

Small Kingdoms and Mighty Empires of the Near East:
Chapter 2

- I. Decline of Great Kingdom's: Hittite's and Egyptian's.
 - A. Migrations occurred throughout region, a natural phenomenon, with reasons ranging from:
 - i. Poverty:
 - ii. New Land: Hyskos
 - iii. Random raids: Sea Peoples
 - iv. Harsh political rule: Hebrews
 - B. Migration produced different results:
 - i. Assimilation:
 - ii. Destruction of civilizations: Egypt
- II. Egypt: a Shattered Kingdom.
 - A. Sea Peoples damaged Egypt in 13th century, didn't destroy empire but brought its golden age to an end. Results:
 - i. Political fragmentation
 - ii. Dark age: Third Intermediate or
Final Decline
of power
 - iii. Foreign affair decline: Egyptian loss
of power
 - B. Rash of new kingdoms in region had little or no regard for the legacy that was Egypt at that time.
 - C. Invasion by neighbors: Libyans ruled independent dynasties in the delta of Egypt from 950-730 BCE. Ruled by Libyan pharaohs! Built cities and created an urban culture that Egypt was not familiar with. Adopted many Egyptian traits.
 - D. Nubian expansion occurred in South. Not a destructive influence. Nubians very similar to Egyptians as they had admired and adopted Egyptian culture.
 - E. Kush: a kingdom of Ancient Africa that arose in the Sudan with a capital at Napata. The Kushites like the Libyans and Nubians worshipped and behaved much like Egyptians. The cultures were highly comparable.
 - i. In the 8th century BCE Kushian king Pianky swept through the entire Nile valley and united Egypt. This unification did not restore the luster of the old empirical ways however. Egypt returned to a certain level of strength but was no longer the big kid on the block as their civilization had to compete with the Greeks (Minoans/Myceneans), and the other Near East kingdoms.
 - ii. However, Egyptian culture had tremendous appeal and widespread influences in Africa as far south as

Ethiopia and the mysterious land of Punt. Cultural diffusion also spread Egyptian ideas into the doorstep of Europe.

- III. The Children of Israel: The birth of kingdom's in the Near East (Biblical lands)
- A. As the Hitites and Egyptians fell a power vacuum was created in the region no longer ruled by 1 or 2 dominant areas the region will see the rise of multiple kingdoms each having a great impact on World History.
 - B. Examples: Philistines, Phoenicians, and Hebrews. Along with the might empires of Assyria and Persia which were arriving shortly.
 - C. Philistines: settled along the coast of Palestine around 1200 BCE. Began to farm and raise flocks.
 - D. Phoenicians: a Semitic people long inhabited Lebanon, now rising to prominence amid the void of power in the region. Became the legendary sailors and traders of the Ancient world. Established great port cities in Tyre and Byblos.
 - i. Founded the kingdom of Carthage on the African coastline to the Mediterranean sea.
 - ii. An urban environment their great contribution to the world was a phonetic (Phonic) alphabet based upon symbols that utilized sounds, sounds unique to the symbol.
 - iii. Their mere presence in the ancient world encouraged the spread and diffusion of ideas from Northern Europe to Africa and beyond.
 - E. Hebrews: our greatest source of Hebrew history is the Old Testament to the Bible and from this we have constructed much of our knowledge of the history of the Hebrews.
 - i. Hebrews traditionally referred to as Hapiru or homeless nomads. Hebrews migrated from the Mesopotamian city of Ur under the leadership of Abraham.
 - ii. Migrated into the Nile delta in search for good, prosperous land. According to the bible the Egyptians enslaved the Hebrews. A group of Hebrews under the leadership of Moses fled Egypt in what has become known as the Exodus. They wandered to the Sinai Peninsula until they settled in Palestine around 1300 BCE.
 - iii. Conquering Palestine was not easy. It required a great amount of warfare to conquer the region. They encountered Philistines, Amorites, Babylonians and Canaanites.

iv. Not all hardship and warfare, Hebrews worshipped and shared philosophical undertones with the Canaanites, including their worship of the Golden Calf Baal.

v. Great conflicts came with the Philistines. Much more militaristic and highly organized the Philistines were a great adversary to the Hebrews. Hebrews were disorganized into the twelve tribes of the son of Abraham, only to be later organized by Saul of Benjamin's tribe. Established a monarchy over all twelve tribes and unified them in their struggle against the Philistines.

vi. Saul's efforts carried on by David of Bethlehem whose struggles against the Philistines pushed the group back gave the people a capital at Jerusalem. The city would later be enlarged, fortified and made the religious center of his realm.

