the chief god.



*a drawing of a ziggurat*

Many of the Sumerians' ideas were a result of the need to solve their daily problems. Because of the threat of frequent floods or invasion, they had to erect dikes, plan irrigation systems, and build city walls. These practical needs meant that they needed to know about mathematics, including geometry. In mathematics, they developed a number system based on the unit 60. Today we use this unit in measuring time. They also developed a lunar calendar with 12 months.

### **Sumer's Successors**

From 3000 B.C to 2000 B.C., the city-states of Sumer were constantly at war with one another. The constant warfare weakened them and made them easy to conquer. Sargon I of Akkad, a city-state north of Sumer, defeated the city-states of Sumer in 2350 B.C. The Akkadians, as they were known, adopted much of the Sumerian culture and helped to spread that culture farther beyond the Tigris-Euphrates Valley.

Sargon created the world's first empire. An empire unites peoples from different cultures under one ruler. Sargon created an empire that lasted for 200 years. At its height, his empire extended from the Mediterranean coast in the west to present-day Iran in the east. Although the Sumerians had an advanced culture, their civilization was eventually attacked and conquered by the Babylonians.

## The Babylonians

In about 2000 B.C., a group of nomadic warriors from the Arabian Desert invaded Mesopotamia and captured the city-state of Babylon on the Euphrates River. The king of Babylon, Hammurabi, conquered both Akkad and Sumer. His empire stretched from the Persian Gulf northward through Mesopotamia. He established the Babylonian Empire. The Babylonians adopted and built upon the existing Sumerian culture. One of the most important things they adopted was cuneiform, the Sumerian system of writing with wedge-shaped symbols. Babylonian scribes wrote many new texts and recopied many Sumerian texts. From the supply of tablets that have been preserved, archeologists have been able to learn about the Babylonian culture.



*an ancient Babylonian toast*

### Babylonian Culture

Like the Sumerians, the Babylonians were farmers and traders. They traded with other parts of the Fertile Crescent, with Egypt, and with India and China. Their social classes were similar to the Sumerians. The upper classes were made up of priests, nobles, and government officials. A middle class included merchants, farmers, and artisans. Slaves made up the lowest class.

#### Social Classes of Babylonian Culture

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| • priest, nobles, and government officials | <i>upper class</i>             |
| • merchants, farmers, and artisans         | <i>middle class</i>            |
| • slaves                                   | <i>lowest level of society</i> |

### Babylonian Religion

The Babylonians adopted many of the Sumerian religious ideas. They were polytheistic and worshiped many gods. Marduk, god of the city of Babylon, was their chief god. They made sacrifices to their gods to improve their harvests and help their business interests. The Babylonian

priests were powerful members of Babylonian society. They used charms and spells to ward off evil spirits. Like the Sumerians, the Babylonians did not believe that an afterlife was a reward for living well.

## Babylonian Contributions to Civilization

### Code of Law

Hammurabi, the king of Babylon, is best known for creating the first system of laws, or rules, which was the *Code of Hammurabi*. This was the first set of laws by a leader designed to protect the citizen. He took what he thought were the best laws from all the lands that he ruled.

Hammurabi put together the collected laws into a code that would be applied to every person in his kingdom. These laws were carved into a block of stone that was seven feet high. This made the code visible to all the people and was a lasting record of the laws of the land.

The code of laws, almost 300 in all, dealt with everything that affected the community, family relations, business, and crime. It stated which actions were considered violations and stated specific punishment for each. Although the code applied to everyone, it set different punishments for rich and poor and for men and women. Crimes of theft and violence were punished harshly, but the punishment depended on one's social class. If an aristocrat committed a crime against a commoner, the aristocrat was punished less severely. Much of Hammurabi's Code of laws was harsh by today's standards.

