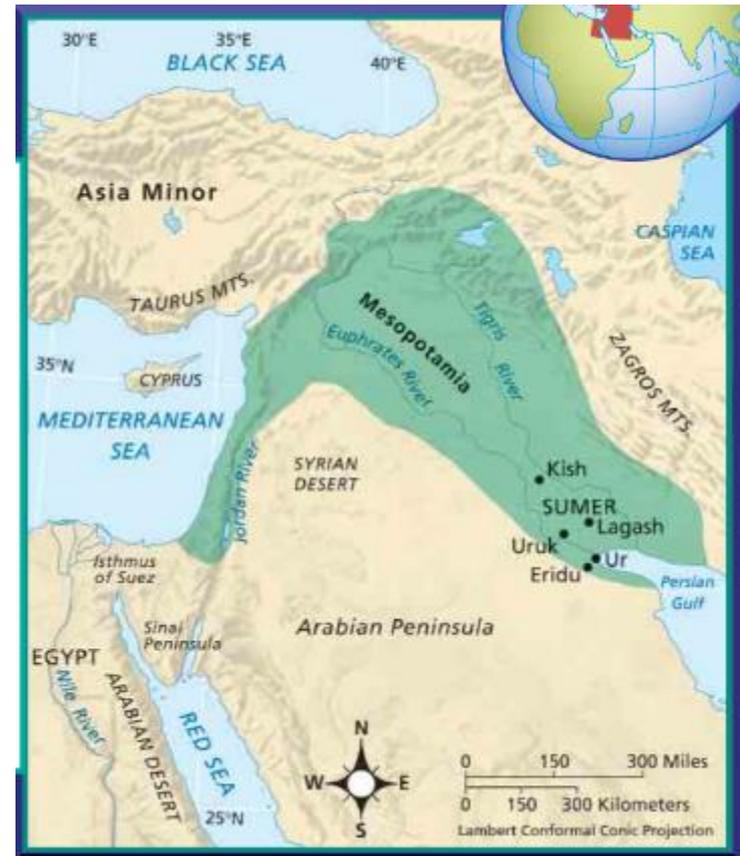


Mesopotamia Civilizations

Activity

1 Sumerians—Background

The Sumerians stand out in history as the first civilization. All the later peoples who lived in this region of the world built upon the innovations of Sumerian civilization. By 3000 B.C., the Sumerians had built a number of cities, each surrounded by fields of barley and wheat. Although these cities shared the same culture, they developed their own governments, each with its own rulers. Each city and the surrounding land it controlled formed a city-state. A city-state functioned much as an independent country does today.



1 Sumer—Politics

Ziggurat

- Def.—A stepped tower in the center of all Sumerian city-states; usually surrounded by a temple
- Inside, the priests and rulers appealed to the gods for the well-being of the city-state
- It was a place of worship, and a city hall



Rulers

- Early rulers were temple priests
- Priests managed the irrigation system and demanded a portion of every farmer's crop as taxes
During wartime the priests did not lead the city. Instead, the men of the city chose a tough fighter who could command the city's soldiers
- After 3000 B.C.E., wars between cities became more and more frequent, so Sumerian priests and people gave commanders permanent control of standing armies

Code of Ur-Nammu

- The oldest known law code surviving today
- It is three centuries older than the Code of Hammurabi
- It is considered remarkably advanced, because it institutes fines of monetary compensation for bodily damage, as opposed to the later 'eye for an eye' principle of Babylonian law
- however, murder, robbery, adultery and rape were capital offenses.

1 Sumer—Religion



Polytheism—belief in more than one god. Like many peoples in the Fertile Crescent, the Sumerians were polytheistic.

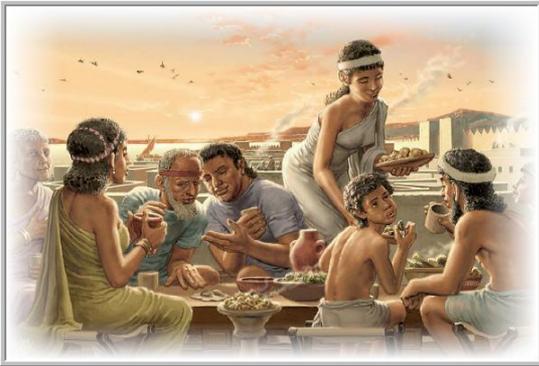
Their gods controlled the various forces in nature

Enlil, the god of storms and air, was among the most powerful gods. Sumerians feared him as “the raging flood that has no rival.”

Sumerians described their gods as doing many of the same things humans do—falling in love, having children, quarreling, and so on. Yet the Sumerians also believed that their gods were both immortal and all-powerful. Humans were nothing but their servants.

At any moment, the mighty anger of the gods might strike, sending a fire, a flood, or an enemy to destroy a city. To keep the gods happy, the Sumerians built impressive ziggurats for them and offered rich sacrifices of animals, food, and wine.

