3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter you will read about how people learned, over thousands of years, to farm their own food. Humans discovered farming towards the end of the Stone Age. The Stone Age gets its name from the tools people made of stone. It began with the first toolmaking hominids about 2 million years ago. It lasted until around 3000 B.C.E., when people learned to make tools and weapons out of metal.

Historians divide the Stone Age into periods. The first is the Paleolithic Age, or Old Stone Age. During this time, people got their food by hunting wild animals and gathering nuts, berries, and other plants. They lived much of their lives out in the open and rarely stayed in one place for long.

By about 8000 B.C.E., some groups of people had learned how to raise animals and crops for food. With this discovery, the Neolithic Age, or New Stone Age, began. For the first time, people settled down to live in one place.

The shift from being hunter-gatherers to being farmers is one of the most important advances people have ever made. In this chapter, you’ll explore the many ways it changed human life.

3.2 FROM OLD STONE AGE TO NEW STONE AGE

The Old Stone (Paleolithic) Age began about 2 million years ago and lasted until about 8000 B.C.E. It was during this time that early modern humans developed. Like the hominids who came before them, early humans were hunter-gatherers. They wandered from place to place, looking for animals to hunt and plants to gather for food. Often they took shelter in caves, like the cave painters you read about in Chapter One.

The New Stone (Neolithic) Age began when people learned to farm and produce their own food. The discovery of farming did not happen all at once. Over thousands of years, people gradually learned to rely on farms for their food. Now they could settle down in one place instead of roaming in search of things to eat.

Historians say that the Neolithic Age began around 8000 B.C.E. because the earliest permanent settlements date back to this time.
It ended in about 3000 B.C.E., when people learned to make tools out of metal instead of stone.

Many Neolithic settlements were located in a region east of the Mediterranean Sea, where the land was fertile (good for growing crops). They included such towns and villages as Jericho (in present-day Israel), Catal Hoyuk (Turkey), and Jamo (Iraq).

People in settlements like these lived very different lives from earlier hunter-gatherers. With farms to provide their food, they could build permanent shelters and form larger communities. They could make better tools and clothing. And they could trade with people in other places for resources they wanted. As you will see, these changes made life safer, more comfortable, and more interesting.

### 3.3 CREATING A STABLE FOOD SUPPLY

During the Paleolithic Age, people obtained food by hunting animals and gathering plants. But hunting and gathering did not provide a very stable, or dependable, food supply. Wild plants and animals grew scarce when people stayed in one area for too long. And hunting was dangerous. Hunters were often injured or killed.

Gradually, people discovered they didn’t have to depend on hunting and gathering. Instead of gathering wild plants, they could plant seeds and harvest crops. Over time, they learned which seeds produced the most crops in the areas where they lived.

Early farmers also learned how to domesticate animals, raising and using them for their own purposes. They raised sheep, goats, and cattle for their meat. They got milk from both goats and cattle. They used mules to carry heavy loads and pull plows.

Together, the growing of crops and the domestication of animals are called agriculture. The Neolithic Age began with the invention of agriculture. For the first time, people had a stable food supply. Let’s explore why this change was one of the most important advances in all of history.

### 3.4 MAKING PERMANENT SHELTERS

The first great change brought about by agriculture was the development of permanent shelters. During the Paleolithic Age, people had lived in caves or rough, tent-like structures. These shelters were temporary because hunter-gatherers often moved to follow wild animals or find new plants to eat. As people settled down to farm during the Neolithic Age, they built more permanent shelters.
In many areas, people packed mud bricks together to build round or rectangular houses. Sometimes they added stones and tree branches to strengthen the walls and roof. The houses had openings high in the walls. People probably climbed a ladder to reach the openings and enter the house.

Inside were several rooms. Places to store food were built into the floor. Pits for cooking were dug into the floor and lined with clay. People may have filled the pits with water and dropped on hot stones to make the water boil for cooking.

