

# **GL8 History**

# **Student Text**

**Excerpts used For GL4**  
**Student Text**



**Rafiki Foundation, Inc.**

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	3
Chapter One: Beginnings of Civilization to Rome.....	5
Chapter Two: The Roman Empire.....	29
Chapter Three: The Early Church.....	51
Chapter Four: Constantine to the Fall of Rome.....	69
Chapter Five: Constantinople, Mecca, and the West .....	97
Chapter Six: The Medieval World Takes Shape .....	121
Chapter Seven: The Tumultuous Ninth and Tenth Centuries.....	139
Chapter Eight: The High Middle Ages.....	159
Chapter Nine: The Age of the Crusades.....	179



# Chapter One: Beginnings of Civilization to Rome

## The Earliest Civilization and Empire

The first human civilization flourished in the fertile lands between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which run through modern day Iraq. Many years later, the Greeks named this land Mesopotamia (meaning “between the rivers”). Settlements first began to appear in the northern regions of Mesopotamia around 5500 B.C. These settlements were made possible by the development of agriculture and irrigation; furthermore, agriculture allowed settlers to live in one place for long periods of time. Some farmers began to grow more food than their families needed to survive, freeing other individuals to devote their energies to different skills and endeavors. As villages grew into towns and then into cities, governments and administrations also evolved to keep up with the growth. The need to keep accurate records of food supplies and transactions eventually led to the invention of writing. By 3000 B.C., all the pieces were in place for the appearance of the first human civilization, which appeared in southern Mesopotamia among the Sumerians.

The Sumerian civilization included a number of large cities, each with its own king and temple. These kings struggled against one another for supremacy, and wars were not uncommon. But the cities shared a common written language and a common set of religious beliefs, expressed in the literature of the Sumerians. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, for example, told the story of a great flood sent by the gods to destroy humanity. Unlike the biblical story of the flood in Genesis, the hero is saved in spite of the determination of the gods to destroy humanity. The Sumerian gods were not merciful or gracious. In fact, they were often violent

and petty. Even the creation of the world was the product of a violent and gruesome clash among deities in which the earth and sky emerge from the torn body of a vanquished god.

These grim stories reflected the conditions of Sumerian life. They had built a great civilization, but it was a fragile achievement. Famine, flood, and war all threatened to overturn the order they had established, returning them to chaos. Despite these challenges, Sumerian civilization persisted for several centuries until Akkadian invaders came from the west around 2300 B.C. From this point forward, the Sumerian people would gradually pass from history, but their culture would endure. The great Akkadian king, Sargon, is remembered chiefly as the first empire-builder, but he was also a skilled administrator. Rather than destroy existing traditions and social structures, Sargon and the Akkadians worked through and built upon Sumerian culture, which consequently outlived the Sumerians themselves.

The life of Sargon became legendary. The great warrior and empire-builder also possessed a dramatic instinct. He knew how to make a memorable gesture and he made sure to publicize his conquests. As a result, long after Sargon had died, kings would aspire to match or surpass the extent of his conquests and fame. In reality, Sargon's kingdom was short-lived. At its height, the Akkadians ruled over an empire that extended from the coasts of the Mediterranean through Mesopotamia. This expansive territory proved too large to manage and defend. Within a century, the empire collapsed. Just as the life of Sargon inspired the ambitions of kings for generations to come, the life cycle of the Akkadian empire—conquests and expansions giving way to rebellions from within and attacks on the frontiers from without—would be repeated in the history of subsequent Mesopotamian empires.

## **The Mesopotamian Empires and the Egyptians**

Around the same time that the first settlements were appearing in northern Mesopotamia, settlements also began to appear along the Nile River in the land that became known as Egypt. The early Egyptians followed a path to civilization that was similar to that followed by the Sumerians. Improved agriculture led to the growth of towns and cities. The Egyptian also developed a form of writing based on symbols called hieroglyphs. As Egyptian civilization developed, two centers of power appeared; one was located in northern Egypt and the other in southern Egypt. Around 3200 B.C., the two kingdoms were united by a king known to us as the Scorpion King. The Scorpion King's unification of Egypt was short-lived; one hundred years passed before another king, Narmer, reunified northern and southern Egypt once again. The subsequent history of Egypt is divided into three main eras: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom, with two intermediate periods between them. Egyptian history is also divided into twenty dynasties that ruled over Egypt from about 3000 B.C. to 1069 B.C.

