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| **LESSON 2**  **History of Southwest Asia**  **ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *Why do civilizations rise and fall?*** | |
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| *Southwest Asia has played a large role in human history. The world’s earliest civilization developed here, and three major religions were born. Great empires that arose in the region grew to cover parts of three continents.*  **Early Southwest Asia**  ***What are some of the most important advancements that occurred in Southwest Asia in ancient times?***  **Mesopotamia**  Throughout most of human history, people lived as hunter-gatherers. In small groups, they hunted wild animals and searched for wild fruits, nuts, and vegetables. They were nomadic, frequently moving from place to place. About 10,000 years ago, though, a dramatic change began to occur: People started practicing agriculture—raising animals and growing crops. One of the first places this agricultural revolution unfolded was in Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia was a fertile plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present-day Iraq.  With the shift to agriculture came a shift to a more settled lifestyle. Villages began to appear in Mesopotamia. Because food was plentiful, some villagers were freed up from farming and could undertake toolmaking, basket weaving, or record keeping. Over time, some villages grew into large, powerful cities that had their own governments and military forces. These cities represent the world’s first civilizations. |  |

Over thousands of years, Mesopotamian societies such as the Sumerians and the Babylonians invented sophisticated irrigation and farming methods. They built huge, pyramid-shaped temple towers, and made advances in mathematics, astronomy, government, and law. Using a writing system called cuneiform (kew-NAY-ih-form), they produced great works of literature, including a poem known as the Epic of Gilgamesh. Mesopotamia’s achievements helped shape later civilizations in Greece, Rome, and Western Europe.

**Birthplace of World Religions**

Southwest Asia is also a cradle of religion. Three of the world’s major religions originated there. In ancient times, most people in the region worshiped many gods. This practice is known as **polytheism**. During the second millennium B.C., a new religion arose. A **millennium** is a period of a thousand years. This new religion was based on **monotheism**—the belief in just one God—and developed among a people called the Israelites. This religion came to be known as Judaism and its followers as Jews.

Jews believe the father of the Israelite people was Abraham. According to the Hebrew Bible, God called Abraham to leave his home in Mesopotamia and found a new nation in a land called Canaan, between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The area is shared today by Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Lebanon.

About A.D. 30, a Jewish teacher named Jesus began preaching in this area. The teachings of Jesus led to the rise of Christianity. This new religion spread rapidly throughout the Mediterranean world and into Europe. It also spread across Southwest Asia.

Then, in the A.D. 600s, Islam—the religion of Muslims—arose in the Arabian Peninsula. Muhammad, regarded by Muslims as the last and greatest of the prophets, announced his message in the desert city of Makkah (Mecca). Many of the teachings of Islam are similar to those of Judaism and Christianity. For example, all three religions are monotheistic and regard Abraham as the messenger of God who first taught this belief.

**Islamic Expansion**

The religion that Muhammad preached was relatively simple and direct. It focused on the need to obey the will of Allah, the Arab word for God. It obligated followers to perform five duties, which became known as the Pillars of Islam: promising faith to God and accepting Muhammad as God’s prophet , praying five times daily, fasting during the month of Ramadan (RAHM-uh-don), aiding the poor and unfortunate, and making a pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah.

In its first several years, Islam attracted few converts. By the time of Muhammad’s death, however, in A.D. 632, it had **expanded** across the Arabian Peninsula. Under Muhammad’s successors, known as caliphs (KAY-lifs), Arab armies began spreading the religion through military conquests. It was also spread by scholars, by religious pilgrims, and by Arab traders.

By about A.D. 800, Islam had spread across nearly all of Southwest Asia, including Persia (present-day Iran) and part of Turkey. It also extended into most of Spain and Portugal and across northernmost Africa. It later expanded to northern and eastern Africa, Central Asia, and South and Southeast Asia.

Islamic society was enriched by knowledge, skills, ideas, and cultural influences from many different peoples and areas. The influences contributed to a flowering of Islamic culture that lasted for centuries. During this period, great works of architecture were built, and centers of learning arose. Arab scholars made advances in math and science. This golden age was to have a lasting impact on every place it touched.

During the 1100s and 1200s, crusaders from Western Europe set up Christian states along Southwest Asia’s Mediterranean coast. The Muslims fought back and gained control of these territories by 1300. However, in other areas, Muslim military power weakened.

In the middle of the 1200s, a Central Asian people known as the Mongols, led by the grandson of the famous leader Genghis Khan, conquered Persia and Mesopotamia. These areas became part of a vast Mongol empire that stretched across much of Eurasia.

As a result of the Mongol attacks, the Islamic world was fragmented and fell into decay. Soon, however, a new era of Islamic expansion began. At its heart were the Ottomans, a group of Muslim tribes who began building an empire on the Anatolian Peninsula in the early 1200s. By the mid-1300s, the Ottoman Empire had grown to include much of western Southwest Asia and parts of southeastern Europe and northern Africa. At its height, it was one of the world’s most powerful states. It endured for six centuries before finally **collapsing** in the early 1900s.

***Determining Central Ideas*** What are some ways in which Islam was spread?

**Modern Southwest Asia**

***What present-day issues facing Southwest Asia have their roots in ancient times?***

The past century has been a period of change and conflict for Southwest Asia. New countries have been born, new borders have been drawn, and numerous wars have been fought. Vast petroleum reserves discovered during this period have brought great wealth to some of the region’s countries but have also created new tensions and conflicts.

