



## ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS (PAGE 1)

---

### Hebrews (~3500 B.C.E.)

Located originally in Mesopotamia, these nomadic people moved throughout the Fertile Crescent. They eventually settled in Canaan (also called Palestine). They were generally not aggressive. However, they did cause problems for other civilizations as they moved through their lands. The Hebrews were *monotheistic*. They believed in one god. Their religious beliefs set them apart from other cultures in the Fertile Crescent. Most of these cultures were *polytheistic*. They believed in many gods. These cultures were threatened by the Hebrews' beliefs.

Like many of the small civilizations of the Fertile Crescent, the Hebrews were repeatedly conquered by larger civilizations. They were first conquered and enslaved by the Egyptians. They were also conquered by the Assyrians. Next they were conquered and held in captivity by the Babylonians. It was the Babylonians who first referred to Hebrews as *Jews* (from their tribe of Judah). When the Persians conquered Babylon they freed the Jews from slavery. They allowed the Jews to return to Palestine. Then the Roman Empire conquered Palestine.



Throughout their history the Hebrews struggled to survive as an independent people. They sustained themselves through their belief that they were God's chosen people. Their experiences when they were conquered and enslaved led the Hebrews to hope for rescue by a messiah or savior. Their beliefs led to a rebellion against Roman rule. Because of this rebellion, the Romans expelled the Jews from their homes. The Jews were dispersed throughout the world. This is known as the *Diaspora*.

---

### Babylonia (2800–1750 B.C.E. and 612 B.C.E.–539 B.C.E.)

Babylonia was the site of the first civilization, Sumer. It was located in the northern part of Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The Sumerians invented the form of writing known as *cuneiform*. The Babylonian ruler Hammurabi used cuneiform symbols to write down the first set of formal laws. This is known as Hammurabi's Code. The Babylonians also wrote the myth of Gilgamesh, about a great flood. Some ancient cuneiform tablets contain tax records. Babylonians studied astronomy. They invented wheeled vehicles. They also built magnificent temples called *ziggurats*. Nebuchadnezzar formed a second Babylonian empire in 612 B.C.E.

---

### Hittites (1900–1200 B.C.E.)

The Hittite civilization began in Anatolia (in what is now Turkey). Eventually their empire stretched almost to Egypt. Egyptian pharaohs often sent their armies into Hittite territory. The Hittites and the Egyptians fought over territory. The two empires finally signed a treaty. Archeologists have discovered the treaty in records of both cultures. The treaties are in almost identical language in both sets of records.

The Hittites were the first to develop iron. They used iron for both tools and weapons. Iron gave them a technological advantage over neighboring tribes. The Hittites also invented the war chariot, which helped them to conquer others.

## ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS (PAGE 2)



### Phoenicia (~11th Century B.C.E.)

The Phoenicians were great sea traders. Their home was on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea near Palestine. They established trade routes and colonies from Carthage in North Africa to Sicily. They explored and traded as far as Spain. Phoenician trade goods included glass and purple dye. They also made papyrus scrolls. The most important and enduring invention of the Phoenicians was the alphabet. Our word *book* comes from the Phoenician town of Byblos.



### Assyria (760-612 B.C.E.)

Assyria was located along the upper Tigris River in the northern part of Mesopotamia. Their territory overlapped that of Babylonia. Assyrians were fierce and effective warriors. Some historians call the Assyrians the “Nazis of the Ancient World.” The Assyrians forged iron weapons. They used these weapons to conquer their enemies. They were much feared by other cultures of the Fertile Crescent. They would attack if they perceived weakness in another civilization. The Babylonians eventually defeated the Assyrians.

The Assyrians designed and built well-planned cities. The Assyrian leader Assurbanipal built one of the first libraries in history. The Assyrians were the first to create laws for the royal household.

### Media (~700-334 B.C.E.)

The Medes were an Indo-European tribe. They lived northwest of the Tigris River near the Caspian Sea. Like many Fertile Crescent cultures, they were conquered by the Assyrians. They were the first people to gain their freedom from the Assyrians. Cyrus the Great, of Persia, defeated the Medes. They became linked with Persia. Historians believe that their language was close to Old Persian. Most of what we know about the Medes comes from records by the Persians. They were known for their wealth in timber. They probably had metal. They were one of the first civilizations to extensively use horses.



### Persia (539-334 B.C.E.)

Persia was located in what is now Iran. At its largest, the Persian Empire stretched from Asia Minor (Turkey) to India. Under the leadership of Cyrus the Great, the Persians defeated the Babylonians. They sometimes fought against the Greeks.

Under the leadership of Darius the Great, the Persians built good roads within their empire. They also developed a trade system that is the basis for all modern trade. They were the first to develop a standardized system of weights and measures for use throughout their empire. They also developed a monetary system based on a standard coinage.