Chapter 2 - First Civilizations: Africa and Asia (3200 BC - 500 BC).

(1) Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile.
(2) Egyptian Civilization.
(3) City-States of Ancient Sumer.
(4) Invaders, Traders, Empire Builders.
(5) Roots of Judaism.

This chapter is a compressed form of two separate chapters in prior text.

(1) Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile.

Vocabulary.
- silt - rich soil.
- cataract - high waterfall, rapids. (Gk. ‘cata’=down, ‘ract’=break)
- delta - triangle-shaped area (marshy flatland).
- dynasty - ruling family.
- pharaoh - ruler. (Egyptian: Per Ao=‘great house’).
- vizier - chief minister.

Setting the Scene.
The Nile would flood every year (summer/fall), recede for planting (winter) before the harvest (March/April). Mechanical regularity of flooding led Egyptians to believe that universe was run on principles of justice. Nile flows from Ethiopia and central Africa and empties into Mediterranean Sea.

Geography of the Nile Valley.
“Egypt,” wrote Herodotus (484-425 BC), “is wholly the gift of the Nile.” Nile is longest river (4160 mi.) in the world. Amazon is #2 at 4000 mi.
Nile flows north from higher elevations in central Africa to Mediterranean.
* John Speke (1827-1864) discovered source of Nile in late 1800s. Called ‘White Nile’ at its source, it joins with major tributary, ‘Blue Nile’ in Sudan.
Nile is major highway that united villages along its bank, encouraging trade.
Egyptians used reed called papyrus that grew in marshy area to make paper.

Natural Boundaries.
Egypt has natural boundaries from attack: Libyan and Nubian Deserts, Red and Mediterranean Seas, and in south cataracts or waterfalls. Egypt ‘Achilles heel’ is Sinai Peninsula (‘pen’=almost, ‘insula’=isle) where invaders came.

Unifying the Land.
Upper Egypt is in south ... and Nile flows to Lower Egypt in the north.
c. 3100 BC Menes, king of Upper Egypt, united two regions of Egypt.
He used Nile a highway to link the south with north. His successors wore double crown to signify unity of two kingdoms. Capital was at Memphis. Menes likely started first dynasty (Gk. ‘dynastes’=to be able) or ruling family.

One way to look at Egypt history is through its more than 30 dynasties.
Another way is to look at three main kingdoms from 2700 BC to 1100 BC.
Old Kingdom. (2700 BC - 2200 BC) or Pyramid age.

**Strong Government.**

Egyptian rulers called pharaohs organized a strong, ‘centralized’ state. Pharaohs claimed divine support; people saw pharaoh as a god. Pharaoh had ‘absolute power’ and owned all the land in the kingdom. Pharaoh depended on vizier, chief minister, to run the government, to wit: tax collection, farming, (very important) irrigation system. One vizier, Ptah-hotep, wrote instructional manual on governing.

**The Pyramids.**

During the Old Kingdom, Egyptians built pyramids (tombs) at Giza. Egyptians believed in afterlife so they preserved bodies of dead rulers and provided everything needed for the next life. Building a pyramid (limestone blocks weighing two tons) took so long that a pharaoh would begin to build his tomb as soon as he inherited the throne. The pyramids suggest strength of ancient civilization, planning, organizing. Power struggles (weak pharaohs), crop failures (peasant riots), and cost of pyramids contributed to the collapse of Old Kingdom. 150 years disunity!

Middle Kingdom. (2050 BC - 1800 BC).

**Turbulent Time.**

After disunity, new pharaohs reunited the land. But Nile did not rise as regularly as it once had. Corruption and rebellions were common. But expanded trade flourished with Middle East and, text says, Crete. c. 1700 BC. Catastrophe struck when Hyksos invaded in chariots against Egyptian foot soldiers. Hyksos were rulers of Egypt for next 100 years but, interestingly, victors adopted Egyptian customs, beliefs, and even names. After 100 years, new Egyptian leaders emerged and drove out the Hyksos.

New Kingdom. (1550 BC - 1100 BC) or Empire age.

