

CHAPTER 2

The Ancient Near East: Peoples and Empires



IMAGE 2.1 The Judgment of Solomon as Painted by Raphael in the Sixteenth Century

CHAPTER OUTLINE AND FOCUS QUESTIONS

2-1 The Hebrews: "The Children of Israel"

Q How did the Israelites establish a united state, and what became of it? In what ways was the Jewish faith unique in the ancient Near East? How did it evolve over time?

2-2 The Neighbors of the Israelites

Q Who were the neighbors of the Israelites, and what was their significance?

2-3 The Assyrian Empire

Q What methods and institutions did the Assyrians use to amass and maintain their empire?

2-4 The Neo-Babylonian Empire

Q What was the significance of the Neo-Babylonian Empire?

2-5 The Persian Empire

Q What methods and institutions did the Persians use to amass and maintain their empire? How did these methods and institutions differ from those of the Assyrians?

CONNECTIONS TO TODAY

What effect, if any, does the history of ancient Israel have on the contemporary state of Israel?

AROUND 970 B.C.E., SOLOMON came to the throne of Israel, a small state in Western Asia. According to the biblical account, he was lacking in military prowess but excelled in many other ways. Through trade and a series of foreign alliances, he created a strong, flourishing state. But he was especially famed for another of his qualities. When confronted with two women who each claimed that the child before them was her natural child, Solomon ordered his servant to cut the child in half and give half to each woman. The first woman cried out, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" The second woman replied, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" Then Solomon rendered his judgment: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." According to the biblical account, "when all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice." After Solomon's death, Israel began to disintegrate. But how had such a small nation been able to survive for as long as it did in a Near East dominated by mighty empires?

The destruction of the Hittite kingdom and the weakening of Egypt around 1200 B.C.E. temporarily left a power vacuum in the Near East, allowing a patchwork of petty kingdoms and city-states to emerge, especially in Syria and Canaan. One of these small states, the nation of Israel, has played a role in Western civilization completely disproportionate to its size. The Israelites were a minor factor in the politics of the ancient Near East, but their spiritual heritage—the Judeo-Christian values—is one of the basic pillars of Western civilization.

The small states did not last, however. Ever since the first city-states had arisen in the Near East around

3000 B.C.E., there had been a movement toward the creation of larger territorial states with more sophisticated systems of control. This process reached a high point in the first millennium B.C.E. with the appearance of empires that embraced the entire Near East. Between 1000 and 500 B.C.E., the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Persians all created empires that encompassed most or all of the ancient Near East. Each had impressive and grandiose capital cities that emphasized the power and wealth of its rulers. Each brought peace and order for a period of time by employing new administrative techniques. Each eventually fell to other conquerors. In the long run, these large empires had less impact on Western civilization than the Hebrew people of Israel did. In human history, the power of ideas is often more significant than the power of empires.

2-1 The Hebrews: "The Children of Israel"



FOCUS QUESTIONS: How did the Israelites establish a united state, and what became of it? In what ways was the Jewish faith unique in the ancient Near East? How did it evolve over time?

The Hebrews were a Semitic-speaking people who had a tradition concerning their origins and history that was eventually written down as part of the Hebrew Bible, known to Christians as the Old Testament. Describing themselves originally as nomads organized into clans, the Hebrews' tradition states that they were descendants of the patriarch Abraham, who had migrated from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan, where they became identified as the "Children of Israel." Again according to tradition, a drought in Canaan caused many Hebrews to migrate to Egypt, where they lived peacefully until they were enslaved by pharaohs who used them as laborers on building projects. These Hebrews remained in bondage until Moses supposedly led them eastward out of Egypt in the Exodus in the first half of the thirteenth century B.C.E. According to the biblical account, the Hebrews then wandered for many years in the desert until they entered Canaan. Organized into twelve tribes, they became embroiled in conflict with the Philistines, a people who had settled in the coastal area of Canaan but were beginning to move inland.

Many scholars today doubt that the early books of the Hebrew Bible reflect the true history of the early Israelites. The Hebrew Bible is a collection of twenty-four books written over hundreds of years. Dating of the biblical books is problematic, although scholars have advanced a documentary hypothesis that maintains that a series of authors wrote different books of the Bible over a period of hundreds of years until the books were finally consolidated around 250 B.C.E. They argue that the early books of the Bible, written centuries after the events described, preserve only the cultural memory of

what the Israelites came to believe about themselves and that recent archaeological evidence often contradicts the details of the biblical account. There is, for example, no archaeological or other evidence for the Exodus from Egypt. These scholars also argue that the Israelites were not nomadic invaders but indigenous peoples in the Canaanite hill country. What is generally agreed upon, however, is that between 1200 and 1000 B.C.E. the Israelites emerged as a distinct group of people who were possibly organized into tribes or a league of tribes.

HISTORIANS DEBATE

2-1a Was There a United Kingdom of Israel?

According to the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites established a united kingdom of Israel beginning with Saul (ca. 1020–1000 B.C.E.), who supposedly achieved some success in the ongoing struggle with the Philistines. After his death, however, a brief period of anarchy ensued until one of Saul's lieutenants, David (ca. 1000–970 B.C.E.), reunited the Israelites, defeated the Philistines, and established control over all of Canaan. According to the biblical account, some of his conquests led to harsh treatment for the conquered people: "David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute." Among David's conquests was the city of Jerusalem, which he supposedly made into the capital of a united kingdom.

According to the biblical account, David's son Solomon (ca. 970–930 B.C.E.) did even more to strengthen royal power. He expanded the political and military establishments and extended the trading activities of the Israelites. Solomon is portrayed as a great builder who was responsible for the temple in the city of Jerusalem. The Israelites viewed the temple as the symbolic center of their religion and hence of the kingdom of Israel itself. Under Solomon, ancient Israel was supposedly at the height of its power (see Map 2.1).


The accuracy of this biblical account of the united kingdom of Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon has been recently challenged by a new generation of archaeologists and historians. Although they mostly accept Saul, David, and Solomon as historical figures, they portray them more as chief warlords than as kings. If a kingdom of Israel did exist during these years, it was not as powerful or as well organized as the Hebrew Bible says. Furthermore, they argue, there is no definitive archaeological evidence that Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem.

2-1b The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

There may or not have been a united kingdom of Israel, but after Solomon's death tensions between northern and southern tribes in Israel led to the establishment of two separate kingdoms—the kingdom of Israel, composed of the ten northern tribes, with its capital eventually at Samaria, and the southern kingdom of Judah, consisting of two tribes, with its capital at Jerusalem. The northern kingdom of Israel joined with some



MAP 2.1 The Israelites and Their Neighbors in the First Millennium B.C.E. United under Saul, David, and Solomon according to the biblical account, greater Israel split into two states—Israel and Judah—after the death of Solomon. With power divided, the Israelites could not resist invasions that dispersed many of them from Canaan. Some, such as the “ten lost tribes,” never returned. Others were sent to Babylon but were later allowed to return under the rule of the Persians.

 **Why was Israel more vulnerable to the Assyrian Empire than Judah was?**

small Syrian states to temporarily stop the onslaught of the Assyrians (uh-SEER-ee-unz), who had consolidated their kingdom to the northeast (see “2-3 The Assyrian Empire,” later in this chapter). But the power of the kingdom of Israel declined, and by the end of the ninth century, Israel was forced to pay tribute to Assyria (see Image 2.2). In the next century, Israel itself was destroyed. The Assyrians overran the kingdom, destroyed the capital of Samaria in 722 or 721 B.C.E., and deported many Israelites to other parts of the Assyrian Empire. These dispersed Israelites (the ten lost tribes) merged with neighboring peoples and gradually lost their identity.

The southern kingdom of Judah was also forced to pay tribute to Assyria but managed to survive as an independent state as Assyrian power declined (see Image 2.3). A new enemy, however, appeared on the horizon. The Chaldeans (kal-DEE-unz) first demolished Assyria and then, under King Nebuchadnezzar (neb-uh-kud-NEZZ-ur) II, conquered Judah and completely destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. Many upper-class people from Judah were deported to Babylonia. The memory of their exile is still evoked in the stirring words of Psalm 137 (the Israelites mistakenly believed that these sacred songs—part of the Hebrew Bible—had been composed by King David):

*By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. . . .
How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.²*

But the Babylonian captivity of the people of Judah did not last. A new set of conquerors, the Persians, destroyed the Chaldean kingdom but allowed the people of Judah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city and temple. The revived kingdom of Judah remained under Persian control until the conquests of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.E. The people of Judah survived, eventually becoming known as the




IMAGE 2.2 The King of Israel Pays Tribute to the King of Assyria. By the end of the ninth century B.C.E., the kingdom of Israel had been forced to pay tribute to the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians overran the kingdom in 722 or 721 B.C.E. and destroyed the capital city of Samaria. In this scene from a black obelisk, Jehu, the king of Israel, is shown paying tribute to Shalmaneser III, the king of Assyria.

Bible Land Pictures/akg-images



IMAGE 2.3 Prisoners from Judah. The Assyrians overran the kingdom of Israel in 722 or 721 B.C.E., destroyed the capital city of Samaria, and then began an assault on the kingdom of Judah. In this eighth-century B.C.E. relief from the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh, Assyrian soldiers are seen impaling Jewish prisoners after their conquest of the fortified town of Lachish in Judah in 701 B.C.E.

 **What does this image tell you about the reputation of Assyrian soldiers?**

Jews and giving their name to Judaism, the religion of Yahweh (YAH-way), God of Israel.

