CHAPTER 4 - THE MEDITERRANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST, 2000–500 B.C.E.

I. The Assyrian Empire, 911–612 B.C.E.
   A. Background and Location
      1. The Assyrian homeland was in northern Mesopotamia. It had more rain and a
         more temperate climate than Sumer and Akkad, but it was also more exposed to
         raiders.
      2. Assyrian power revived in the ninth century B.C.E. and the Assyrians built an
         empire, expanding along trade routes westward toward the Mediterranean, north
         to modern Armenia, east to modern Iran, and south to Babylonia.
   B. God and King
      1. Assyrian kings were regarded as the center of the universe, chosen by the gods as
         their surrogates in earth. Kings had secular and religious duties.
      2. The secular duties of kings included receiving information, hearing and deciding
         on complaints, and carrying out diplomacy and military leadership. The religious
         duties of kings included supervision of the state religion, performance of public
         and private rituals, and consulting and gaining the approval of the gods.
      3. Assyrian kings were celebrated in propaganda that was designed to produce
         feelings of awe and fear in the hearts of their subjects. Such propaganda included
         the public display of royal inscriptions relating to conquests and punishments
         and artistic renderings of the kings as large, muscular, and fierce men.
   C. Conquest and Control
      1. At their peak, the Assyrian armies had half a million troops divided into
         functionally specialized units. The Assyrian troops used a variety of military
         technologies, including iron weapons, cavalry, couriers, signal fires, and spy
         networks.
      2. Assyrian techniques of conquest included terror tactics and mass deportation of
         civilian populations. Mass deportation served a dual purpose: to destroy the
         morale of the enemy and to transfer needed laborers to the core area of the
         empire.
      3. The Assyrians found it difficult to control their vast and diverse territory. Their
         level of control varied, being more effective at the core and less effective in the
         peripheral parts of the empire.
      4. Within the empire, the duties of Assyrian officials were to collect tribute and
         taxes, to maintain law and order, to raise and provision troops, and to construct
         and maintain public works. The central government included high-ranking
         officials and professionals.
      5. The central government exploited the wealth and resources of the empire for the
         benefit of the center, but also invested in provincial infrastructure, and so was
         not entirely parasitic.
   D. Assyrian Society and Culture
      1. Assyrian society had three major social strata: free, land-owning citizens;
         farmers and artisans; and slaves. The Assyrian economy was based on
         agriculture but also included artisans and merchants.
      2. In the realm of knowledge and learning, the Assyrians both preserved the
         knowledge inherited from older Mesopotamian societies and made original
         contributions to mathematics and astronomy. The Assyrian Empire maintained
         libraries that were attached to temples in the cities, such as the Library of
         Ashurbanipal in Ninevah.
III. Israel, 2000–500 B.C.E.
A. Background and Location
1. The Israelite people were nomadic herders and caravan drivers who developed a complex sedentary agricultural civilization. As they did so, their cult of a desert god evolved into an influential monotheistic religion.
2. Israel’s location makes it a crossroads for trade. However, the area has few natural resources.

B. Origins, Exodus, and Settlement
1. Sources for the early history of the Israelite people include the Hebrew Bible, which is based in part on oral traditions compiled in the fifth century B.C.E., and archeological excavations.
2. Biblical accounts of the origins of the Israelite people include the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These stories may be a compressed account of the experiences of many generations of nomads. The story of Cain and Abel and the stories of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah reflect the tensions between the nomadic Israelite people and settled agricultural people.
3. The Biblical account of the Egyptian captivity is not confirmed by Egyptian sources but may be linked to the rise and fall of the Hyksos rulers of Egypt. The period of Israelite slavery according to the Bible corresponds to the period of large-scale construction projects under Sethos I and Ramesses II, while the Biblical account of the exodus may reflect the memories of a migration from Egypt and nomadic life in the Sinai.
4. The cult of Yahweh with its exclusive devotion to one god developed during the period of nomadism in the Sinai.
5. The Biblical account of Israelite settlement in the land of Canaan says that Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan and destroyed Jericho and other Canaanite cities. The archeological evidence of what probably happened is that the nomadic Israelite tribes settled in the hills of Canaan, where they were joined by other groups and by refugees from a troubled Canaanite society.