### Hammurabi's Code

*If a builder has built a house for a man and has not made his work sound so that the house he has made falls down and causes the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death. If it causes the death of the son of the owner of the house, they shall kill the son of that builder.*

*If a man has stolen an ox, a sheep, a pig, or a boat that belonged to a temple or palace, he shall repay thirty times its cost. If it belonged to a private citizen, he shall repay ten times. If the thief cannot pay, he shall be put to death.*

*If a woman hates her husband and says to him "You cannot be with me," the authorities in her district will investigate the case. If she has been chaste and without fault, even though her husband has neglected or*

*belittled her, she will be held innocent and may return to her father's house. If the woman is at fault, she shall be thrown into the river.*

*If a son has struck his father, they shall cut off his hand.*

*If a man has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy, they shall destroy his eye.*

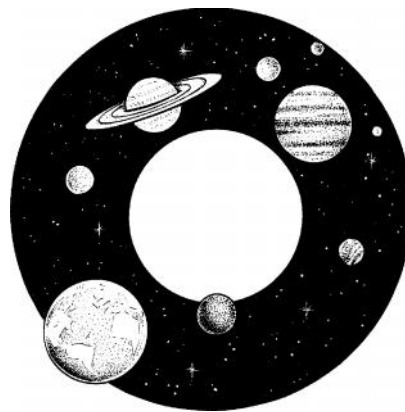
*If a man has knocked out a tooth of a man of his own rank, they shall knock out his tooth.*

*If a man is robbed and the robber is not caught, the governor of the city shall give the victim the value of the stolen goods.*

Hammurabi's Code of laws began the idea that the government had a responsibility for what happened in society. Hammurabi stated that his goal was to cause justice to prevail in the land, and destroy the wicked and the evil, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak and to further the welfare of the people. Hammurabi's Code of laws was a major advance in civilization. He was the first ruler to organize laws into a complete system. His code became the foundation for other legal systems in the future.

## **Astronomy**

The Babylonians believed in astrology, the belief that the movements of the stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies directly affect the lives of people. Through their observations of the heavens, they learned to identify planets and predict eclipses. Eventually, the study of astrology by the Babylonians led to the development of the study of astronomy, the scientific study of the position, motion, and makeup or physical composition of planets and matter in outer space.

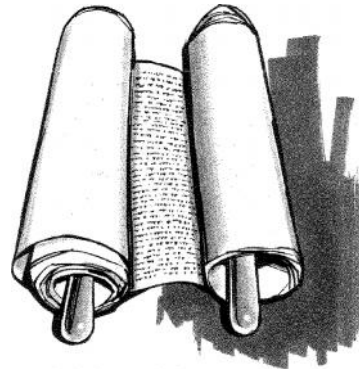


*The Babylonians learned to identify the planets.*

## The Hebrews

### Abraham

The history of the Hebrew people can be traced in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, also known as the **Torah** or the *law*. The principles of social righteousness and justice were handed down in the code of law of the Torah. In the Torah, God chose Abraham to be the father of the Hebrew people. Abraham was a herder and trader who lived in the Mesopotamian city of Ur. According to the Bible, God commanded Abraham to leave his home and move his family to a promised land.



*the Torah*

*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing.*

*Genesis 12:1-2*

The Hebrews believed that God made a **covenant** or an agreement with Abraham. If Abraham and his descendants remained faithful to their God, he would bless and protect them. In about 2000 B.C., at the command of God, Abraham and his family settled in a region known as *Canaan*. Canaan was located in the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It was a land bridge or meeting point between Egypt and the rest of the ancient Middle East. Canaan contained rocky hills and deserts, fertile plains, and grassy slopes. Living as nomads, the Hebrew people herded sheep and goats. They shared this land with several other ancient cultures.

Although the Hebrew people lived among other civilizations, they did not share their polytheistic beliefs. Most ancient civilizations worshipped the local gods and goddesses of their city. They erected statues of their gods and built magnificent temples to honor them. The Hebrew's God was an invisible God. No physical images were made of their God. Because their God did not belong to any one place, the Hebrews could worship their God wherever they went.



