

V. Assyrians

1. Read the article and answer the questions.

The Fall of Babylonia

The Babylonians had dangerous enemies, particularly the **Hittites** from the north. They discovered how to get fire hot enough to melt iron. This gave them iron weapons. The Hittites captured Babylon in 1595 BC, but they were driven out later.

In the Tigris Valley around a city **Assur** a warlike people **Assyrians** lived and they destroyed the first Babylonian state.

The Assyrians were the most cruel people of the ancient times. Their foot-soldiers and horsemen, often using **chariots**, captured town after town in Mesopotamia and showed no mercy to their captives. Rival kings were blinded and then burned alive. Men, women and children were beheaded or crucified, flayed alive or torn limb from limb. Even the land was sometimes poisoned so that it could not produce crops.

At first the rulers of Babylonia tried to be friendly with the Assyrians and help them in their wars. Then in 689 BC the Assyrians turned against them. The Assyrian king, **Sennacherib**, besieged Babylon for nine months with a large army when finally he broke it.

- What did the Hittites become well-known for?
- Describe how cruel the Assyrians were to their captives.
- Who and when destroyed the first Babylonian state?

3. Read the article and answer the questions.

The Glories of Nineve

There was a more pleasant side to Assyrian rulers. **Sennacherib**, for example, was very interested in farming and engineering. His capital and the greatest city of Assyria, **Nineve**, got its water from a 300-metre long aqueduct. He also introduced cotton-growing to Assyria.

Another Assyrian conqueror, **Assurbanipal** improved the army and under his rule the Assyrian Empire reached its greatest extent around 650 BC. He was also interested in education. He collected a library of 22 000 clay tablets written in cuneiform. Some of these clay tablets told the stories of the Creation of the World and the Great Flood. Others were about medicine, science and mathematics. Assurbanipal could hold this large empire together, but his successors could not. The cruelties of Assyrian rule provoked revolt after revolt. In 616 BC the Babylonians joined forces with the Medes and together attacked the Assyrians. Nineve was captured and destroyed by fire in 612 BC. The fire caused that the clay tablets in Assurbanipal's library were baked hard and so survived to be read in recent times. Three years later, all Assyria had been captured and never again appeared as an independent power.

- What achievements did the Assyrian kings reach?
- Thanks to what do we know more about the Assyrian Empire?

Nineve



VI. The Second Babylonian Empire

1. Read the following article and answer the questions.

The Glory of Babylon

After defeating the Assyrians, the Babylonians and Medes split the Assyrian Empire. The Medes took the north and east, and the Babylonians the south and west. For nearly two thousand years, Babylon had been an important city, and especially the reign of king **Nebuchadnezzar** was the most glorious in its history.

Babylon stood on the Euphrates where the main trade routes of the ancient world met. Babylonian ships traded down the river and along the coast of Arabia and India. Merchant caravans reached deep Persia and Asia Minor. Babylon was a busy centre of trade and commerce.

Babylon was also a great centre of learning and religion. The priests seemed to be interested in **astronomy**. Using their temple towers as observatories, they carefully noted the movements of the moon and of the planets.

King **Nebuchadnezzar** was famous for he invaded and conquered Judah, captured and destroyed Jerusalem and took many Jews back to Babylon as captives.

During his reign Babylon turned into one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The best description that we have of the city was written by the Greek, **Herodotus**. The most wonderful part of the city were the famous **Hanging Gardens** (one of the Wonders of the World). An artificial hill of terraces upon terraces was planted with every sort of flower and tree. Water for the top was raised by machinery from the river below. The story goes that Nebuchadnezzar had them made because his new young queen was homesick for the green hills of Persia.

The successors of Nebuchadnezzar were not able to protect the empire against the Persians. The Persian king, **Cyrus the Great**, moved against Babylon after he had conquered the Medes in 549 BC. The last Babylonian king, **Nabonidus**, was disliked by many of his people. So it came as no surprise that **Cyrus** was greeted by cheering crowds waving date palms when he led his **army into Babylon in 539 BC**. By 300 BC the main trade routes no longer passed through the city and it began to decay and the buildings turned to ruins. The glory of Babylon came again during the reign of **Alexander the Great**.

- > How was the Assyrian Empire divided after its fall?
- > What was Babylon famous for?
- > Why is the name of the king Nebuchadnezzar mentioned in the Bible?
- > What was Herodotus famous for?

> What is bizarre about the Hanging Gardens?

> Who was the last Babylonian Emperor?

> Who defeated Babylon, when and why?

