***This is an example of an essay that received a 5. The only point this student missed was the Complex Understanding point.***

Around the year 3000 BCE, early civilizations developed in Southwest Asia and northern Africa. Many of these civilizations were located on rivers due to the silt they deposited, making it easier for small villages to evolve into complex societies through agriculture. Two of these river valley civilizations were Mesopotamia, which arose in the fertile crescent, and the other was Egypt, which developed along the Nile River. Although Mesopotamia and Egypt were different in the area of geography, they nevertheless had significant similarities with regard to religion and society and economics. Therefore, Mesopotamia and Egypt were more similar than different.

While Mesopotamia and Egypt have many similarities, their geographies and environments different greatly. Mesopotamia developed east of the Mediterranean Sea in the Fertile Crescent, specifically between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In Greek, Mesopotamia literally means “land between two rivers.” In contrast, Egypt developed along only one river, the Nile River. These rivers were important to the civilizations because they deposited silt, which made the land around the rivers exceptionally fertile. However, Mesopotamia and Egypt experience different flooding from their rivers. In Mesopotamia, the Tigris and Euphrates flooded unpredictably. This caused Mesopotamians to have chaotic lives and live in fear of the floods. They had a negative outlook on life, whereas the Egyptians had a positive view because of their flooding. The Nile flooded predictably which Egyptians saw as a sort of gift from the gods. Another distinct difference between the geographies of the two civilizations were their natural barriers. Mesopotamia had few natural barriers, which left them vulnerable to outside invasion. This was exposed when Sargon of Akkad conquered Mesopotamia and created the first empire. On the contrary, Egypt had numerous natural barriers such as the Sahara Desert, Mediterranean Sea, and Arabian Peninsula which protected it from attacks.

In terms of religion, Mesopotamia and Egypt had major similarities. Both river valley civilizations used a polytheistic belief system, meaning they believed in many gods. These gods and goddesses controlled different aspects of the peoples’ lives and also nature. Egyptians believed in gods such as Ra the Sun God, Osiris, the God of the Underworld, and Thoth, the God of Knowledge. Because of their dedication to their gods, Egyptians and Mesopotamians worshipped their gods extensively and provided offerings for them to keep them happy. Mesopotamians even dedicated religious buildings to specific deities. The places of worship in these civilizations, such as Sumerian ziggurats in Mesopotamia and Egyptian temples, were also the workplaces of priests. Priests would perform rituals and religious practices in these places. For both civilizations, believing in gods and supernatural forces was a way to explain the unexplainable in their lives.

Another area of similarity between Mesopotamia and Egypt were their societies and economics. As time went on, the agricultures increased, creating food surpluses. Since people knew they had plenty of food to survive, they shifted their focus from farming to other things. With their extra time, Mesopotamians and Egyptians were able to create luxury items that weren’t necessary for survival. We begin to see the rise of artisans and specialized workers, but also a rise in merchants. Merchants traded and bartered for goods, which artisans could then use for their specialized craft. Mesopotamian merchants traded wine and food for things like metal and natural resources. In Egypt, merchants, bartered food and manufactured goods for ebony, ivory, and animal skins. As people started to assume their roles in society, a similar social hierarchy emerged in both civilizations. The first tier consisted of the pharaohs, kings, and priests. Next were the scribes, nobles, and merchants. The last tier was made up of the artisans, specialized workers, and farmers. Slaves were at the very bottom of the social pyramid and had little to no status. With the development of a social hierarchy, certain people became more important and possessed more power than others.