vii. David's son Solomon concerned himself with building an efficient nation, a nation with political developments such as divisions of administration within the large country. Also brought the need to construct great public buildings and temples like other great civilizations of the day. Not particularly popular as the taxes were the highest in the Ancient world. His great temple contained the Ark of the Covenant. At his death the kingdom broke in two parts with Israel and Judah becoming the new nations. (Israel-North, capital at Samaria. Judah-South capital at Jerusalem.)

viii. A great war broke out between these two groups, much of the evidence on this great war was coming from the Bible and is currently being re-interpreted.

ix. Demise: Northern Kingdom of Israel (under King Jezeiah) will be wiped out by the mighty Assyrians with the South surviving until they were crushed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, at which time they were subjected to the Babylonian captivity a time where religious leaders kept the civilization alive by preserving their religion and composing the Old Testament to keep it alive.

x. Result: laws of Yahweh, persons who followed them to be called Jews.

IV. The Creation and Evolution of the Jewish Religion.

A. Chief literary product: The Old Testament or Hebrew Bible. Great influence on Islam and Christianity.

B. Formal agreement: Covenant or an agreement between Yahweh who appeared on Mt. Sinai to Moses and the Hebrew people. That covenant was should the Hebrews consider him their only god, he would consider them his chosen people and protect them from enemies.

C. Believed that he had led them out of Egypt and gave them prosperity in Israel while now keeping them alive in Babylon.

D. Key component the Ten Commandments.

E. Yahweh had no human form, became a spirit, a being whose form cannot be contemplated.

F. Faced great competition from other gods in the region but developed willingly into the world's first monotheistic religion unlike the Akhenaton experiment in Egypt.

G. Because of the personal nature of Yahweh's relationship to his people the faith he spread was personal to Hebrews and required no spreading as Christianity and Islam do/did.

H. Hebrew law arose, similar to Hammurabi but derived from the Ten Commandments with a personal, less harsh approach. Yahweh viewed as very forgiving and this effected Hebrew outlook.

V. Daily life in Israel:

A. End of nomadic life brings about changed customs in family and marriage.

- i. Land ownership became individual or Familial
- ii. Extended family gave way to Nuclear family.
- iii. Monogamous marriages with strict limits on divorce.
- iv. Marriages legal contracts with economic roots arranged by parents.
- v. Divorce available only to male.
- vi. Children:
 1. sons very important for political economic reason
 2. Children worked in agriculture.
- vii. Slave labor and large farms replace small family farms
- viii. Torah and Talmud become Hebrew law books. The Torah is the first five books of Bible.

VI. Assyria: The Military Monarchy.

A. The Hebrews, Phoenicians, Phillistines and other small groups were allowed to exist only because they emerged at a time in World History when the region they occupied was devoid of a powerful empire. That changes in the 9th century BCE.

B. Assyrian civilization was born out of their geographical location in Northern Mesopotamia experiencing almost constant attacks from the powers of the region as

well as nomadic raiders. Living under this constant threat the Assyrians developed a constant unyielding closeness in political matters.

C. The Assyrians had one thing in mind, to dominate the region and as a result their existence is almost constantly associated with war. However, we'll see that there is much more to this people than their war like tendencies.

D. Empire: the empire during the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II during the 7th century BCE stretched from the East and North of the Tigris River to the center of Egypt. See map on page 50.

E. Control: revolt against the empire was met with unspeakable bloodshed and atrocities. As their historical counterpart in Greece, the Spartans learned, ferocity and blood are powerful political motivators. The results were often plague, cannibalism and bloodthirsty battle.

F. Sophistication amidst the primitive culture? First off, the Assyrians turned the art of Military into a science with the greatest armies of the ancient world. These armies were not based solely on the ferocity of the people's culture. It was based on military sophistication that included: weaponry (spear, arrow, and sword), armor, helmets, utilization of horseback archers as well as chariots. Siege machinery, excavation techniques and battering rams also aided the Assyrian siege. Engineering, bridge construction etc...

G. Rule and culture: the Assyrians were master organizers. They not only organized their thoughts into great libraries but organized their political earnings into great empires with provincial leaders. Geographical proximity was key in the Assyrian scheme of ruling. They were a surprising combination of brutality and intelligence as suggested in their legendary library of Nineveh.

H. Assyrian fall: as was their ascent, the fall of this empire was swift. The brutality of this people made them a likely target for invading groups and angry subjects. Such was the case with their collapse in 612 BCE by the Northern Iranian empire of Media and their alliance with Babylon.

I. Nineveh: the worlds greatest library of antiquity was unearthed by A.H. Layard a British archaeologist and scholar. Layard found amazing artwork and architecture, art which was very serious and direct and told a story, most of which dealt with military matters.