**Empire.**

Egypt created a large empire, reaching the Euphrates River at its peak. Powerful Rulers. Queen Hatshepsut (c. 1540- c. 1482 BC) exercised the rights of pharaoh. She encouraged trade with eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea coast. Ramses II was most powerful pharaoh (for 67 years during 1290-1224 BC) pushed Egypt north as far as Syria. He did sign a peace treaty with the Hittites that is the first such document to have survived in history.

After Ramses II, Egyptian power slowly declined. Invaders would conquer the Nile region: in order - Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

**Egypt and Nubia.**

The Nile kingdom of Nubia (aka Kush) developed in the south of Egypt. Egypt traded with Nubia for centuries. Ramses II attacked Nubia for gold.

750 BC Nubia regains its independence by attacking Egypt. Rule 100 years. 650 BC Assyrians attack Egypt. Drive Nubians back to original land (Sudan).
(2) Egyptian Civilization.

Vocabulary.
mummification - preservation of dead body.
hieroglyphics - Egyptian picture writing.
ideogram - pictures that symbolize idea or action.
demotic - Egyptian language ‘of the people’ (Gk. ‘demos’=people).
papyrus - reed along Nile used as paper.
decipher - decode.

Setting the Scene.
Belief in afterlife had an important effect on Egyptian civilization.
Myth: Osiris ruled Egypt. Set (his brother) kills him, chops up his body and tosses pieces
into Nile (text says ‘all over Egypt’). Isis is wife of Osiris who reassembles his body (gets
most of the pieces). Osiris becomes god of dead; he becomes judge of souls seeking afterlife.
Isis’s symbol is ‘ankh’, a cross with a loop above the bar .. that Egyptians put on dead body
for afterlife.

Egyptian Religion.

Chief Gods & Goddesses.
The chief god was sun god called Amon-Re. Tombs (death) on west bank.
The pharaoh was also considered a god as well as a monarch.
Osiris is god of underworld and (very important) god of the Nile.
Isis is goddess with special appeal to women.
Set is bad god who withers the harvest.
Horus is son of Osiris and Isis who kills Set to avenge dad’s diced death.

A Religious Rebel.
c. 1380 BC. A young pharaoh pushes monotheism versus polytheism.
Amenhotep IV wants one god, Aton, becomes Akenaton.
Queen Nefertiti (wife) helps eviction of gods from temple.
Powerful priests are plenty mad at upstarts!
c. 1361 BC. Akenaton dies.
His son-in-law becomes pharaoh at 12 and dies at 18.
Tutankhamon changes his ‘mono’ name to Tutankhamon.
Polytheism is back. Priests are back in business.
Tut’s magnificent tomb was discovered in 1922 by Howard Carter.

Belief in Afterlife.
Test.
Dead soul is ferried across lake of fire to reach hall of Osiris.
Osiris weighs dead person’s heart against the ‘feather of truth’.
Sinners>Eater of Dead. Worthy souls>Happy Field of Food.
Egyptians relied on the Book of the Dead written on scrolls and put in tomb.
It contained spells, charms, and formulas for dead to use in afterlife.

Mummification.
Skilled embalmers extracted brain from dead through nostrils and removed most of
internal organs .. ere filling body cavity with spices .. and wrap-up.
Mummification was first only for ruler/nobles and later for ordinary people.
Egyptian Society.

Draw a social pyramid:
pharaoh > priests/nobles > merchants/scribes/artisans > peasants/slaves.

The Life of Farmer.

Majority of Egyptians were peasant farmers on land that pharaoh owned. Peasants in off-season were expected to work for pharaoh building jobs.

Social Change.

In Middle Kingdom more trade and warfare meant upward mobility. Trade led to growing merchant class. War led to riches artisan worked on.

Women.

Women in Egypt enjoyed higher status than in other ancient civilizations. In Middle Kingdom, women could inherit property, testify in court, divorce. Women were not confined to the home and had job like doctor or priestess. But women could not be scribe (power job) or government official.

Egyptian Learning.

Scribes learned to read and write .. and math, medicine and engineering.

Written Records.

Egypt developed hieroglyphs as picture writing system, in order:
- pictogram - picture of an object, e.g., an ox was an ox.
- ideogram - picture symbolized an idea, reclining person was sleep.

Hieroglyphs - first on stone, wood and, later, papyrus. Up to New Kingdom.

Rosetta Stone.

