**Eastern Hemisphere**  
**Study Guide**  
**Unit 3: The Ancient Fertile Crescent**  

This unit study guide contains the knowledge you will need to be successful during this unit. Please keep it in your social studies binder for future reference.

**Essential Questions**

The purpose of this unit is to teach you the answer to the following essential questions:

- What is the physical and cultural geography of the Middle East and Central Asia?
- How does the Ancient Fertile Crescent fit into the chronology of world history?
- What religious traditions developed in the Ancient Fertile Crescent, and what effect did they have on our world?
- What written legal systems came out of the Ancient Fertile Crescent, and what effect did they have on the world?

**Lesson A: The Geography of the Middle East and Central Asia**

1. **Where is the Middle East and Central Asia located?** The region of the Middle East & Central Asia is located in the southwestern corner of the continent of Asia. You should be able to locate this region on a map of the Eastern Hemisphere. You should also be able to locate the nations of Israel, the West Bank, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan. Two other random nations will be pulled from a map of this region.

2. **What are important points to remember about the geography of the Middle East and Central Asia?** You should learn the following points about the geography of the Middle East and Central Asia, and know where to find these places on a map.

   a. The Middle East and Central Asia is a land of very hot and very dry deserts, like the vast Arabian Desert in Saudi Arabia, the Dasht-e Kavir in Iran, and the Kara Kum in Central Asia. Nevertheless, large areas of fertile land also exist in this region, watered by the Tigris and Euphrates River in Iraq. Much of this region is mountainous, especially in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan.

   b. Three-fifths of the world’s oil supply is found in this region. As a result, this region is very important to the world. International competition over this dwindling natural resource will likely make this region a focal point for conflict in the decades to come.

   c. This region is the birthplace of three major world religions. These include Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Two major religious centers for these religions are located in this region, Mecca in Saudi Arabia and Jerusalem in Israel. Historically, conflicts between and within these religions have been the source of a great deal of violence in this region. Most of the people in this region are Muslim, belonging to the faith of Islam. It is important to note that there are many divisions within this religion, and these divisions have been a source of conflict in the region. Substantial minorities of Christians and Jews also exist in the region.

   d. This region is a land of many ethnic groups. Often they do not get along, and their conflicts lead to violence. Some examples of these are the Armenian Genocide during the Great War (1914-1918) and the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds by Saddam Hussein in the 1980s.

   e. This region has become the battleground for the global war on terror. In 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan to topple the Taliban regime. This government harbored Al Qaeda, the terrorist organization responsible for 9-11. American troops remain in this country battling the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq. The goal of this invasion was to seize weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator, was suspected of developing. While no WMDs were found in Iraq, U.S. troops remain in Iraq to this day.
f. Israel has been a major focal point for conflict in this region. Since its birth in 1948, this nation has waged wars with many of its Arab neighbors such as Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon. Moreover, a constant conflict over land ownership between Israeli settlers and native Palestinians has been a major source of conflict for this region. The United States and Israel are staunch allies, and America has always backed the Israeli side in this conflict. This relationship has led to poor relations between the United States and the Islamic nations of the Middle East.

**Lesson B: The Chronology of the Ancient Fertile Crescent**

3. **What is the Fertile Crescent?** The Fertile Crescent was an arc of land that included Mesopotamia and Palestine (a.k.a. the Levant). It was the home of many important ancient civilizations, including the city-states of Sumer, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Hittites, the Persians, the Phoenicians, and the Hebrews.

4. **How does the Fertile Crescent fit into the chronology of world history?** Please know the following events:
   a. Around 3500 BCE, the people of Mesopotamia built the city-states of Ur, Lagash, and Nippur in ancient Mesopotamia.
   b. Around 2000 BCE, the Amorites built the city of Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates River.
   c. Around 1790 BCE, King Hammurabi of Babylon carved the laws of his land on a black stone column.
   d. Around 1750 BCE, the Hittites built an empire in the mountains of modern-day Turkey with the iron weapons they invented.
   e. Around 1350 BCE, the Assyrians created an Empire in the Fertile Crescent.
   f. Around 1250 BCE, Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt in the Exodus.
   g. Around 1200 BCE, the Phoenicians created an alphabet of 22 letters in the Levant.
   h. Around 550 BCE, the Cyrus the Great conquered large areas of the Iranian Plateau, the Fertile Crescent, and Egypt to form the Persian Empire.
   i. In 334 BCE, Alexander the Great of Macedon marched into the Persian Empire to successfully conquer it.

**Lesson C: Hammurabi and Babylonia**

5. **What is Mesopotamia?** Mesopotamia is a band of land that surrounds the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in modern-day Iraq. In Greek, its name literally means “The Land between the Rivers.”

6. **What is polytheism?** Polytheism is the belief in many gods. A religion which believes in many gods is a polytheistic religion and its followers are polytheists. People who are polytheists are also called pagans.

7. **What is a deity?** A deity is a god or goddess.

8. **What is a ziggurat?** Ziggurats were large stepped mud brick pyramids. The ancient peoples of Mesopotamia used them as temples to worship their gods.

9. **What is cuneiform?** Cuneiform is a form of ancient writing which was used by the peoples of the Fertile Crescent. It uses characters made from a wedge-shaped stylus pressed into damp clay. These characters represent sounds, words, and whole ideas. In Latin, it means “wedge shaped.”

