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*"In thy seed shall all the nations
of the earth be blessed."*

EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

I. Mesopotamia

- A. Sumerian Civilization
- B. Amorite Civilization

II. Egypt

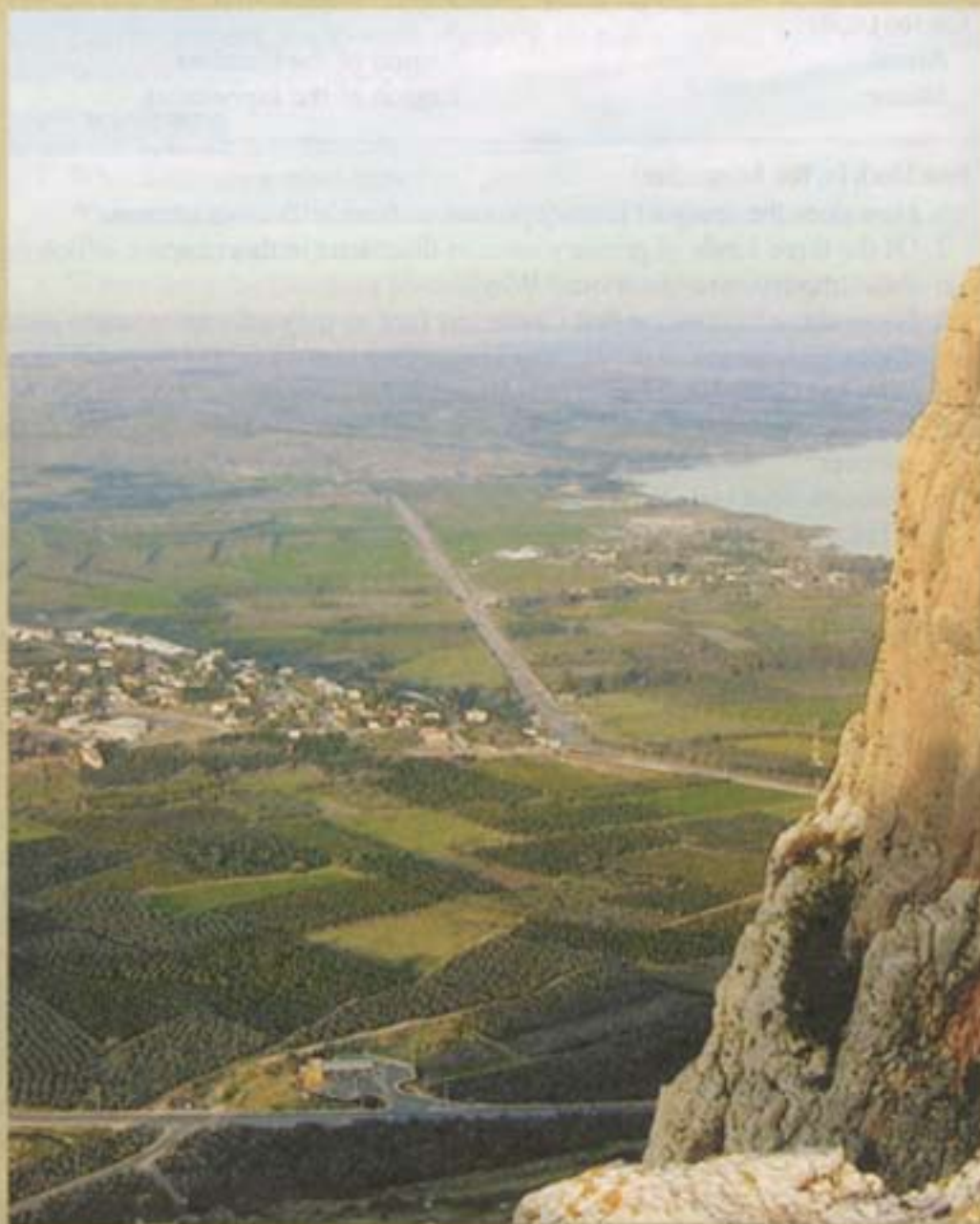
- A. The Land
- B. The History
- C. The Culture

III. Land of Canaan

- A. The Hittites
- B. The Phoenicians
- C. The Arameans
- D. The Hebrews

IV. Near Eastern Empires

- A. The Assyrian Empire
- B. The Chaldean Empire
- C. The Persian Empire



The Plain of Genneseret below the Arbel Cliffs

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Psalm 1:1-3

It is no coincidence that the psalmist compares the life of a godly man to a tree planted on a riverbank. To the people of the ancient world, rivers were the source of life. It was along riverbanks that civilization began anew after the Flood. This chapter highlights development of the early Middle Eastern and Egyptian civilizations and God's work in their midst.