1 Sumer—Society



Kings, priests,
landholders

Wealthy merchants

Farmers and artisans (most of population)

Slaves—Some slaves were foreigners who had been captured in war. Others were Sumerians who had been sold into slavery as children to pay the debts of their poor parents. Debt slaves could hope to eventually buy their freedom.

Gender:

Sumerian women could work as merchants, farmers, or artisans. They could hold property in their own names. Women could also join the priesthood. Some upper-class women did learn to read and write, though Sumer's written records mention few female scribes. However, Sumerian women had more rights than women in many later civilizations.

1 Sumer–Innovations

- Invented the wheel, the sail, and the plow and that they were among the first to use bronze
- Arithmetic and geometry
- Developed a number system in base 60, from which stem the modern units for measuring time (60 seconds = 1 minute) and the 360 degrees of a circle
- Arches, columns, ramps, and the pyramid
- Cuneiform was the Sumerians' system of writing (it was also the first system of writing ever!)



▲ Writing on a soft clay tablet with a reed pen.

2 Babylon—Culture

Division of Labor

- Most Babylonians farmed. They kept domestic animals and grew a wide variety of food crops. They also wove cotton and wool cloth.
- The Babylonians were very active traders. Their merchants exchanged goods with distant parts of the Fertile Crescent and with Egypt and India.

Women

- Babylonian women had some legal and economic rights, including property rights.
- Women could be merchants, traders, or even scribes.
- Yet husbands could divorce their wives, but wives could not divorce their husbands. If a husband was cruel, however, a woman could leave him and take her property with her.

Hammurabi

- The Babylonian Empire reached its peak during the reign of Hammurabi, from 1792 B.C. to 1750 B.C.
- Hammurabi accomplished three things: he made his kingdom secure, unified Mesopotamia, and joined together the Sumerian idea of urban kingship and the concept of tribal chieftain.
- Hammurabi's most enduring legacy is the code of laws he put together.

2 Babylon—Hammurabi's Code

Hammurabi recognized that a single, uniform code of laws would help to unify the diverse groups within his empire. He collected existing rules, judgments, and laws into the Code of Hammurabi. Hammurabi had the code engraved in stone, and copies were placed all over his empire.

The code lists 282 specific laws dealing with everything that affected the community, including family relations, business conduct, and crime. Since many people were merchants, traders, or farmers, for example, many of the laws related to property issues. Additionally, the laws sought to protect women and children from unfair treatment.



The laws tell us a great deal about the Mesopotamians' beliefs and what they valued. Although the code applied to everyone, it set different punishments for rich and poor and for men and women. It frequently applied the principle of retaliation (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) to punish crimes.

2—Babylon Religion

Adopted many Sumerian religious beliefs

Made sacrifices to their gods for favors like good harvests or success in business

Priests foretold the future, so they held

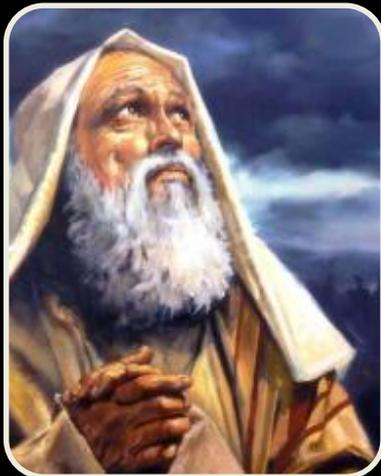
Religious practices focused on rewards on Earth since they did not believe in rewards/punishments in the afterlife great power and wealth

3 Israel—Background



Monotheistic

- They worshipped to only one God
- The Hebrews proclaimed Yahweh as the one and only God.
- Yahweh had power over all peoples, everywhere.
- God was not a physical being, and no physical images were to be made of him.
- The Hebrews asked Yahweh for protection from their enemies, just as other people prayed to their gods to defend them.



Abraham

- God chose Abraham to be the “father” of the Hebrew people.
- Abraham was a shepherd who lived in the city of Ur, in Mesopotamia.
- The Bible tells that God commanded him to move his people to Canaan. Around 1800 B.C., Abraham and his family made their way to Canaan. Then, around 1650 B.C., the descendants of Abraham moved to Egypt. Abraham and his family roamed for many years from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt and back to Canaan. All the while, their God, whose name was Yahweh, watched over them.

3 Israel—The Exodus

In Egypt

Hebrews migrated to Egypt because of a drought and threat of a famine.

At first, the Hebrews were given places of honor in the Egyptian kingdom.

Later, however, they were forced into slavery.

