

# Early Hebrew History

- Originally from Ur, in Mesopotamia
- Spoke Aramaic (Semitic language)
- Abraham, a nomad in Genesis, crossing back & forth between Mesopotamia & Egypt → “crosser” = “hibri” → Hebrew.
- ~8500 BCE famine drove them to Egypt
  - After Egypt → Palestine (eastern Mediterranean coast).
  - Early settlement of Canaan (Israel), c. 1300 BCE
- The Hebrew Bible is a historical source for slavery in Egypt, divine redemption, the teachings of the faith at the time, the lives of political leaders, etc..
- On-going conflict with indigenous populations (including Phoenician Canaanites) under King David (1000-970 B.C.E.) and Solomon (970-930 B.C.E.)

## Political & Social Organization: 12 tribes

- Evidence in Deuteronomy 33.
  - *Independent & only cooperated when absolutely necessary, usually for military defense.*
- 1200 B.C.E. threats created by widespread invasion brought tribes together, united in their need for someone to lead them in defense.
- Philistines got foothold in area
  - **~1050 majority of Israelites decided to elect a collective military leader, est. a precedent (Saul → David → Solomon).**
- **Saul**
  - More warlord than king.
  - No standing army or organizing support (no centralized state or bureaucracy).
- **David**
  - Organized a standing army (i.e, no longer dependent on untrained temporary fighters).
  - Jerusalem becomes capital
  - *Period of greatest territorial expansion*
  - Saul & David defeat Philistines
- **Solomon (10<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.E.)**
  - David's son.
  - *Consolidates central authority and role of "king"*
  - Builds temple.
  - Gains personal wealth. Creates stark contrast between elites in Jerusalem & rural non-elites, which was consistent with the emergence of social stratification in Mesopotamian urban trade centers at the time. **But**, this difference was hard to reconcile with the collective refugee lifestyle lived historically, under Abraham & Moses.
  - Consolidates political power.
  - *→ revolt against king and kingship, & Solomon's heavy taxation, effectively leading to civil war.*
    - *→ permanent split among tribes*
  - **10 tribes → north = ISRAEL (capital at Samaria)**
  - **2 tribes → south = JUDAH (capital at Jerusalem)**
    - *effectively two separate political states with different leaders.*
  - Northern tribes ten tribes ruled by Jeroboam, leader of revolt, & southern tribes ruled by Rehoboam, Solomon's son.

# Biblical Israel





# Collapse of Israel and Judah

**In 722-721 B.C.E. northern kingdom (Israel) conquered by the Assyrians.** (Mesopotamian history becomes useful at last!).

The Assyrians captured leaders & transported to northern Mesopotamia; rest of population remained in Israel. Some exiles assimilated & lost their cultural & religious Hebrew identity.

**Judah held out against Assyrians, but fell to the Neo-Babylonians.**

In 612 B.C.E., Assyrian power weakened when the Neo-Babylonians took over & destroyed the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. 587-586, Jerusalem was attacked & temple destroyed.

The entire population of the two tribes in the south was forcibly relocated to Babylonia (the Neo-Babylonians were following, i.e., chasing, the Assyrians).

***Entire population of Judah held in Babylonia 587-538 B.C.E. → known historically as the Babylonian Captivity.***

Cyrus the Great, king of the Persians (we'll meet him later) destroys the city of Babylonia (538) and lets the Judeans return home to Palestine. Two points worth mentioning:

- 1) This is why Cyrus & the Persians get a favorable mention in Hebrew history & sources.
- 2) Being freed leads the Judeans to ask where they should go. Their collective answer was "home," which they understood from their own history to be the eastern Med. Coast. The precedent of that historical claim continues to underly geo-political tensions in modern Israel & the Palestinian territories.

Those who returned to Judea had retained their Jewish spiritual & cultural identity.

***By 500 BCE, a wide Jewish diaspora across Near East & Mesopotamia.***

*Question arises: how to worship away from the temple in Jerusalem? → Synagogues & rabbis (leaders charged with teaching the faith & interpreting the Torah to answer new questions that arose in individual communities).*

# Transformation of **authority** in all philosophical & religious communities over time



How did priests, rabbis, theologians, etc. gain so much influence in global faith communities when their roles didn't really exist in the earliest periods of their faiths? Why do differences arise in all faiths about how to interpret their original teachings?

# Moses and Monotheism

The Torah (the “doctrines or teachings” of the texts in the Hebrew Bible; sometimes a more general reference to the Hebrew Bible).