Karnak temple ruins

I. Mesopotamia

After God scattered the nations at the Tower of Babel, many of the descendants of Ham and Shem remained and settled in the fertile region of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Gen. 10: 6-32). Later the Greeks described this region with the word *Mesopotamia* (MES uh puh TAY mee uh), meaning the "land between the rivers." By about 3000 BC the people in the southern part of this area had established the Sumerian civilization.

Sumerian Civilization

Sumer consisted of about a dozen independent city-states that had no political unity but possessed a similar culture. The cities fought constantly among themselves, each trying to gain dominance over the others. The Sumerians believed that their cities belonged to the gods. For this reason the temple was not only a place of worship but also the center of education, government, and trade. Each city had its own ruler, usually a priest, who acted as the representative of the gods.

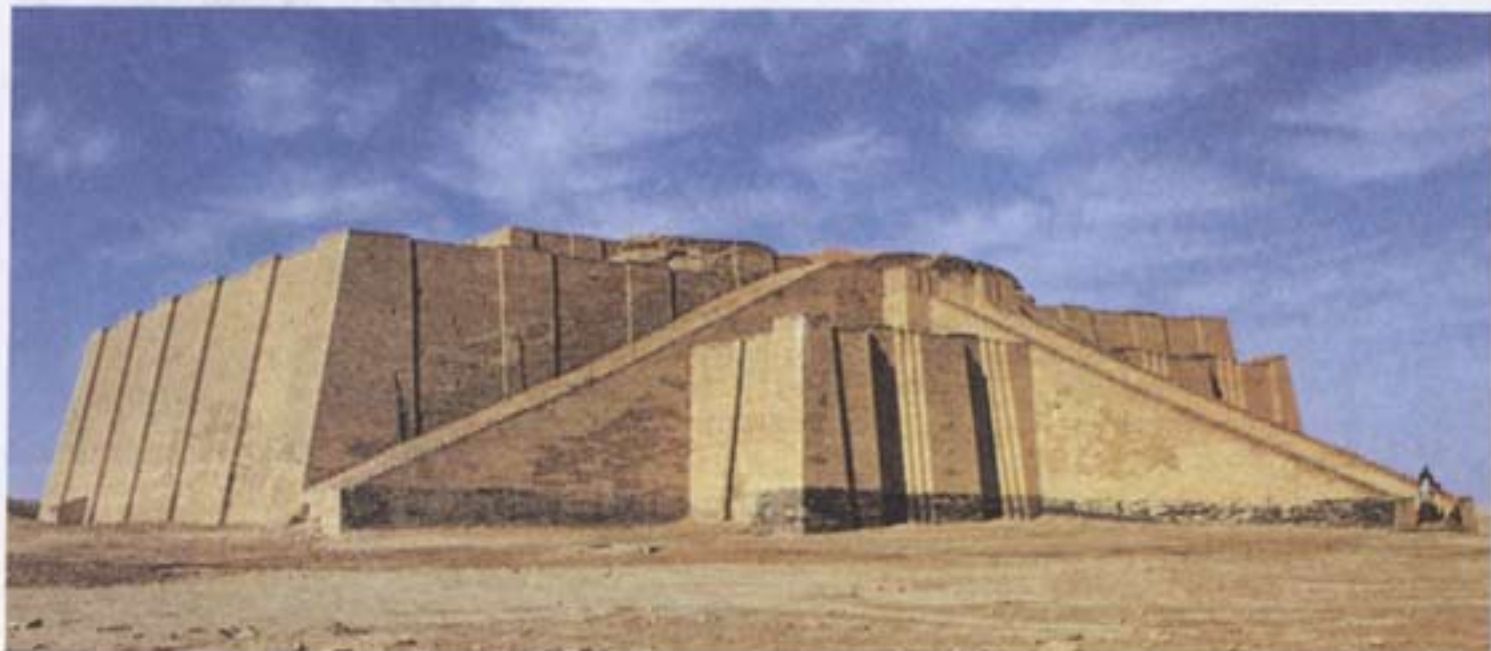
The Sumerians' religion was a clear rejection of the one true God. They, along with almost all other civilizations until the coming of Christ, were committed to **polytheism** (belief in many gods). The fact that they were polytheistic, though historically near to the Flood and the witness of Noah, testifies to the truth of Romans 1:20-21: "The invisible things of [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made . . . so that they are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations." False religion is not motivated by a desire to find and know the true God. It is an attempt to hide from the testimony to this God, found everywhere in this world.