Jean Champollion (1790-1832), used Rosetta Stone to decipher hieroglyphs: three languages - hieratic (priests ‘holy’), demotic (‘of people’), Greek. See “Riddle of Rosetta Stone” by James Giblin (Harper Trophy 1990). Deciphering hieroglyphs let scholars read records of ancient Egypt.

Advances in Medicine and Science.

Egypt knew a lot about medicine, astronomy, and mathematics.
Doctors observed symptoms, diagnosed diseases .. did complex surgery.
Astronomers charted movement of planets and developed a calendar. 12 months, 30 days each, (5 added at end year): basis of modern calendar.
Engineers used geometry (a) to establish boundary lines of farmland and (b) to calculate exact size and location of stones in a pyramid or temple.

Arts and Literature.


Painting and Sculpture.

Painting styles remained almost unchanged for thousands of years. The pharaoh and gods were always much larger than human figures. Humans appear with heads/limbs in profile but eyes/shoulders facing viewer. Humans appear in stiff, standard poses .. sometimes with animal heads. The Great Sphinx at Giza portrays an early pharaoh as a powerful lion. *An obelisk (like in Central Park) is tall stone monument from single rock.

Egyptian Literature.

Oldest literature includes hymns and prayers to gods, proverbs, folk tales. Remember that “Instruction of Ptah-hotep” was instructional manual. “The Tale of Sinuhe” helps us to see how Egyptians see themselves v. others.
City-States of Ancient Sumer.

Vocabulary.
- hierarchy - social classes: upper, middle, lower.
- ziggurat - trapezoidal temple (not tomb)
- cuneiform - wedged-shaped writing on clay tablets.

Setting the Scene.
The city of Sumer lay in Tigris-Euphrates valley called Mesopotamia.
Word ‘mesopotamia’ (Gk. ‘mesos’=middle, ‘potamos’=river) is ‘land between the rivers.’
It is site of earliest civilization in what is today Iraq in the Middle East.
Sumer likely preceded Egypt with writing (cuneiform) and architecture (ziggurat).

Geography of Fertile Crescent.

Crossroads For Trade and War.
The Fertile (rich soil) Crescent (arc) is called the “crossroads of the world” because the arc
of land commands land routes to Asia, Africa, and Europe.
The Fertile Crescent was different than Egypt that had natural boundaries. Mesopotamia
did not have natural boundaries: invaders came; much war.

Floods and Irrigation.
Floods were major problem. Strong government (temple priests) needed: Build dikes to
hold back flood and irrigation ditches to get water to fields.

The First Cities.
c. 3200 BC the first Sumerian cities emerge in southern Mesopotamia.
- Ur. Erech. Made with bricks of clay. (No timber or stone).
Trade was key for Sumerian cities. Along river. Even across deserts.
Sumer made first wheeled vehicles (wheel invented earlier unknown).
- Sumerians will be the first to use wheel war chariots.
- first sail for long-distance travel.
- first arches, columns
- first ramps, inclined walks

Sumerian Civilization.
Sumerian cities fought for control of land and water.
War leaders became hereditary rulers.

Government and Society.
Each city was a city-state - large town/city and countryside in mutual defense.
Ruler was responsible for maintaining city walls and irrigation system.
Ruler led army in war and enforced the laws.
Ruler was seen as chief servant of gods and led ceremonies to please gods.
Social hierarchy or system of ranks was as follows:
- highest class - ruling family, nobles, high priests.
- middle class - lesser priests, scribes, merchants, artisans.
- lowest class - peasant farmers (majority).
- underclass - slaves.
Men gained more power and wealth .. and women became dependent on men. But women
had legal rights: could own property and engage in trade.
Sumerian Religion.

Polytheism. Many gods cover all aspects of life, particularly forces of nature. People believed gods and goddesses behaved like ordinary people. Deity ate, drank, married, and raised families. Deity favored truth and justice; but responsible for violence and suffering. People felt need to keep gods happy to ensure safety of their city-state. Each city built a ziggurat, a pyramid-temple that soared to the heavens. Wide steps led to the top and shrine to chief god or goddess of that city. * Sumerians believed gods descended to earth using steps as ladder. People prayed and offered sacrifices of animals, grain, and wine. * In Egypt, favorable climate let people enjoy life and see kind gods. * In Sumer, floods/invasions made gloomy life with gods as punishers.