The Old Kingdom, which extended from 3000 B.C. to 2160 B.C., was notable mostly for the monuments it left behind. The largest and most impressive pyramids were built during this period, as were other notable monuments such as the Great Sphinx. Toward the end of the Old Kingdom, the once unquestioned power of the kings of Egypt appears to wane. The priests of the sun-god Ra and powerful noble families challenged the authority of the kings and this challenge led to a period of political instability. Later Egyptians portrayed this period as a time of chaos, but contemporary historians now believe that this is not entirely accurate. While no

central authority could claim to control the whole of Egypt, varieties of Egyptian culture seem to have flourished in the towns and cities.

At the close of the Old Kingdom in Egypt, a new power was on the rise in Mesopotamia. Ur-Nammu, king of the city of Ur, established the Third Dynasty of Ur and extended his rule across the whole of Mesopotamia. The kingdom he built endured for more than one hundred years and the region enjoyed relative peace and prosperity during that time. It was during the Third Dynasty of Ur that the massive ziggurats, the Mesopotamian equivalent of the Egyptian pyramids, were built in the major cities of Mesopotamia.

Not long after the ziggurats were built in an effort to reach into the heavens, the God of the Bible called a man named Abram to leave his home in Ur and travel to an unknown land; God promised Abram that he would be the father of a great nation. In faith Abram obeyed, and he and his family traveled north to the city of Haran before turning southwest toward the land of Canaan along the Mediterranean shore. There they settled as aliens and strangers and God changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning "father of nations." Two sons were born to Abraham. Hagar, a servant in Abraham's house, bore Ishmael; Abraham's wife, Sarah, bore Isaac. Ishmael was later sent away from the family, and Isaac and his children lived on in Canaan until a great famine forced them to flee into Egypt. In Egypt, they were cared for by one of Abraham's grandchildren, Joseph, who had attained a position of influence in Egypt after being sold as a slave. The family of Abraham resided in Egypt for several generations until they were led out of Egypt by Moses.

While the family of Abraham made their way into Canaan and then Egypt, the kingdom of Babylon rose to dominance over Mesopotamia. The Babylonians were Amorites from the



west who had migrated into Mesopotamia at a time of instability and decline. The greatest Babylonian king, Hammurabi, took advantage of the fragmentation, and through a series of military campaigns, gradually took over the whole of Mesopotamia. During Hammurabi's long reign (approximately 1792 – 1750 B.C.), Babylonian art and literature flourished. Hammurabi is also remembered today for a famous code of laws that bears his name. While it is no longer taken to be the first written code of laws, The Code of Hammurabi is the most complete and extensive code of laws that survives from the ancient world. The Code was notable for the ideal of justice that it set out, an ideal that was most likely never fully realized. The enforcement of the Code depended on the might of Hammurabi and his successors, but even after both Hammurabi and his kingdom passed away, the Code still circulated.

Following the collapse of the Old Babylonian kingdom, no single power managed to exert its authority over the whole of Mesopotamia for the remainder of the second millennium B.C. The Hittites centered in modern day Turkey, the Hurrians and Mitannians in northern Mesopotamia, and the Egyptians all fought one another to establish their power. But despite years of warfare, none of them were able to establish their control over the region. While these multiple kingdoms warred against one another, the children of Abraham established themselves in the land that God promised to Abraham and his descendants.

The Hebrews entered Egypt when a famine drove them from Canaan (likely between 2000-1500 B.C.). They were initially welcomed there, but as they grew in number, the rulers of Egypt came to believe the Hebrews were a threat to their power. During Egypt's Middle Kingdom, invaders from the east known as the Hyksos had settled in Egypt and for a time assumed power over the Egyptian people. They were later driven out, but the memory of the

Hyksos invasion lived long among the Egyptians. It may explain why, during the New Kingdom, the kings of Egypt grew to fear the presence of the Hebrews among them. Their fears drove them to enslave the Hebrews and even murder their infants. Moses, who escaped death as an infant and grew in the court of the Egyptian king, later led the Hebrews out of Egypt.