2-1c The Spiritual Dimensions of Israel

The spiritual perspective of the Israelites evolved over time. Early Israelites probably worshiped many gods, including nature spirits dwelling in trees and rocks. For some Israelites, Yahweh was the chief god of Israel, but many, including kings of Israel and Judah, worshiped other gods as well. It was among the Babylonian exiles in the sixth century B.C.E. that Yahweh—God of Israel—came to be seen as the *only* God. After these exiles returned to Judah, their point of view eventually became dominant, and pure **monotheism**, or the belief that there is only one God for all peoples, came to be the major tenet of Judaism.

“I Am the Lord Your God”: **Ruler of the World** According to the Jewish conception, there is but one God, whom the Jews called **Yahweh**. God is the creator of the world and everything in it. To the Jews, the gods of all other peoples were mere idols.

CHRONOLOGY The Israelites

Saul	ca. 1020–1000 B.C.E.
David	ca. 1000–970 B.C.E.
Solomon	ca. 970–930 B.C.E.
Northern kingdom of Israel destroyed by Assyria	722 or 721 B.C.E.
Southern kingdom of Judah falls to Chaldeans; destruction of Jerusalem	586 B.C.E.
Return of exiles to Jerusalem	538 B.C.E.

The Jewish God ruled the world; he was subject to nothing. All peoples were his servants, whether they knew it or not. This God was also transcendent. He had created nature but was not in nature. The stars, moon, rivers, wind, and other natural phenomena were not divinities or suffused with divinity, as other peoples of the ancient Near East believed, but were God’s handiwork. All of God’s creations could be admired for their awesome beauty but not worshiped as gods.

This omnipotent creator of the universe was not removed from the life he had created, however, but was a just and good God who expected goodness from his people. If they did not obey his will, they would be punished. But he was also a God of mercy and love: “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”³ Despite the powerful dimensions of God as creator and sustainer of the universe, the Jewish message also emphasized that each person could have a personal relationship with this omnipotent being. As the psalmist sang: “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber.”⁴

The chief source of information about Israel’s spiritual conceptions is the Hebrew Bible. Its purpose was to teach the essential beliefs about the God of Israel after the Babylonian captivity of the Jews and their dispersal. During and after the Babylonian exile, the Jews recorded many of their traditions in order to create and preserve their identity. These writings became the core of the Hebrew Bible. The first five books, known as the **Pentateuch** (PEN-tuh-took), which cover the time from the beginning of the world until the Israelites’ arrival in Canaan, constitute the **Torah** (TOR-uh), or law code, governing the lives of worshipers and their relations to one another and to the non-Jewish population. The Hebrew Bible focuses on one basic theme: the necessity for the Jews to obey their God.

“You Only Have I Chosen”: **Covenant and Law** The covenant, the law, the prophets, and the rabbis are additional aspects of the Jewish religious tradition. The Israelites believed that during the Exodus from Egypt, when Moses supposedly led his people out of bondage into a land of plenty promised to them by Yahweh, a special event occurred that determined the Jewish experience for all time. According to tradition, God

The Covenant and the Law: The Book of Exodus



What was the nature of the covenant between Yahweh and the Israelites? What was its moral significance for the Israelites? How does it differ from Hammurabi's code, and how might you explain those differences?

ACCORDING TO THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT, it was during the Exodus from Egypt that the Israelites supposedly made their covenant with Yahweh. They agreed to obey their God and follow his law. In return, Yahweh promised to take special care of his chosen people. These selections from the book of Exodus describe the making of the covenant and God's commandments to the Israelites.

Exodus 19:1–8

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do

everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

Exodus 20:1–17

And God spoke all these words, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Source: The Holy Bible, New International Version (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Biblica, 1973).

entered into a covenant, or contract, with the tribes of Israel, who believed that Yahweh had spoken to them through Moses (see Historical Voices, “The Covenant and the Law,” above). The Israelites promised to obey Yahweh and follow his law. In return, Yahweh promised to take special care of his people, “a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.”

This covenant between Yahweh and his chosen people could be fulfilled, however, only by obedience to the law of God. Law became a crucial element of the Jewish world and had a number of different dimensions. In some instances, it set forth specific requirements, such as payments for offenses. Most important, since the major characteristic of God was his goodness, ethical concerns stood at the center of the law. Sometimes these took the form of specific standards of moral behavior: “You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal.”⁴ But these concerns were also expressed in decrees that

regulated the economic, social, religious, and political life of the community, for God’s laws of morality applied to all areas of life (see Image 2.4). These laws made no class distinctions and emphasized the protection of the poor, widows, orphans, and slaves.

The Prophets and Rabbis The Israelites believed that certain religious leaders or holy men, called prophets, were sent by God to serve as his voice to his people. In the ninth century B.C.E., the prophets were particularly vociferous about the tendency of the Israelites to accept other gods, chiefly the fertility and earth gods of other peoples in Canaan. They warned of the terrible retribution that Yahweh would exact from the Israelites if they did not keep the covenant to remain faithful to him alone and just in their dealings with one another.



IMAGE 2.4 *Moses and the Ten Commandments.* As we have seen, according to the Hebrew Bible, God gave to Moses a set of commandments for the Israelites to obey. Although these commandments are interpreted and numbered differently by religious groups, the early Christian church came to consider the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God as a summary of God's law and a standard for ethical behavior. This is evident in this sixth-century detail of Moses and the Ten Commandments in the Eastern Roman (later known as Byzantine) church of San Vitale in Italy. The Israelites shown in the photo are, of course, garbed in the styles of the sixth century.

The golden age of prophecy began in the mid-eighth century and continued during the time when the people of Israel and Judah were threatened by Assyrian and Chaldean conquerors. These “men of God” went through the land warning the Israelites that they had failed to keep God's commandments and would be punished for breaking the covenant: “I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Amos prophesied the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria; twenty years later, Isaiah said the kingdom of Judah too would fall (see *Historical Voices, “The Hebrew Prophets,”* p. 39).

Out of the words of the prophets came new concepts that enriched the Jewish tradition and ultimately Western civilization, including a notion of universalism and a yearning for social justice. Although the Jews' religious practices gave them a sense of separateness from other peoples, the prophets transcended this by embracing a concern for all humanity. All nations would someday come to the God of Israel: “All

the earth shall worship you.” A universal community of all people under God would someday be established by Israel's effort. This vision encompassed the elimination of war and the establishment of peace for all the nations of the world. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many people. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”⁶

The prophets also cried out against social injustice. They condemned the rich for causing the poor to suffer, denounced luxuries as worthless, and threatened Israel with prophecies of dire punishments for these sins. God's command was to live justly, share with one's neighbors, care for the poor and the unfortunate, and act with compassion. When God's command was not followed, the social fabric of the community was threatened. These proclamations by Israel's prophets became a source for Western ideals of social justice, even if they have never been perfectly realized.

Although the prophets ultimately developed a sense of universalism, the demands of the Jewish religion—the need to obey their God—encouraged a separation between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. Unlike most other peoples of the Near East, Jews could not simply be amalgamated into a community by accepting the gods of their conquerors and their neighbors. To remain faithful to the demands of their God, they might even have to refuse loyalty to political leaders.

The Babylonian captivity of the Jews also led to an important figure in Judaism—the rabbi. Devoid of the usual community worship of their homeland, Jews faced new challenges and new questions about their faith and began to turn to the rabbi for answers. Although not new figures in Judaism, rabbis now emerged as teachers of Jewish law and became the leaders of the Jews in exile. They not only taught the Torah but also began to interpret it, leading to a body of rabbinical law that greatly affected Jewish life.

2-1d The Social Structure of the Hebrews

Originally, the Israelites were organized along tribal lines, but by the time of the monarchy a new social structure had evolved as the Israelites settled in towns and villages, leaving them with conspicuous “divisions of the population.”

Social Patterns The men of rank and influence formed a special group of considerable importance in Hebrew society. This group included officials of the king, military officers, civil officials, and governors. Although simply servants to the kings, they held a privileged position in the society at large. The common people, sometimes called “people of the land,” remained a body of free people having basic civil rights. Their livelihood came mostly from the land and from various crafts. These peasants and artisans sold their own produce and products directly to buyers in markets in their local town or village squares, thus avoiding the need for intermediaries or traders. There was no real merchant class in ancient Israel. Commerce was carried on by foreigners, such as the Phoenicians. Not until the *Diaspora* (dy-ASS-pur-uh), when Jews became scattered throughout the ancient world after their exile to Babylon, did they become merchants.

The Hebrew Prophets: Micah, Isaiah, and Amos



What did the Hebrew prophets see as the chief transgressions of the Hebrew people? What do these selections tell you about the nature of the Hebrews as a “chosen” people?

THE HEBREW PROPHETS warned the Israelites that they must obey God’s commandments or face punishment for breaking their covenant with God. These selections from the prophets Micah, Isaiah, and Amos make clear the dreadful punishments that God would inflict on the Israelites for their sins. Even the Assyrians, as Isaiah indicated, would be used as God’s instrument to punish them.

Micah 6:9–16

Listen! The Lord is calling to the city—and to fear your name is wisdom—“Heed the rod and the One who appointed it. Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures? Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully. Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins. You will eat but not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You will store up but save nothing, because what you save I will give to the sword. You will plant but not harvest; you will press olives

but not use the oil on yourselves, you will crush grapes but not drink the wine. . . . Therefore I will give you over to ruin and your people to derision; you will bear the scorn of the nations.”

