

History of cultural groups

1. The Sumerians

After the Tower of Babel, people moved into the fertile land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, Mesopotamia, and began to form small villages which slowly grew into large towns. Eventually these cities developed into the civilization of the Sumer. This land is often called the "Cradle of Civilization". As we have learned previously, Abraham was originally from here before God called him out to go to Canaan. Abraham was a descendent of Noah, and would have known Noah and his family because Noah and Abraham were alive at the same time. Abraham was 58 years old when Noah died. The people of Sumer practiced agriculture and farmed animals like sheep and goats. These would have been the offspring of the animals that were on Noah's ark. Although there were 2 of every kind of animal on the ark, male and female, God sent SEVEN of certain kinds of animals that could be used for food after coming off the ark.

Although the Sumerian civilization developed not so long after Noah's Flood, the people once again started to worship false gods. Abraham however, did not. He worshiped the true God. This is why God called him out to go to a new land, Canaan.

Sumer City-States

Each city-state had its own god. In the center of each city was a large temple to the city god called a ziggurat. The ziggurat looked like a step pyramid with a flat top. Here the priests would perform rituals and sacrifices.

As the Sumerian villages grew into large cities, they formed city-states. This is where a city government would rule the city as well as the land around it. These city-states often fought each other. They built walls around their cities for protection. Farmland was outside the walls, but people would retreat to the city when invaders came.

There were many city-states throughout Sumer. One of them was Ur, where Abraham came from. Eridu is thought to be the first of the major cities formed and one of the oldest cities in the world.

Sumerian Rulers and Government

Each city-state had its own ruler. The ruler was like a king or governor. The ruler of the city was often the high priest of their religion as well. This gave him even more power.

In addition to the king or governor, there was a fairly complex government with officials who helped to organize city building projects and keep the city running. There were also laws that the citizens must follow or face punishment. The invention of government is often credited to the Sumerians.

Important Inventions and Technology

One of the great contributions the Sumerians made to civilization was their many inventions. They invented the first form of writing, a number system, the first wheeled vehicles, sun-dried bricks, and irrigation for farming. All of these things were important for the development of human civilization.

They also had an interest in science including astronomy and the movement of the moon and the stars. They used this information to make a more accurate calendar.

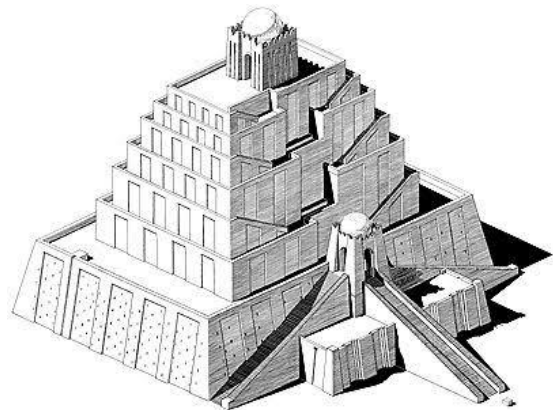
Fun Facts About the Sumerians

- Their number system was based on the number 60, like ours is based on the number 10. They used this when they came up with 60 minutes in an hour and 360 degrees in a circle. We still use these divisions today.
- Some historians think that the ziggurat at the city of Eridu was the Tower of Babel from the Bible.
- Some of the city-states were quite large. Ur is thought to have been the largest and may have had a population of 65,000 people at its peak.
- Their buildings and homes were made from sun-dried bricks.

Ziggurats

What did they look like?

Ziggurats looked like step pyramids. They would have anywhere from 2 to 7 levels or steps. Each level would be smaller than the one before. Typically, the ziggurat would be square in shape at the base.



How big were the ziggurats?

Some ziggurats are believed to have been huge. Perhaps the largest ziggurat was the one at Babylon. Recorded dimensions show that it had seven levels and reached a height of nearly 90 metres. It was also 90 metres at the base.

Why did they build them?

The ziggurat was a temple to the main god of the city. Each city in Mesopotamia had a primary god. For example, Murdock was the god of Babylon, Enki was the god of Eridu, and Ishtar was the goddess of Nineveh. The ziggurat showed that the city was dedicated to that god.

