

## **1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed Readers' Guide**

1. General/Introductory questions
  - a. Why might we consider the Late Bronze Age to be the first truly global era? What type of evidence do we have that the ancient societies were connected so strongly?
  - b. Do you think it is accurate to use the word globalization discussing the Late Bronze Age, or is it anachronistic, since that period is in the distant past?
  
2. The Date of the Collapse
  - a. What really happened in 1177 B.C., the eighth year of reign of Ramses III? Why is that year so crucial for ancient history?
  - b. In 1177 B.C. the author claims that decline began as early as c. 1250 BC and as late as c. 1130 BC, depending on geographical location. Do you agree that 1177 BC is a turning point and an important date in our understanding of the end of the Bronze Age, even if the decline took place over as much as a century?
  
3. The Causes of the Collapse
  - a. Do you think that there was one main factor that caused the collapse of the Bronze Age civilization? Or do you agree with the author that the failure of these empires was due to a combination of natural catastrophes like earthquakes and prolonged droughts, migration and foreign invasions, internal rebellions, and the collapse of international trade? Why do you think earlier generations of scholars were so keen to find a single explanation for the breakdown of Bronze Age civilizations? If there were a perfect storm of calamities, can you list these calamities and rank them in order of importance?
  - b. How often do you think climate has played a role in the rise and fall of great civilizations? Is this a recurring trend in history?
  - c. There appears to be a fascination these days with the collapse of civilization. Why do you think this is? Is it just a response to the complexity of our technological culture? Or is it an intuition of its frailty? Is this fascination something that is always there in high cultures or is it prevalent at particular moments in history?
  
4. Who Were the Sea Peoples

Among the several causes explaining this downfall, scholars mention an invasion by the people from the sea. These are very mysterious people, indeed. Do we have any hint about their origins? That is, who do you think the Sea Peoples were? Where did they come from and where did they go?

#### 5. The Impact and Aftermath of the Collapse

- . In what way does the author compare the collapse in 1177 BC to the fall of the Roman Empire? Did any polities or groups in particular benefit from the collapse of the Bronze Age? The Phoenician city-states and the Aramaeans seem to have fared better than many others, for example, and then there is the rise of Israel and, eventually, Greece as well. What sorts of developments come about later in history as a result of the rise of these civilizations?
- a. In discussing the aftermath of such a catastrophe, the author seems to imply that sometimes good things come out of bad. Would you agree? Can you think of any other examples in history or even in your own life?

#### 6. Parallels with the Modern World

- . Do you think that there are any parallels between the world described in the book and today? If so, what similarities do you find? Are those parallels particularly unique to that era and ours (i.e., the role of climate or the failure of broad international economic ties/diplomacy)?
- a. The author quotes a British scholar who stated that the strategic importance of tin was really not very different from that of crude oil today. Would you agree?
- b. For Fernand Braudel, the history of the Bronze Age was crammed with invasions, wars, pillages, political disasters and lasting financial downfalls, in addition to the first civilization clashes. Do you think that this statement could apply to present day?
- c. Would you consider the tumultuous ending of the Bronze Age in that part of the Mediterranean very similar to what is actually happening in Syria and Iraq today?

#### 7. Lessons to be Learned

- . The author suggests that the globalization of the interconnected civilizations in the Mediterranean and Middle East during the Late Bronze Age contributed to their collapse. Could this give us any lessons for our global world today? Consider the belief that we came close to collapse a few years ago because of the economic crisis in the United States.

- a. In many places in the book, the author seems to suggest that these remote events may have some link with the present, or some lesson to teach us. If we don't want to repeat history, what lessons should we be learning from Bronze Age mistakes?

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