

The Hebrews

Brief History:

From 1400-1200 B.C., ancestors migrated from Mesopotamia to Canaan/Palestine. Grazing animals rather than farming; drought causes them to move to Egypt where they eventually become enslaved; they are freed from slavery by the great figure of Moses.

After wandering the desert for years, they returned to Canaan and, between 1200 and 1000 B.C., organized into tribes and established a kingdom known as Israel.

King David rules from about 1000 B.C. to 970 B.C. and establish control over the land and made Jerusalem the capital.

King Solomon expands the government and army, encourages trade and builds a great temple.

After Solomon, tensions among the tribes lead to the creation of two separate kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

In 722 B.C. the Assyrians conquered the Kingdom of Israel in northern Palestine. In 586 B.C., the Chaldeans overran the Kingdom of Judah to the south and exiled many of the inhabitants to Babylon. (the Babylonian Captivity)

In 539 B.C., the Persians captured Babylon and allowed the Hebrew exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

Later, Palestine was controlled by the Greeks – except for a 100 year period of independence beginning in the 2nd century B.C. with the victorious revolt of the Maccabees.

Still later the region was ruled by the Romans. In 70 A.D. the Roman armies under Titus suppressed a Hebrew revolt for independence and drove most of the people from their land.

The expulsion partly explains why the Hebrews, or Jews, are presently scattered throughout the world.

Contributions to Civilization:

1. **Monotheism.** The Hebrews were the first people to accept the belief in a single ethical God as the Creator and Supreme Ruler of the Universe.
2. **Sacred Writings.** The Hebrews recorded their history, moral principles, and religious beliefs in the Hebrew Bible. A great literary masterpiece, the Hebrew Scriptures beautifully express deep religious feeling.
The Hebrew Scriptures constitutes the first part of the Christian Bible.
3. **High Moral Principles.** Judaism, the religion of the Hebrews, embodies precepts of ethical behavior that were advanced for the ancient world and that are applicable in our own times. It sets moral standards for relationships among people and peoples.
 - a) The **Mosaic Law** is found in the **Torah**, the first five books of the Old Testament. This law of Moses teaches “Love Thy neighbor as thyself.” It includes the Ten Commandments. Some of these commandments are: “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”; “Thou shalt not kill”; “Thou shalt not steal”; “Thou shalt not bear false witness”; and “Honor thy father and thy mother.”

- b) The Hebrew **prophets** cried out for social righteousness and a better world. They denounced evil and oppression, and demanded justice for the poor and weak. The prophet Isaiah envisioned a time when nations “shall beat their swords and plowshares” and “shall not learn war anymore.” The prophet Micah asked, “What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

The essence of Judaism is summed up by the great teacher Hillel, who lived at about the time of Jesus, is the rule of conduct: “What is hateful unto thee, do not do unto others.”

In its emphasis on monotheism and high moral principles, Judaism influenced Christianity and became part of the Western world’s declared code of ethics, known as the Judeo-Christian heritage.

4. Famous Hebrews:

- a) **Abraham**-patriarch of the Hebrew people; journeyed from Mesopotamia; believed in the one God;
- b) **Moses** led his people out of servitude in Egypt and gave them the Ten Commandments.
- c) **Saul** united the 12 Hebrew tribes, led them against the Philistines, and became the first Hebrew king.
- d) **David** slew Goliath, the Philistine giant and later succeeded Saul as king. David wrote many **psalms**(sacred songs).
- e) **Solomon**, son of David, was a King renowned for his wisdom. He also built the famous **temple** in his capital city of Jerusalem.