## The Belief of the Hebrews—Monotheism

Hebrews believed that their God was an all-powerful God. Not only did God have power over the Hebrews but over people everywhere in the world. The Hebrews were the first people to accept the belief in a single God as the Creator and Supreme Ruler of the Universe. Their God held them to a very high standard of **moral** conduct. People were expected to treat each other justly and accept responsibility for their actions. The rich and powerful were to protect the poor and weak, and all people were equal before God. The Hebrews believed the main concern of religion is **ethics**, and people should listen to an inner voice of conscience and do only what is right and just.

This belief in one God is called **monotheism**. It was in direct contrast to the neighboring ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt that worshipped many gods. The teachings of the Hebrews still exist today as the religion known as *Judaism*. Judaism later became a major world religion. Two other monotheistic religions were influenced by Judaism—Christianity and Islam.

Abraham's grandson Jacob, also known as *Israel*, raised 12 sons in Canaan and each son led a separate family group or tribe. These family groups became known as the 12 tribes of Israel. The Hebrews were also known as the *Israelites*. When a severe drought caused famine in the land, the Hebrews migrated to Egypt. There they prospered as farmers and herders for 400 years. Later the Hebrews were forced into slavery by the pharaoh Ramses II. The Egyptians made life bitter for the Hebrews with hard labor working in the fields or building Egyptian temples.

## The Leadership of Moses

According to the Bible, a great leader named Moses **liberated** or freed the Hebrew people from slavery in the 1200s B.C. They fled from the land of Egypt back toward the Promised Land of Canaan. Their flight from Egypt became known as the *Exodus* or departure. The Bible describes this movement out of Egypt in the Book of Exodus. During the festival of Passover, Hebrews, or Jews as they are called today, recall the story of the Exodus from Egypt.



*Moses leading the Hebrew people to the Promised Land.*





*Moses and the Ten Commandments*

Moses became the lawgiver of the Hebrew people. According to the Torah, Moses climbed up Mount Sinai to pray. It was there that he received two tablets of stone from God on which were written the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments became the basis of the religious laws of the Hebrews. The Ten Commandments were recorded in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. The Hebrews believed that these laws once again affirmed the covenant originally made between God and Abraham. This covenant would continue through the generations. The Ten Commandments required that the Israelites follow a high standard of moral conduct. Hebrew law encouraged fairness and justice and strict rules for behavior.

*I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt,  
out of the house of bondage.*

*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto  
thee a graven image.*

*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.*

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

*Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon  
the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

*Thou shalt not murder.*

*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

*Thou shalt not steal.*

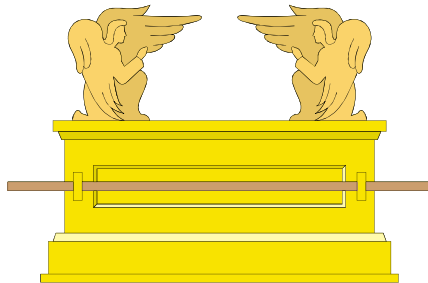
*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*

*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house; thou shalt not covet thy  
neighbour's wife... nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*

*Exodus 20:2-14*

## The Hebrew Kingdoms

After wandering in the desert for more than 40 years, the Hebrews settled in the Promised Land of Canaan. It was there that they set up their first kingdoms. From 1020 B.C. to 922 B.C., the Hebrews united under three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. The New Kingdom was called *Israel*.



*the Ark of the Covenant*

Saul became king after he successfully drove out the Philistines, an enemy of the Hebrew people. David united all the Hebrew tribes and made Jerusalem the capital. Solomon, his son, was the most powerful of all the Hebrew kings. He built a great temple that was the home of the Hebrew's holy treasure, the *Ark of the Covenant*. It contained the tablets of Moses'

law, the Ten Commandments. During his reign, he built a magnificent palace and many other building projects.