The Exodus

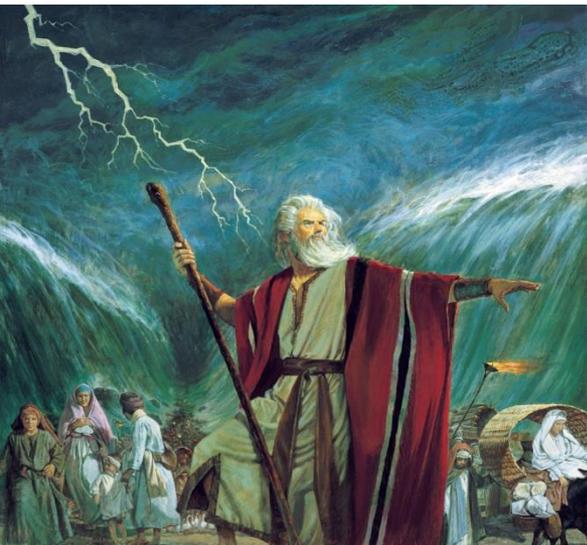
The Hebrews fled Egypt—perhaps between 1300 and 1200 B.C.E. Jews call this event “the Exodus,” and they remember it every year during the festival of Passover.

The man who led the Hebrews out of slavery was named Moses.

40 Years

While the Hebrews were traveling across the Sinai Peninsula, Moses climbed to the top of Mount Sinai to pray. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he brought down two stone tablets on which Yahweh had written the Ten Commandments.

After 40 years of wandering in the desert, they returned to Canaan, where Abraham had lived.



3 Israel—Religious Texts & Laws

Torah

- Def.—First five books of the Hebrew Bible
- Jews/Hebrews consider them the most sacred writings
- Christians respect them as part of the Old Testament of their Bible



10 Commandments

- Def.—part of a code of laws delivered to Moses
- Rules regulating social and religious behavior
- Basis for the civil and religious laws of Judaism
- Similar to Hammurabi’s Code with its attitude of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” However, its strict justice was softened by expressions of God’s mercy.
- This emphasis on right conduct and the worship of one God is called ethical monotheism—a Hebrew idea that has influenced human behavior for thousands of years through Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

3 Israel—Kingdom

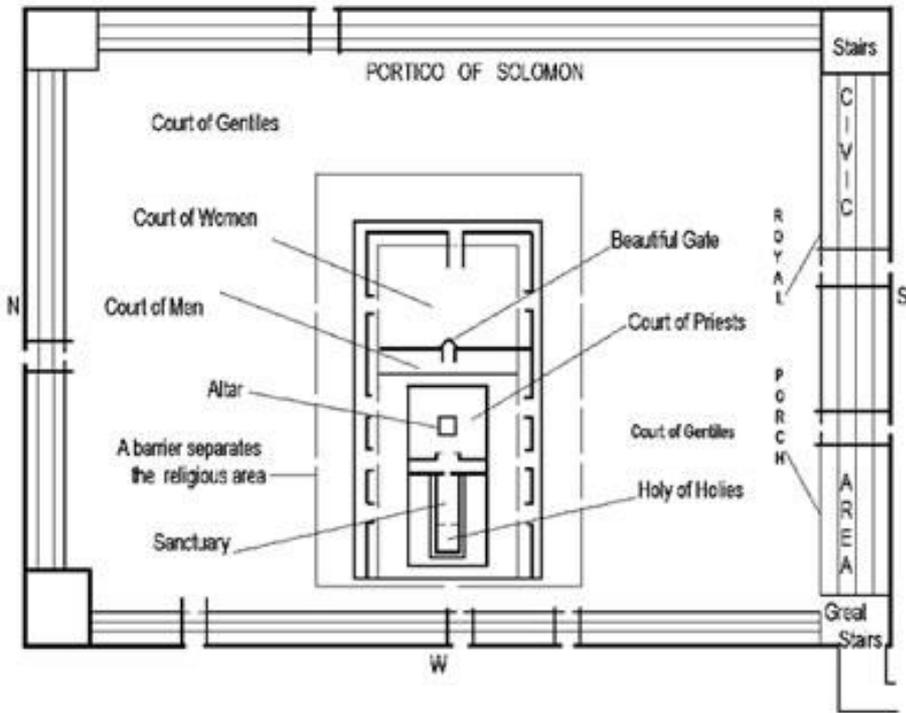
From about 1020 to 922 B.C., the Hebrews united. The new kingdom was called Israel. For 100 years, Israel enjoyed its greatest period of power and independence.

Solomon was the most powerful of the Hebrew kings. He built a trading empire and beautified the capital city of Jerusalem. The crowning achievement of his extensive building program in Jerusalem was a great temple, which he built to glorify God.

The temple was also to be a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of Moses' law. The temple that Solomon built was not large, but it gleamed like a precious gem. Bronze pillars stood at the temple's entrance. The temple was stone on the outside, while its inner walls were made of cedar covered in gold. Solomon also built a royal palace even more costly and more magnificent than the temple.



3 Israel—Temple



Solomon's temple. The colonnaded outer courtyard held an enormous altar for burnt offerings and a large cast metal basin, or Sea, that was supported by 12 metal bulls

