

## Where Civilization Began: Mesopotamia

I would like to tell you a little story about the first civilization of the world. This first civilization began around 3,500 bc in the middle eastern part of the world. Today, we know this area as Iraq and Iran, but long ago, when this first civilization was just starting out, it was called Mesopotamia. We have just finished learning about the Stone Age. We learned that the Stone Age is not a civilization. Our next unit, Mesopotamia is a civilization. So what's the difference? Well, what makes Mesopotamia a civilization is because a civilization is a group of people who have a complex and organized society. A civilization has its own customs, food supply, social divisions, government, religion, and technology. In the Stone Age, there was none of that. The Stone Age people simply spent each day trying not to die. In this civilization known as Mesopotamia, that was not the case. The people of this civilization spent their days working, making progress, and improving their lives. This was a huge difference between Mesopotamia and the Stone Age.

The people of Mesopotamia started in south west Asia between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf. These lands had rich and fertile soil, which meant farming, was a good option. This land became known as the fertile crescent because of the fact it had good land for farming and because it was shaped like a crescent (crescent looks like a quarter moon). What else did this part of the world look like? Well, there was habitat for deer, goats, and sheep. In the southern part, there were oxen and wild pigs. In the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent, there were the Zagros Mountains and in the west, deserts. The central part of the Fertile Crescent is where all the action was at. This is where the people built city-states and did their farming. The reason why the central part of the Fertile Crescent was the main area was because of two RIVERS! These two rivers are called the Tigris and Euphrates. These two rivers provided the people of the Fertile Crescent lots of good water for farming, drinking, etc. It is with these two rivers that the area gets its name of "Mesopotamia." The word Mesopotamia actually means "land between two rivers." So, the name was given.

The people of Mesopotamia (also known as the Fertile Crescent), did face some challenges in starting and growing their civilization. The climate to the north of Mesopotamia was not ideal for farming. Summers were long, hot and dry. Very little rain and when the rain did come, it poured, which was not helpful for farmers. So, these people faced their FIRST problem: not enough rain for crops to grow. The solution to this problem was to move south between the Tigris and Euphrates. This was a good move because the rivers are a permanent source of fresh water, which is the most essential element for human development and life. These rivers would overflow leaving silt, which would give the people fertile land. However, the rivers were not consistent. They would either overflow too much or not enough. In both cases, the crops would be ruined and the people would struggle. So, to fix this problem, the people of Mesopotamia developed irrigation, which is when you can control when and how much water crops get. This solution proved to be successful and farming became a major factor in Mesopotamia's rise.

The people of Mesopotamia were good problem solvers, as you read about above with the farming. They also had a problem of constructing buildings. The solution to this problem was to make sun-dried bricks. This was done by cutting reeds from the marshy areas and mixed it with mud. They would then form the bricks, let them dry, and then use them to build. This solution produced strong buildings for the people.

There were basically two types of people in Mesopotamia: Farmers and Herders. Farmers would farm many things: barley, wheat, onions, lettuce, apples, garlic, millet, and dates. Herders would herd goats, sheep and cattle. Their transportation method was the two rivers. Much easier to float down the river than to push and pull a cart. Between farming and herding, the people of Mesopotamia developed a highly developed farming system. With the irrigation and the animals, they grew and prospered. The key factor in their rise to power was the fact that they were able to develop a surplus of goods, or extra amount, because they got so good at farming. With a surplus of goods, they were then able to get other things they needed by trading with other areas.