Cuneiform

Much of what we know about Sumer has come from the discovery of thousands of clay tablets bearing **cuneiform** (KYOO nee uh FORM), the earliest known form of writing. Using a wedge-shaped stylus (a split reed), the Sumerians made impressions on tablets of wet clay, which they later baked until hard. They could express ideas by the manner in which they arranged these wedge-shaped impressions. Young men learned this complex writing in a formal educational system. Professors were called "school-fathers," and the students were called "school-sons." Sumerian boys also studied the Sumerian numerical system—a system based not upon ten like ours today, but on the number sixty.

An Account of a Sumerian Schoolboy

I recited my tablet, ate my lunch, prepared my (new) tablet, wrote it, finished it. . . . When school was dismissed, I went home, entered the house, and found my father sitting there. I told my father of my written work, then recited my tablet to him, and my father was delighted. . . . When I awoke early in the morning, I faced my mother and said to her: "Give me my lunch, I want to go to school." My mother gave me two "rolls" and I set out. . . . In school the monitor in charge said to me, "Why are you late?" Afraid and with pounding heart, I entered before my teacher and made a respectful curtsy.'



A reconstructed ziggurat at Ur

Farming and Architecture

The major occupation of the Sumerians was farming. They built an elaborate network of canals and dikes to provide irrigation for their crops. Although agriculture was the basis of their economy, the people lived in fortified cities. They built their homes and public buildings with baked clay bricks. The most outstanding examples of Sumerian architecture are the temple towers called **ziggurats** (ZIG uh RATS). These impressive pyramidlike structures had terraces at different levels along their exterior. The bricks used in these buildings were often glazed in different colors.