These building projects were costly. The people were forced to pay high taxes and spend one month out of every three working on the temple. The people became discontented. After Solomon's death, the Hebrew kingdom divided into two separate kingdoms, with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. For the next 200 years, both kingdoms had periods of prosperity followed by periods of fighting against one another. Eventually their independence would end.

The Assyrians, a people from Mesopotamia, captured Northern Israel in 722 B.C. and Judah in 683 B.C. The two kingdoms were too weak to stop the invasions. As a result of these conquests, the Hebrew people were scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire.

## The Prophets

The Hebrew people had many men and women who were known as **prophets** or messengers of God. These prophets preached to the Hebrew people about obedience to God's law and warned their people of the dangers of breaking God's laws. The Hebrew Bible, the Torah, records the teachings of many prophets as well as the laws and history of the Hebrew people. The wisdom and teachings of prophets as Elijah, Isaiah, Deborah, and Micah are found in the first books of the Bible.

## The Babylonian Captivity

In 586 B.C. the Chaldeans, another Mesopotamian civilization, captured Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's temple. Many Hebrews who were captured were enslaved. They were taken from their homeland to the Chaldean capital city of Babylon. According to the Bible, the Hebrews remained in **exile**, separated from their homeland for many generations.

During this difficult period, prophets such as Jeremiah reminded the Hebrew people not to forget their duties to God and to one another. The prophets helped the Hebrew people to keep their culture and religious identity during their long Babylonian Captivity.

In 539 B.C., the Persians conquered the Chaldeans. The Persian king allowed the Hebrew people to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple. Many returned, but many also remained in Babylon. After the Babylonian exile, the Hebrew people were called *Jews*. Some Jews migrated to other areas in the Middle East. Ever since this time, Jews have existed outside their homeland in many other parts of the world. This has come to be known as the **Diaspora**, a Greek word meaning *scattered*, and stands for the scattering of the Jewish people from their homeland in Palestine after the Babylonian Captivity. As the Jews scattered around the world, they took the Torah with them and spread the teaching of their faith.

## Hebrew Contributions to Civilization

### Concept of One God

Although the armies of several mighty empires conquered the Jews, they made contributions to the world that have continued to this day. The Hebrews were the first to believe in one God. They believed that their God was wise and loving. Their God was also merciful and just. The religion of the Hebrews became important because its beliefs became the basis for later religions, Christianity and Islam.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims all honor Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. They all teach the ethical world view, or proper moral conduct, developed by the Hebrews: to live justly with one another, to share with one's neighbor, and to act with compassion.

## Literature, Law, and Social Justice



*the Ten Commandments*

The ancient Jews made a major contribution to narrative art in the Book of Genesis, Judges, and Samuel and in the tales of the prophets and the Story of Ruth. People throughout the world still accept the Hebrew Bible, including the Ten Commandments, as teaching guides to ethical living.

Other civilizations had codes of law listing crimes and punishments. Hebrew law was the first to make the choice between right and wrong a matter of personal conscience. Almost 3,000 years ago, Jewish prophets spoke of universal peace and brotherhood. This personal sense of right has become a source for Western ideals of social justice.

The ideas of human dignity encouraged a more democratic society. The Jewish emphasis on charity as a duty shaped the growth of modern charitable organizations.

### Division of Time

It is not known exactly how the manmade division of time of seven days equaling one week came into being, but the ancient Hebrews were among the first to use it. The Book of Genesis in the Bible says that the world was created in six days and the seventh day, or the Sabbath, was a day of rest and worship.

The Hebrew calendar was supposed to have started with the Creation, at a moment 3,760 years and three months before the beginning of the Christian era. The Hebrew year is based on the moon, similar to the Sumerian lunar calendar. The Hebrew year normally consists of 12 months which alternate between 30 and 29 days long. Extra months and days are added seven times in a 19-year period to adjust the calendar, just as we systemically adjust our calendars with the addition of one day every four years. The Hebrew calendar is still used today to mark the passage of time and dates of holidays.