Afterlife. Like Egyptians, Sumerians believed in afterlife. Remember Egyptians vision of Happy Field of Food. Sumerians underworld was dark where food was mud. The floods of Tigris and Euphrates were more irregular than those of Nile. That may explain why Sumerians took a pessimistic view of life and death.

Advances in Learning.

Writing. c. 3200 BC Sumerians develop first form of writing, later called cuneiform from Latin word ‘cuneus’ for wedge because it involved a reed pen to make wedge shaped marks on clay tablets. Cuneiform grew out of system of pictographs that priests used to record goods brought to temple warehouses, (So first use is accountancy!). Priests developed symbols to represent more complicated thoughts. Cuneiform uses: first to record grain, then myths, prayers, laws, treaties, and business contracts.

Medicine. Mathematics. Geography. Astronomy. Literature. Sumerians developed basic algebra and geometry. Sumerians used geometry like Egyptians to survey land. Sumerians based their number system on six, dividing the: hour into 60 minutes; minute into 60 seconds, circle into 360 degrees. Priests studied skies, recorded the movement of heavenly bodies, that led to the development of a calendar so necessary to a farming community.

Looking Ahead.

Armies swept across Mesopotamia (wide-open area), conquering city-states. Newcomers adopted Sumerian ideas such as cuneiform. Newcomers elaborated on Sumerian literature such as “Epic of Gilganesh.” Sumerian knowledge passed on to the Greeks and Romans, to western world.
(4) Invaders, Traders, and Empire Builders.

Vocabulary.
codify - to arrange and set down laws in writing.
criminal law - robbery, assault, murder.
civil law - property inheritance, taxes, marriage, divorce.
tolerance - victor ‘acceptance’ of vanquished.
satrap - a governor in Persian empire.
barter economy - exchange good for another good.
money economy - exchange ‘money’ for a good.
colony - territory settled and ruled by foreign people.
alphabet - letters that represent spoken sounds.

Setting the Scene.
Assurbanipal (668-627 BC) was Assyrian king known for his bloody warfare (mentioned here in text) and building world’s first library (mentioned later).

Ruling a Large Empire.
Invasion and conquest were prominent feature in ancient Middle East.
First Empire Builder.
c. 2300 BC. Sargon, ruler of Akkad, conquers Sumer (his neighbor).  
He builds first empire known to history.  
After his death. Invaders. His empire crumbles.

Hammurabi the Lawgiver.
c. 1790 BC. Hammurabi, king of Babylon, takes over Mesopotamia.  
He unites the Babylonian empire.  
Outstanding general, administrator, art patron.  
His accomplishment is the Code of Hammurabi,  
a set of 300 laws (not actually written by him),  
carved on stone pillar for all to see in public.  
Hammurabi’s Code was first attempt by a ruler to codify laws in writing.  
(Note: In c. 2050 BC the ruler of Ur compiled the first known code of laws.)

Crime and Punishment.
One part of Hammurabi’s Code is criminal law, another is civil law.
Code is often seen as cruel for “eye for an eye and a life for a life” principle.
Code was supposed to protect the powerless such as slaves and women.
Women could own property and pass it on to children.
Men had unlimited authority over children. Orderly house=Stable empire.

Warfare and Spread of Ideas.
Conquerors uprooted conquered and, thus, helped spread ideas to new places.

Secret of Ironworking.
c. 1400 BC. Hittites pushed out of Asia Minor into Mesopotamia.  
Hittites were first to use iron for spears and battle axes.
c. 1200 BC. Hittite empire collapses.  
Hittite ironsmiths migrate with knowledge. Enter Iron Age!

Assyrian Warriors.
c. 1100 BC. Assyrians from upper Tigris expand across Mesopotamia.  
Assyrian empire based on warfare lasts for 500 years.
Babylon Revived.
612 BC. Assurbanipal’s capital, Nineveh, falls 15 years after his death.
605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar (dies 562) becomes king of Babylon.
   He rebuilds Babylon as power during his 43-year reign.
600 BC. He builds Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Wonder of world.
597 BC. He captures Jerusalem.
586 BC. He destroys Jerusalem.