10. **What was Babylonia?** Babylonia was an ancient civilization that started in Mesopotamia. It borrowed much of its culture from the older Sumerian culture. They ruled a large empire from the capital city of Babylon on the Euphrates River from 2000 BCE to 1600 BCE. Babylon was conquered by the Hittites c. 1600 BCE, and then by the Assyrians. Babylon later rebuilt its empire around 600 BCE.
11. **What religious beliefs did the Babylonians have?** The Babylonians borrowed many of their religious ideas from the earlier Sumerians:
   a. They had a polytheistic religion which worshiped many deities. Each deity controlled an area of nature or human activity. For example, Sin was the god of the moon. Ishtar was the goddess of love and war. Adad was the god of wind, storm, and flood.
   b. Each important god had a large temple called a ziggurat. Minor gods had smaller temples and chapels. An idol of the deity was kept in a special part of the temple called the Holy of Holies. Only the priests and priestesses could see it. Daily, they washed it, dressed it, and gave it offerings of food and drink. They even entertained it with music and dancing.
   c. The Babylonians believed strongly in the lawfulness. They believed that the gods punished evildoers for their sins in the form of natural disasters.

12. **Who was Hammurabi?** Hammurabi was a king of Babylon who ruled from c. 1790 BCE to c. 1750 BCE. He was a very successful king who conquered an empire and wrote the Code of Hammurabi, a system of laws for the people of Babylonia.

13. **What was the Code of Hammurabi?** The Code of Hammurabi was a set of laws.
   a. Hammurabi had the code inscribed on a black stone stele in cuneiform.
   b. Hammurabi wrote that he had received the law from the sun god, Shumash.
   c. The laws in his code cover many areas. They include criminal law, family law and laws on trade. But it had no laws to govern religion.
   d. The criminal laws set down a pattern of “equal retribution” punishment. This is also known as “eye for an eye” justice. If a person knocked out a person’s tooth in a fight, his tooth could be knocked out in punishment.
   e. The code sought to protect all members of society, from the rich and powerful to the poor and weak. Even so, they treated people of different classes differently. A rich man had different (and lesser) punishments than a poor man, for example.

**Lesson D: Moses and the Hebrews**

14. **What is Palestine (a.k.a. the Levant)?** Palestine (a.k.a. the Levant) is an area in southwestern Asia. It is centered on the Jordan River, and includes the modern-day nations of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. In these lands, most of the events recorded in the Bible took place. It is also known as the Holy Land, because it is considered sacred to three major religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

15. **What is monotheism?** Monotheism is the belief in one god only. Any religion which believes in only one god is said to be monotheistic, and its followers are monotheists.

16. **Who were the ancient Hebrews or Israelites?** The Hebrews or Israelites were the ancestors of today’s Jewish people. Almost all we know about them comes from Old Testament of the Bible.
   a. Around 1800 BCE they were wanderers in Palestine. A severe drought forced them to leave their homelands and settle in Egypt. There, the Egyptians enslaved them. At this time, the Egyptians had enslaved many other foreign peoples they had conquered, like the Libyans and Nubians.
   b. They escaped around 1250 BCE, led by a prophet named Moses. Their escape was called the Exodus. He led them back to Palestine. On their journey, Moses revealed Mosaic Law to his people.
   c. The Hebrews conquered Philistines and Canaanites of Palestine. By 1000 BCE, they completed their conquest and made their capital in Jerusalem. Around 950 BCE, they built the Temple of Solomon.
   d. The Hebrews were conquered repeatedly throughout their history. In turn, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans conquered their homeland. Often, their conquerors forced them to leave Palestine, as Nebuchadnezzar...
Il did in 597 BCE. They rebelled often because they did not agree with the invaders’ pagan religious beliefs.

17. **What religious beliefs did the ancient Hebrews have?** The religious beliefs of the Hebrews were different from their neighbors in Mesopotamia and Egypt.
   a. They had a monotheistic religion and worshiped only one God. They believed God was responsible for everything that happened.
   b. They had a temple for the worship of God. There, they made offerings to God. The temple had a Holy of Holies like pagan temples, but it did not contain an idol. Instead, they contained the Ark of the Covenant, a box that contained the stone tablets upon which God’s laws were written.
   c. The Hebrews believed strongly in lawfulness. They believed that God punished them when they broke his laws. They used this belief to explain natural disasters and why their lands were invaded time and again throughout history.

18. **Who was Moses?** Moses was a prophet of the Hebrews. He led them out of Egypt to Palestine around 1250 BCE and revealed Mosaic Law to them as they migrated there.

19. **What is Mosaic Law?** Mosaic Law is the legal code that the Hebrews followed. It forms the basis of the legal system of many modern nations, including the United States.
   a. Many people believe that Moses recorded Mosaic Law in the Five Books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These are the first five books of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible. The Jewish people call them the Torah.
   b. These laws cover every aspect of life for the Jewish people. These include laws that governed the religion of the Hebrews.
   c. The criminal laws set down a pattern of “equal retribution” punishment. This is also known as “eye for an eye” justice. If a person knocked out a person’s tooth in a fight, his tooth might be knocked out in punishment.
   d. Mosaic Law sought to protect all members of society, from the rich and powerful to the poor and weak. In general, Mosaic Law promoted equal justice for all, regardless of a person’s wealth or power. Even foreigners were entitled to equal justice under Mosaic Law.