Isaiah 10:1–6

Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. “Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.”

Amos 3:1–2

Hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt: “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your sins.”

Source: The Holy Bible, New International Version (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Biblica, 1973).

Family The family was the central social institution in Hebrew life and consisted of individuals connected by common blood and a common living place. A family living in one house could comprise husband and wife, married sons and their wives, and their children. The Hebrew family was patriarchal (pay-tree-AR-kul). The husband-father was master of his wife and possessed absolute authority over his children, including the power of life and death.

Marriage and Women Marriage was an important aspect of Hebrew family life. In ancient Israel, polygamy was an accepted form of marriage, especially for kings and wealthier citizens. Hebrew law limited kings to eighteen wives and citizens to four. In practice, only kings could afford a large harem. When others had more than one wife, it was usually because they desired more children; the first wife, for example, might have been unable to have children or produced only daughters.

Many Hebrews, however, believed that monogamy was the preferred form of marriage. Wives were honored for their faithfulness and dedication to their husbands. The book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible provides a picture of what Hebrews considered a perfect wife:

*A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.
Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.
She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.
She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands.
She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from a far.
She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls.
She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.
She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. . . .
She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.
She watches over the affairs of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her?*

Women were greatly valued, but their work was obviously never done.

Although the Hebrew Bible, a male-edited work, reveals a society dominated by men, it also includes stories of women who played heroic roles in the early history of Israel. Deborah, for example, played a prominent role in the defeat of the Canaanites at Mount Tabor. After the same battle, Jael killed Sisera, the leader of the Canaanites. According to the Song of Deborah, “Most blessed of women be Jael, . . . most blessed of tent-dwelling women. . . . Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman’s hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay.”⁸

But these accounts are not the norm. In the Hebrew Bible, women are mostly dependent on men. It should not surprise us, then, to learn that a married woman was subject to her husband’s authority. A married woman left her parents’ home, lived with her husband’s family, and became a member of their clan. Her children also belonged to the husband’s clan. Since boys and girls were married at a relatively young age, parents took the responsibility for matchmaking. Wives were expected to remain faithful to their husbands, an ideal that would later have an impact on Christian attitudes toward women.

The primary goal of marriage was to produce children. They were the “crown of man,” and sons, in particular, were desired. Daughters would eventually leave the family house, but sons carried on the family line. Mothers were in charge of the early education of children, especially in regard to basic moral principles. As boys matured, their fathers took over responsibility for their education, which remained largely informal. This included religious instruction as well as general education for life. The rod was not spared as a matter of principle. Since trades were usually hereditary, fathers also provided their sons’ occupational education. As one rabbi warned, “He who does not teach his son a useful trade is bringing him up to be a thief.”⁹ Additional education for boys came from priests, whose sacred mission was to instruct people in the Torah. The only education girls received was from their mothers, who taught them the basic fundamentals of how to be good wives, mothers, and housekeepers.

2-2 The Neighbors of the Israelites



FOCUS QUESTION: Who were the neighbors of the Israelites, and what was their significance?

The Israelites were not the only people living in Canaan. The Philistines, who invaded from the sea, established five towns on the coastal plain of the region. They settled down as farmers and eventually came into conflict with the Israelites. The Phoenicians (fuh-NEE-shunz) had resided in Canaan for some time but now found themselves with a new independence. A Semitic-speaking people, the Phoenicians resided along the Mediterranean coast on a narrow band of land 120 miles long (see Map 2.2). They had rebuilt their major cities, Byblos (BIB-uhs), Tyre, and Sidon (SYD-un), after destruction by the Sea Peoples. Their newfound political independence helped the



MAP 2.2 Phoenician Colonies and Trade Routes, ca. 600 B.C.E.

Phoenicians expand the trade that was already the foundation of their prosperity. In fact, Byblos had been the principal distribution center for Egyptian papyrus outside Egypt (the Greek word for book, *biblos*, is derived from the name Byblos).

All three chief cities of Phoenicia were seaports, but they also served as distribution centers for the lands to the east in Mesopotamia. The Phoenicians themselves produced a number of goods for foreign markets, including purple dye, glass, wine, and lumber from the famous cedars of Lebanon. In addition, the Phoenicians improved their ships and became great international sea traders (see Image 2.5). They charted



Relief portraying Phoenician merchant ship, fourth century B.C./DE AGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES

IMAGE 2.5 A Phoenician Merchant Ship. The Phoenicians, a Semitic-speaking people dwelling in ancient Canaan, became the predominant sea traders of the ancient Near East. The Phoenicians built both warships and trading ships. In their trading ships, they sailed westward from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and traded with native peoples and set up colonies as far west as the Atlantic coasts of Spain and Morocco, past the Straits of Gibraltar, establishing a reputation as the greatest mariners in the ancient world. Shown here is a fourth-century B.C.E. relief portraying a Phoenician merchant ship with its traditional high prow with a horse head.



Thinking Time How did the location of the Phoenicians determine their trading patterns?

TABLE 2.1

A Comparison of Phoenician, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin Alphabets (Letters A–F)

PHOENICIAN			HEBREW	GREEK		LATIN		
Phoenician	Phoenician Name	Modern Symbol	Hebrew	Early Greek	Classical Greek	Greek Name	Early Latin	Classical Latin
	p	·				alpha		
	bēt	b				beta		
	gīml	g				gamma		
	dālet	d				delta		
	hē	h				epsilon		
	wāw	w				digamma		

Source: Andrew Robinson, *The Story of Writing* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), p. 170. Reprinted by permission of Thames & Hudson.

new routes not only in the Mediterranean but also in the Atlantic Ocean, where they sailed south along the west coast of Africa. The Phoenicians established a number of colonies in the western Mediterranean, including settlements in southern Spain, Sicily, and Sardinia. Most of the Phoenician colonies were trading stations, not permanent settlements. A major exception was Carthage, the Phoenicians' most famous colony, located on the North African coast.

Culturally, the Phoenicians are best known as transmitters. Instead of using pictographs or signs to represent whole words and syllables as the Mesopotamians and Egyptians did, the Phoenicians simplified their writing by using twenty-two different signs to represent the sounds of their speech. These twenty-two characters or letters could be used to spell out all the words in the Phoenician language. Although the Phoenicians were not the only people to invent an alphabet, theirs would have special significance because it was eventually passed on to the Greeks. From the Greek alphabet was derived the Roman alphabet that we still use today (see Table 2.1). The Phoenicians achieved much while independent, but they ultimately fell subject to the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Persians.

2-3 The Assyrian Empire



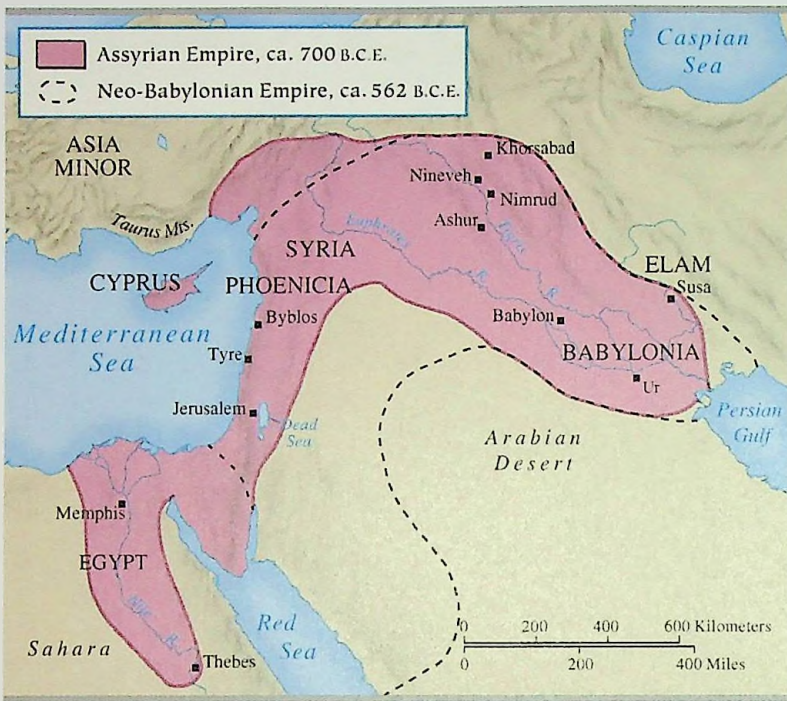
FOCUS QUESTION: What methods and institutions did the Assyrians use to amass and maintain their empire?

Independent states in Canaan flourished in the power void that followed the destruction of the Hittite kingdom and the weakening of the Egyptian empire. But this state of affairs did not last; new empires soon came to dominate vast stretches of the ancient Near East. The first of these empires


emerged in Assyria, an area whose location on the upper Tigris River brought it into both cultural and political contact with southern Mesopotamia.

Although part of Mesopotamia, Assyria, with its hills and adequate, if not ample, rainfall, had a different terrain and climate. The Assyrians were a Semitic-speaking people; for much of their early history, they were vassals of foreign rulers, including Sargon of Akkad, the Third Dynasty of Ur, and the Babylonian King Hammurabi (see Chapter 1). From about 1650 to 1360 B.C.E., the Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni in northern Mesopotamia dominated Assyria. The Assyrians finally became independent when the Hittites destroyed Mitanni; we read in Hittite documents from about 1360 B.C.E. of the emergence of the “king of the land of Assyria.” For the next 250 years, the Assyrians experienced alternating expansion and decline until the reassertion of Assyrian power under Tiglath-Pileser (TIG-lath-py-LEE-zur) I (1114–1076 B.C.E.), a brutal conqueror whose policy of deliberate terror set a pattern for later Assyrian rulers.

