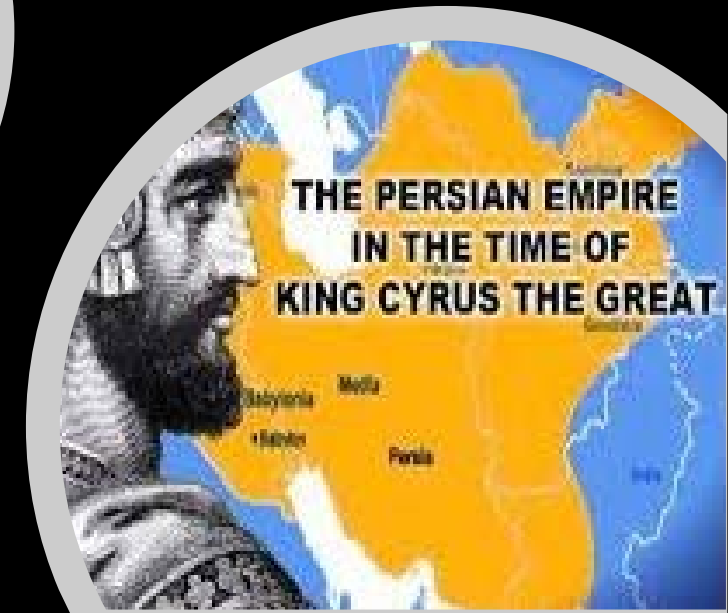


Have you ever wondered?
Grandpa's History Lessons that Matter

Lesson 2: Ancient Mesopotamia (5000 – 333 BCE)



Ancient Mesopotamia (5000 – 333 BCE)

INTRODUCTION:

- *Mesopotamia is a region of southwest Asia which includes lands around the eastern Mediterranean Sea now known as the Middle East. Located in the Tigris and Euphrates river system that benefitted from the area's climate and geography to host the beginnings of human civilization, it is part of the Fertile Crescent, an area also known as "Cradle of Civilization" for the number of innovations, including the concept of time, math, the wheel, sailboats, maps and writing that arose from the early societies in this region.*
- *Mesopotamia is also defined by a changing succession of ruling cultures from different areas and cities that seized control over thousands of years. Four of these cultures in particular – the Akkadians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Persians expanded to build empires.*
- *The word "mesopotamia" is formed from the ancient words "meso," meaning between or in the middle of, and "potamos," meaning river. Situated in the fertile valleys between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the region is now home to modern-day Iraq, Kuwait, Turkey and Syria.*

"It happens in humans, too. Some behaviors that seem harsh to us now ensured the survival of early man in whatever swamp he was in at the time. Without them, we wouldn't be here. We still store those instincts in our genes, and they express themselves when certain circumstances prevail. Some parts of us will always be what we were, what we had to be to survive – way back yonder." From Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens

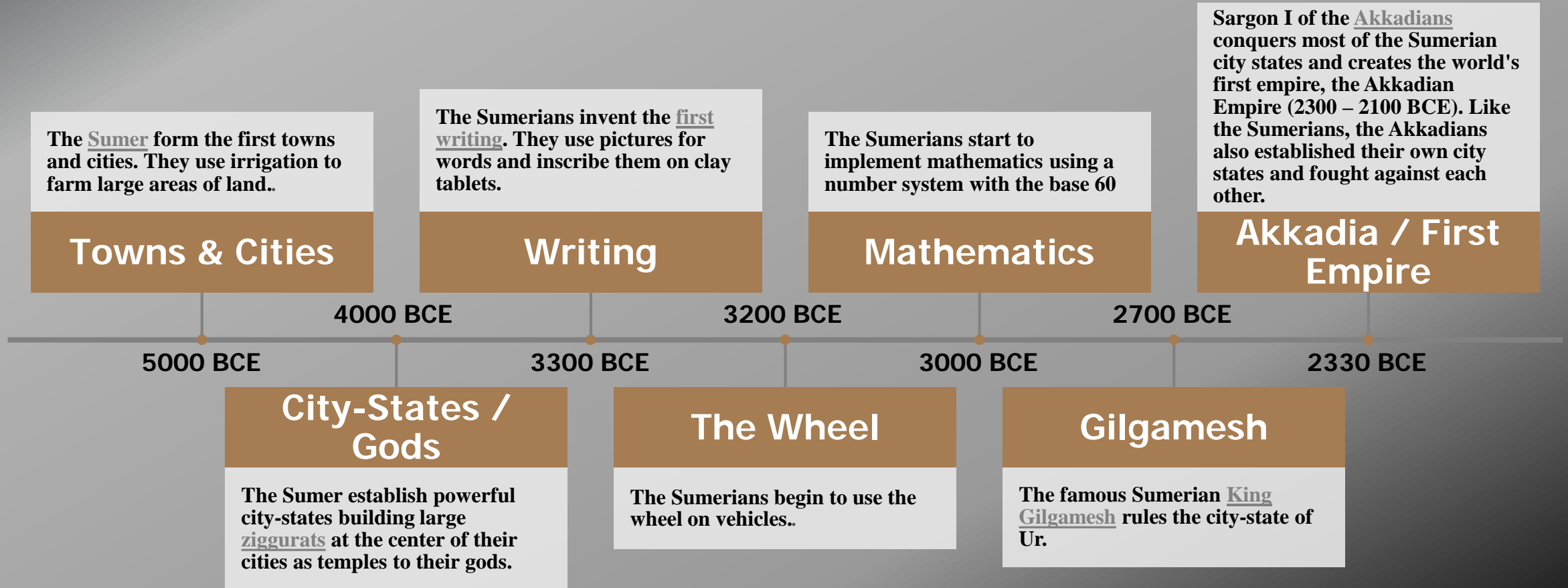
Ancient Mesopotamia (5000 BCE – 333 BCE)

