



Chapter 7

New Civilizations and Empires in Western and Central Asia

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Chapter Chronology

.....
1900s B.C.E.

Hebrews leave Mesopotamia
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c. 1250 B.C.E.

Hebrew exodus from Egypt
.....

c. 1000 B.C.E.

Hebrew Kingdom established; Phoenicians develop early alphabet
.....

c. 800 B.C.E.

Assyrian Empire expands; Carthage founded by Phoenicians
.....

722 B.C.E.

Assyrians conquer Samaria
.....

612 B.C.E.

Fall of Nineveh/End of Assyrian Empire
.....

500s B.C.E.

Establishment and expansion of Persian Empire
.....

586–539 B.C.E.

Babylonian Captivity of the Jews
.....

Assyrian Empire (900-612 BCE) (Slide 1 of 2)

Assyrians

- Dominant Semitic people in what is now northern Iraq
- Conquered Tigris-Euphrates region by 800 BCE
- **Nineveh** – chief town
- **Assur** – chief god
- Success due to strong military
 - Tightly-knit, well-armed infantry formations able to withstand chariots
 - Siege machinery
 - Terroristic tactics (enslavement, execution, pillage, rape)



Assyrian Empire (900-612 BCE) (Slide 2 of 2)

- Empire stretched from upper Tigris to central Egypt
 - Divide and conquer policy
 - Governed by network of military commanders
 - Merciless toward rebels
 - Deported many
 - Held hostages to insure good behavior of subject people
- Conquered peoples united under Chaldees and overthrew Assyrians
 - Nineveh destroyed by 612 BCE
- Assurbanipal built largest library of ancient times
 - 20,000 volumes (clay tablets) have been recovered since early 1800s CE

Phoenicians

- Lived along coastal strip (present-day Lebanon)
- Great colonists, traders in luxury wares (copper, dyes)
 - Around Mediterranean and the Atlantic (coast of Britain)
 - Spread art of iron making
- Established colonies throughout western Mediterranean
 - Carthage (800 BCE to 200 BCE)
- Most notable contribution was phonetic alphabet, 1000 BCE
 - System of 22 marks (“letters”)
 - Made literacy accessible to more people
 - Adopted by Greeks who added vowels



Persians

Persia (present-day Iran)

- Situated on a high arid plateau
- Central point on the Silk Road
- **Iranian** nomadic groups emigrated south, 1500-1000 BCE
 - Indo-Europeans, related to Aryans of India
 - Achieved dominance due to cavalry tactics
 - Adopted agricultural, sedentary, civilized life

Achaemenid Persian Empire (Slide 1 of 3)

- Cyrus the Great built empire, 559-530 BCE
 - United Persians in mid-6th c. BCE, overcoming Medes
 - Extended domain from Indus to Mediterranean
 - Cambyses, his son, extended it to Arabia, Egypt
- Main cities included Susa, Persepolis, Ecbatana
- Government showed tolerance toward non-Persian subjects
 - “King of Kings” at Persepolis ruled empire
 - Allowed subjects to keep their customs, laws, religion
 - Emperor delegated authority to Persian supervisors (satraps) ruling provinces (**satrapies**)
 - Local authorities stayed in power, if they remained loyal, paid taxes, and provided conscript soldiers

Achaemenid Persian Empire (Slide 2 of 3)

Zoroastrianism

- Based on teachings of **Zoroaster (Zarathrustra)** found in the **Avesta**
- Ethical monotheistic religion
- Conflict between good and evil
 - Ahuramazda (God) vs. Ahriman (Devil)
 - Ultimate triumph of good
- Human free will
- Judgment Day, heaven and hell
- Importance of the priesthood

Achaemenid Persian Empire (Slide 3 of 3)

Darius I (522-486 BCE)

- Extended empire to greatest size
- Introduced uniform coinage and calendar throughout the Empire
- Adopted advanced law code
- Tried, but failed to conquer Greece (as did his son Xerxes)

Hebrews (Slide 1 of 3)

