

THE ANCIENT HEBREWS INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Hebrews have a complicated history. It includes many changes in location and social status, as well as nearly constant threats from outsiders. In an effort to explain the geographic region from which the Hebrews originated, Joshua J. Mark who published in the *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, relays, "The Kingdom of Israel occupied that part of the land on the Mediterranean Sea known as the Levant which corresponds roughly to the State of Israel of modern times. The region was known, historically, as part of Canaan, as Phoenicia, as Palestine, Yehud Medinata, Judea and, after the Romans destroyed the region in 136 CE, as Syria-Palaestina." The picture on the right details where the modern country of Israel resides.



The Hebrews have a rich, fascinating history that is undeniably ancient. In fact, they are first mentioned in the *stele* (a commemorative carved stone slab) of Egyptian pharaoh Mertenptah, which reveals that ancient peoples lived in what is now Israel in 1203 BCE. While scholars are still at odds with the Israelites' beginning, we know that the Hebrews have had a history steeped in turmoil. They were defeated and enslaved, they moved in a mass exodus to modern Egypt, and eventually they established their own political territory. In these stations, you will learn about the Hebrews and their intricate ancestry, rich religious traditions, varied locations, building and legal accomplishments, and heroic leaders.

THE ORIGINS OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE

Key concepts you will learn about at this station:

Religion — A belief system that influences the development of a civilization.

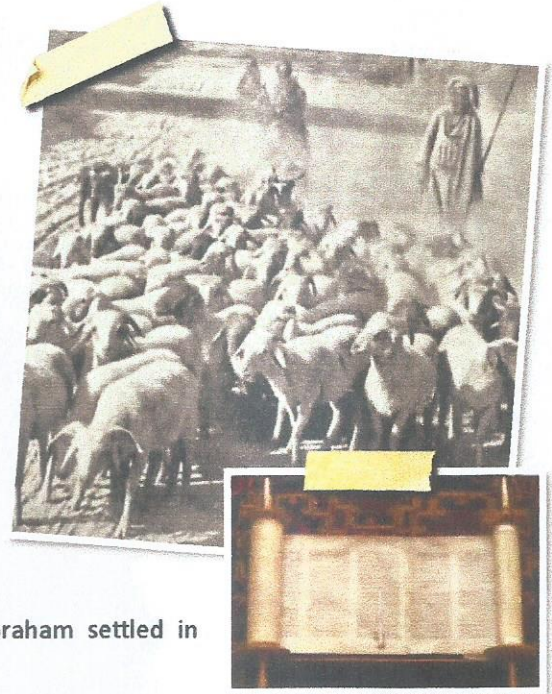
Leadership/Government — How a civilization creates an organized way of leadership.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEBREW FAMILY LINES

Most of the limited information historians have on the ancient Hebrews comes from the writings of their oral traditions, or stories, that eventually were written down in the books of the Torah. These religious writings include laws and genealogies, or family lines, of their people. These same teachings and stories make up the Old Testament of the Christian Bible in modern times.

The Ancient Hebrews were monotheistic, meaning they worshipped a single God whom they called many names, including Jehovah (meaning "I am that I am"), Abba (meaning "father"), and Adonai (meaning "Lord" or "Master"). They believed that God made the ancient Hebrews promises of blessings through Abram, a descendant of Adam, the first man on earth. Abram, later renamed Abraham by God, became known as the Hebrew (the traveler) by the Canaanite people west of the Euphrates River. Eventually, Abraham settled in Canaan with his wife Sarah.

According to ancient Hebrew oral tradition, Abraham had only one son, named Isaac, at the old age of ninety-nine. Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau's offspring became the Edomite tribe. Jacob was renamed Israel, and he fathered twelve sons that would create the **twelve tribes of Israel**. The Israelites became skilled shepherders. Eventually, famine (lack of food) would force the Israelites into the fertile crescent of flourishing Egypt. There, the Pharaoh's concern about the growing number of Israelites would lead the Hebrews into slavery.



MOVING THE HEBREW MASSES

Key concepts you will learn about at this station:

Religion - A belief system that influences the development of a civilization.

Leadership/ Government - How a civilization creates an organized way of leadership.

Social Classes - How a civilization is divided into classes that have different roles, responsibilities, and privileges.