The Cradle of Civilization



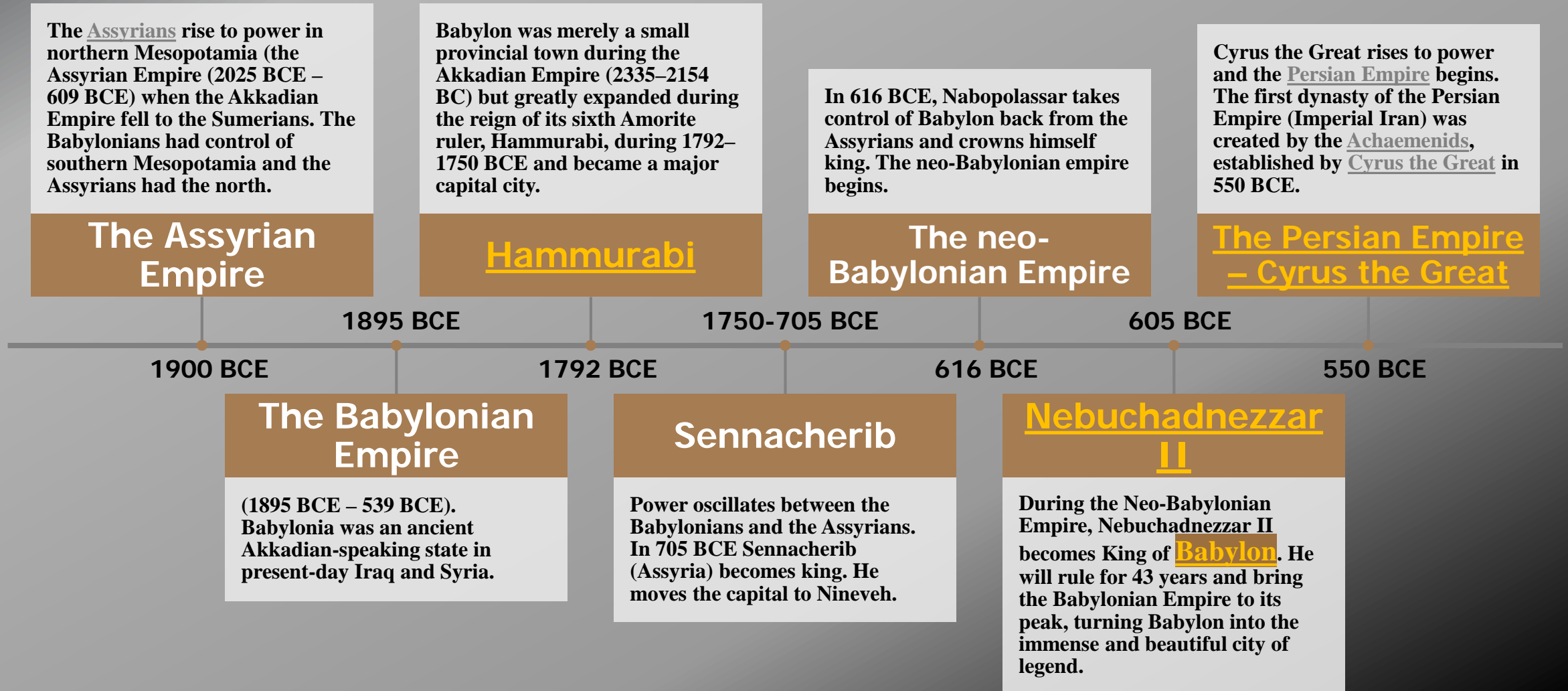
Ancient Mesopotamia (5000 BCE – 333 BCE)

The Sumer . . . The Akkadians



Ancient Mesopotamia (5000 BCE – 333 BCE)

The Assyrians . . . The Babylonians



Ancient Mesopotamia (5000 BCE – 333 BCE)

The Persians, then the Greeks

Darius I becomes King of Persia. He expands the empire, establishes the capital of the Persian Empire at Persepolis, attacks the Greeks and is defeated at the Battle of Marathon.