**Independent Countries**

After reaching the peak of its power in the 1500s, the Ottoman Empire began to decline. The decline worsened in the 1800s and early 1900s. During that time, the empire lost African and European territories through wars, treaties, and revolutions. After fighting alongside the losing Central Powers in World War I, the empire was formally dissolved. A few years later, the modern country of Turkey was founded on the Anatolian Peninsula, where the empire had been born.

European interest and influence in Southwest Asia had been growing since the 1869 completion of the Suez Canal, which quickly became an important world waterway. In the peace settlement that ended World War I, Britain and France gained control over the Ottoman Empire’s former territories under a mandate system. In this arrangement, the people of these territories were to be prepared for eventual independence.

Dividing up their territories, the British and French created new political boundaries that showed little regard for existing ethnic, religious, political, or historical divisions. These boundaries would take on deep importance when the territorial units became independent countries and when new discoveries of petroleum deposits were made.

Long-simmering resentment toward the European colonial powers soon grew into strong nationalist movements among Arabs, Persians, Turks, and other groups. Between 1930 and 1971, one country after another won its independence, and the map of Southwest Asia began to take its present form.

**Arab-Israeli Conflict**

One of the mandates received by Britain after World War I was the territory called Palestine. It roughly corresponded to the Land of Israel, which was the area inhabited by the Jewish people in ancient times. Most of the people living in Palestine at the time of the mandate were Muslim Arabs. During the same period, growing numbers of Jewish immigrants seeking to escape persecution had been arriving from Europe and other parts of the world. As the Jewish population increased, tensions between Palestinian Arabs and Jews deepened.

Jewish nationalists called for the reestablishment of their historic homeland in Palestine. This movement gained support as a result of the Holocaust—the systematic murder of 6 million European Jews by Nazi Germany during World War II. Hundreds of thousands of Jews who survived the Holocaust were now refugees in search of a place to live.

In 1947 the United Nations decided on the issue of Palestine. The United Nations voted to divide the territory into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. The proposal was rejected by the Arabs.

The Arabs did not want to give up land. On the day in 1948 that Israel, the Jewish state, declared its independence, armies from neighboring Arab countries invaded. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs became refugees after fleeing the violence. That war ended with a truce in 1948. Other major Arab-Israeli wars were fought, however, in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

During a brief 1967 war, Israel captured areas known as the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights. Its control of these areas was opposed by Palestinian Arabs and neighboring Arab countries, which led to further conflict. Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982 and from the Gaza Strip in 2005. It continues to control the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Numerous attempts have been made to find a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but so far none have been successful.

**Civil Wars**

In addition to the strife between Arabs and Israelis, Southwest Asia has seen numerous other conflicts since World War II. Ethnic, religious, and political differences have fueled many conflicts. So has the rise of Islamist movements that consider Islam to be a political system as well as a religion. The desire to control large oil fields has also caused, or contributed to, many of the conflicts.

Civil wars have torn apart Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Yemen. The Kurds, a fiercely independent people living in eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, and western Iran, have fought to gain their own country. A revolution in Iran in the late 1970s resulted in the overthrow of that country’s monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic republic. Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, touching off an eight-year-long war. A decade later, Iraq invaded and annexed its small but oil-rich neighbor, Kuwait. This invasion triggered the Persian Gulf War, in which a coalition led by the United States quickly liberated Kuwait.

**Conflict and Terrorism**

On September 11, 2001, an Islamist organization called al-Qaeda carried out terrorist attacks on U.S. soil that killed nearly 3,000 people. The United States determined that Afghanistan’s Islamist ruling group, the Taliban, was supporting al-Qaeda and sheltering its leaders. In October, forces led by the United States and the United Kingdom invaded Afghanistan and removed the Taliban from power.

Two years later, the Second Persian Gulf War began when forces from the United States and the United Kingdom invaded Iraq and overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein. Hussein was accused of possessing weapons of mass destruction, a suspicion that eventually was proved to be untrue.

**Looking to the Future**

Despite the many conflicts, there is hope for a more peaceful and brighter future in Southwest Asia. Revenue from petroleum has brought prosperity and modernization to oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf. In 2010 and 2011, a popular uprising in Tunisia inspired democratic movements in Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria.

On the other hand, militant Islamic political movements limit the growth of democracy and civil rights. In addition, throughout the region, major gaps still exist in standards of living between the oil-rich countries and poorer countries.

***Determining Central Ideas*** What event in Europe helped spur the creation of a Jewish state in Southwest Asia?

**Lesson 2 Review**

**Reviewing Vocabulary**

1. What is the difference between *monotheism* and *polytheism*?

**Answering the Guiding Questions**

1. ***Identifying*** What is one of the Pillars of Islam?
2. ***Describing*** What change in Mesopotamia around 10,000 years ago resulted in a less nomadic lifestyle?
3. ***Identifying*** What are two developments that occurred during Islam’s golden age?
4. ***Citing Text Evidence*** What empire represented a second period of Islamic expansion, and where did that empire begin?
5. ***Determining Central Ideas*** How did the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States lead to a U.S. invasion of Afghanistan?
6. ***Informative/Explanatory Writing*** Some conflicts in Southwest Asia relate to the struggle for a homeland by groups such as the Jews, the Palestinians, and the Kurds. Write a short essay discussing what a homeland is and why groups are willing to fight for one.