Lecture 2: Empires and Nomads: Hebrews, Assyrians, and Persians

The Hittites (1600 – 717)
• A commercial people who readily adopted from other cultures
• Destroyed the Old Babylonians (Amorites)
• 1600-1200 BC empire reached height
• Share an empire with the Assyrians
  – Suppiluliumas, c. 1380-1340 B.C.
• Destroyed by the “Sea Peoples”?

The Philistines
• Established along Mediterranean coast
• Most likely part of the “Sea Peoples”
• King David subdues the Philistines
• ca. 600 B.C. Philistines ceased to exist as a distinct people

The Phoenicians (Canaanites)
  – Resided along the Mediterranean coast of Lebanon
  – Byblos, Tyre, Sidon
  – Independent city-states
  – International sea traders
  – Colonies across the Mediterranean
• Greek alphabet developed from the Phoenicians
• Primary god El,
  – Protector of the universe
  – Often called Baal
• ca. 1000 B.C. Phoenicians reached their peak
• Tyre falls to Nebuchadnezzar in 573 B.C.

Jewish history
♦ Jewish history starts with Abraham
  – Abraham lived c. 1800 -1500 B.C.
  – God told Abraham to leave Mesopotamia
  – Abraham and his sons are the patriarchs (fathers) of the Jewish people
  – Jacob's son Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt
  – Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt
  – God dictates his laws to Moses
  – Collection of teachings called the Torah

The United Kingdom of Israel...
• The Kingdom of Israel
  – Saul, c. 1020-1000 B.C.
– David, c. 1000-970 B.C.
– Solomon, c. 970-930 B.C.
• The Divided Kingdom
  – Kingdom of Israel with its capital at Samaria
  – Kingdom of Judah with its capital at Jerusalem
• Assyria crush’s Israel

The Hebrews and Their God
• Hebrews diverge religiously from the other cultures
• Hebrew Bible
  – Forms Old Testament of the Christian Bible
• Yahweh (Jehovah)
• Covenant, Law and Prophets
  – Covenant with Yahweh
  – Obedience to the law of God
  – Prophets

The Assyrian Empire
• Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 B.C.)
• Sargon II (722–705 BC)
• Ashurbanipal (669-626 B.C.E.)
• A Military machine unmatched by any other
• Neo-Babylonian Empire
  – Emerges from the late Assyrian Empire

The Persian Empire
• Achaemenid Empire
• Cyrus the Great (559-530 B.C.)
  – 550 Cyrus starts a conquest
  – That will reach the borders of India and Greece
  – 539 liberates Babylonians
  – Frees the Jews of Babylon
  – Remembered for his compassion and wisdom
• Cambyses II (530-522 B.C.)
  – Conquered Egypt in 525
• Darius I (521-486 B.C.)
  – A great builder and military leader
  – Known in history for his at Marathon in 490

The Persian Empire…. 
• Government
  – Tribute calculated by law
  – Used within province
  – Satrapies (provinces)
  – Many local non-Persian governors
  – “Royal Road” (Sardis to Susa)
– Persians were great palace builders
– Hoarding of wealth and distance from subjects will bring ruin to the late emperors
• Persian army
  – The “Immortals”

Persian Religion
• Zoroastrianism (Impact of Christianity?)
  – It was accepted by the Persian Kings
  – Wandering of Zoroaster (prophet) c. 660
  – Ahuramazda is only god
  – Ahuramazda asks for good thought, piety, justice
  – Concept of universal Good vs. evil in which humans play a part