AN EARLY EXODUS

The kings of Egypt feared the growing Israelite population so they enslaved them. Hence, the Hebrews built many of the structures in Ancient Egypt and they also shared the knowledge they had about geology and astronomy. In addition, they kept their oral traditions and religion alive, clinging to the hope that their God would send a king to free them and fulfill (carry out) the promise of blessings made to Abraham, hopefully in the form of land.

"It came to pass at midnight, and the Lord smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt." ~The Shemot of the Torah, Exodus 12:29a

The Exodus, or major migration, is when **Moses** led the Israelites out of Egypt. Though there's still debate on exactly when in history this happened, it is believed to be sometime between 1500 BCE and 1200 BCE. According to Hebrew accounts, God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh to let his people go, but Pharaoh refused. God sent a series of plagues upon Egypt, the worst of which was the death of all first-born sons. The Hebrews were instructed to sacrifice a lamb

and smear the blood on their doorways so that the angel of death would pass over their families during this plague. Modern Hebrews, or Jewish people, still celebrate Passover to commemorate God's protection at that time. The Pharaoh relented, and Moses lead the Israelites, numbering over six hundred thousand people, out of Egypt.

A LATER SCATTERING

History repeated itself for the Hebrews. Though the Hebrews had judges and Hebrew kings who led them for many years, eventually they would be conquered by one foreign king after another. In 722 BCE, the vicious Assyrians swooped down upon the ten northern tribes of Israel and scattered them. This displacement of the ancient Hebrews is known as the Diaspora. The two southern tribes of Israel were also conquered in 586 BCE by Nebuchadnezzar of the Chaldeans, destroying their temple and sending them to Babylon for 70 years. They were then sent back home under the rule of Persian statesmen until the Greeks conquered the Persian empire. The Romans destroyed the second temple built in Jerusalem and crucified many Hebrews to keep control of them. Eventually, a Jewish family called the Maccabees would lead a revolution in 160 BCE to reunite the Jewish people into a nation again.

TRADE WITHIN THE PROMISED LAND

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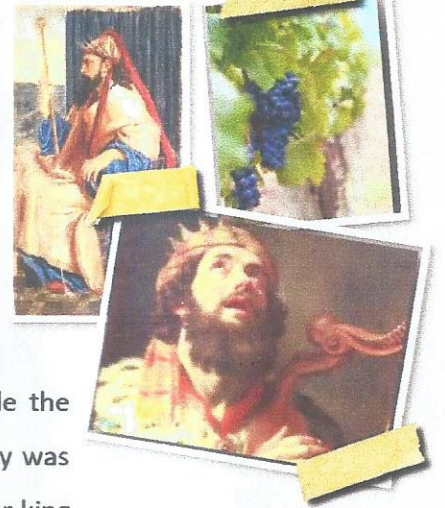
FROM WANDERERS TO FARMERS

The Israelites miraculously crossed the Red Sea on dry ground and were led into the wilderness of the Arabian Peninsula. As the story goes, Moses was given two tablets from God, on which were written the Ten Commandments. These laws stated that the Hebrews should only worship God, and gave laws on how they should live. Eventually, the Hebrews would enter Canaan and fight for the land God promised them. They became farmers of grain and olives, and had vineyards ripe with grapes pressed into flowing wine. They also herded sheep as a way to earn income.



"And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corner of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God."

Leviticus 19:9-10.



GREAT HEBREW KINGS AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE HEBREW NATION

Eventually, the Hebrews called for a king to lead them, rather than the judges they were used to. Hebrew kings were said to be selected by God to rule the people. King Saul was the first chosen by the Hebrew people, but his legacy was destroyed by southern, foreign people called the Philistines. His successor, or king that followed him, was David. King David is well known as the writer of many of the Psalms in the Old Testament of the Bible. He led a small army to defeat the Philistines. In this way, he protected the Hebrews so they could continue to enjoy the land promised to them by God. David's son, Solomon, was known as a wise king. He negotiated trade with surrounding countries, and commissioned, or paid for, the building of a giant white temple in Jerusalem, which centralized religion for the Hebrew people.

FIRST LAWS FROM GOD

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According to Hebrew oral traditions and later writings, after the Ancient Hebrews fled from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, God claimed Mt. Sinai as a holy mount and spoke the Ten Commandments to the Hebrew people. The people were afraid and asked Moses to approach God and speak to Him on their behalf. God gave Moses two stone tables that had the Ten Commandments written on them, and God used Moses to give the Hebrews other, more specific laws on everyday life situations.