The Assyrian Empire created by Tiglath-Pileser was unable to maintain its strength after his death. A new phase of expansion did not begin until the ninth century with the conquests of Shalmaneser (shal-muh-NEE-zur) III (858–824 B.C.E.), who marched westward into Canaan and southward into Babylonia. Yet Assyrian power did not go unchallenged. The almost continuous warfare on these new frontiers did not end until the reigns of Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 B.C.E.) and Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.), who waged military campaigns almost every year, reestablishing control over Mesopotamia and completely subduing Canaan. The conquered territories were then incorporated into the empire as provinces. These two kings were also responsible for centralizing the system of government in order to increase the power of the king. By 700 B.C.E., the Assyrian Empire had reached the height of its power and included Mesopotamia, sections of Asia Minor, Syria, Canaan, and Egypt up to Thebes (see Map 2.3).



MAP 2.3 The Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires. The Assyrian Empire expanded in large part because of its brutal military methods. It maintained its rule by using a common language and religion and by violently suppressing internal revolts. It was overthrown by the Chaldeans in Babylonia, leading to the Neo-Babylonian Empire epitomized by Nebuchadnezzar.

 Why was control of Babylonia crucial to both empires?

Ashurbanipal (ah-shur-BAH-nuh-pahl) (669–627 B.C.E.) was one of the strongest Assyrian rulers, but it was already becoming apparent during his reign that the Assyrian Empire was greatly overextended. Internal strife intensified as powerful Assyrian nobles gained control of vast territories and waged their own private military campaigns. Moreover, subject peoples greatly resented Assyrian rule. The hatred that the Babylonians felt after the brutal Assyrian sack of the city of Babylon in 689 B.C.E., for example, led them to rebel during the reign of Ashurbanipal. Soon after Ashurbanipal's death, the Assyrian Empire began to disintegrate. The capital city of Nineveh fell to a coalition of Chaldeans and Medes (see "2-4 The Neo-Babylonian Empire," later in this chapter) in 612 B.C.E., and in 605 B.C.E. the Neo-Babylonian Empire took over the rest of the empire.

2-3a Organization of the Empire

At its height, kings whose power was considered absolute ruled the Assyrian Empire. Under their leadership, the empire became well organized. By eliminating governorships held by nobles on a hereditary basis and instituting a new hierarchy of local officials directly responsible to the king, the Assyrian kings gained greater control over the resources of the empire. Personal loyalty determined the relationship between the king and his officials. Loyalty to the king was also expected of all people in Assyria. According to King Ashurbanipal, when his father King Esarhaddon appointed him as his successor, he "convened the people of Assyria, great and small, from coast to coast, made them swear a loyalty oath by the gods and established a binding agreement to protect my future kingship over Assyria."¹⁰

The Assyrians also developed an efficient system of communication to administer their empire more effectively. They established a network of posting stages that used relays of

horses (mules or donkeys in mountainous terrain) to carry messages throughout the empire. The system was so effective that a provincial governor anywhere in the empire (except Egypt) could send a question to the king in his palace and receive an answer within a week.

2-3b The Assyrian Military Machine

The ability of the Assyrians to conquer and maintain an empire derived from a combination of factors. Through years of practice, the Assyrians developed effective military leaders and fighters. They were able to enlist and deploy troops numbering in the hundreds of thousands, although most campaigns were not on such a large scale. In 845 B.C.E., Shalmaneser III led an army of 120,000 men across the Euphrates on a campaign. Size alone was not decisive, however. The Assyrian army was extremely well organized and disciplined. It included a standing army of infantry as its core, accompanied by cavalry and horse-drawn war chariots that were used as mobile platforms for shooting arrows. Moreover, the Assyrians had the advantage of having the first large armies equipped with iron weapons. The Hittites (see Chapter 1) had been the first to develop iron metallurgy, but iron came to be used extensively only after new methods for hardening it came into common use after 1000 B.C.E.

Another factor in the Assyrian army's success was its ability to use different kinds of military tactics. The army was capable of waging guerrilla warfare in the mountains and set battles on open ground as well as laying siege to cities. The Assyrians were especially renowned for their siege warfare. They would hammer a city's walls with heavy, wheeled siege towers and armored battering rams while sappers dug tunnels to undermine the walls' foundations and cause them to collapse. The besieging Assyrian armies learned to cut off



Erin Lessing/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 2.6a

IMAGE 2.6 Assyrian Warriors. The Assyrians had a highly efficient and well-organized military machine, capable of fighting under a variety of conditions. In Image 2.6a, a stone relief from the palace of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh depicts Assyrian archers at work during the siege of Lachish in Judah. Image 2.6b shows Assyrian warriors in a chariot from an eighth-century B.C.E. stele.



Alfredo Dagli/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 2.6b

supplies so effectively that if a city did not fall to them, the inhabitants could be starved into submission.

A final factor in the effectiveness of the Assyrian military machine was its ability to create a climate of terror as an instrument of warfare, a policy that one historian has called “calculated frightfulness.” The aim of the Assyrians was to encourage their enemies to surrender quickly rather than face a series of atrocities. The Assyrians became famous for their terror tactics, although some historians believe they were no worse than other Near Eastern conquerors. As a matter of regular policy, the Assyrians laid waste to the land in which they were fighting, smashing dams, looting and destroying towns, setting crops on fire, and cutting down trees, particularly fruit trees. The Assyrians were especially known for their brutality toward their captives. King Ashurnasirpal (ah-shur-NAH-zur-pahl) II recorded this account of his treatment of prisoners:

3,000 of their combat troops I felled with weapons. . . . Many of the captives taken from them I burned in a fire. Many I took alive; from some of these I cut off their hands to the wrist, from others I cut off their noses, ears, and fingers; I put out the eyes of many of the soldiers. . . . I burned their young men and women to death.

After conquering another city, the same king wrote: “I fixed up a pile of corpses in front of the city’s gate. I flayed the nobles, as many as had rebelled, and spread their skins out on the piles. . . . I flayed many within my land and spread their skins

out on the walls.”¹¹ Note that this policy of extreme cruelty to prisoners was not used against all enemies but was reserved primarily for those who were already part of the empire and then rebelled against Assyrian rule (see *Opposing Viewpoints*, “The Governing of Empires: Two Approaches,” p. 44).

2-3c Assyrian Society

Unlike the Hebrews, the Assyrians were not fearful of mixing with other peoples. In fact, the Assyrian policy of deporting many prisoners of newly conquered territories to Assyria created a polyglot society in which ethnic differences were not very important. It has been estimated that over a period of three centuries, between 4 and 5 million people were deported to Assyria, resulting in a population that was racially and linguistically mixed. What gave identity to the Assyrians themselves was their language, although even that was akin to that of their southern neighbors in Babylonia. Religion was also a cohesive force. Assyria was literally “the land of Ashur,” a reference to its chief god. The king, as the human representative of the god Ashur, brought order to his people and served as a final unifying focus.

Assyrian society was hierarchical. There was a noticeable gap between kings, royal officials, and warriors at the top and the merchants, peasants, and slaves below them. As in other ancient Near East societies, the Assyrian family was patriarchal. The father held authority over his wife and children; women

The Governing of Empires: Two Approaches



Both Ashurbanipal and Cyrus entered Babylon as conquerors. How did their treatment of the conquered city differ? How do you explain the differences? Which method do you think was more effective? Why?

BOTH THE ASSYRIANS AND THE PERSIANS created large empires that encompassed large areas of the ancient Near East. Although both Assyrian and Persian rulers used military force and violence to attain their empires, their approaches to conquest and ruling sometimes differed. Assyrian rulers were known for their terror tactics and atrocities, as described in the first two selections that follow. Although the kings of Persia used terror when needed, they also had a reputation for less cruelty and more tolerance. Especially noteworthy was Cyrus, as is evident in the third selection from a decree (known as the Cyrus Cylinder) that he issued in 538 B.C.E. The propagandistic value of his words is also apparent, however.

King Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.E.) Describes His Siege of Jerusalem (701 B.C.E.)

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them by means of well-stamped earth-ramps, and battering-rams brought thus near to the walls combined with the attack by foot soldiers, using mines, breaches as well as sapper work. I drove out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered them booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate.

King Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.E.) Describes His Treatment of Conquered Babylon

I tore out the tongues of those whose slanderous mouths had uttered blasphemies against my god Ashur and had

plotted against me, his god-fearing prince; I defeated them completely. The others, I smashed alive with the very same statues of protective deities with which they had smashed my own grandfather Sennacherib—now finally as a belated burial sacrifice for his soul. I fed their corpses, cut into small pieces, to dogs, pigs, . . . vultures, the birds of the sky and also to the fish of the ocean. After I . . . thus made quiet again the hearts of the great gods, my lords, I removed the corpses of those whom the pestilence had felled, whose leftovers after the dogs and pigs had fed on them were obstructing the streets, filling the places of Babylon, and of those who had lost their lives through the terrible famine.

The Cyrus Cylinder

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four corners of the earth. . . .

