

Who were the Sumerians?

The Sumerians were an ancient people that occupied Sumer, that is, the southern region of Mesopotamia, which is now southern Iraq. It is unclear when the first settlers of the region arrived, but they were a non-Semitic people that historians believe may have come out of the Samarra culture in northern Mesopotamia or Assyria. The Sumerians established many city-states in southern Mesopotamia, and their culture thrived there until around 1700 BC when Babylonia subdued the Sumerians and took control of the region during the reign of Hammurabi, the last Sumerian king.

The Sumerians are credited with creating one of the first forms of writing, cuneiform, which is made of a series of wedge-shaped marks carved into clay with a stylus. The famous Epic of Gilgamesh was written in cuneiform and took archeologists a long time to decipher. Once it was translated, they found the Epic of Gilgamesh to be a heroic story about a Sumerian king. The manuscript describes the daring adventures of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, a wild man who was first created by the gods to fight against Gilgamesh but who befriends him and fights alongside him. The epic also contains a fascinating account of a great flood with many similarities to the Genesis account.

The Sumerians were also the builders of the city-state of Ur and the Ziggurat of Ur, an impressive structure built in the worship of the Sumerian moon deity, Nanna. Archeology suggests that the Sumerians were powerful warriors, skilled at agriculture, architecture, and literature.

The Sumerians farmed the fertile land by the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers, and historians have even classified the Sumerians as “proto-Euphrateans.” The Tigris and the Euphrates are two of four rivers mentioned in Genesis 2:14 that flowed from the Garden

of Eden. Today, these rivers still have a common source, in the mountains of Turkey, from which they flow through Syria and Iraq. That area later became known as the “Fertile Crescent” and the “cradle of civilization” because agriculture flourished there and the peoples of that region developed glass, the wheel, and irrigation techniques.

The Sumerians have a connection with biblical history. In the Bible, Ur is mentioned as the home of Abram, or Abraham, who became the first Hebrew patriarch and later the spiritual father of all those who would have faith in the Lord (Genesis 17:5; Acts 3:25; Romans 4:12, 16). The Bible tells us that Abram was a descendent of Shem (Genesis 11:10-26), so he was a Semite living in Sumer, or southern Mesopotamia, when the Lord spoke to him and told him to leave his family and the land of his fathers and go to a new land (Genesis 12:1). By faith (Hebrews 11:8-9), Abram took his wife, Sarai; his nephew Lot; and all their possessions, and they left their land and traveled to Canaan, which is present-day Lebanon and Israel. Many scholars also see the Bible’s references to “Shinar” in Genesis 10:10 and 11:2 to mean Sumer.