**Chapter 4: Mesopotamia**

**Lesson 1: The Sumerians**

*The First Civilizations in Mesopotamia*

-Civilizations first developed in about 3000 B.C.

-These civilizations also started around some sort of water source.

-Social classes started to develop. Your job determined what social class you belong to.

-People started developing values and beliefs. (Religion).

-People started specializing – making new technology/tools/weapons.

-Started a system of government and laws.

*The Two Rivers*

-Mesopotamia is located in present day Iraq.

-Mesopotamia means “the land between rivers”. Those rivers are the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

-Mesopotamia is located on the Fertile Crescent.

*Early Valley Dwellers*

-They found the remains of Mesopotamia in the 1800’s.

-They believe people started hanging out there circa 7000 B.C.

-Circa 4000 B.C. is when people started settling there.

*Taming the Rivers*

-Little or no rain fell in the summer- the rivers were low. The farmers relied heavily on the melting snowcaps from the winter.

-A lot of times violent flooding would come and wipe out homes, crops, and livestock.

-Flooded rivers were filled with silt or small particles of soil. When the floods went away the silt would remain and the farming lands would be prime time.

-Over time they start to build dams, and canals- these were systems of irrigation- These systems allowed the rivers to go where they needed them to.

-The system of irrigation allowed for a surplus of food---having more food than they need.

-Once people started to have a surplus of food they could specialize. –Make pottery, weapons, tools, and clothes.

-They started trading with other people to get things they didn’t have.

*Sumer’s Civilization*

-The Sumerians were the first civilized people to live in Mesopotamia.

*City-States Arise*

*-*Sumerian Cities were far apart from each other- forcing them to be their own separate civilization. These separate civilizations were known as city-states.

-These city-states became independent of each other. They had their own governments and weren’t part of a larger governing state.

-They had a large wall surrounding the city for protection- gates open during the day- closed at night. Ruler’s temple was in the middle of the city-state.

-The city-states (even though they were all Sumerians) went to war with each other over resources and political borders. Sometimes they fought to win territories.

-During times of peace they would trade with each other.

*Gods, Priests, and Kings*

-Sumerians believed in many gods. This belief is known as polytheism.

-They believed that the gods were responsible for everything that happened to them – in their own individual lives and in nature.

-Although Sumerians honored all gods. Each city-state claimed one of its own.

-Most city-states built a temple known as a Ziggurat.

-A Ziggurat looked like a step pyramid. They believed that the Gods would come down from the skies and climb down their Ziggurat like a ladder.

-Sumerian kings claimed they got their power from the Gods.

-Most of the time, the kings first came to power because they were war heroes.

-The kings would pass the throne to their kids.

***Social Groups***

* People started to settle into social classes. Your occupation determined what social class you were in. You would most likely stay in the same social class you were born into.
* Sumerian Families
  + The men were the head of the family.
  + Sons went to school and trained for work.
  + Women stayed home –did household duties.
  + Daughters stayed with Mom.

-Women had few civil rights.

-Some owned businesses but most stayed with family.

***Farmers and Traders***

-Majority of the population were farmers. They had a plot of land and grew wheat, barley, and dates. They also raised sheep, goats, and pigs.

-Trade was another key part of Sumer’s economy. They would trade with other civilizations for things that they needed.

-They would trade with people from India and Egypt.

***Sumerian Contributions***

-The Sumerians are known as the “cradle of civilization”. This is because they were one of the first civilizations.

-They developed a system of writing. -They kept records of their lives and history. It was a way for them to pass information to the next generations. --Their system of writing was called cuneiform. This was a system that had about 1,200 characters.

-They would write in clay because they didn’t have paper. The clay would harden later.

-Only a few people were scribes---mostly boys from rich families would go to school to be a scribe.

-Scribes would record court records, marriage contracts, business dealings, and important events. They would also record stories that praised the gods and famous warriors.

-The oldest story-written story was the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. This was written 4,000 years ago.

-An **epic** is a long poem that tells the story of a hero.

-They invented the wheel!!!

-It started with wheels to transport carts that were moved by donkeys. Eventually they made the wheel a tool of war. They made chariots for soldiers to fight in.

-They invented the sailboat and a wooden plow for farming.

-They started studying and using mathematics and astronomy.

-They used the positions of the stars to help them know when to plant crops.