The development of permanent shelters was important in several ways. Houses gave people protection from harsh weather and wild animals. They made life more comfortable. They allowed new ways of cooking food, and living in permanent shelters allowed people to form larger communities.

3.5 ESTABLISHING COMMUNITIES

Along with permanent shelters, farming allowed people to form larger communities. In Paleolithic times, small bands of 20-60 people wandered from place to place in search of food. Once people began farming, they could settle down near their farms. As a result, villages and towns grew up, like those at Jericho and Catal Hoyuk.

Living in communities allowed people to organize themselves more efficiently. They could divide up the work of producing food and other things they needed. While some workers grew crops, others built new houses and made tools.

Village dwellers also learned to work together to do a task faster. For example, toolmakers could share the work of making stone axes and knife blades. By working together, they could make more tools in the same amount of time.

With their basic needs met, people had more time and energy for other activities. They could invent new ways of making their lives safer and more comfortable. Larger communities could also defend themselves more easily against enemies. The Neolithic town of Jericho, for example, was protected by strong stone walls. All these changes helped populations to grow where farming villages developed.
3.6 DEVELOPING NEW JOBS

Having a stable food supply allowed people to develop new kinds of jobs. In Paleolithic times, people’s main job was finding enough food to survive. With farms to provide their food, Neolithic people could develop more specialized skills.

A good example is the town of Catal Hoyuk, which dates back to about 6000 B.C.E. Historians believe that the town’s people worked in a number of different jobs. Besides farmers, there were weavers, basket makers, toolmakers, and traders.

Focusing on one job allowed people to get better at their work. In Catal Hoyuk, farmers learned how to grow more than 14 kinds of food plants. Clothing makers developed a way to spin and weave. They wove natural fibers such as wool and linen into comfortable cloth. In some regions, people mined flint so that stoneworkers could create sharper tools.

Neolithic people didn’t just want to survive. They wanted to make themselves, and their surroundings more beautiful. They decorated their pottery and baskets with geometric shapes. Stoneworkers learned to polish stones to make shiny jewelry and mirrors. House builders added special rooms to honor the gods and goddesses they believed in.

The development of different jobs encouraged people to become highly skilled at their crafts. This led to new and better ways of doing things. Furthermore, different jobs created much more variety in community life.

3.7 BEGINNING TO TRADE

Another major change in Neolithic times was the growth of trade. Paleolithic hunter-gatherers rarely traded with other groups. They usually used only the plants, animals, and other resources they found nearby. Once people settled in towns and villages, trade became much more common.

People trade to get resources they do not have in their own area. As Neolithic people became more skilled in their crafts, they wanted materials to improve the strength and beauty of the things they made. Getting those resources became the job of the traders.

Traders often traveled hundreds of miles to find what they wanted. They crossed mountains on foot, rode donkeys across deserts, and sailed the Mediterranean Sea on ships.
For what were the traders searching? Popular items included flint and obsidian. Obsidian is a black glass from volcanic mountains. Craftspeople used it to make knife blades, arrowheads, and mirrors. People also traded for “beauty products” like shell ornaments and a red ore called hematite. Women rubbed hematite on their lips and cheeks to make them redder.

The growth of trade allowed people to make use of more resources. It also brought them into contact with people from distant places. These contacts helped spread ideas and knowledge around the ancient world.

**SUMMARY**

In this chapter, you learned how the development of farming changed people’s lives between the Paleolithic Age and the Neolithic Age.

**A Stable Food Supply** During the Paleolithic Age, people lived as nomads, obtaining their food by hunting animals and gathering plants. Gradually, people discovered they could grow crops and domesticate animals. These two developments are called agriculture. Agriculture marked the beginning of the Neolithic Age.

**Shelters and Communities** As people began to farm, they built permanent shelters and formed communities. Towns and villages grew up near farms.

**Jobs and Trade** Living in communities allowed people to improve how they lived and worked. They created new jobs and traded for the resources they needed.