These laws declared how the people should worship only God (monotheism, worshipping a single God), and how they should treat each other. When they arrived at Canaan, the land they believed was promised to them through Abraham, Moses sent spies into the country to see how they should proceed. Ten spies said they couldn't possibly defeat the people of the land, but two claimed that with God they could do anything. The people were afraid, believed the ten spies, and chose not to fight. The Israelites had to wander in the wilderness for forty years because they did not trust in God and were afraid.

I AM THE LORD THY GOD:

1. *Have no other gods before me.*
2. *No graven images or idols.*
3. *Do not take the LORD's name in vain.*
4. *Remember the Sabbath day.*
5. *Honor thy father and thy mother.*
6. *Thou shalt not kill.*
7. *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*
8. *Thou shalt not steal.*
9. *Thou shalt not bear false witness.*
10. *Thou shalt not covet (envy).*

~The Ten Commandments,

Exodus 20:1-17

GOD APPOINTS A TRIBE OF PRIESTS

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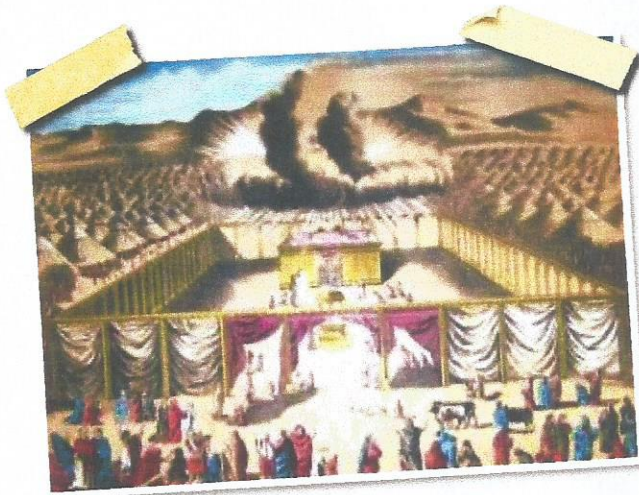
Religion was an important part of Israel's society. The Hebrews formalized religion into a lifestyle because the laws given to them by God were very detailed. The **Torah** contains Hebrew history, songs and poetry, laws, and prophecies. Today, it's sometimes called the **Old Testament** and is used by Christians and modern Hebrews, who are called Jews. It is the oldest book in the world still being printed today. Some scholars believe it was influenced by Hittite and Canaan laws.

An example of the detailed rules of the Torah is stated in Exodus 22:25: *"If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest."*

When God first gave the Hebrews these precious laws, God appointed a priests to lead the Israelites' religious ceremonies and remind them of the laws they should keep. The first priest was **Aaron** (brother of

Moses), and the responsibility was passed down to his sons. His family is referred to as the tribe of Levi. While the priests were suppose to educate the people about God and how to live, they failed to study the religious law and teach it. Without priestly guidance, the people fell away from worshipping God, and started worshipping foreign gods of Canaan and the surrounding nations. Some kings of Judah such as **Jehosaphat** (Ja-ho-sa-fat) and **Josiah** (Jo-si -ah) drew the people back to worshipping God by reading the **Torah** aloud to the people, who then turned back to

God. Peace and prosperity abounded in Judah when they worshipped God, but the Hebrews fell away from God again within a few generations.



THE HEBREWS INFLUENCE HISTORY

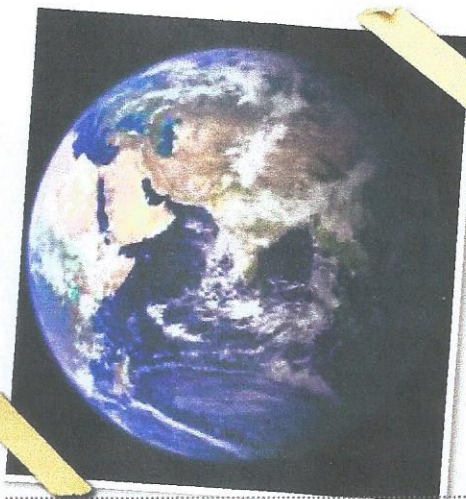
Key concepts you will learn about at this station:

Religion - A belief system that influences the development of a civilization.

Achievements - The lasting contributions of a civilization.

