Framed by deserts, the northward-flowing Nile River is fed by two major tributaries, the Blue Nile and the White Nile that meet at the city of Khartoum.

The **Blue Nile** contributes about two-thirds of the Nile’s volume and flows through narrow gorges on its way to Khartoum. The upper part of the river is characterized by rapids, waterfalls, and water that is anything but blue. The combination of mountain rain and snowmelt from the Ethiopian Highlands in the summer months resulted in erosion and transported soil to the Nile’s downriver floodplain.

The **White Nile** originates south of the equator at Lake Victoria. Water flow and associated silt load from its tributaries are larger than that of the Blue Nile, but much of the silt is lost in small lakes or is spread over floodplains and lowland swamps.

Sedentary agriculture along the Nile was supported by predictable seasonal flooding that deposited fertile soil for agriculture. The Egyptians are credited as being one of the first groups of people to practice agriculture on a large scale. This was possible because of the ingenuity of the Egyptians as they developed basin irrigation. Their farming practices allowed them to grow staple food crops such as wheat and barley, and “industrial” crops such as flax and papyrus.

**Definitions**
An arid area or desert receives less than 10 inches of rain a year.
A semi-arid area generally receives between 10 and 20 inches of rain per year.