



The Mesozoic Era

By

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Mesozoic means middle life. The Mesozoic was the age of reptiles. There were three periods of the Mesozoic Era.

- The Triassic Period
- The Jurassic Period
- The Cretaceous Period

As with the Paleozoic Era each period had different characteristics.

The super continent Pangea had formed at the end of the Paleozoic Era. Most of the earth's land was part of Pangea. This affected the earth's weather. Over all the Mesozoic was warmer and dryer. There were more deserts. Swamps of the Paleozoic dried up. These dryer conditions favored the reptiles.

Many of the amphibians which depended on wet environments died out. Only the frogs and salamanders survived.

The reptiles thrived in the Triassic Period. Many new kinds developed at this time. Fish like reptiles like ichthyosaurus swam in the seas. On land there were lizards and armored reptiles. They were very successful animals.

Pterodons flew in the Jurassic skies and a new kind of animal appeared, the dinosaurs! Dinosaurs are different from reptiles. Their skeletons allow them to stand taller and run faster. They were also warm blooded. Some dinosaurs grew very large. There were small ones too. Some scientists think that the birds of today evolved from the dinosaurs. The archaeopteryx was an animal that seemed to be part bird and part dinosaur.

Pangea began to break apart in the Jurassic Period. By the Cretaceous Period the continents as we know them were moving towards their present locations. Many of the mountain chains of today were formed during the Cretaceous Period.

Flowering plants developed during the Cretaceous Period. They were very successful. They could grow in places where ferns, mosses, and conifers could not.

In the oceans of the Mesozoic Era the largest predators were the reptiles like ichthyosaurus, mosasaurus, and plesiosaurus. They ate many of the same kinds of fish that are in our oceans today. This was also the time of the ammonites.

The Mesozoic era ended with a mass extinction about 65 million years ago. No one knows for sure what caused this to happen. Many people think it was caused by a large meteor or comet crashing into the earth. What ever it was many animals became extinct at the end of the Mesozoic Era.