-They used astronomy to make a 12-month calendar based on the cycles of the moon.

**Lesson 2: Mesopotamian Empires**

*The First Empires*

In 2400 B.C. Sumer’s city-states were weakened by conflict. Other kingdoms that were north of Sumer became powerful and started an empire.

An Empire is a group of lands that were ruled by one ruler.

Through conquering lands and trade, they spread their empires over large regions.

Who was Sargon?

In the north, an ambitious king named Sargon ruled the Kingdom of Akkad. In 2340 B.C. Sargon moved his well-trained armies to the south towards the Sumerians.

The Akkadians defeated the Sumerians and ruled over Mesopotamia. This was the first empire the world had ever seen.

The Akkadians ruled Mesopotamia for over 200 years.

*Who was Hammurabi?*

Around 1800 B.C. the Babylonians moved in and conquered Mesopotamia. Babylon was the grandest city of these people.

In 1792 B.C., the Babylonian King, Hammurabi ruled over all of Mesopotamia.

Hammurabi was thought to be a fair ruler. He made a code (laws) that dealt with crimes, farming, business, marriages, and the family. The code listed a punishment for each crime. ---THIS WAS THE FIRST WRITTEN SET OF LAWS.

The code was set up under the “eye for an eye” – punishment---whatever you did, you received a punishment suitable to the crime.

Hammurabi was also smart enough to have all of the city-states be ruled under one ruler.

*The Assyrian Empire (DUH DUH DUH)*

After 1,000 years of Babylonian rule, The Assyrian empire began to arise. This group of people had a powerful military and began taking over different regions of Mesopotamia one at a time.

The Assyrian Military consisted of foot soldiers, cavalry (soldiers on horses), chariot riders. They fought with bows and arrows, swords, spears, and slingshots.

They were not nice! They set fire to farmlands, robbed people, destroyed towns and dams.

They took tribute or forced payments from their conquered people.

They were so ruthless that sometimes people would surrender to them without a fight.

A huge advantage that the Assyrians had was the use of Iron Weapons and armor.

The capital of the Assyrians was Ninevah.

Assyrian Kings were powerful and ruthless because they ruled over such a large kingdom.

The Assyrian Kings broke their kingdom into provinces (territory governed as a political district of a country or empire). They elected governors to enforce the laws and collect tribute.

The Assyrians used previous Mesopotamian culture to influence their own. They used a similar set of codes like the Babylonians used (Hammurabi’s Code), but the punishments were very harsh.

They based their writing system off of the Sumerians and even worshipped many of the same gods.

The Assyrians created the first library. This is important today because now we have recorded events from the Assyrians.

*The Chaldean Empire*

The Assyrians ruled for over 300 years, but soon people started to rebel against them.

In 650 B.C. the Assyrians started fighting amongst themselves to decide who the next king should be.

The Chaldeans were a group of people who lived in southern Mesopotamia who were conquered by the Assyrians. They HATED their rulers.

In 627 B.C. the leader of the Chaldeans- Nabopolassar- led the revolt against the Assyrians. Within one year of fighting, he forced the Assyrians out of Mesopotamia and retook the region. This is known as New Babylonia.

This was because the Chaldeans were descendants of earlier Babylonians.

King Nebopolassar’s son, Nebuchadnezzar, was the king who rebuilt the Babylonian Empire. He built Babylon to be the richest and largest city in the world. There was a huge wall that surrounded the city, their Ziggurat was over 300 feet tall, and it had a roof made of gold.

Nebuchadnezzar’s palace was so large it has become one of the Seven Wonders of the World. On this palace he created hanging gardens. He did this because his wife was from a wooded area and she missed her home. He wanted her to feel comfortable living in Babylon. (Happy wife, happy life.)

Nebuchadnezzar’s grand palace and beautiful city required heavy taxes from the people of the Babylonian Empire. However, most of their wealth came from trade. The Babylonians were located in the center of all trade with the other river valley civilizations. This meant that all the other civilizations came to them to trade.

The Babylonians also contributed to science. They studied the stars and planets (astronomy). They invented the first seven-day week.

After Nebuchadnezzar died, the following rulers were weak. The Babylonians had poor harvests, and trade slowed down. All of this lead to their downfall. Soon after, the Persians conquered the Chaldeans. The Persians allowed them to keep many aspects of their culture. They didn’t want to destroy all the Chaldeans had accomplished.