The biblical book of Exodus records the miraculous liberation of the Hebrews and crossing of the Red Sea. Once they entered the Sinai desert, the Hebrews were to advance to Canaan and conquer the land. The generation that came out of Egypt, who wandered in the desert for forty years, failed to carry out this directive and it was left to the subsequent generation under the leadership of Joshua to take the land of Canaan. This they managed to do after years of fighting. Once they settled in the land, the Hebrews, known also as Israelites (after Israel, Abraham's grandson), entered into a period of disorganized coexistence with what remained of the native population. This time was marked by recurring war and subjugation. Military leaders known as judges delivered the Israelite tribes from their oppressors, but Israel remained disorganized and religiously corrupt.

This period came to end when a man named Saul became king over all of Israel. The struggle against Israel's chief foreign enemy, the Philistines, consumed Saul's reign and eventually led to his death in battle. In his stead, David became king of Israel (ca.1000 B.C.) and under his leadership the Israelites finally defeated the Philistines and entered into a period of stability and growth. David's long reign was followed by that of his son, Solomon, who expanded Israel's borders, generated wealth for the nation, and built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. At the time, it may have appeared as if Israel was entering a long golden age, but this was not to be the case. Internal conflicts among the northern tribes and Judah led to a

division of Israel into northern and southern kingdoms. Additionally, far to the east, a powerful empire was once again emerging.

Assyria entered the first millennium B.C. with strength and energy. The Assyrian's homeland in northern Mesopotamia was secure, they boasted a strong army, and they enjoyed political stability. These advantages allowed Assyria to build the largest empire the region had ever known. Assyria, however, did not initially set out to build an empire. Their early military ventures were raids rather than invasions. Gradually, though, as the Assyrian kings ventured farther, the lands they raided became dominions to be administered. Beginning with the conquest of Babylon, the Assyrians marched in all directions and met little resistance. Soon the lands under their control extended from the Mediterranean coasts down into Egypt to the westernmost regions of Mesopotamia. The Assyrians were unusually cruel masters and their massive empire was held in check by the power of intimidation and the mass deportation of vanquished populations.

The northern tribes of Israel were among the peoples conquered and deported by the Assyrians. Israel's history was marked by a series of wicked and mostly ineffectual kings. Despite the warnings of multiple prophets, the northern Israelite kingdom persisted in their wayward ways. Finally, in 722 B.C., according to the biblical book of 2 Kings, they were given over by God to the Assyrians. Some refugees from the north managed to escape to the southern kingdom. A remnant remained in the land and intermingled with the foreigners that the Assyrians had forcibly transplanted to Israelite lands. The Samaritans of the New Testament were the product of this intermingling of populations.

The Assyrians enjoyed another century of dominance, but the same familiar pattern that first emerged in the case of the Akkadian empire presented itself again. Assyria was perpetually at war, facing enemies without and rebellions within, including power struggles within the royal family. While Assyria struggled, its enemies banded together. The Elamites, Babylonians, and Medes all warred together against Assyria and finally, in 610 B.C., Assyria collapsed. The Assyrians had enjoyed nearly five hundred years of ascendancy and dominance, but they finally succumbed to the combined forces of their enemies. One of those enemies, the resurgent Babylon, was now the greatest power in the region.

The Babylonian Empire, sometimes called the Neo-Babylonian Empire to distinguish it from the earlier empire of Hammurabi, enjoyed a brief but glorious life under the reign (605–562 B.C.) of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon’s most powerful king. Not only did the empire dominate Mesopotamia, but its capital city developed into an architectural and cultural marvel, also. It was Nebuchadnezzar who completed the destruction and deportation of the Israelite kingdom when he sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Babylon’s glory, however, was fleeting. Nebuchadnezzar’s successors were unimpressive and there was always another king with visions of empire. In the case of the Babylonians, it was Cyrus of Persia who appeared in the east to challenge the power of Babylon. In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to the combined forces of the Medes and the Persians.