## The Phoenicians

From about 1200 B.C. to 800 B.C. the Phoenicians lived and prospered on the Mediterranean coast, north of Palestine. Phoenicia was a narrow area between mountains and the sea. There was little land for farming, but cedar trees were plentiful and could be used for building ships. The Phoenicians became highly skilled shipbuilders, navigators, and seafaring merchants. These merchants and traders became rich and built many great cities.



Phoenician couple

They founded several city-states around the Mediterranean, which often competed with one another. Their chief cities were Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos (see map on page 57). These city-states were located on natural harbors. This location allowed Phoenicia to develop a large merchant trade. They traded throughout the Mediterranean and even traveled to the coasts of Europe and Africa.

Although the Phoenicians traded goods from other lands, such as wine, weapons, valuable metals, ivory, and slaves, their trade centered around three products unique to their area: lumber, glass, and purple dye from a snail native to their coast. The purple dye known as *Tyrian purple* became their trademark. It became a favorite color of royalty. As a seafaring people, the Phoenicians built many colonies throughout the Mediterranean to promote trade. They founded colonies at Sardinia, Sicily, Malta, Cadiz, and Carthage which became the greatest and most important. Many historians believe that the Phoenicians may have sailed around the tip of Africa and to America. The Assyrians in 842 B.C. eventually conquered the Phoenicians, but Phoenician influence was evident for many centuries afterward.

## Phoenician Contributions to Civilization

### The Alphabet

The Phoenicians were known as the *missionaries of civilization* because of their role in spreading the culture and ideas of the civilizations that they came in contact with through trade. As merchants, the Phoenicians needed a system of writing that could quickly and efficiently record their business transactions. They are best known for developing a simple alphabet of 22 letters that replaced the cuneiform alphabet of more than 500 characters.

The Phoenician alphabet was phonetic, meaning that one sign equaled a sound. The word alphabet comes from the first two letters of the Phoenician alphabet: *aleph* and *beth*.

Phoenician		Greek		Modern
𐤀	→	Α	→	A
𐤁	→	Δ	→	D
𐤂	→	Λ	→	L

As they traveled throughout the Mediterranean, they introduced their alphabet to many other cultures. The Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet and changed the form of some of the letters. This simplified alphabet was one of the greatest contributions of the Phoenicians.

## The Assyrians

From the end of Hammurabi's rule in 1750 B.C. until about 900 B.C., Mesopotamia was invaded and ruled by different groups of people. Each new group brought with them their own culture and added it to the culture established by the Babylonians and Sumerians. The Assyrians were a warlike people and quickly built a huge empire. From an earlier people known as the *Hittites*, the Assyrians learned how to use iron to make more powerful weapons. It was much stronger than copper or bronze, metals used by less advanced civilizations. Having learned how to use iron to make spears, swords, and arrows, their well-trained army was successful in battle.

The Assyrian army was divided into foot soldiers, cavalry (soldiers on horseback), and archers with bows and arrows. Each group also had chariots, two-wheeled horse-drawn vehicles. In addition to being armed with iron spears and swords, Assyrian soldiers also wore iron helmets and breastplates. During battle, they used battering rams to break through the city gates. They also terrorized their enemies using cruelty and violence. They beheaded their enemies and made slaves of soldiers conquered in battle.



*Assyrian archer soldiers*



Many feared the Assyrians so much that they chose to pay **tribute**, offerings of gifts or money to the King of Assyria, rather than fight. By 900 B.C. the Assyrians conquered the Fertile Crescent and Egypt and established a great empire. With all the money and taxes collected from its conquered people, the Assyrians were able to build their capital at Nineveh, the showplace of the ancient world.