Parallels between the ethical teachings & legalistic language of the Torah & the Code of Hammurabi should make sense to you; Hammurabi had simply enshrined the existing customs of dispute resolution widely practiced across Mesopotamia.

## Hebrew worldview?

- The Hebrews as a social, ethnic, & early political community had originally shared the polytheistic beliefs common to other Mesopotamian societies.
- Moses introduced monotheism, belief in a single god, who rewarded & punished the community **collectively** in response to their conformity with the divinely revealed teachings, or their failure to follow them. I mentioned this here b/c we'll contrast this worldview with the ancient Egyptians, who believed in a more individualized kind of judgement after death. This is a reminder that while the faith tradition of Christianity was historically rooted in Hebrew history, it was also deeply influenced by other, non-Abrahamic faiths around the Mediterranean & Mesopotamian regions.

Chart showing the traditional way that the texts in the Hebrew Bible are grouped together based on their content.

<div><div><div>The Old Testament Library of 39 Books</div><div>©2000 Rev Paul R. Schmidt &amp; Leicher, Th.M.</div></div></div>				
Law	Genesis	Joshua		Hosea
	Exodus	Judges		Joel
	Leviticus	Ruth		Amos
	Numbers	1 Samuel		Obadiah
	Deuteronomy	2 Samuel		Jonah
History		1 Kings		Micah
		2 Kings		Nahum
		1 Chronicles	Job	Habakkuk
		2 Chronicles	Psalms	Zephaniah
		Ezra	Proverbs	Haggai
Poetry		Hehemiah	Ecclesiastes	Zechariah
		Esther	Song Solomon	Malachi
Major Prophets			Isaiah	
			Jeremiah	
			Lamentations	
			Ezekiel	
			Daniel	
Minor Prophets				



# Sources for Hebrew Political History in the Hebrew Bible

## **Joshua**

The conquest and division of Canaan.

## **Judges**

Covers the history of Israel from the conquest of Palestine to beginnings of the monarchy

## **Samuel**

The early reign of David

Samuel 8:1-22 (Warning to the Israelites about their demand for a king)

## Patterns of Kingship in Mediterranean & Mesopotamian Region

- **Mesopotamia:** kings generally not gods (exceptions: heirs to throne of Sargon at Akkad)
- **Egypt:** kings as divine figures; intermediaries between gods and men; caretakers of society
- **Israel: no kings.**

Kings not a part of their culture. Why?

→ The tribes had traditionally rejected kingship because the examples of most kings known to them from their own time & historically were law-makers and law givers, e.g. Hammurabi. Remember, the tribes only united in time of military crisis.

- Why? **The Hebrews viewed Mesopotamian kingship generally as a position for someone who made new laws. The Hebrews didn't need or want law-making kings. Why? They already had laws & teachings directly revealed by their God, & enforced by their God.**

→ *Israeli kings were only meant to be military leaders.*

- *Did not make new laws, only protected the people against invaders.*
- *Would be elected by the people (several candidates elected, then anointed by the prophets).*

**This is the context for reading I Samuel on kingship among the Hebrews.**

# I Samuel 8:1-22 (Warning to the Israelites about their demand for a king)

**The Hebrews Demand a King** 1 And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. 2 Now the name of his first-born was Joel; and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beer-sheba. 3 And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted justice. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah. 5 And they said unto him: 'Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.' 6 But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said: 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed unto HaShem. 7 And HaShem said unto Samuel: 'Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not be king over them. 8 According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, in that they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. 9 Now therefore hearken unto their voice; howbeit thou shalt earnestly forewarn them, and shalt declare unto them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.'

**Samuel's Warning Against Kings** 10 And Samuel told all the words of HaShem unto the people that asked of him a king. 11 And he said: 'This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them unto him, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and they shall run before his chariots. 12 And he will appoint them unto him for captains of thousands, and captains of fifties; and to plow his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and the instruments of his chariots. 13 And he will take your daughters to be perfumers, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. 14 And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. 15 And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. 16 And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. 17 He will take the tenth of your flocks; and ye shall be his servants. 18 And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king whom ye shall have chosen you; and HaShem will not answer you in that day.'

**Yahweh Grants the Hebrew's Request** 19 But the people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel; and they said: 'Nay; but there shall be a king over us; 20 that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.' 21 And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he spoke them in the ears of HaShem. 22 And HaShem said to Samuel: 'Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king.' And Samuel said unto the men of Israel: 'Go ye every man unto his city.'

(*HaShem* is a way of making reference to the Hebrew God without naming him. Similarly, G-d is a way of making reference in writing for those who observe the faith tradition. It doesn't have any further significance for examining this passage in a 100-level history class).