Persian Empire.
539 BC. Babylon falls to Persia (king Cyrus the Great).
Persia becomes the largest empire yet seen in history.
Persia practices a policy of ‘tolerance’ to conquered peoples: it respects customs and
religions of diverse groups in its vast empire.

Uniting Many Peoples.
522 BC. Persian Empire unites during Darius (Cyrus’ son-in-law) reign.
   Persia copies Assyrian model of dividing empire into satrapies.
A satrapy or province had to pay tax based on its resources and wealth.
   Persia copies Babylonian idea of single law code for all empire.
   Persia copies Assyrian idea of building roads for better access.

Economic Life.
Darius improved trade by setting up a common set of weights and measures.
Darius encouraged us of coins that Lydia (Turkey) introduced in 600s BC.
Result: single Persian coinage; demise of barter, rise of money economy.

A New Religion.
Zoroaster (630-553 BC) was Persian prophet who helped unite the empire.
He rejected old Persian gods in favor of a single wise god who ruled world.
But the creator of good spirit was in constant struggle with the devil of evil.
Each individual had to choose whether to support good or evil.
Zoroaster teachings are collected in holy book called “Zend-Avesta.”
On Judgment Day, individuals will get heaven (good) or hell (bad).
Later, both Christianity and Islam emerge in the Middle East and both
religions stress similar ideas about heaven, hell, and a judgment day.

Phoenician Sea Traders.
Phoenicia (today Lebanon and Syria) was small state with big contribution.
Phoenicians were “carriers of civilization” due to travel on Mediterranean.

Manufacturing and Trade.
Products: glass > coastal sand; purple dye > sea snail; books > papyrus.
The word ‘Bible’ is notably derived from the Phoenician city of ‘Byblos.’
Trade: Sailors. Set up colonies: Sicily, Spain.
   Set up colony in Africa - Carthage c. 814 BC.

Phoenician Alphabet.
Cuneiform and hieroglyphs had symbols that represent a word or concept.
c. 1000 BC. Phoenician alphabet is developed:
   contains 22 symbols for consonant sounds;
   contains no vowels;
c. 800 BC. Greeks adapt Phoenician alphabet, Add symbols for vowels.
   Greek alphabet is developed.
   Romans later adapt the Greek version of the alphabet.
(5) The Roots of Judaism.

Vocabulary.
- monotheistic - belief in one god.
- covenant - a binding agreement.
- patriarchal - father is head of family.
- Sabbath - holy day for rest and worship.
- prophet - spiritual leader.
- ethics - moral standards.
- diaspora - scattering of people.

Setting the Scene.
Israelites were apart from others in Fertile Crescent with 10 Commandments. Their early religion evolved into Judaism, one of main faiths in world.

Early History of Israelites.
Israelites (Hebrews) came to believe that God was taking part in their lives. Accordingly, they recorded events and laws in Torah, their sacred text.

Nomadic People.
c. 2000 BC. Abraham migrated from Ur in Mesopotamia to Canaan region. (Centuries later, under Roman rule, Canaan became Palestine.) Abraham is considered the founder of Israelite nation.
The Book of Genesis says that a famine later force Israelites to go to Egypt. Israelites were enslaved in Egypt.
Moses led Israelites out of Egypt (exodus). Moses dies.
Israelites later enter Canaan, the land they believe God has promised them.

Kingdom of Israel.
c. 1000 BC. Israelites had set up kingdom of Israel. 
- David, a strong king, unites feuding tribes into united nation.
- Solomon (David’s son) turns Jerusalem into an grand capital.
- Solomon negotiates with powerful Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Division and Conquest.
- 722 BC. Israel falls to Assyrians.
- 586 BC. Judah falls to Babylonians.

Many Israelites are forced into exile in Babylon: “Babylonian Captivity.” During this period Israelites became known as the Jews.
- 539 BC. Cyrus takes Babylon and frees the Jews from captivity.
Many Jews return to homeland; some continue to live under Persian rule.

Covenant With God.
To Israelites, history and faith were interconnected within God’s plan. Israelites were monotheistic at a time when most others were polytheistic. Israelites believed they were ‘Chosen People’ with a covenant with God.

Law and Morality.
At core of Judaism are Ten Commandments, a set of laws God gave Moses. Religious duties include keeping the Sabbath or holy day for rest and worship. Prophets or spiritual leaders preached strong code of ethics, moral standards.