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1 The First Civilized People

**TIME LINE**

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<td>Sumerians lived along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers</td>
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<td>4500 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Chinese civilization was beginning</td>
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<tr>
<td>4000 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Nile River civilization developed</td>
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<td>3400 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Menes united Upper and Lower Egypt</td>
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<td>Hittites used iron weapons in Asia Minor; Phoenicians developed letter alphabet</td>
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<td>Hammurabi ruled Babylon and wrote his code of laws</td>
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<tr>
<td>1000 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Hebrews were well established in Palestine</td>
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<td>900 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Nok people lived in what is now northern Nigeria</td>
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<td>563–483 B.C.E.</td>
<td>Buddha's life in India</td>
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<td>Persia began conquests</td>
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<td>529 B.C.E.</td>
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**ACTIVATING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

Watch for answers to these questions as you read.

- What sorts of knowledge and culture did the Sumerians have and use?
- How was life in ancient Egypt different from life in Sumer?
- What advances did other ancient civilizations make in Africa and Asia Minor?
- How were early civilizations in China and Japan different from those in Africa and Asia Minor?

**INTRODUCTION**

**Inventions** and discoveries through the ages have allowed us more and more wonderful choices of how to live. Let’s look back in time and see how some early people lived. Let’s also see what things they did then that help us live the way we do now.

**THE PEOPLE OF SUMER**

Nearly 7,000 years ago, the people of Sumer lived where the country of Iraq is today. These people, called Sumerians, developed one of the world’s first **civilizations**. They built their cities in the valleys along the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. They settled along the rivers because of the rich soil and water supply. About nine out of every ten people farmed. The others were businesspeople, priests, rulers, or **traders**. **Slaves** were used by farmers and **merchants**.

**invention**—a device or process that did not exist before

**civilization**—a large group of people with a highly organized society

**trader**—someone whose business is buying and selling goods

**slave**—a person who is owned by someone else

**merchant**—a person who buys and sells goods
The Sumerians were the first people known to use irrigation. The Sumerians dug large ditches and ponds. When the river flooded, the ponds filled. When dry weather came, ditches carried water from the ponds to the fields. Without irrigation, the people of Sumer could not have raised large crops.

The earliest surviving examples of writing are Sumerian. At first, the Sumerians used picture writing, but it was too slow and hard to use. They then invented cuneiform. They made marks in wet clay tablets with wedge-shaped sticks. The clay was then hardened by baking to make a lasting record. Writing made record keeping possible. It also enabled one city to send messages to another.

The Sumerians had a government. Every nation needs some form of government. At first, each city had its own government. These cities were small city-states. The city-states soon learned to cooperate. They formed one nation, ruled by a king. The stronger nation could better protect itself during war. Because all cities helped with trade and irrigation, the people of the nation could live better.

Any nation needs laws to live peacefully. Sumer had some interesting laws. Anyone who said a person had committed a crime had to prove it. If not, the accuser could be put to death. If your leg was cut in a fight, you had the right to cut your enemy's leg. The laws also divided the population into three classes: aristocrats, commoners, and slaves. Slaves had rights and could even own land. Sometimes a slave could buy his or her freedom. On the other hand, for some crimes a free person could be made a slave.

Religion was important to the Sumerians. They built huge temples of clay bricks and believed that their priests could talk to the gods. The Sumerian religion told about the gods creating human beings. Their religion told the story of a great flood. Some of the gods decided to destroy the people on Earth by a great flood. A favored king of one city was warned by friendly gods, so he built a great boat. In this great boat, the good king took all the animals of authorized to perform the sacred the field and forest. After the rain stopped and the flood waters went down, the good king gave thanks to the friendly gods who had warned him. Flood stories such as this one are found in many cultures.
CIVILIZATIONS IN THE AMERICAS

We have read about great civilizations in Africa, Europe, and Asia. What about North and South America? Civilizations were also developing there.

Three groups of **Native Americans** set up empires and were highly civilized. They were the Aztecs of Mexico, the Mayas of Central America, and the Incas of South America.

For years historians have felt that the first people in the Americas came from Asia. No matter where they came from, these three early groups developed great civilizations.

By about 100 C.E., the Mayas had great city-states. Some of their temples were 200 feet high. These people knew how to use a zero in math before the Europeans did. They had a better calendar than the people of Europe. Their scientists studied astronomy, and their doctors knew about surgery.