When I entered Babylon as a friend and when I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord [the chief Babylonian god], caused the magnanimous inhabitants of Babylon to love me, and I was daily endeavoring to worship him. My numerous troops walked around in Babylon in peace. I did not allow anybody to terrorize any place of the country of Sumer and Akkad. I strove for peace in Babylon and in all his other sacred cities. As to the inhabitants of Babylon . . . I brought relief to their dilapidated housing, putting thus an end to their main complaints. . . .

As to the region from as far as Ashur and Susa . . . I returned to these sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which used to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I also gathered all their former inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings.

Source: All selections from J. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament*, 3rd revised edition with supplement (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969). Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

were expected to take care of the household and bear children. Although women were not equal to men, legal documents indicate that some Assyrian women could purchase and sell property, take part in business for themselves, and assist their husbands in legal matters. There were also enormous differences between high- and low-class women. The former included the wives and daughters of rulers and royal officials;

the latter included lower-class wives and slaves who worked in households and temples. Their lives were regulated by harsh laws (see *Historical Voices*, “The Code of the Assura,” p. 45).

Agriculture formed the principal basis of Assyrian life. Assyria was a land of farming villages with relatively few significant cities, especially in comparison with southern Mesopotamia. Unlike the river valleys, where farming required

The Code of the Assura



Compare these excerpts from the Code of the Assura with the Code of Hammurabi and *The Advice of Shuruppak* in Chapter 1. How are they similar? How are they different? What do the differences reveal about Assyrian society?

ASSYRIAN LAW was similar to Sumerian and Babylonian law, but it could be considerably harsher, especially in regard to women. The excerpts that follow are taken from one compilation of Assyrian laws known as the Code of the Assura, which is dated around 1075 B.C.E.

The Code of the Assura

- 1.7. If a woman bring her hand against a man, they shall prosecute her; 30 manas of lead shall she pay, 20 blows shall they inflict on her.
- 1.8. If a woman in a quarrel injure the testicle of a man, one of her fingers they shall cut off. And if a physician bind it up and the other testicle which is beside it be infected thereby, or take harm; or in a quarrel she injure the other testicle, they shall destroy both of her eyes.
- 1.9. If a man bring his hand against the wife of a man, treating her like a little child, and they prove it against him, and convict him, one of his fingers they shall cut off. If he kiss her, his lower lip with the blade of an axe they shall draw down and they shall cut off.
- 1.13. If the wife of a man go out from her house and visit a man where he lives, and he have intercourse with her,

knowing that she is a man's wife, the man and also the woman they shall put to death.

- 1.15. If a man catch a man with his wife, both of them shall they put to death. If the husband of the woman put his wife to death, he shall also put the man to death. If he cut off the nose of his wife, he shall turn the man into a eunuch, and they shall disfigure the whole of his face.
- 1.16. If a man have relations with the wife of a man at her wish, there is no penalty for that man. The man shall lay upon the woman, his wife, the penalty he wishes.
- 1.40. If the wives of a man, or the daughters of a man go out into the street, their heads are to be veiled. The prostitute is not to be veiled. Maidservants are not to veil themselves. Veiled harlots and maidservants shall have their garments seized and 50 blows inflicted on them and bitumen poured on their heads.
- 1.50. If a man strike the wife of a man, in her first stage of pregnancy, and cause her to drop that which is in her, it is a crime; two talents of lead he shall pay.
- 1.52. If a woman of her own accord drop that which is in her, they shall prosecute her, they shall convict her, they shall crucify her, they shall not bury her. . . .
- 1.57. In the case of every crime for which there is the penalty of the cutting-off of ear or nose or ruining or reputation or condition, as it is written it shall be carried out.
- 1.58. Unless it is forbidden in the tablets, a man may strike his wife, pull her hair, her ear he may bruise or pierce. He commits no misdeed thereby.

Source: Internet Ancient History Sourcebook.

the minute organization of large numbers of people to control irrigation, Assyrian farms received sufficient moisture from regular rainfall.

Trade was second to agriculture in economic importance. For internal trade, metals such as gold, silver, copper, and bronze were used as a medium of exchange. Various agricultural products also served as a form of payment or exchange. Because of their geographic location, the Assyrians served as intermediaries and participated in international trade, importing timber, wine, and precious metals and stones while exporting textiles produced in palaces, temples, and private villas.

2-3d Assyrian Culture

The culture of the Assyrian Empire was a hybrid. The Assyrians assimilated much of Mesopotamian civilization and saw themselves as guardians of Sumerian and Babylonian culture. Ashurbanipal, for example, amassed a large library at Nineveh

that included the available works of Mesopotamian history. Assyrian religion also reflected this assimilation of other cultures. Although the Assyrians considered their own national god, Ashur, their chief deity, they recognized virtually all of the Mesopotamian gods and goddesses as well.

Among the best-known objects of Assyrian art are the relief sculptures found in the royal palaces in three of the Assyrian capital cities: Nimrud, Nineveh, and Khorsabad. These reliefs, which were begun in the ninth century and reached their apex in the reign of Ashurbanipal in the seventh century, depicted two different kinds of subject matter: ritual or ceremonial scenes revolving around the person of the king and scenes of hunting and war (see Image 2.7). The latter show realistic action scenes of the king and his warriors engaged in battle or hunting animals, especially lions. These reliefs depict a strongly masculine world in which discipline, brute force, and toughness are the enduring values—indeed the very values—of the Assyrian military monarchy.



IMAGE 2.7 An Assyrian Lion Hunt. This stone panel was on a wall of the palace of King Ashurbanipal in Nineveh. It was part of a much larger work connected to the royal sport of hunting. Lion hunts were not conducted in the wild but were held under controlled circumstances. The king and his retainers faced lions released from cages in an arena. The purpose of the scene was to glorify the king as a conqueror of the king of beasts. Shown here are the hunt attendants with large dogs whose purpose was to guard the edge of the arena in which the king killed the lions.

2-4 The Neo-Babylonian Empire

Q FOCUS QUESTION: What was the significance of the Neo-Babylonian Empire?

The Chaldeans, a Semitic-speaking people, had gained ascendancy in Babylonia by the seventh century, came to form the chief resistance to Assyrian control of Mesopotamia, and established a new Babylonian monarchy. King Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 B.C.E.) achieved the final defeat of the Assyrian Empire. Under his rule, the Chaldeans defeated Egypt to gain control of Syria and Canaan, destroyed Jerusalem, carried the people of Judah into exile in Babylon, and in the process regained for Babylonia a position as the leading power in the ancient Near East (see Map 2.3).

During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Babylonia was renowned for a prosperity based on lush agricultural lands, lucrative trade routes, and industries, especially textiles and metals. Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt Babylon as the center of his empire, giving it a reputation as one of the great cities of the ancient world. Babylon was surrounded by towering walls, 8 miles in length, encircled by a moat filled by the Euphrates River. The Ishtar Gate (see Image 2.8) opened onto the Triumphal Way, which led to the sacred precincts of Marduk, the chief Babylonian god. Babylon was adorned with temples and palaces; most famous of all were the Hanging Gardens, renowned as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The gardens were supposedly built to satisfy Nebuchadnezzar's wife, a princess from the land of Media, who missed the mountains of her homeland. A series of terraces led to a plateau, an artificial mountain, at the top of which grew the lush gardens irrigated by water piped to the top. According to the account of



bpk, Berlin/(name of museum)/(name of photographer)/Art Resource, NY

IMAGE 2.8 Ishtar Gate of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt Babylon as the center of his empire and adorned it with such architectural wonders as the Ishtar Gate, which was built of blue glazed bricks and opened onto the Triumphal Way. The bricks were made separately and then assembled on the gate walls. Figures of the dragon of Marduk (patron god of the city of Babylon, whose sacred animal was the dragon) and the bull of Adad (god of storms, whose sacred animal was the bull) alternate on the surfaces of the gate. Ishtar was the Babylonian goddess of war and sexual love. This picture shows the Ishtar Gate as it was rebuilt in the Pergamum Museum in Berlin.

The Customs of the Persians



According to Herodotus, what were the most important customs of the Persians? To what extent do you think this is a realistic account? What bias might Herodotus have had?

IN HIS HISTORY OF THE PERSIAN WARS, written in the fifth century B.C.E., the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who is often regarded as the father of history (see Chapter 3), gave a detailed account of the customs of the Persians. Herodotus traveled widely in search of his information and obtained it from a variety of sources, especially the stories of local inhabitants. Although the Greek-speaking world was the center of his perceptions, he could be remarkably open-minded about other cultures.

Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*

The customs which I know the Persians to observe are the following. . . . Of all the days in the year, the one which they celebrate most is their birthday. It is customary to have the table furnished on that day with an ampler supply than common. The richer Persians cause an ox, a horse, a camel, and an ass to be baked whole and so served up to them; the poorer classes use the smaller kinds of cattle. They eat little solid food but abundance of dessert, which is set on table a few dishes at a time. It is this custom which makes them say that “the Greeks,

when they eat, leave off hungry, having nothing worth mention served up to them after the meats; whereas, if they had more put before them, they would not stop eating.”

The Persians are very fond of wine. It is their practice to deliberate upon affairs of weight when they are drunk. . . .

When they meet each other in the streets, you may know that the persons meeting are of equal rank . . . if, instead of speaking, they kiss each other on the lips. In the case where one is a little inferior to the other, the kiss is given on the cheek. Where the difference of rank is great, the inferior prostrates himself upon the ground. . . .

