CHAPTER 2

Iron Age Civilizations, 1200–500 b.c.e.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Merchants and Traders of the Eastern Mediterranean, 1200–650 B.C.E.
   A. From Bronze to Iron
      1. During the Bronze Age, iron existed as a luxury item, but in the Iron Age, it became widely available to common people, who made household items and plows.
      2. Tough tempered iron weapons came later; early iron was brittle and difficult to make, requiring much higher temperatures (1,538 degrees Celsius) than bronze (950 degrees Celsius).
      3. Iron use expanded agriculture; iron plows could work tough soils, such as those in the Danube and Rhine Valleys.
      4. Iron Age cultures depended more on manufacturing and trade than the river valley Bronze Age civilizations.
   B. The Phoenicians
      1. The sea-trading Phoenicians lived in independent city-states governed by a king, who was advised by a council of nobles.
      2. They developed coast-hugging, sail-driven merchant ships and each city maintained a navy to protect its trade.
      3. Phoenicians grew wealthy importing luxury goods, including paper at the city of Byblos, the source of the word Bible.
      4. Phoenicians developed the alphabet of twenty-two consonants that the Greeks and Romans later borrowed.
      5. Phoenicians had a triad of three primary gods:
         a) El, the creator, father god
         b) Ba’al, a storm god, the son of El
         c) Astarte, a goddess of fertility, sexuality, and war (also known as Ishtar in Mesopotamia and Aphrodite in Greece)
   C. Other Eastern Mediterranean Traders
      1. Several Iron Age peoples developed in the eastern Mediterranean.
      2. Arameans, a Semitic people from northern Arabia, monopolized trade by land. Because of their widespread trading caravans, their language, Aramaic, replaced Akkadian as a common language.
      3. Philistines, Indo-European farmers, worshiped the crop and fertility god Dagon.
      4. The Lydians, ruled by the legendary King Midas, used gold lumps as the first coins.

II. The Hebrews and Monotheism, 1800–900 B.C.E.
   A. Hebrew Origins
      1. Hebrews were Semitic pastoralists, the first people of the book, or Tanakh (to Christians, the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament).
      2. The Torah (the first five books) spoke about Abraham’s covenant (binding agreement) with El Shaddai (God Almighty), committing to monotheism through circumcision and enforcement by prophets.
      3. Hebrew society had patriarchs ruling the twelve tribes, and assimilated much of Mesopotamian culture, including stories about a great flood.
B. The Exodus and the Age of Judges
1. In the Exodus (1270 B.C.E. or possibly 1446 B.C.E.), Moses led enslaved Hebrews out of captivity in Egypt.
2. In the book of Exodus, Moses spoke to God through a burning bush, revealing the name YHWH and distributing the Ten Commandments.
3. After forty years in the wilderness, the Hebrews, led by Joshua, invaded Canaan in a fierce campaign.
4. The most important Hebrew leaders were called judges, who acted under Yahweh’s authority; Deborah and Samson were two judges.

C. The Evolution of Hebrew Identity
1. Hebrew laws and tradition emphasized ethical behavior, personal morality, and social justice.
2. They were more comprehensive than the laws of other Near Eastern peoples, dealing not only with religious, civil, and criminal law, but also with intimate aspects of personal behavior.
3. They honored Yahweh and respected the Sabbath, the day of worship.
4. In some ways, Hebrew law, religion, and society were similar to that of other Near Eastern peoples.
   a) For personal injury, they had the same “eye for an eye” law as the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi.
   b) Women could not own or sell property or initiate lawsuits or divorces.
   c) Yahweh was the true ruler of the Hebrews.

D. The Hebrew Kingdom
1. The last prophet Samuel reluctantly established a Hebrew kingdom, anointing Saul (r. 1050–1010 B.C.E.) and then the successful David (r. 1010–970 B.C.E.) as kings.
2. David captured the heavily fortified Canaanite city of Jerusalem, where his son Solomon (r. 970–930 B.C.E.) built a temple to contain the Ark of the Covenant.
3. After Solomon’s death, the kingdom was split in two.
   a) In the south, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin became the kingdom of Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem and its inhabitants called Jews.
   b) The remaining ten tribes were incorporated into the northern kingdom of Israel, with its capital at Samaria and its inhabitants called Samaritans.
4. The northern Hebrews adopted elements of Phoenician culture, such as worship of Ba’al, while the southern kingdom remained more conservative and less affected by foreign influences.