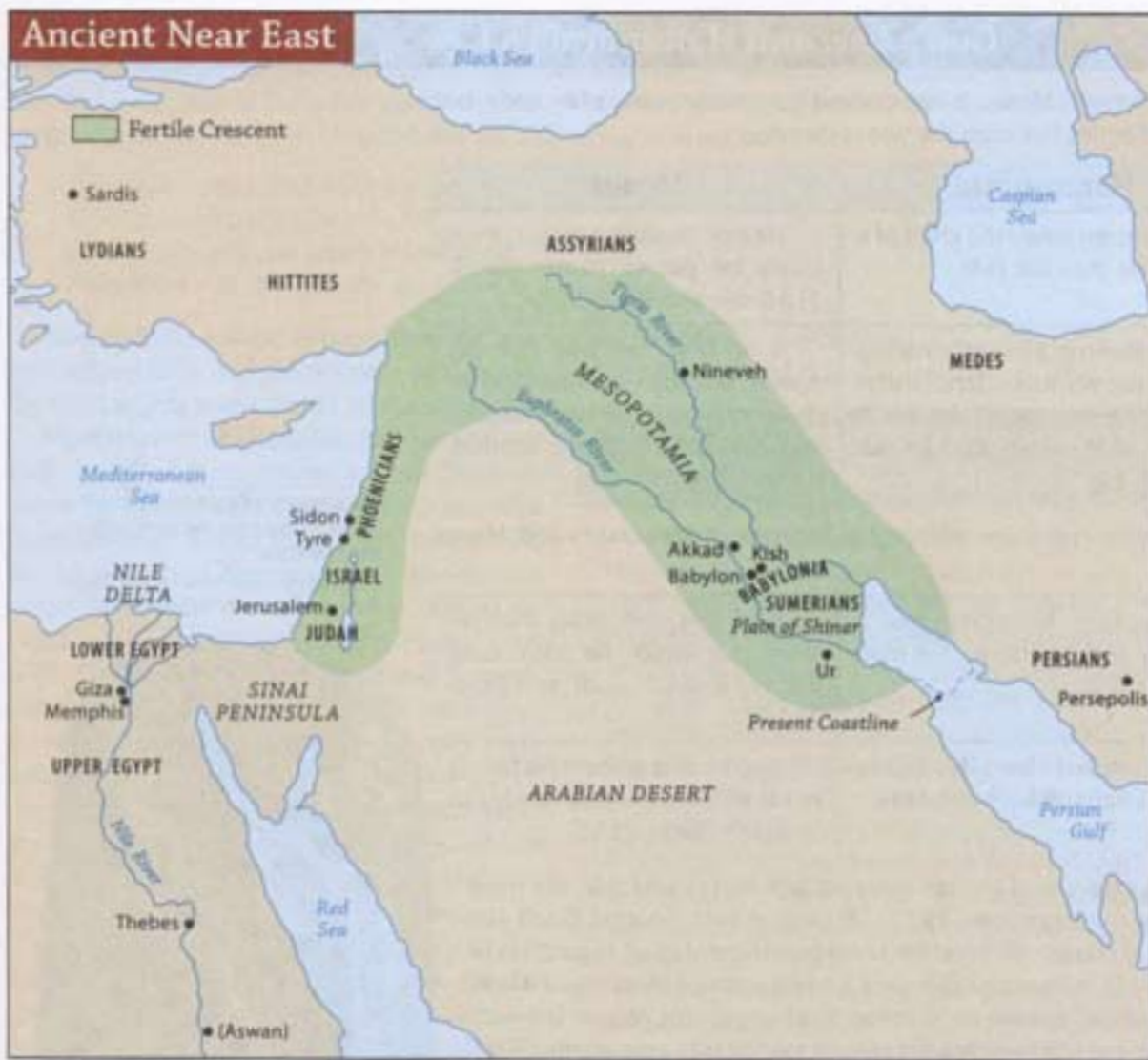
Sargon

During the period of Sumerian dominance, a new people migrated into the northern Sumerian cities. They adopted much of the Sumerian culture. At the same time, they began to assert their own influence upon the cities in which they settled. Around 2350 BC the ruler **Sargon I** came to power in the city-state of Kish. Sargon conquered other city-states and established the first known **empire**—the rule of one people over another. Making the city of Akkad his capital, he created a united kingdom—the Akkadian (uh KAY dee un) Empire—which stretched from the Persian Gulf to northern Mesopotamia. Under Sargon, the king's authority surpassed that of the priests. Many people began viewing the kings as gods.

About a century after Sargon's death, the city of Ur rose to prominence. This powerful city-state may have been the same Ur that is mentioned in Genesis 11:31 as the birthplace of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people. But whether "Ur of the Chaldees" (as the Bible calls it) was the well-known city of southern Mesopotamia is ultimately of little importance. What is important to know and remember is that the world into which Abraham was born was a world dominated by polytheism and idolatry. God revealed Himself to Abraham around 2100 BC. And when He called him to move out of Ur, He was not simply telling him to leave his home. He was also telling him to leave his way of life—probably the only way of life he had known.

Sumerian Contributions

By 2000 BC the Sumerian civilization had died out. However, aspects of its culture continued in later civilizations. The Amorites, Hittites, Assyrians,



and Persians used cuneiform. Roman architects adopted Sumerian building techniques, such as the arch. Even today we use Sumerian inventions: the wheel, the division of a circle into 360 degrees, and the division of hours and minutes into sixty units. These influences testify of Sumerian knowledge and technological skill.

Amorite Civilization

Weakened by a series of wars with its neighbors, the Sumerian civilization, centered at Ur, fell to Amorite invaders. The Amorites established the "Old Babylonian" Empire. Its capital was the city of Babylon (BAB uh lun), one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. The history of this city began shortly after the Flood, when Nimrod established a kingdom that included Babylon (Gen. 10:10). It was in or near this city that the Tower of Babel was built.

Hammurabi (1795?–1750 BC)

The sixth king of the Amorites, **Hammurabi** (HAH moo RAH bee), united the land of Mesopotamia under his rule. He was a successful military leader and an able administrator. His large staff assisted in the building and maintenance of the canals for irrigation, in the collection of taxes, and in the regulation of the administrative and business matters of the kingdom.

Hammurabi is best remembered for his code of laws. He did not write these laws but compiled, organized, and simplified existing laws. Hammurabi's code