CHAPTER 4 Section 2 (pages 95–98)

The Assyrian Empire

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read about Egypt and Nubia, In this section, you will read about the Assyrians, the people who took over Egypt.

AS YOU READ

Use the chart below to take notes on Assyria.

A Mighty Military Machine

(pages 95–96)

Who were the Assyrians?

For a time, Assyria was the greatest power in Southwest Asia. The Assyrians began as a farming people in the northern part of Mesopotamia. Because their homes were open to attack, they formed a strong fighting force. Soon they turned to conquest. Assyrian kings, including the fierce Sennacherib, built an empire that stretched from east and north of the Tigris River all the way to central Egypt.

The Assyrians used many different methods to win their battles. Their soldiers carried strong iron-tipped spears and iron swords. They used large numbers of men with bows. They dug tunnels under city walls to weaken them. They used heavy battering rams to knock down the wooden gates of the city.

The Assyrians conquered almost everything in their path. They usually killed or enslaved those they defeated. Some Assyrian kings bragged about their cruelty toward people they captured.

Sometimes conquered peoples would revolt. Assyrians wanted to stop these rebellions and dominate the peoples. They forced groups of captives to leave their homelands. Then the captives were too far away to cause trouble.

1. What made the Assyrians such a strong fighting force?
The Empire Expands (page 96)

Whom did the Assyrians conquer?

Between 850 and 650 B.C., the Assyrians conquered all of Mesopotamia along with Syria and Palestine. Then they took modern Turkey and Egypt. They ruled by putting in power kings who would support them. They also collected taxes and tribute—yearly payments from peoples who were weaker. If a city did not pay, the Assyrian army moved in and destroyed it.

The Assyrian kings were builders, too. One built the city of Nineveh on the north branch of the Tigris River. It was the largest city of its day. The city was surrounded with walls.

Another king, Ashurbanipal, gathered thousands of writing tablets from the lands that had been taken. Some of these tablets were dictionaries. The collection provided historians with much information about the earliest civilizations in Southwest Asia. The library was also the first to have many of the features of a modern library, including a cataloging system.

2. Besides conquering other people, what did the Assyrians accomplish?

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The Empire Crumbles (pages 97–98)

Why did the Assyrians fall?

The Assyrians had also made many enemies over the years. After a while, those enemies banded together. An army made up of Medes, Chaldeans, and others struck back. In 612 B.C., they destroyed the city of Nineveh. Many people in the area were glad that the city was in ruins.

The Chaldeans, who had ruled the area earlier, took control of Mesopotamia again. A Chaldean king named Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt the city of Babylon. Once more it was one of the greatest cities of the world. The city included famous hanging gardens with many different plants from the cool mountain regions, Slaves watered the plants with hidden pumps.

Babylon also featured a ziggurat. This step-shaped pyramid soared 300 feet into the air. It was the tallest building in Babylon. At night, priests would study the stars and the planets. They recorded what they saw. This was the beginning of the science of astronomy.

3. Who were the Chaldeans?