### Assyrian Government



*Assyrian king*

Assyrian rulers used terror in ruling their subjects. They were cruel and harsh and often crushed any rebellions and **deported** many people from their homeland. King Assurbanipal of Assyria once bragged, "I am Assurbanipal, the Great King, the Mighty King, King of Kings." To govern their empire Assyrians divided it into provinces or small states. A governor who was responsible to the all-powerful king ruled each state or province. The governors collected taxes and enforced the laws of the king. A system of roads was built that allowed trade and military troops to move quickly to any part of the empire. The Assyrian Empire lasted 150

years before being destroyed. After the king's death, it became too difficult to hold such a large empire together. In 612 B.C. the Assyrian city of Nineveh was captured and destroyed by the Chaldeans.

### Assyrian Contributions to Civilization

#### Great Libraries

The Assyrians were great builders. The capital of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh, was a great walled city that became famous as the largest city of its day. Assurbanipal, an Assyrian king, built a great library at Nineveh containing the knowledge and achievements of many of the civilizations in the ancient world.

One of the world's largest libraries, it contained a collection of more than 25,000 clay tablets from throughout the Fertile Crescent. The Assyrians copied and edited many of the literary works of Babylonia. Dictionaries that contained the same words in several languages have helped scholars to better understand Mesopotamian writing and thus the ancient cultures of the Fertile Crescent.

## The Chaldeans

In 616 B.C., the Chaldeans seized control of the city of Babylon. They captured and destroyed Nineveh and overthrew the Assyrian Empire. Many people throughout the Fertile Crescent celebrated the news of Nineveh's destruction.

The Hebrew prophet Nahum said:

*And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee  
Shall flee from thee,  
And say: 'Nineveh is laid waste;  
Who will bemoan her?  
Whence shall I seek comforters for thee?'*

*Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria,  
Thy people are scattered upon the mountains,  
And there is none to gather them.*

*Nahum 3:7, 18*

The Chaldeans then gained control of the entire Fertile Crescent and created what became known as the *Second Babylonian Empire*. One of the greatest Chaldean rulers, King Nebuchadnezzar, expanded the Chaldean Empire as far west as Syria and Canaan. He defeated the Egyptians and captured Jerusalem. Fifteen thousand Jews were captured and sent to Babylon as slaves. The city of Babylon became the Chaldean capital and the center of a new and powerful empire.

Nebuchadnezzar made Babylon the most beautiful city in the ancient world. Walls that were 300 feet high and 80 feet wide enclosed the city. The Chaldean Empire flourished while Nebuchadnezzar ruled. After the king died in 562 B.C., civil wars and weak kings led to the eventual overthrow of the Chaldean Empire. The Book of Daniel in the Bible describes how Babylon was destroyed. A young Hebrew named Daniel told King Belshazzar that the mysterious words written on the wall said that his days were numbered and that his kingdom would be conquered by a mighty empire. In 539 B.C. the Chaldeans were overthrown. The Chaldean Empire became part of the Persian Empire when King Cyrus II seized Babylon.

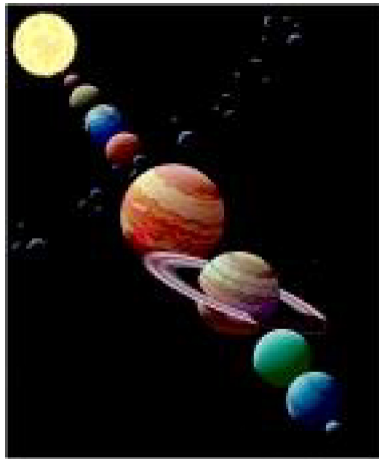


## Chaldean Contributions to Civilization

### Architecture

During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldeans constructed the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (see page 45). According to legend, these lush rooftop gardens were designed and built to please the homesick wife of the king. The king had flowering trees and shrubs planted on terraces that rose 75 feet above the Babylonian plain and were visible from any point in Babylon. These magnificent gardens were watered by a complex system of pumps that pumped water from a nearby river.