At the top of the ziggurat was a shrine to the god. The priests would perform sacrifices and other rituals here. They built them high because they wanted the shrine to be as close to the heavens as possible.

Are there any ziggurats left?

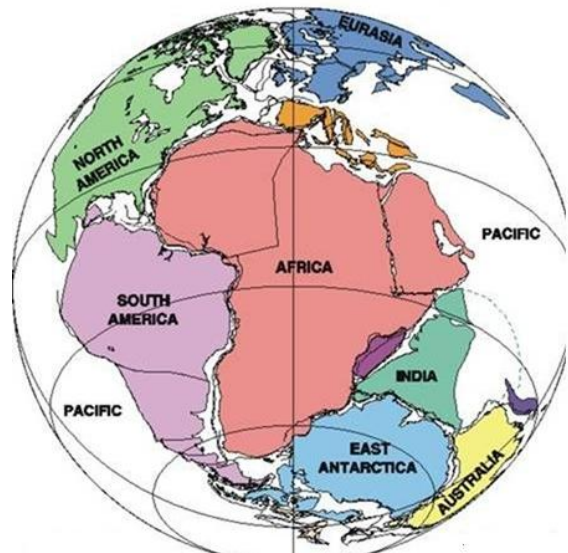
Many of the ziggurats have been destroyed over the past several thousands of years. The famous huge ziggurat of Babylon was said to have been in ruins by the time Alexander the Great conquered the city in 330 BC. The ziggurat at Chogha Zanbil is one of the last surviving ziggurats. Some ziggurats have been reconstructed or rebuilt. The ziggurat at the city Ur is one that has been somewhat rebuilt.

Interesting Facts About Ziggurats

- The ziggurat at Babylon was named Etemenanki. This meant "Foundation of heaven and Earth" in Sumerian.
- The tall height of the ziggurat may have also been useful during the seasonal flooding.
- There were generally only a few ramps leading up to the top of the ziggurat. This made the top easy to guard and helped keep the priest's rituals private, if they wanted.
- The early Egyptian pyramids were step pyramids similar to the ziggurat.
- The Aztecs of South America built stepped pyramids to their gods as well. This was years later and on a completely different continent.

This makes us ask, "Did the Aztecs learn how to build ziggurats from the Sumerians, because their ancestors lived in Sumaria and passed on the knowledge?" The second question is, "If so, how did the Aztecs get from Sumeria to South America?" In general, how did people get to such far away places in such a short time?

The answer to this is, that immediately after the Flood, the earth was not as we know it today. Originally the continents were joined together, but in 1960 it was scientifically proven that the continents at one stage drifted apart, forming the continents as we know them today. This is called 'continental drift'. Continents today may still be drifting apart at a very slow rate, but at the time of the Flood, and for a short time after, the drift was fast. This is called 'catastrophic plate tectonics'. During the Flood, the ocean floor moved like a conveyer belt. The sinking ocean floor displaced material from the earth's mantle. The earth's crust would have been under such stress that it would have been torn apart, breaking up the pre-Flood supercontinent and the ocean floor. Because people started migrating only about 100 years after the Flood, (after Babel), the continents were not yet completely separated, and for a short window of time, they could walk from one continent to another on land bridges.



Activities

1. Draw a map of Sumer showing the Tigris and Euphrates.
2. Name two major cities in Sumer.
3. Why do you think Sumer is called “the Cradle of Civilization”?
4. Make a list of the inventions of the people of Sumer. Which invention is shown in the picture bottom left?
5. How did they create a calendar?
6. What kind of animals did they use for animal farming?
7. How old was Abraham when Noah died?
8. What evidence is there from the text that most people of Sumer had moved away from worshipping the true God?
9. What symbols on the Mesopotamian pottery below could be evidence of their religion?
9. Why did God choose Abram (later called Abraham), and what was his role going to be?
10. Describe the government of Sumer.
11. Make a list of dot points: facts about ziggurats. Draw one.
12. What is the possible origin of the remains of ziggurats in South America?
13. How did the people who left Babel get to faraway places?
14. Draw a map of the world before continental drift.
15. Why did rapid continental drift take place during and soon after the Flood?

