The Rise of Civilization - Mesopotamia and Gilgamesh

Ancient Civilization
"Prehistory" and "Civilization", Archeology
Prehistory - before writing

Before civilization:
The evolution of the species – Australopithecines
Homo Habilis (3 mil BCE), Homo Erectus (1.5 mil BCE), Homo Sapiens (250,000 BCE)
Paleolithic Age (2.5 million B.C.E - 10,000 B.C.E)
aka "Stone Age" (specifically "old" stone age) - Hunting and gathering "nomadic" tribes
Mesolithic Age (10,000 B.C.E - 8000 B.C.E) (middle stone)
The roots of Civilization
Neolithic Age (8000 B.C.E - 3000 B.C.E) (new stone)
Copper age (7000-3500 BCE), Bronze age (3500-1200 BCE), Iron age (1200 BCE-1870 CE)

The Agricultural Revolution
Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China
Jericho, Çatal Hüyük (Turkey)
Civilization - l. civitas "city-state"
Cities, Political institutions, Government bureaucracy, Social structure, Religious institutions,
Technology, Agriculture, Law, Art/Architecture
Effects
Permanent settlement, Larger communities, Accumulation of goods, Specialization, Trade
Mesopotamia (Gr. "Between the rivers" - Tigris and Euphrates) – “The Fertile Crescent”
Sumerians - Enidu, Ur, Uruk, Umma, Lagash
The Cities and the People – Kings and Priests, Nobles, Commoners, Slaves
Hierarchy and Stratification, “Patriarchal societies”
Religion / Spiritual Life
Polytheism, Anthropomorphism, Ziggurats, Temples, Theocracy
Technology and Beer
Conflicts and Empires
Akkadians - Sargon I (r.2332-2279 B.C.E.)
Babylonians (Amorites) - Hammurabi (r.1792-1750 B.C.E)
The Law Code of Hammurabi (The Stele of Hammurabi)(1760 BCE)
[US Supreme Court, South Wall Frieze]

Writing (3300 B.C.E - )
“Oral Literature” and Written Literature
Pictograms, Cuneiform, Records, Literature, Beer ads
The Epic of Gilgamesh
History of the Text
The real king of Uruk around 2700 BCE
Oral Tradition 2700-1600 BCE, the “11 tablet version” 7th c. BCE
The Re-discovery in 1844 of the “Record of Darius” (Behistun Rock, Iran)
Themes / Story – The “Human Condition”
Sumerian Myth and the Bible
The Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar II (r.604-562 B.C.E.)
Tower of Babel (Etemenanki, Marduk), Hanging Gardens (7 wonders)

8th c. Assyrian bas-relief from Jorabah shows Gilgamesh wrestling with a lion
There are strong parallels between Sumerian mythology and the stories in the biblical book of Genesis. There are, for instance, surviving Sumerian texts that parallel the story of Noah and the flood, including an episode in The Epic of Gilgamesh - a huge flood did indeed inundate Mesopotamia about 2900 B.C. In another Sumerian myth, the story of Enki and Ninhursag, which is some three hundred verses long, Enki, the great Sumerian god of water, creates a garden paradise in Dilmun by bringing water up from the earth, In Genesis 2:6, a similar event occurs: "But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." Ninhursag, the mother-goddess of the Sumerians, causes eight plants to sprout in this proto-Garden of Eden, and Enki, wanting to taste the plants, has another lesser god pick them. Ninhursag is furious and pronounces the curse of death upon Enki. This is a moment in the story that anticipates the biblical God's fury at Adam and Eve for eating the apple that Satan has tempted them with and their expulsion from the garden into a fallen world in which they must confront their mortality. Unlike Adam and Eve, however, Enki is eventually restored to immortality by Ninhursag, but the parallels between the two stories are striking. Also close in spirit to the biblical Creation story is the Poem of the Supersage, an Akkadian text written down about 1700 B.C. Like most Akkadian texts, it is probably based on Sumerian legend. The story begins in a divine society where the gods, in order to satisfy their material needs, had to work. Some gods, the leaders, called Anunnaki, were pure consumers, but the rest were laborers. These last, called Igigu, finally revolted, creating the prospect of famine among the Anunnaki. It was Enki who resolved the crisis by proposing that the gods create a substitute labor force out of the clay of the earth, whose destiny it would be to work and whose life would have a limited duration. Thus, as, in Genesis, humankind is created out of clay, must labor, and is mortal. The earliest parts of the Bible date from about 1000 B.C. Most of the Sumerian texts date from 2000 B.C. or earlier. How these stories survives is a matter of speculation, though it is worth pointing out that the biblical Abraham was born in Ur, perhaps around 1700 B.C. It is therefore entirely possible that it was he who brought this lore with him to Palestine. Even more to the point, the language of the Akkadians, who conquered the Sumerians in about 2300 B.C., was also used throughout Palestine during the second millennium B.C., and there is little doubt that Palestinian scholars were well acquainted with Akkadian stories and texts, most of which are retellings, in one form or another, of Sumerian prototypes. (from Benton and DiYanni, Arts and Culture)