Darius I

522-490 BCE

480 BCE

Alexander the Great invades the land and conquers the Persian Empire. The Battle of Gaugamela, in which **Alexander** the Great **defeated Darius** III of Persia in 331 BC, was a decisive conquest that insured the **defeat** of his Persian rival.

Alexander the Great

333-323 BCE

Xerxes I

Xerxes I tries to conquer the Greeks with a huge army. He is eventually turned back in defeat.

**MORE FUN, MORE FACTS
ABOUT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT
PEOPLE AND EVENTS
IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA**

Hammurabi (1792–1750 BCE)

The Code of Hammurabi

- The town of Babylon greatly expanded during the reign of its sixth Amorite ruler, **Hammurabi**, during 1792–1750 BCE and became a major capital city. A very efficient ruler, Hammurabi established a bureaucracy, with taxation and centralized government. He freed Babylon from Elamite dominance, and indeed drove the Elamites from southern Mesopotamia entirely. He then systematically conquered southern Mesopotamia, giving the region stability after turbulent times and coalesced the patchwork of small states into a single nation; it is only from the time of Hammurabi that southern Mesopotamia acquired the name Babylonia.
- One of Hammurabi's most important and lasting works was the compilation of the Babylonian law code, which improved the much earlier codes of Sumer, Akkad and Assyria. This was made by order of Hammurabi after the expulsion of the Elamites and the settlement of his kingdom. In 1901, a copy of the **Code of Hammurabi** was discovered on a stele by Jacques de Morgan and Jean-Vincent Scheil at Susa in Elam, where it had later been taken as plunder. That copy is now in the Louvre.

King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon (605 BC – c. 562 BC)

The Babylonian Exile

- In 605 BCE, King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon (605 BC – c. 562 BC, was the longest-reigning and most powerful monarch of the Neo-Babylonian Empire), turning Babylon into the immense and beautiful city of legend. He besieged Jerusalem, ultimately leading to the exile of the Jewish people to Babylonia in three deportations dated 597 BCE, 587/586 BCE, and 582/581 BCE respectively.



Cyrus the Great

The Persian Empire

- After the fall of Babylon to the Persian king Cyrus the Great (Cyrus II - 600 – 530 BCE, ruled 30 years, 559 to 530 BCE). In 539 BCE, exiled Judeans were permitted to return to Judah and construction of the **Second Temple in Jerusalem** began around 537 BCE. What is sometimes referred to as the Edict of Restoration (actually, two edicts) described in the Bible as being made by Cyrus the Great left a lasting legacy on the Jewish religion. According to Isaiah 45:1 of the Hebrew Bible,[15] God anointed Cyrus for this task, even referring to him as a messiah (lit. 'anointed one') and he is the only non-Jewish figure in the Bible to be called so. Cyrus the Great created the largest empire the world had yet seen – the Achaemenid Empire (**also known as the First Persian Empire**). Cyrus the Great respected the customs and religions of the lands he conquered. This became a very successful model for centralized administration and establishing a government working to the advantage and profit of its subjects. Under his successors, the empire eventually stretched at its maximum extent from parts of the Balkans (Bulgaria-Paeonia and Thrace-Macedonia) and Eastern Europe proper in the west, to the Indus valley in the east.
- The Achaemenid Empire is noted in Western history as the antagonist of the Greek city-states during the Greco-Persian Wars and for the emancipation of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. The historical mark of the empire went far beyond its territorial and military influences and included cultural, social, technological and religious influences as well. Despite the lasting conflict between the two states, many Athenians adopted Achaemenid customs in their daily lives in a reciprocal cultural exchange, some being employed by or allied to the Persian kings. The empire also set the tone for the politics, heritage and history of Iran (also known as Persia).

The First Persian (Achaemenid) Empire

Map



Alexander the Great

From Macedonia to India

- 342 BCE - The great philosopher, scientist, and mathematician, Aristotle, begins to tutor Alexander (later to be called Alexander the Great).
- 336 BCE - Alexander the Great (356 BCE – 323 BCE) becomes king when his father, Philip of Macedon is assassinated.
- 333 BCE – Alexander, an avid admirer of Cyrus the Great, conquered Egypt, establishing the new capital of Egypt at Alexandria. Over the next several years Alexander would greatly expand his empire, defeating Darius III of Persia and conquering much of the Achaemenid Empire on the way to India, annexing it to Macedon (northern Greece where Alexander was born and raised) and earning himself the epithet 'the Great'. When Alexander died in 323 BC, Greek power and influence was at its zenith. Upon Alexander's death, most of the empire's former territory fell under the rule of the Ptolemaic Kingdom and Seleucid Empire, in addition to other minor territories which gained independence at that time. The Iranian elites of the central plateau reclaimed power by the second century BCE under the Parthian Empire.
- British historian [Charles Freeman](#) suggests that "In scope and extent his achievements [Cyrus] ranked far above that of the Macedonian king, Alexander, who was to demolish the Achaemenid Empire in the 320s but fail to provide any stable alternative."