C. Rise of the Monarchy
1. Wars with the Philistines brought about the need for a strong central government. Saul, the first king, established the Israelite monarchy. David, the second king, completed the transition to monarchy.
2. The Israelite monarchy reached the height of its power in the reign of King Solomon, who forged alliances and sponsored trade. Solomon also expanded the bureaucracy and the army, and built the First Temple in Jerusalem. The temple priesthood sacrificed to Yahweh, received a portion of the agricultural tax, and became very wealthy.
3. The wealth and prestige of the temple priesthood was indicative of the increasing gap between the rural and urban, and the wealthy and the poor in Israeli society.
4. Israelite people lived in extended families and practiced arranged marriage. Monogamy was the norm. Men were allowed to have extramarital relations; women were not.
5. In early Israel, women enjoyed relative equality with their husbands in social life, but at the same time, they suffered certain legal disadvantages: women could not inherit property, nor could they initiate divorce. The main occupations of women were bearing and raising children, maintaining the household, and engaging in agriculture or herding. As society became more urbanized, some women began to work outside the home in a variety of occupations.
6. There are some records of women exercising political influence. Examples include the story of Deborah and references to “wise women.” However, the status of women declined during the period of monarchy.

D. Fragmentation and Dispersal
1. After Solomon, Israel divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north (capital: Samaria), and Judah in the south (capital: Jerusalem). The two kingdoms were sometimes at peace with each other, and sometimes fought.
2. There were some significant religious developments during the period of fragmentation. The concept of monotheism was sharpened, but at the same time, some Israelites were attracted to the worship of Canaanite gods.
3. Political developments during the period of fragmentation include the Assyrian destruction of the northern kingdom (Israel) in 721 B.C.E. and the fall of the southern kingdom (Judah) to the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C.E. Nebuchadnezzar deported a large number of Jewish elites and craftsmen to Babylon. This was the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora.
4. During the Diaspora, the Jewish people developed institutions to preserve Jewish religion and culture. These developments continued even after some of the Babylonian Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem. Developments of the Diaspora included a stronger commitment to monotheism, strict dietary rules, and veneration of the Sabbath.

III. Phoenicia and the Mediterranean, 1200–500 B.C.E.
A. The Phoenician City-States
1. The Phoenicians were the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel who were pushed into the strip of land between the mountains and the sea in modern Lebanon by about 1100 B.C.E. There, the Phoenicians established a number of small city-states that were deeply involved in commerce. They also invented the first alphabetical writing system.
2. The major Phoenician city-states were Byblos, Berytus, Sidon, and Tyre.
B. Carthage’s Commercial Empire
1. The city of Carthage was established on a narrow promontory near modern Tunis around 814 B.C.E. The walled city was governed by two judges selected from upper-class families and by a Senate that was dominated by the leading merchant families.
2. The navy was the most important arm of Carthaginian power. Citizens served as rowers and navigators of the fast, maneuverable warships.
3. Carthaginian foreign policy and military activity were in the service of trade and were deployed in enforcing a commercial monopoly in the Mediterranean and developing new trading opportunities. Carthaginian merchants were active around the Mediterranean and traded with sub-Saharan Africa, along the Atlantic coasts of Spain and France, and with Cornwall.
C. War and Religion
1. The Carthaginians made no attempt to build a territorial empire; their empire was an empire of trade routes and ports. The Carthaginian military was subordinate to the civilian government and consisted of mercenary soldiers commanded by Carthaginian officers.
2. Carthaginian religion involved the worship of capricious gods that needed to be appeased by sacrifice, including the sacrifice of Carthaginian children. The Greeks and Romans thought that the Carthaginians were a hard, gloomy people who treated their subjects harshly.
IV. Failure and Transformation, 750–550 B.C.E.

A. Consequences of the Assyrian Conquest

1. The Assyrian conquest brought about the destruction of Israel, deportation of the Jewish population of Israel, and pressure on the kingdom of Judah.

2. The Assyrian conquest put pressure on the Phoenicians; Assyrian threats and Assyrian demands for tribute helped to spur the Phoenicians to establish colonies in the western Mediterranean.

3. The Assyrian conquest also resulted in the invasion and occupation of Egypt and in Assyrian control over Babylonia and western Iran.

4. As their empire grew, the resources of the Assyrians became overextended and they had difficulty ruling over a large, ethnically complex territory with subjects and neighbors who had come to hate Assyria.

5. The major sources of resistance to the Assyrian Empire were the Neo-Babylonian dynasty of Babylon and the kingdom of the Medes in Iran. The Assyrian Empire was destroyed when the Medes captured the Assyrian homeland in northern Mesopotamia and eastern Anatolia, and the Neo-Babylonians took over much of the other territory of the Assyrian Empire.