## **The Persians**

Unlike the Assyrians and the Babylonians, the Persians sought to maintain the loyalty of conquered peoples through a policy of relative generosity. When they conquered Babylon, the

Persians chose to free the people Babylon had exiled from their lands. Among these exiles now free to return home were the people of Judah, the southern Israelite kingdom. Not only did Cyrus allow the exiles to return home, he also provided funds for the rebuilding of the temple. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, three waves of exiles made their way back to Judah. In time, the recovering nation rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and reconstructed the temple.

Cyrus's son, Cambyses, and his successor, Darius, extended Cyrus's conquests even farther. At its height the Persian Empire was the largest empire that had ever appeared in the region. The Persian Empire extended from Asia Minor and Egypt in the west, through Mesopotamia, and east to the borders of India. At its height, the empire seemed invincible. It was well organized and fielded a powerful army; and yet, all empires fall. As they extended across Asia Minor (present day Turkey), the Persians conquered Ionian Greeks who had established colonies on the western coast of the peninsula. These Greeks petitioned the Greek city-states for assistance and Athens was among the few to send help. At the time, the Persian king had not even heard of Athens, but this seemingly insignificant encounter would lead to Persia's downfall.

## **The Greeks**

Although disunity defined the early Greek civilizations of the second millennium B.C., mountainous terrain contributed to the eventual formation of city-states that were largely independent from one another. Despite their relative isolation, the Greek city-states did share certain characteristics. The people spoke a common language, believed in the same pantheon

of gods, and told a stock set of stories about their past. The most important of these stories centered on an expedition of Greek warriors that set out to destroy the city of Troy in Asia Minor. The most famous telling of these stories is found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, epic poems attributed to the poet Homer.

For some time historians believed that these stories were entirely mythical, but then archeologists uncovered the ruins of Troy in the 1860s. Since then, it is generally assumed that the stories were based, loosely perhaps, on a historical event. Based on archeological evidence, scholars believe that the sacking of Troy that inspired the stories told in *the Iliad* most likely took place in the 1200s B.C. Before they were finally written down nearly five centuries later, these stories were passed down through a tradition of oral storytelling. In their Homeric form, these stories became the centerpiece of Greek culture.

*The epic poems Iliad and Odyssey* depict a society shaped by war and for whom the virtues of the warrior were held in highest esteem. These stories continued to shape the Greek imagination long after the social world in which they were set ceased to exist. Not long after the destruction of Troy, Greek lands along with the rest of the Mediterranean world entered an era of tumult and upheaval. This period was marked by migrations of people, the disruption of agriculture, and the collapse of civilizations. Consequently, the Greeks passed through what historians have labeled a Dark Age (ca. 1200–900 B.C.), mostly because little was left behind for historians to piece together a record of the period.

By 850 B.C., however, agricultural production improved enough to allow for settled life to emerge and prosper once more. The Greek city-states appeared during this period and became the center of Greek life; two in particular rose to prominence – Sparta and Athens.

Sparta is remembered for its devotion to war and Athens for the development of democracy. The whole of Spartan society revolved around the creation of able soldiers to defend Sparta against both external enemies and an uprising of the large slave population the Spartans maintained. Athens passed through a series of political reforms that eventually led to the most democratic society the world had yet known. By the late sixth century B.C., Sparta and Athens were only two of roughly 1,500 Greek city-states and colonies scattered throughout the Greek mainland, surrounding islands, the western coast of Asia Minor (Ionia), and the wider Mediterranean world.

It took a massive external threat to pressure these city-states to work together as fellow Greeks. The Persian invasion supplied that threat and it brought the Greeks together under the leadership of Athens and Sparta. The path to war against the Persians began when the Ionian Greeks came under the control of the Persian Empire as it expanded westward. These Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor sent messengers to the Greek city-states seeking their aid. All but Athens and Eretria refused. The Athenians participated in a brief struggle against the Persians that ended in the defeat of Greek resistance. Angered by the Athenians participation in the fighting, the Persian emperor, Darius, dispatched an army to punish Athens. The Athenians called for help from their neighbors, but only soldiers from the city-state of Plataea arrived in time. The Persians landed near Marathon and there on a plain along the shore they assembled an army that vastly outnumbered the Greeks.

The Athenians and Plataeans advanced on the Persian forces, breaking into a run as they approached the Persian lines. The Persians pushed back the center of the Greek line, but they were forced to give ground on their flanks. This was according to the Greeks' plan; they thinned