III. The Assyrians and Their Successors, 900–550 B.C.E.
A. The Rise of the Assyrian Empire
1. The Semitic Assyrians used a mighty military machine to forge an oppressive empire.
   a) They originated the concept of a standing army.
   b) They assimilated up-to-date tactics: cavalry mounted on horseback, use of swords and short spears, and mounted archers.
   c) They had specialist troops skilled in siege warfare and they used new iron weapon-making technology.
2. The greatest Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pilezer III (r. 745–727 B.C.E.), seized Babylonia, defeating the Chaldeans and Indo-European Medes.
3. Sargon II (r. 721–705 B.C.E.) captured Samaria, capital of the northern Hebrew kingdom of Israel in 721, exiling the ten lost tribes of Israel.
4. Sennacherib (r. 704–681 B.C.E.) took Lower Egypt in 671 B.C.E.

B. Assyrian Economy and Government
1. Assyrian society was built on war; they fought for defense, territorial expansion, and economic growth.
2. The Assyrians used terror tactics, putting defeated peoples into exile or making them into vassals, who paid tribute but were not incorporated into Assyrian society. This led to unrest, resistance, and revolt.

3. The Assyrian centralized imperial government formed around a powerful king, representing the war god Assur, with scribes to record important events, and a capital at Nineveh with a library of 20,000 clay tablets.

C. The Successors of the Assyrians

1. The Assyrian Empire fell when the mercenary Scythians, Indo-European steppe nomads, allied with the rebel Medes and Chaldeans to destroy Nineveh.

2. The Assyrian Empire was succeeded by four powers: Egypt, the Medes, Lydia, and the New Babylonians. The strongest of these was the New Babylonian Empire, established by the Chaldeans and led by Nebuchadrezzar.

3. In 587 B.C.E., Nebuchadrezzar captured Jerusalem, destroying Solomon’s Temple and starting the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews.

IV. The Persian Empire, 550–500 B.C.E.

A. Cyrus and the Rise of the Persian Empire

1. The gentler Indo-European (Aryan) Persian Empire differed from the Assyrians by respecting the local traditions of their subject peoples.

2. In 550 B.C.E., the Persian king Cyrus (r. 550–531 B.C.E.) began the Persian Empire by defeating the Medes, and subsequently conquered Babylon (539 B.C.E.).

3. Cyrus ended the Babylonian Captivity, allowing the deported Jews of Babylon to return home to Judah in 535 B.C.E., where they completed the Second Temple in 515 B.C.E.

4. The son of Cyrus, Cambyses (r. 530–522 B.C.E.) took Egypt in 525 B.C.E. and was installed as pharaoh.

B. Darius and the Consolidation of the Empire

1. Darius (r. 521–486 B.C.E.) ruled the empire as earthly representative of Ahura Mazda, the god of light, with the help of the Immortals (his personal bodyguards) and a huge Persian army of subject peoples.

2. Administration was by governors of twenty autonomous satrapies.

3. Darius and later kings introduced policies to unify the empire, facilitate trade, and increase economic productivity.
   a) Standardized law codes
   b) Simplified cuneiform system
   c) Aramaic as a universal language of commerce and diplomacy
   d) The first large-scale road system, the Royal Road
   e) A nautical trade route was opened from India to Egypt, and the canal connecting the Mediterranean and Red Seas was completed.
   f) Standardized coinage system

C. Persian Society and Religion

1. Persian society was organized around the family, with a male leading each clan.

2. Persian religion was dualistic, with evil sky gods (daevas) and good but abstract moral qualities (ahuras).

3. Zarathustra, called Zoroaster (750 B.C.E.) believed there was a battle between good and evil forces, with good ultimately winning, as set forth in the Zend Avesta scriptures.

D. Persia, the West, and the Future

1. Darius ruled over an expansive empire, ruling the three major river valleys of the ancient world (Nile, Euphrates, Indus).

2. Darius also invaded Central Asia to chase away the Scythians, and established a new satrapy in Thrace (modern-day Bulgaria), making contact with the Greeks.