There is no nation which so readily adopts foreign customs as the Persians. Thus, they have taken the dress of the Medes, considering it superior to their own; and in war they wear the Egyptian breastplate. As soon as they hear of any luxury, they instantly make it their own. . . .

Next to bravery in battle, it is regarded as the greatest proof of manly excellence, to be the father of many sons. Every year the king sends rich gifts to the man who can show the largest number; for they hold that number is strength. Their sons are carefully instructed from the fifth to their twentieth year, in three things alone: to ride, to draw the bow, and to speak the truth. Until their fifth year they are not allowed to come into the sight of their father, but pass their lives with the women. This is done that, if the child dies young, the father may not be afflicted by its loss.

Source: Hutton Webster, editor, *Readings in Ancient History* (New York: D.C. Heath & Co., 1913), pp. 9–11.

a first-century C.E. author, from a distance the gardens made a remarkable impression:

On the top of the citadel are the hanging gardens, a wonder celebrated in the tales of the Greeks. . . . Columns of stone were set up to sustain the whole work, and on these was laid a floor of squared blocks, strong enough to hold the earth which is thrown upon it to a great depth, as well as the water with which they irrigate the soil; and the structure supports trees of such great size that the thickness of their trunks equals a measure of eight cubits [about 12 feet]. They tower to a height of fifty feet, and they yield as much fruit as if they were growing in their native soil. . . . To those who look upon the trees from a distance, real woods seem to be overhanging their native mountains.¹²

The splendor of the Neo-Babylonian Empire proved to be short-lived. Nabonidus (nab-uh-NY-duss) (555–539 B.C.E.) was the last king of the Chaldean dynasty. He had a great interest in history and encouraged scholars to collect Sumerian texts and study the Sumerian language. But his policies aroused considerable internal dissent, and when Babylon fell to the Persian conqueror Cyrus in 539 B.C.E., the Babylonians welcomed him as a liberator.

2-5 The Persian Empire




FOCUS QUESTIONS: What methods and institutions did the Persians use to amass and maintain their empire? How did these methods and institutions differ from those of the Assyrians?

The Persians were an Indo-European-speaking people related to the Medes. Both peoples probably formed part of the great waves of Indo-European migrations into the Mediterranean, the Near East, and India. The Persians lived to the southeast of the Medes, who occupied the western Iranian plateau south of the Caspian Sea. Primarily nomadic, both Medes and Persians were organized in clans. Both peoples were led by petty kings assisted by a group of warriors who formed a class of nobles. Their populations also included both free and unfree people who worked the land, craftspeople, and slaves (see Historical Voices, “The Customs of the Persians,” above).

By 735 B.C.E., the Medes had begun to form a confederation of the various tribes, and around the beginning of the



MAP 2.4 The Persian Empire at the Time of Darius. Cyrus the Great united the Persians and led them in the successful conquest of much of the Near East. By the time of Darius, the Persian Empire was the largest the world had yet seen. The Persians allowed a high degree of religious toleration and gave some government positions to natives of conquered territories.

 How did Persian policies attempt to overcome the difficulties of governing far-flung provinces?

seventh century they became unified under a monarchy. The Persians did likewise under the Achaemenid (ah-KEE-muh-nud) dynasty established in Persis in southern Iran. About fifty years later, the Persians were made subject to the Medes. The Medes now constituted a powerful state and joined the Babylonians in attacking the Assyrians. After the capture of Nineveh in 612 B.C.E., King Cyaxares (si-AK-suh-reez) established a Median empire, the first Iranian empire known to the ancient Near East.

2-5a Cyrus the Great

In 559 B.C.E., Cyrus became the leader of the Persians, united them under his rule, and went on the offensive against the Medes. By 550 B.C.E., he had established Persian control over Media, making it the first Persian satrapy (SAY-truh-pee), or province. Three years later, Cyrus defeated the prosperous Lydian kingdom in western Asia Minor, and Lydia became another Persian satrapy (see Map 2.4). Cyrus's forces then went on to conquer the Greek city-states that had been established on the Ionian coast of western Asia Minor. Cyrus then turned eastward, subduing the eastern part of the Iranian plateau,

Sogdia, and even western India. His eastern frontiers secured, Cyrus entered Mesopotamia in 539 and captured Babylon (see Historical Voices, "The Fall of Babylon," p. 49). His treatment of Babylonia showed remarkable restraint and wisdom. Babylonia was made into a Persian province under a Persian satrap (SAY-trap), or governor, but many government officials were kept in their positions. Cyrus took the title "King of All, Great King, Mighty King, King of Babylon, King of the Land of Sumer and Akkad, King of the Four Rims (of the Earth), the Son of Cambyses the Great King, King of An-shan"¹³ and insisted that he stood in the ancient, unbroken line of Babylonian kings. By appealing to the vanity of the Babylonians, he won their loyalty. Cyrus also issued an edict permitting the Jews, who had been brought to Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E., to return to Jerusalem with their sacred temple objects and to rebuild the temple there as well.

From 538 to 530 B.C.E., Cyrus consolidated his empire. Among other things, he constructed forts, especially in the northeast, to protect against nomadic incursions. It was there that he undertook his last campaign. In 530 B.C.E., he marched from Sogdia into the territory of the Massagetae, where he was killed in battle.

The Fall of Babylon



Do you think this is a realistic account of the fall of Babylon? What image do you have of Cyrus from this account?

Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*

Cyrus, at the beginning of the following spring, resumed his march to Babylon. The Babylonians had taken the field and were awaiting his approach. When he arrived near the city they attacked him, but were defeated and forced to retire inside their defenses; they already knew of Cyrus' restless ambition and had watched his successive acts of aggression against one nation after another, and as they had taken the precaution of accumulating in Babylon a stock of provisions sufficient to last many years, they were able to regard the prospect of a siege with indifference. The siege dragged on, no progress was made, and Cyrus was beginning to despair of success. Then somebody suggested or he himself thought up the following plan: he stationed part of his force at the point where the Euphrates flows into the city and another contingent at the opposite end where it flows out, with orders to both to force an entrance along the riverbed as

soon as they saw that the water was shallow enough. Then, taking with him all his non-combatant troops, he withdrew to the spot where Nitocris had excavated the lake, and proceeded to repeat the operation which the queen had previously performed; by means of a cutting he diverted the river into the lake (which was then a marsh) and in this way so greatly reduced the depth of water in the actual bed of the river that it became fordable, and the Persian army, which had been left at Babylon for the purpose, entered the river, now only deep enough to reach about the middle of a man's thigh, and, making their way along it, got into the town. If the Babylonians had learned what Cyrus was doing or had seen it for themselves in time, they could have let the Persians enter and then, by shutting all the gates which led to the waterside and manning the walls on either side of the river, they could have caught them in a trap and wiped them out. But as it was they were taken by surprise. The Babylonians themselves say that owing to the great size of the city the outskirts were captured without the people in the center knowing anything about it; there was a festival going on, and they continued to dance and enjoy themselves, until they learned the news the hard way. That, then, is the story of the first capture of Babylon.

Source: Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (New York: Penguin Books, 2003, pp 83–84).

To his contemporaries, Cyrus the Great was deserving of his epithet. The Greek historian Herodotus recounted that the Persians viewed him as a “father,” a ruler who was “gentle, and procured them all manner of goods.”¹⁴ Cyrus must have been an unusual ruler for his time, a man who demonstrated considerable wisdom and compassion in the conquest and organization of his empire (see *Opposing Viewpoints*, “The Governing of Empires,” p. 44). Cyrus obtained the favor of the priesthoods in his conquered lands by restoring temples and permitting religious toleration. He won approval by using not only Persians but also native peoples as government officials in their own states. He allowed Medes to be military commanders. Unlike the Assyrian rulers of an earlier empire, he had a reputation for mercy. Medes, Babylonians, and Jews all accepted him as their legitimate ruler. Some peoples portrayed him as a great leader and peacemaker. Indeed, a Hebrew prophet regarded him as the anointed one of God: “I am the Lord who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please’; he will say of Jerusalem, ‘Let it be rebuilt’; and of the temple, ‘Let its foundations be laid.’ This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him.”¹⁵ Cyrus had a genuine respect for ancient civilizations—in building his palaces, he made use of Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, and

Lydian practices. Indeed, Cyrus believed that he was creating a world empire that included peoples who had ancient and venerable traditions and institutions.

2-5b Expanding the Empire

Upon Cyrus's death in 530 B.C.E., his son Cambyses (kam-BY-seez) II assumed power as the Great King. Four years later, Cambyses undertook the invasion of Egypt, the only kingdom in the Near East not yet brought under Persian control. Aided by the Phoenician fleet, he defeated and captured the pharaoh and the Egyptian forces. Egypt was made into a satrapy with Memphis as its capital. In the summer of 525 B.C.E., Cambyses took the title of pharaoh.

