

# Understanding Ancient History

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## Unit One: Introduction

The study of history is very important, but one should remember, as Leopold von Ranke wrote, that it is important to not only know what happened, but also how it happened in history. While memorizing dates, names, and locations can be beneficial, reading the words of individuals who lived throughout history is a key to understanding why the people did what they did. In short, the past influences the present which, in turn, shapes the future.

At the end of each unit, I've listed additional resources that can help further your study of ancient history. These are not necessary to complete this course.

In this course, we're going to focus on two key areas: enduring understandings and essential questions.

### Enduring Understandings

- Geography influences the development of a region.
- Natural resources and geography influence a nation's development.
- Leaders emerge and exercise power in different ways.

### Essential Questions

- How does the geography of a nation influence the people?
- How do natural resources and geography affect history?
- How have individuals influenced history?
- How does a change in leadership impact society?
- What makes a great leader?

Please keep in mind that the dating of ancient history is a complex matter. On SchoolhouseTeachers.com, we support and teach that the Bible is true, that the events such as the creation of Adam and Eve and the Flood as recorded in Genesis are historic facts, and that the earth is only several thousand years old. The World Book articles referred to in this course may, at times, offer dates that are not consistent with this view. For a more thorough study of Biblical chronologies, and their historic accuracy, please see this series of articles on Creation Ministries International: <http://creation.com/history-questions-and-answers>.

World Book provides a number of useful resources for this unit study on Ancient History. You will be using the World Book Online resources that are part of your SchoolhouseTeachers.com membership extensively for this course. For your log in information, go to <https://schoolhouseteachers.com/world-book/#1490804064729-8477c70d-092d> and click "To Access World Book Resources."

During the study of the introductory unit on Ancient History, you should be able to meet the following objectives:

1. Identify the three main characteristics shared by civilizations.
2. Explain which other two characteristics may be shared by civilizations.
3. Describe the other characteristics and achievements that marked the first river valley civilizations.

Visual Dictionary Project:

Throughout this course, you will need to create a visual dictionary that includes images and definitions. The images will be your choice—specific images will not be mentioned. As you study, collect images that strike you as interesting and add them to your visual dictionary.

There are several ways you can format your dictionary entries. You can include the image and a simple definition; you can use a vocabulary map *like* any of the ones shown here <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/graphicorganizers/vocab/> or <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/FREE-VOCABULARY-GRAPHIC-ORGANIZER-545291>

## Foundations of Civilization

As people spread out and migrated to various parts of the world following the Flood, they built settlements and developed civilizations. The four earliest civilizations we are going to study developed in the Nile River Valley in Africa, in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in southwestern Asia, in the Indus River Valley in southern Asia, and in the Huang or Yellow River valley in eastern Asia.

A civilization can be defined as a complex culture that has at least three characteristics: people have a stable food supply and are able to produce surplus or extra foods, people establish large towns or cities with some form of government, and people perform different jobs, instead of each person doing all kinds of work (which is called division of labor).

When you look at the four civilizations above, you'll notice that they all center on one or more rivers. The rivers in these valleys flood during periods of heavy rains, but rain little the rest of the year. This, combined with irrigation techniques used by the farmers, provided enough food, not only for their own people, but for others as well.

These permanent settlements also had other things in common, such as a leadership and government with rules that governed the people and directed their work. As farming and irrigation techniques improved, fewer people were needed to work in the fields. People were able to divide the jobs that needed done by skill, or more often, by a social class structure. Laborers provided the work needed to build great palaces, temples, and other public buildings. Merchants and traders worked in commerce and finance. Artisans were specially skilled to create various masterpieces.

As the merchants and traders continued in their fields, cultures shared and spread ideas, art, and even beliefs from one area to another.

These civilizations also developed calendars, writing systems, technology, art, a military, and a belief system. Calendars were key because the people needed to know when the yearly floods that their crops were dependent on would begin. Writing systems were key to communication, commerce, religion, literature, and administration. People throughout history have continued to develop new technologies to meet their needs or make their lives simpler or safer. Whether the technology was wheeled vehicles for transportation, better systems of irrigation, or modern inventions like satellites and cell phones, the desire to create that was placed in our hearts by God when He created us has always made itself known.

Unfortunately, the sinfulness of mankind has also always made itself known. Conflicts between people perpetually arose, driving the need for an organized military for defense.

At the heart of man is a desire to worship God. That desire has manifested itself in many ways. In some civilizations, man has made himself a god and worshipped himself by denying the existence of anything beyond. Other cultures created gods out of nature that controlled many aspects of human life. The Hebrews, whom we'll learn about later in this course, worshipped Jehovah God, the Creator of all, who revealed Himself to men throughout history.

Key Points to Remember and Additional Information:

### Characteristics of Civilization

- Permanent settlements grew in four sites
  - Nile River Valley in Africa
  - valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in southwestern Asia
  - Indus River Valley in southern Asia
  - the Huang or Yellow River valley in eastern Asia
- Civilizations (complex cultures that have at least three characteristics) developed
  - people are able to produce surplus or extra food (stable food supply)
  - people establish large towns or cities with some form of government
  - people perform different jobs, instead of each person doing all kinds of work (division of labor)
- surplus food and irrigation
  - rivers in the valleys flood during periods of heavy rains
  - except for these periods, there is little, if any, rain
  - farmers in each valley learned to dig ditches and canals to move water from the river to their fields; developed first system of irrigation
- cities, government and labor
  - labor provided for great palaces, temples and other public buildings
  - improved farming techniques and flood-control systems
  - different forms of leadership
    - rules helped people to plan, direct and regulate their work

- as farming improved, less people were needed to work the fields, so there arose a division of labor
- artisans - a class of skilled workers
- new class of people - merchant and traders
- cultural diffusion—spread of ideas and other aspects of culture from one area to another

### Other Characteristics

- Calendar
  - developed calendars because they needed to know when the yearly floods would start
  - year divided according to the phases of the moon
- Form of writing
  - trading goods and living and working together required the development of writing—new form of communication
  - useful for communication, commerce, religion, literature, and administration
- Technology
  - Systems of irrigation
  - Invention of wheel/use of chariots
- Art
- Organized Army
- Religion
  - gods and goddesses and forces of nature controlled aspects of human life

### Questions:

- a. What are the characteristics of a complex civilization?
- b. Why is having a surplus of food so important?
- c. How does the development of a complex government, military, religion, etc., demonstrate a civilization has developed (or is developing)?

## Activities:

1. Geography: locate the above rivers on a world map.
2. Optional: Take a look at the modern countries represented by these ancient civilizations. Find an example of bank notes (money) from each nation (or as many as you wish).
  - a. Compare and contrast the images on them.
  - b. What level of civilization can you infer from the notes?
  - c. Are there any clues on the notes to demonstrate the history of the nation?
  - d. What data can you collect from the notes? (dates, leaders, etc.)
  - e. What languages are written on the notes? If it is written in multiple languages, why?
  - f. Are there different notes for each denomination? Why would there be different ones in circulation?
3. Explore different museum websites to view examples of art and artifacts from the ancient civilizations. Below are a few places that house examples.
  - Penn Museum: <https://www.penn.museum/>
  - British Museum: <http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/galleries.aspx>
  - Metropolitan Museum of Art: <http://maps.metmuseum.org/>
  - Art Institute of Chicago: <http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/>