VII. The Persian Empire:

A. Origin: the Persians were (Iranian) an Indo-European group who migrated from central Europe and southern Russia. Became enamored with the culture of the Mesopotamians. Along with the Medians they formed the core of the Iranian peoples.

B. Geography: Iran is a large country stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf (see 53). Iran lies on a plateau that stretches from the Euphrates valley all the way to the Hindu Kush mountains above India. This plateau the largest in the

world is filled with scattered oases and vast deserts. The borders are fertile with the Mountains catching rain and creating moisture, the middle is dry and desolate salt deserts. These areas are nearly impossible to cross without modern technology. This puts Iran at the crossroads between East and West and their civilization will embody characteristics of both.

C. Medes and the Persians: Iranians and Medes were two of the larger group of people known as Indo-Europeans who migrated from lands in Southeastern Europe into the areas of Iran, Mesopotamia, and India. These groups were warriors and horse experts, they divided themselves into groups resembling Medieval European feuds with chiefs/petty kings who depended on the aid of horse bound warriors and a collection of rent paying commoners. These groups became more powerful and profitable with the advent of iron into the region, these people first used iron in agriculture and the results were dramatically improved yields and larger populations. Iran used its mineral wealth to its advantage. These groups gradually splintered into two separate groups. The Northern Medes and the Southern Persians.

D. Creation of a Persian empire: The rise of Cyrus the Great. After the Persians were conquered by the Medians, a great leader arose in Persia Cyrus the Great. Cyrus, one of the worlds five greatest rulers ever, threw off the Medians by conquering them and turns their country into his first province or satrapy. This mind-boggling achievement was achieved largely due to the greatness of Cyrus. Cyrus had two traits that separated him from other rulers in the ancient world, characteristics that will make him a blueprint for future leaders. 1. Thought of all conquered territories as a state, and did not distinguish between groups. 2. He held an enlightened view of empire. He was not unwilling to relinquish his own personal ideals in favor of other more advanced ideas. He refused to limit himself like the snobby Egyptians, Exclusive Hebrews and Cruel Assyrians had. All were given great opportunities for gaining wealth, maintaining their customs and religious freedoms and feeling as if they were still a part of Persia.

E. Cyrus goals: win control of west and its rich trading ports. Secure all of Iran from nomadic invaders. First conquest: Lydia in present day Turkey giving him conquests with access to the Mediterranean sea. Six years later in 540 BCE after conquering the remainder of Iran, Cyrus was greeted in Babylon as a liberator whose generosity and tolerance was foreign to them, yet was a very welcome addition.

F. Cyrus and the Jews: perhaps most remarkable, was Cyrus' treatment of the Jews. No group in human history with the exception of the current NATO alliance structure has shown any understanding and or generosity to the Jews. The first and most generous group to bestow upon the Jews great freedom and wealth was Cyrus and the Persians. Cyrus gave them Palestine back after their captivity in Babylon in addition he rebuilt all of their beloved monuments to their original splendor-with his wealth. He allowed them to practice their religious beliefs in temples he built (despite belief differences) under the protection of his empire. Perfect for the Hebrews who were not interested in conquest or conversion.

G. Iranian/Persian religion: Thus spake Zarathustra. Despite all of their religious endeavors the Persians maintained a polytheistic blend unique to their region. The chief god was Ahuramazda the creator and benefactor of all living things. They were polytheistic with a religious structure similar to the Egyptians. Most deities were animist in nature in that they represented a real life entity like fire, rain etc...until Zarathustra. Zarathustra or Zoroaster a mysterious figure whose birth and origin is a mystery brought with him a precursor to Christian thought with his new faith. The faith was based on the centrality of two gods Ahuramazda and Ahiriman who were in a cosmic battle over good and evil. Every human must choose a side in this struggle and be judged by Ahuramazda and sent to his after life or the oppositions. The alternatives were very different and Zoroaster made the positive alternative at the day of reckoning seem much more pleasant with images that resemble our heaven and hell. The teachings of Zoroaster like those of all early religious philosophers were slow to be embraced, in this case until the Royal family of the energetic Darius embraced the faith in the 5th century BCE.

H. Persian Empire: Cyrus' successors turned the Persian Empire into the greatest of the ancient world by conquering Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and India. The Persians knew that one man alone could not rule this empire. Thus they established a primitive form of Federalism that separated power into several tiers, with the emperor at the zenith of the power structure. Officials depending on their nobility were given authority in certain arenas, ranging from tax collection to military endeavors. To govern this empire the Persians also built an elaborate system of roads, the greatest until the Roman Empire, including a Royal Road, which spanned almost 1700 miles! This system allowed the emperor to communicate through messengers to all areas of his kingdom. See example on 60!