After the death of Cambyses in 522, Darius (duh-RY-uss) emerged as Great King after a year of intense civil war. Once in charge, Darius (521–486 B.C.E.) turned to the task of strengthening the empire (see Image 2.9). He codified Egyptian law and built a canal to link the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. A campaign into western India led to the creation of a new Persian province that extended to the Indus River. Darius also moved into Europe proper, conquering Thrace and making the Macedonian king a vassal. In 499 B.C.E., the Ionian Greek cities in western Asia Minor rose in revolt and temporarily obtained

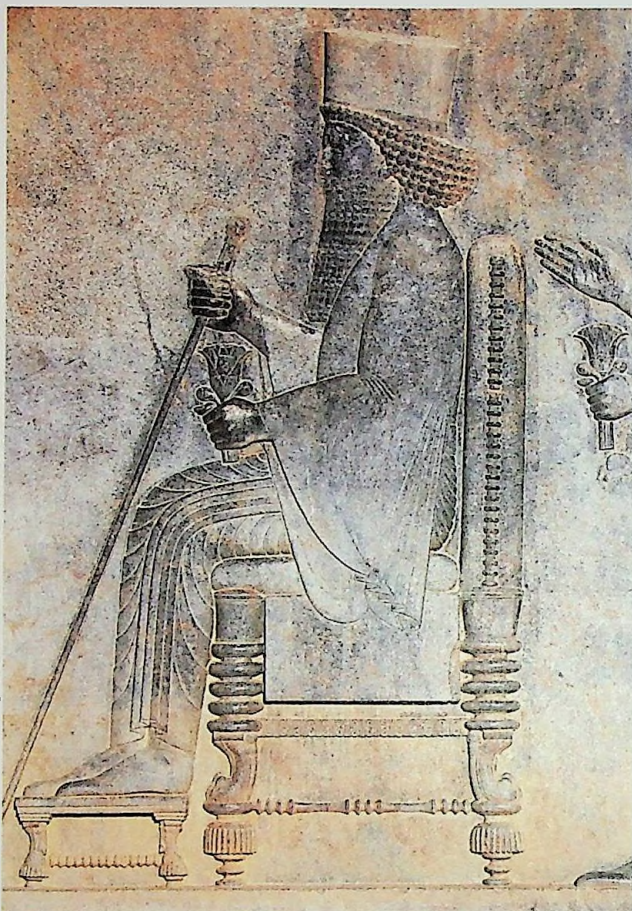



IMAGE 2.9 Darius, the Great King. Darius ruled the Persian Empire from 521 to 486 B.C.E. He is shown here on his throne in Persepolis, a new capital city that he built. In his right hand, Darius holds the royal staff. In his left hand, he grasps a lotus blossom with two buds, a symbol of royalty.

 **What are the similarities and differences between this image of Darius and the image of an Egyptian pharaoh in Chapter 1?**

their freedom. With aid from the Greek mainland, most notably from Athens, the Ionians then invaded Lydia and burned Sardis, center of the Lydian satrapy. This event led to Darius's involvement with the mainland Greeks. After reestablishing control of the Ionian Greek cities, Darius undertook an invasion of the Greek mainland, which culminated in the Athenian victory in the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.E. (see Chapter 3).

2-5c Governing the Empire

With the reign of Darius the Persians had created the largest empire the world had yet seen. It not only included all the old centers of power in the Near East, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Assyria but also extended into Thrace and Asia Minor in the west and into India in the east.

For administrative purposes, the empire had been divided into approximately twenty satrapies. Each satrapy was ruled by a provincial governor or satrap, literally a “protector of the

kingdom.” Although Darius had not introduced the system of satrapies, he did see that it was organized more rationally. He created a sensible system for calculating the tribute that each satrapy owed to the central government and gave the satraps specific civil and military duties. They collected tributes, were responsible for justice and security, raised military levies, and normally commanded the military forces within their satrapies. In terms of real power, the satraps were miniature kings who established courts that imitated the Great King's.

From the time of Darius on, satraps were men of Persian descent. The major satrapies were given to princes of the king's family, and their positions became essentially hereditary. The minor satrapies were placed in the hands of Persian nobles. Their offices also tended to pass from father to son. The hereditary nature of the governors' offices made it necessary to provide some checks on their power. Consequently, some historians think that there were officials at the satrapal courts, such as secretaries and generals in charge of the garrison, who reported directly to the Great King, keeping him informed of what was going on within the various satrapal governments. It is also possible that an official known as the “king's eye” or “king's messenger” annually inspected each satrapy.

An efficient system of communication was crucial to sustaining the Persian Empire. Well-maintained roads facilitated the rapid transit of military and government personnel. One in particular, known as the Royal Road, stretched from Sardis, the center of Lydia in Asia Minor, to Susa, the chief capital of the Persian Empire (see Map 2.4). Like the Assyrians, the Persians established staging posts equipped with fresh horses for the king's messengers.

CHRONOLOGY The Empires

The Assyrians

Tiglath-Pileser I	1114–1076 B.C.E.
Shalmaneser III	858–824 B.C.E.
Tiglath-Pileser III	744–727 B.C.E.
Sargon II	721–705 B.C.E.
Ashurbanipal	669–627 B.C.E.
Fall of Nineveh	612 B.C.E.
Assyrian Empire destroyed	605 B.C.E.

The Chaldeans

Ascendancy in Babylonia	600s B.C.E.
Height of empire under King Nebuchadnezzar II	605–562 B.C.E.
Fall of Babylon	539 B.C.E.

The Persians

Unification of Persians	600s B.C.E.
Conquests of Cyrus the Great	559–530 B.C.E.
Cambyses II and conquest of Egypt	530–522 B.C.E.
Reign of Darius	521–486 B.C.E.

2-5d The Great King

In this vast administrative system, the Persian king occupied an exalted position. Although not considered a god like the Egyptian pharaoh, he was nevertheless the elected one or regent of the Persian god Ahuramazda (see “2-5e Persian Religion,” below). All subjects were the king’s servants, and he was the source of all justice, possessing the power of life and death over everyone. Persian kings resided largely in seclusion in a series of splendid palaces and were not easily accessible. Darius in particular was a palace builder on a grand scale. In the construction of a palace in the chief Persian capital of Susa, he used workers and materials from throughout the Persian Empire. But Darius was unhappy with Susa. He did not really consider it his homeland, and it was oppressively hot in the summer months. He built another residence at Persepolis, a new capital located to the east of the old one and at a higher elevation.

The policies of Darius also tended to widen the gap between the king and his subjects. As the Great King himself said of all his subjects, “What was said to them by me, night and day it was done.”¹⁶ Over a period of time, the Great Kings in their greed came to hoard immense quantities of gold and silver in the various treasuries located in the capital cities. Both their hoarding of wealth and their later overtaxation of their subjects are seen as crucial factors in the ultimate weakening of the Persian Empire.

In its heyday, however, the empire stood supreme, and much of its power depended on the military. By the time of Darius, the Persian monarchs had created a standing army of professional soldiers. This army was truly international, composed of contingents from the various peoples who made up the empire. At its core was a cavalry force of 10,000 and an elite infantry force of 10,000 Medes and Persians known as the Immortals, so called because their number was never allowed to drop below 10,000; anyone killed would be replaced immediately (see Image 2.10). The Persians made effective use of their cavalry, especially for operating behind enemy lines and breaking up lines of communication. The Persian navy consisted of ships from subject states, including the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Anatolians, and Ionian Greeks.

2-5e Persian Religion

Of all the Persians’ cultural contributions, the most original was their religion, **Zoroastrianism**. Zoroaster (ZOR-oh-ass-tur), or Zarathustra, was a semilegendary figure who, according to Persian tradition, was born in 660 B.C.E. After a period of wandering and solitude, he experienced revelations that caused him to be revered as a prophet of the “true religion.” It is difficult to know what Zoroaster’s original teachings were because the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, the Zend Avesta, was not written down until the third century C.E. Scholars believe, however, that the earliest section of the Zend Avesta, known as the Yasna, consisting of seventeen hymns (*gathas*), contains the actual writings of Zoroaster. This enables us to piece together his message.

Like the Hebrews, Zoroaster taught a spiritual message of monotheism. To Zoroaster, the religion he preached was the



IMAGE 2.10 Archers of the Persian Guard. One of the main pillars supporting the Persian Empire was the military. This frieze, composed of enameled brick, depicts members of the famous infantry force known as the Immortals. They carry the standard lance and bow and arrow of the infantry.

only perfect one, and Ahuramazda (uh-HOOR-uh-MAHZ-duh) was the only God. Ahuramazda (the “Wise Lord”) was the supreme deity who brought all things into being:

This I ask [You], O Ahura! tell me aright: Who by generation was the first father of the Righteous Order (within the world)? Who gave the (recurring) sun and stars their (undeviating) way? Who established that whereby the moon waxes, and whereby she wanes, save [You]? . . .

This I ask [You], O Ahura! tell me aright, who from beneath ha[s] sustained the earth and the clouds above that they do not fall? Who made the waters and the plants? Who to the wind has yoked on the storm-clouds, the swift and fleetest two? . . .

This I ask [You], O Ahura! tell me aright; who fashioned Aramaiti (our piety) the beloved, together with [Your] Sovereign Power? Who, through his guiding wisdom, has made the son revering the father? (Who made him beloved?) With (questions such as) these, so abundant, O Mazda! I press [You], O bountiful Spirit, [You] maker of all!”

According to Zoroaster, Ahuramazda also possessed abstract qualities or states that all humans should aspire to, such as good thought, right, and piety. Although Ahuramazda was supreme,

he was not unopposed. Right is opposed by the lie, truth by falsehood, life by death. At the beginning of the world, the good spirit of Ahuramazda was opposed by the evil spirit (in later Zoroastrianism identified with Ahriman).