### Astronomy

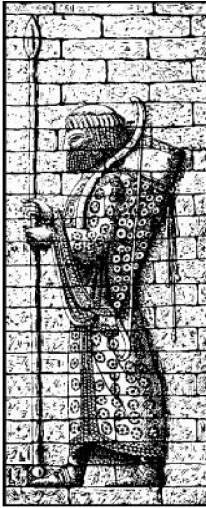


*The Babylonians studied the planets and the phases of the moon and the Chaldeans continued the recording of accurate observations of the heavens.*

The Chaldeans continued the Babylonian practice of recording accurate observations of the heavens. The highest building in the city of Babylon was a 300-foot high ziggurat or temple-tower. Many scholars believe that this temple-tower inspired the story of the Tower of Babel in the Bible. From this temple, the priests studied the movements of the planets and the heavenly bodies. They recorded their observations of the stars and made maps showing the position of the planets and the phases of the moon. The Babylonians also believed in astrology, the belief that the placement of the stars influences a person's life. The Chaldeans, adding to the work of earlier civilizations, contributed to the science of astronomy.

## The Persians

### The Conquests of Cyrus



*Persian warrior relief*

The ancient civilization of the *Persians* originated in the grass plains of central Asia. They eventually migrated to the Middle East. Cyrus, a powerful king, made Persia a mighty empire. He became known as *Cyrus the Great*. His armies conquered an empire that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to Afghanistan and from the Arabian Sea north to the Caspian and Aral seas. He added Northern Mesopotamia, Syria, Canaan, and the Phoenician cities to his empire (see map on page 57). He brought an end to the Jews' Babylonian captivity. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. Under Persian rule, the Jews rebuilt their city and temple and were permitted to practice their religion.

Under later kings, the Persian Empire grew until it stretched from the Nile River of Egypt to the Indus River of India. This was more than 3,000 miles. The Persian Empire was second to none. The Persians ruled more than 50 million people. The empire was so large that it was difficult to govern.

### Darius Expands the Empire

The Persian King Darius I expanded and strengthened the Persian Empire. He appointed **satraps**, or *governors*, to govern each province. To keep an eye on all his officials, Darius hired government inspectors who reported regularly to the king. These inspectors became known as the *eyes* and *ears* of the king. To encourage trade among the people of the empire and improve the movement of soldiers, he built a network of roads. This helped to link his huge empire together and encouraged trade.

Persia was one of the few early civilizations to use a standard currency as a medium of exchange. This made it easier for merchants to do business. For the first time, people no longer had to use the barter system. In the barter system, people had to trade goods for goods in order to trade with each other.

Unlike the Assyrians, the Persians treated the people they conquered fairly. They were tolerant rulers. They did not destroy the cities that they conquered or steal from the people. Conquered peoples could keep their own languages, customs, and religion. The Persians expected that in return, the people that they conquered would pay their taxes and obey Persian laws.

### **The Persians and the Greeks Go to War**

In 499 B.C., Darius went to war with the Greeks living in Ionia in Asia Minor. The Greeks had revolted against Persian rule. When the Ionian Greeks asked the mainland Greeks in Greece to help them, Athens sent warships. King Darius was so angered at the mainland Greeks for helping Ionia that he sent 600 ships and thousands of soldiers to invade Greece. Although the Greeks were outnumbered, they managed to defeat the forces of Darius.

After Darius died, his son Xerxes led the forces of the Persian army in an effort to conquer the Greeks in 480 B.C. His efforts to conquer the Greeks also failed and eventually led to a weakening of the Persian Empire.

### **Persian Religion and Culture**

Of all the Persian's cultural contributions, their religion was the most original. In religion the Persians followed the teachings of a Persian prophet named Zoroaster, who worshiped one god, Ahura Mazda. He taught that human beings had a choice between doing good and doing evil. He saw life as a struggle between the forces of good and evil. Ahura Mazda, the Wise Lord, was the supreme god who stood for truth, goodness, and light. Ahriman was the Evil Spirit that represented darkness. At the end of time, all souls would be judged according to which side they had chosen. Followers of Ahura Mazda would be rewarded by entering paradise. Followers of Ahirman would be sent to a dismal underworld.