THE TORAH OFFERS SCIENTIFIC FACTS

As stated at another station, the Hebrews lived out their religion. The Torah, or book of laws, led every aspect of their lives. They believed in just one God, and that he gave them rules on how to live, what to eat, and how to worship through Moses about 4,000 years ago. In modern times, Christians call it the **Old Testament**. Not only is the Torah the oldest book still being printed today, this book was the first to declare the Earth was a sphere (Isaiah 40:22 and Job 26:10) and that it hung in space (Job 26:7). Most text books credit Pythagoras (c. 570–500 BCE) with the declaration that the earth is round, but it's estimated that Isaiah was written in 700s BCE and that Job was written in 2000 BCE, long before Pythagoras was born. The Hebrews spread their knowledge by way of religion during the Diaspora, or international scattering of their people, when foreign powers took over their land and kicked them out.



"He stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing." -Job 26:7

ARCHITECTURAL FEATS

The Hebrews can claim two major building accomplishments. In 701 BCE, King Hezekiah, commissioned a tunnel 131 feet from two different sides of Jerusalem so that the people would have water. This tunnel also prevented the Assyrians' siege on Jerusalem, saving hundreds of Hebrew lives.

King Solomon also left his mark on history by building the massive white stone temple in Jerusalem. This temple helped to center the religion of the Hebrews into their daily routine and regular lives. It was destroyed and rebuilt several times in history, a symbol of hope for the Hebrews, later called Jews.

A SOCIETY UNITED AND LATER DIVIDED

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DEDICATING ARTISTRY TO THE PAPACY

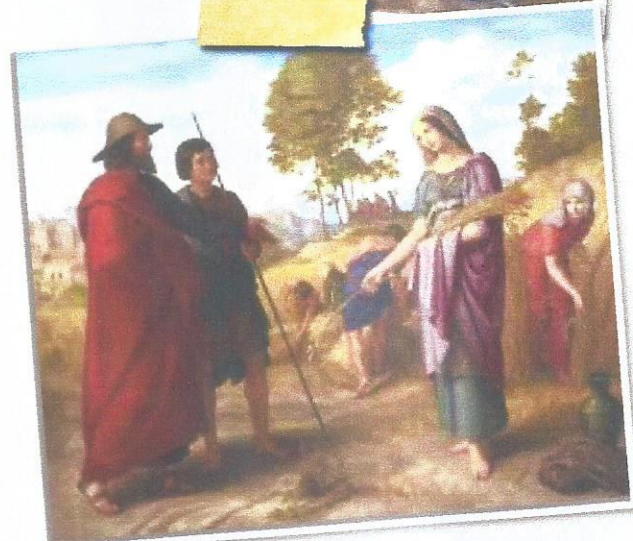
In the beginning, the Hebrew people allowed God and those he appointed as judges and priests to lead the people. Later, when the Hebrews called for a



king, the upper ruling class broke Israeli society into more defined classes. The kings crowned the social ladder, with a working class in the middle, and slaves making up the bottom. High priests served God and kings, nestling in the lowest rung of the high class.



While Hebrew women had a higher status in Hebrew society than women of other countries, the laws of the Hebrews kept them serving men. Hebrew woman could own land, buy, sell, and trade. Biblical stories like Ruth's story illustrate good character of women. Queen Esther's story also illustrates the great courage of Hebrew women.



CLASHING WITH THE ROMANS!

A FAMOUS JEWISH HISTORIAN FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS DESCRIBES THE ROMAN SACKING OF JERUSALEM:

"So the Romans being ... masters of the wars, they both placed their ensigns upon the towers, and made joyful acclamations for the victory they had gained...for they had [won] without any bloodshed, they could hardly believe what they found to be true; but seeing nobody to oppose them, they stood in doubt what such an unusual solitude could mean. But when they went in numbers into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to the houses wither the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them...and when they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses, that is of such as died by the famine; they then stood in a horror at this sight, and went out without touching anything...yet had they not the same for those that were still alive, but they ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood. And truly so it happened, that though the slayers left off at the evening, yet did the fire greatly prevail in the night, and as all was burning, came that eighth day of the month Gorpheus [Elul] upon Jerusalem; a city that had been liable to so many miseries during the siege, that, had it always enjoyed as much happiness from its first foundation, it would certainly have been the envy of the world."

**-The Works of Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Book 6, Chapter 9,
translated by William Whiston. Hendrickson Publishers, 1987.**