The Assyrians were a major Semitic empire of the Ancient Near East and who existed as an independent state for approximately nineteen centuries between c. 2500-605 BCE, enjoying widespread military success in its heyday.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE** [edit]

- Describe key characteristics and notable events of the Assyrian Empire

**KEY POINTS** [edit]

- Centered on the Upper Tigris river in northern Mesopotamia, the Assyrians came to rule powerful empires at several times, the last of which grew to be the largest and most powerful empire the world had yet seen.

- At its peak, the Assyrian empire stretched from Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea to Persia, and from the Caucasus Mountains (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan) to the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. It was at the height of technological, scientific and cultural achievements for its time.

- In the Old Assyrian period, Assyria established colonies in Asia Minor and the Levant, and asserted itself over southern Mesopotamia under king Ilushuma.

- Assyria experienced fluctuating fortunes in the Middle Assyrian period, with some of its kings finding themselves under the influence of foreign rulers while others eclipsed neighboring empires.

- Assyria became a great military power during the Neo-Assyrian period, and saw the conquests of large empires such as Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Hittites, and the Persians, among others.

- After its fall in the late 600s BCE, Assyria remained a province and geo-political entity under various empires until the mid-7th century CE.

**TERMS** [edit]

- **Aššur**
  - the original capital of the Assyrian Empire, which dates back to 2600 BCE.

- **Assyrian Empire**
  - a major Semitic kingdom of the Ancient Near East which existed as an independent state for a period of approximately nineteen centuries from c. 2500-605 BCE.
The Assyrian Empire was a major Semitic kingdom, and often empire, of the Ancient Near East. It existed as an independent state for a period of approximately nineteen centuries from c. 2500 BCE to 605 BCE, which spans the Early Bronze Age through to the late Iron Age. For a further thirteen centuries, from the end of the 7th century BCE to the mid-7th century CE, it survived as a geo-political entity ruled, for the most part, by foreign powers, although a number of small Neo-Assyrian states arose at different times throughout this period.

This map shows the extent of the empires of Egypt (orange), Hatti (blue), the Kassite kingdom of Babylon (black), Assyria (yellow), and Mitanni (brown). The extent of the Achaean/Mycenaean civilization is shown in purple.
Centered on the Upper Tigris river, in northern Mesopotamia (northern Iraq, northeast Syria and southeastern Turkey), the Assyrians came to rule powerful empires at several times, the last of which grew to be the largest and most powerful empire the world had yet seen.

As a substantial part of the greater Mesopotamian "Cradle of Civilization", Assyria was at the height of technological, scientific and cultural achievements for its time. At its peak, the Assyrian empire stretched from Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea to Persia (Iran), and from the Caucasus Mountains (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan) to the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. Assyria is named for its original capital, the ancient city of Ašur (a.k.a. Ashur) which dates to c. 2600 BCE and was located in what is now the Saladin Province of northern Iraq. Ashur was originally one of a number of Akkadian city states in Mesopotamia. In the late 24th century BCE, Assyrian kings were regional leaders under Sargon of Akkad, who united all the Akkadian Semites and Sumerian-speaking peoples of Mesopotamia under the Akkadian Empire (c. 2334 BC to 2154 BCE). Following the fall of the Akkadian Empire c. 2154 BCE, and the short-lived succeeding Sumerian Third Dynasty of Ur which ruled southern Assyria, Assyria regained full independence.

The history of Assyria proper is roughly divided into three periods, known as Old Assyrian, Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian. These terms are in wide use in Assyrology and roughly correspond to the Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, respectively. In the Old Assyrian period, Assyria established colonies in Asia Minor and the Levant. Under king Ilushuma, it asserted itself over southern Mesopotamia. From the late 19th century BCE, Assyria came into conflict with the newly created state of Babylonia, which eventually eclipsed the older Sumero-Akkadian states in the south, such as Ur, Isin, Larsa and Kish. Assyria experienced fluctuating fortunes in the Middle Assyrian period. Assyria had a period of empire under Shamshi-Adad I and Ishme-Dagan in the 19th and 18th centuries BCE. Following the reigns of these two kings, it found itself under Babylonian and Mitanni-Hurrian domination for short periods in the 18th and 15th centuries BCE respectively.

However, a shift in the Assyrian's dominance occurred with the rise of the Middle Assyrian
Empire (1365 BCE to 1056 BCE). This period saw the reigns of great kings, such as Ashur­uballit I, Arik-den-ili, Tukulti-Ninurta I and Tiglath-Pileser I. As well, during this period, Assyria overthrew Mitanni and eclipsed both the Hittite Empire and Egyptian Empire in the Near East. Beginning with the campaigns of Adad-nirari II from 911 BCE, Assyria again showed itself to be a great power over the next three centuries during the Neo-Assyrian period. It overthrew the Twenty-Fifth dynasty of Egypt, and conquered a number of other notable civilizations including Babylonia, Elam, Media, Persia, Phoenicia/Canaan, Aramea (Syria), Arabia, Israel, and the and Neo-Hittites. They drove the Ethiopians and Nubians from Egypt, defeated the Cimmerians and Scythians, and exacted tribute from Phrygia, Magan and Punt, among others. After its fall (between 612-605 BCE), Assyria remained a province and geo-political entity under the Babylonian, Median, Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, Roman and Sassanid Empires until the Arab Islamic invasion and conquest of Mesopotamia in the mid-7th century CE, when it was finally dissolved.