In the late 800s, the Mayas began leaving their great cities. No one is sure why.

During the 1200s, the nomadic Aztecs began settling in the Valley of Mexico. They grew into an empire by conquering and controlling most of central Mexico. By 1500, the empire had a population of about 20 million. Their capital city, Tenochtitlan, was magnificent. It was filled with wide streets and **canals**, and many temples and palaces.

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**Native Americans**—the people who lived in North America before Europeans arrived; also called Indians

**canal**—a waterway made by artificial means, such as digging
Montezuma was born in Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital that is now Mexico City. The Aztecs were tough, intelligent people. The ruling class lived in great luxury. Almost 400 conquered towns paid tribute, or protection money, to them.

The Aztecs believed in many gods who controlled every part of their lives. To make their gods happy, the Aztec people sacrificed humans to the gods. The Aztecs kept an army just to capture people from neighboring tribes to use for sacrifice.

The government of the Aztecs was headed by an elected ruler. He was elected by a council from the old ruler’s family. Like a god, the ruler had absolute, or total, control over the Aztec people.

In 1502, Montezuma was elected as ruler. As Montezuma studied to know the gods better, he became concerned. The books told of Quetzalcoatl, one of the Aztec gods. He had been beaten and then sent away by the war god. Quetzalcoatl said he would return in a One Reed year to rule the Aztecs again. Many One Reed years passed without Quetzalcoatl returning. The next One Reed year would be in 1519.

The books said Quetzalcoatl would have white skin and a black beard. White skin and beards were unknown to the Aztecs.

When the One Reed year arrived in 1519, the pale-skinned, black-bearded Spanish soldier Hernando Cortés came to Mexico. Montezuma believed Cortés to be Quetzalcoatl. He knew that there would be a battle between Quetzalcoatl and the war god. Montezuma was willing to pay anything to Cortés if he would not come to Tenochtitlan. Cortés, however, set up his camp along the coast and began to move inland.

Cortés arrived at Tenochtitlan on November 8, 1519. Montezuma greeted him and housed the Spanish troops in the palace. Eventually, the Spanish made Montezuma a prisoner. Though Montezuma believed Cortés was the god Quetzalcoatl, many of the people did not. When the Spanish took Montezuma prisoner, the people rebelled. They elected a new leader who would force Cortés to leave.

Cortés returned to the coast to make sure things were going well there. He left a large force in Tenochtitlan to keep control of the Aztecs. A battle broke out between the Spanish and the Aztecs. Cortés returned from the coast with a large fighting force. When Montezuma tried to calm his people, they threw stones and arrows at him. Montezuma was badly wounded. The Spanish took care of him, but he died on June 29, 1520. The city he loved so much was totally destroyed in August 1521.
In South America, the Incas were also great builders. Their famous Inca Highway was 2,000 miles long. It went through high mountain country and used suspension bridges and tunnels. Runners carried messages from the ruler to his people along this great highway.

A central government tightly controlled the Inca empire. The emperor was a god-king and owned everything in the empire. Subject people owed labor to the state. All people within the empire had to speak the Incan language and practice the Incan religion.

In North America, people developed a variety of societies in the many very different regions where they lived. For example, the Anasazi people of the Southwest built villages called pueblos. Each one was a compound of linked, multistory buildings. People of the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys built giant burial mounds and created trading centers. People in the East lived in woodlands and farmed and hunted.

PUZZLE: EMPIRES AND CIVILIZATIONS

Read each of the following clues and think of a word to fit in the lines provided. Some lines have a number under them. At the end of the quiz, there are thirteen numbered lines. Place the letter from each numbered line above the same number in the line at the end of the exercise. The word you spell will tell you what this chapter is all about. We have given you one letter to get you started on that long word.

1. the name for the religion followed by Muslims _______ _______ _______ _______
2. warlike people who controlled many native tribe ____________________________
3. a great road-building South American civilization. ____________________________
4. a Muslim group that lived in Spain ________________________________
5. a new name for the Eastern Roman Empire ________________________________
6. the Muslim name for God ______________________
7. the Muslim holy book ______________________
8. the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire ________________________________
9. _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______
10. _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______
11. _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______
12. _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______
13. _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______ _______