Zoroaster's followers considered him to be a prophet. A collection of sacred writings of their religion are found in the sacred book called the *Zend-Avesta*. The teaching of the Persian religion about heaven, hell, and a final judgement are similar to the teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Persians adopted Zoroastrianism as the official religion of the empire.

## Persian Contributions to Civilization

### System of Roads



*ancient Persian pot*

By maintaining their vast empire, the Persians stimulated a cultural exchange among many peoples. The Persians adopted many ideas of the civilizations that they conquered. From the Assyrians, they learned how to subdivide their empire into provinces and to rule their vast empire efficiently. Also like the Assyrians, they continued the practice of connecting their empire with a system of roads which reached all parts of the empire. The Royal Road built by the Persian Empire connected Persia with Asia Minor and thus connected India with Persia for trade so that East met West.

### Money Economy


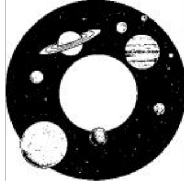



To improve trade, the Persians set up a common system of weights and measures. The Persians also borrowed another idea, the use of coins, from a people known as the *Lydians*. The manufacture and use of metal coins as a medium of exchange promoted trade and made the Persian Empire prosper. Through their tolerance and good government, the Persians brought stability to their empire. They helped to preserve the ideas from earlier civilizations for the future.



*Early Persians coins were made of electrum, a natural mix of gold and silver.*

## Review

Many civilizations developed in the area known as the Fertile Crescent. Their kingdoms were established along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the eastern bank of the Mediterranean Sea. These early civilizations made many contributions that lasted long after their empires were conquered by other mighty empires. The Sumerians of Mesopotamia established the first great civilization. From them came the first writing system and a deep devotion to the gods. Although there were many successive invasions, the ideas of each conquering people were preserved and passed on to other groups.

<b>Contributions of the Fertile Crescent</b>		
<b>Sumerians</b>	 <i>cuneiform writing</i>	<i>cuneiform writing is made up of wedge-shaped symbols which represent an alphabet of about 600 symbols</i>
<b>Babylonians</b>	 <i>astronomy</i>	<i>astronomers knew the positions of planets in relation to the sun and could predict eclipse of the sun and moon</i>
<b>Hebrews</b>	 <i>one God</i>	<i>concept of one God became the basis for later religions, Christianity and Islam</i>
<b>Phoenicians</b>	 <i>alphabet</i>	<i>alphabet contained 22 symbols standing for consonant sounds</i>
<b>Assyrians</b>	<i>a great library</i>	<i>a great library containing the knowledge and achievements of many civilizations of the ancient world</i>
<b>Chaldeans</b>	<i>Hanging Gardens of Babylon</i>	<i>one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World</i>
<b>Persians</b>	 <i>metal coins</i>	<i>manufacture and use of metal coins</i>



*Assyrian hunting wild ox*

The strong military kingdom of Assyria built the beautiful capital of Nineveh and a great library with thousands of clay tablets that contained valuable information about life in ancient Mesopotamia. The Babylonians under their great King Hammurabi gave us the first system of laws and the Hebrews' greatest contribution was the belief in one God.

Their beliefs later became part of two other major religions, Christianity and Islam. Other Hebrew beliefs that had powerful impacts were the ideas of social justice, respect for the law, and the worth of an individual.

The seafaring people known as the Phoenicians helped to spread the culture and ideas of civilizations they came in contact with through trade. They developed a simple alphabet that was adopted by many other civilizations. The Chaldean King Nebuchadnezzar made the city of Babylon a great center of trade and learning. He is also best known for building one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

The Persians built and maintained the largest empire in the Middle East. They connected their vast empire with a system of roads that extended to every corner of their empire. They adopted many ideas of the civilizations that they conquered. They were fair and just in the treatment of the people they conquered, and through their tolerance and good government, the ideas of many civilizations are preserved for us to learn about today.