Humans also played a role in this cosmic struggle between good and evil. Ahuramazda, the creator, gave all humans free will and the power to choose between right and wrong. The good person chooses the right way of Ahuramazda. Zoroaster taught that there would be an end to the struggle between good and evil. Ahuramazda would eventually triumph, and at the last judgment at the end of the world, the final separation of good and evil would occur. Individuals, too, would be judged. Each soul faced a final evaluation of its actions. The soul of a person who had performed good deeds would achieve paradise; but if the deeds had been evil, the person would be thrown into an abyss of torment. Some historians believe that Zoroastrianism, with its emphasis on good and evil, heaven and hell, and a last judgment, had an impact on Christianity, a religion that eventually surpassed it in significance.

The spread of Zoroastrianism was due to its acceptance by the Great Kings of Persia. The inscriptions of Darius make

clear that he believed Ahuramazda was the only God. Although Darius himself may have been a monotheist, dramatic changes in Zoroastrianism occurred over time. Before Zoroaster, Persian religion had focused on the worship of forces of nature, such as the sun, moon, fire, and wind, with the aid of priests known as Magi. As the kings and Magi propagated Zoroaster's teachings on Ahuramazda, Zoroastrianism lost its monotheistic emphasis, and the old nature worship resurfaced. Soon Persian religion had returned to polytheism, with Ahuramazda the chief of a number of gods of light. Mithra, the sun god, became a helper of Ahuramazda and later, in Roman times, the source of another religion. Persian kings were also very tolerant of other religions, and gods and goddesses of those religions tended to make their way into the Persian pantheon. Moreover, as frequently happens to the ideas of founders of religions, Zoroaster's teachings acquired concrete forms that he had never originally intended. The struggle between good and evil was taken beyond the abstractions of Zoroaster into a strong ethical dualism. The spirit of evil became an actual being who had to be warded off by the use of spells and incantations.

CHAPTER SUMMARY



By 1500 B.C.E., much of the creative impulse of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations was beginning to wane. And by 1200 B.C.E., the decline of the Hittites and Egyptians had created a power vacuum that allowed a patchwork of petty king-

doms and city-states to emerge, especially in the area of Syria and Canaan. One was that of the Phoenicians, who created a trading empire in the Mediterranean as well as an alphabet that was later adapted by the Greeks and Romans.

Of these small states, however, perhaps the most important was that of the Israelites, who created a kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon. By the tenth century B.C.E., the inhabitants of Israel had divided into a northern kingdom of Israel and a southern kingdom of Judah, but the rise of larger states in the region eventually led to their demise. Israel fell to the Assyrians at the end of the eighth century B.C.E. and Judah to the Chaldeans in the sixth century. Nevertheless, although the Israelites did not create an empire and were dominated by



the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and eventually the Persians, they left a spiritual legacy that influenced much of the later development of Western civilization. The evolution of Hebrew monotheism

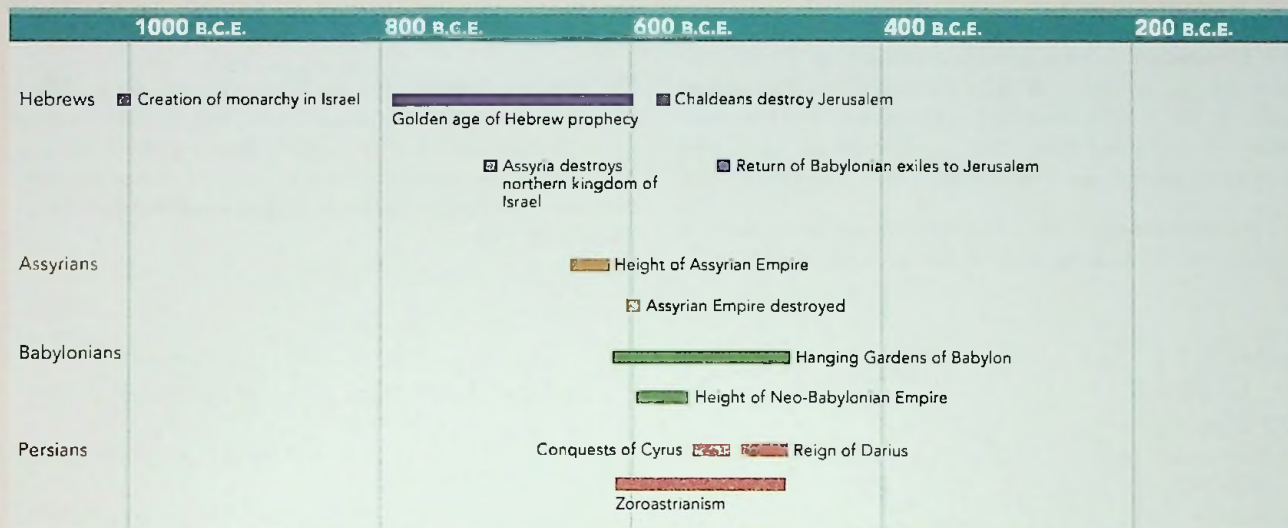
created in Judaism one of the world's great religions; it influenced the development of both Christianity and Islam. When we speak of the Judeo-Christian heritage of Western civilization, we refer not only to the concept of monotheism but also to ideas of law, morality, and social justice that have become important parts of Western culture.

All of these small states were eventually overshadowed by the rise of the great empires of the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Persians. The Assyrian Empire, built upon the effective use of military force, was the first to unite almost all of the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, after reaching the height of its power by 700 B.C.E., it gradually succumbed to internal dissension and was overrun by the armies of the Medes and Chaldeans near the end of the seventh century B.C.E. The latter created a Neo-Babylonian Empire, which in turn was short-lived and soon conquered by the Persians. Although the Persian Empire owed much to the administrative organization developed by the Assyrians, the Persian Empire had its own peculiar strengths. Persian rule was tolerant



as well as efficient. Conquered peoples were allowed to keep their own religions, customs, and methods of doing business. The two centuries of relative peace that the Persian Empire brought to the Near East facilitated trade and the general well-being of its peoples. Many Near Eastern peoples, including the Israelites, expressed gratitude for being subjects of the Great Kings of Persia.

CHAPTER TIMELINE



CHAPTER REVIEW

Upon Reflection

- Q What is the relationship between the political history of the Israelites and the evolution of their religious beliefs?
- Q How did the Israelites establish a united state, and what became of it?
- Q Compare and contrast the administrative and military structure and attitudes toward subject peoples of the Assyrian and Persian Empires.
- Q If the large empires of the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Persians dominated the entire Near East for centuries, why did the small state of the Israelites have a greater impact on Western civilization?

Key Terms

- monotheism (p. 36)
- Pentateuch (p. 36)
- Torah (p. 36)
- Diaspora (p. 38)
- patriarchal (p. 39)
- satrapy (p. 48)
- satrap (p. 48)
- Zoroastrianism (p. 51)

Full definitions also appear in the Glossary at the end of the book.

Suggestions for Further Reading

General Surveys For excellent general surveys of the material covered in this chapter, see A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 B.C.*, vol. 2 (London, 1995), and M. van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 B.C.*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 2016).

Ancient Israel There is an abundance of literature on ancient Israel. For important revisionist views on the archaeological aspects, see I. Finkelstein and N. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel* (New York, 2002), and M. Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (London, 2007). For a historical narrative, see H. Shanks,

Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 2010). On the origins of the Israelites, see W. G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2003). On early Israelite kings, see I. Finkelstein and N. Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (New York, 2006). On the controversies surrounding the history of the Israelites, see J. M. Golden, *Ancient Canaan and Israel* (Oxford, 2004). P. J. King and L. E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (New York, 2002), is useful in regard to the social institutions of ancient Israel. On women in ancient Israel, see C. Meyers, *Discovering*

Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context (New York, 1988). For a general study on the religion of Israel, see W. J. Doorly, *The Religion of Israel* (New York, 1997).

The Phoenicians For a good introduction to the Phoenicians, see M. Woolmer, *A Short History of the Phoenicians* (London, 2017); M. E. Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies and Trade*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2001); and G. Markoe, *Phoenicians* (London, 2000), on Phoenician society.

The Assyrian Empire For a brief introduction to the Assyrian Empire, see K. Radner, *Ancient Assyria* (Oxford, 2015). On

Assyrian culture, see P. Collins, *Assyrian Palace Sculpture* (London, 2008). The Neo-Babylonian Empire can be examined in P.-A. Beaulieu, *A History of Babylon, 2000 B.C.-75 AD* (Hoboken, N.J., 2018).

The Persian Empire On the Persian Empire see L. Allen, *The Persian Empire* (Chicago, 2005), and P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, Ind., 2006). On the history of Zoroastrianism, see S. A. Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith: Tradition and Modern Research* (New York, 1993).

Notes

1. 2 Samuel 8:2.
2. Psalms 137:1, 4–6.
3. Psalms 145:8–9.
4. Psalms 121:2–3.
5. Exodus 20:13–15.
6. Isaiah 2:4.
7. Proverbs 31:10–20, 24–28.
8. Judges 5:24–27.
9. Quoted in R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (New York, 1961), p. 49.
10. Quoted in M. van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East* (Oxford, 2004), p. 242.
11. Quoted in H. W. F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria* (London, 1984), pp. 261–262.
12. John C. Rolfe, trans., *Quintus Curtius I* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 337–339.
13. Quoted in J. M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (New York, 1983), p. 32.
14. Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. George Rawlinson (New York, 1942), p. 257.
15. Isaiah 44:28, 45:1.
16. Quoted in Cook, *The Persian Empire*, p. 76.
17. Yasna 44:3–4, 7, from *The Zend Avesta, Part III*, trans. L. H. Mills, *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 31 (Oxford University Press, 1887), pp. 113–115.

MindTap Tips

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