- Most knowledge of Hebrews comes from the **Tanakh** (Old Testament of **Bible**)
- Story of Abraham leading people from wilderness into the land of Canaan coincides with archaeological evidence of Semitic migrations, 2000 - 1500 BCE
 - Subsequent migration into Nile Valley
 - **Exodus** from Egypt (13th c. BCE) under Moses
 - Eventual return to Canaan
 - Conflicts with Canaanites, Philistines
- King Saul set up kingdom in Canaan with lieutenant and successor, David, c. 1000 BCE
- David conquered Jerusalem – Hebrews' capital city

Hebrews (Slide 2 of 3)

- King Solomon (973-935 BCE)
 - Kingdom served as trading intermediary between Mesopotamians and Egypt
 - Built magnificent, expensive Temple at Jerusalem
- Revolt against Solomon's son split kingdom into Kingdom of Judah and Kingdom of Israel (Samaria)
- First **Diaspora**
 - Assyrians ended Kingdom of Israel, 722 BCE
 - Mass deportation of Ten Lost Tribes
- Judea continued under Assyrians to 612 BCE

Hebrews (Slide 3 of 3)

- Babylonians defeated Judea, 586 BCE
 - Babylonian Captivity, 586-539 BCE
 - Temple demolished
- Persians took over, 539 BCE
 - Tolerant to Hebrews
 - Temple rebuilt
- Alexander the Great conquered the area (330s BCE)



Jewish Religious Belief and its Evolution

- Yahweh (Jehovah) chief deity of the Hebrews became the only god of the Jews
- Jews bound to Yahweh by the Covenant, said to have been given through Moses
 - Faithfulness to it would assure triumph over enemies, prosperity
 - Required adherence to the Ten Commandments
- Judaism and Zoroastrianism are earliest attempts to link ethics and worship
 - Yahweh as enforcer of correct ethical actions
 - Evil would be punished

Economic Change

- Jews were mostly minor players in economic affairs, politics
 - Division into two kingdoms weakened both
 - Frequent, expensive wars followed
- Made transition from nomadic herders (Abraham, Saul) to town life
- Social tension between rich and poor appeared
 - Prophets of 700s-400s BCE repeatedly called for “social justice”

Social Customs

- Yahweh, a male deity
- Women
 - Marriage, divorce reflected patriarchy
 - Male polygamy allowed
 - Wife married into husband's family, moved into his house
 - Retained separate property rights
 - Divorce easy for husband, unusual for wife
 - Adultery defined by marital status of the woman
- Children the key reason for marriage
 - Boys shared inheritance, girls did not
 - Education carried out within family

A Changing Theology (Slide 1 of 3)

- Concept of Yahweh changed over time
- Long spiritual crisis during Babylonian Captivity
 - Hope for triumph over enemies NOT realized
- New interpretation of the Covenant (the Talmud)
 - Not only was Yahweh the only god, He was the universal god of all
 - He was just and merciful, omnipotent and omniscient
- Granted Man free will, thus allowing principle of evil to appear
 - Last Judgment concept

A Changing Theology (Slide 2 of 3)

- Yahweh became a PERSONAL deity
 - Could be prayed to directly
 - Actions were not impulsive or unpredictable
 - Relationship between God and Man is meant to be one of mutual love
- Some expected a **messiah**, a redeemer
 - Belief in a king from the line of David who would redeem the Jews from captivity and restore the Kingdom of Israel
 - Disbelief in Jesus because he spoke of a kingdom “not of this earth”

A Changing Theology (Slide 3 of 3)

- **Zealots**, expecting a powerful messiah to liberate Israel, were unwilling to bend before any nonbeliever
- Tension between Jewish nation and Roman overlords
 - Zealots rebelled against Romans
 - Their defeat led to the 2nd Diaspora
- Hebrews held belief in their identity as the Chosen People
- Relationship between the deity and his creations:
 - Mutually dependent, ethical, and just
 - Merciful on the Lord's side; submissive but not slavish on Man's side
 - Basis for the evolution of Christianity

Summary

Key Empires of the first millennium BCE included

- Assyrians-with their efficient but brutal military
- Phoenicians-known for the invention of the Alphabet
- Persian Empire-who brought peace and progress to much of the Near East
- Rise of ethical monotheism: Zoroastrianism and Judaism