

2. The Hebrews

As we have already learned, the history of the Hebrews, (the Israelites or Jews) is recorded in the Bible. The history outlined in the Old Testament is shared by Jews and Christians. Hebrews believed in one God, called Yahweh, who gave them instructions and laws. These were written down in the Scriptures, the first 5 books called the Torah.

Yahweh made a covenant with the Hebrews. He promised them that one day they would have a homeland in Canaan and that He would always look after them, provided the Hebrews always obeyed Yahweh's laws. Canaan became the land of Israel and Syria.

Hebrew priests made sacrifices on behalf of the people as a way of saying sorry for their sin. At certain times the priests killed lambs, calves, goats, doves as a sin offering. This practice was no longer necessary once Christ came into the world, (AD 2-4), to be our ultimate sacrifice for sin.

The Hebrews had to follow many laws, including the Ten Commandments. Priests helped the people understand the laws. There were laws for:

- Observing religious festivals
- Diet – such as only eating clean animals such as cows and sheep, (ones that don't eat other animals)
- Personal cleanliness and health
- Marriage
- Inheritance
- Ownership of property
- Morality
- Care of the poor
- Crime and punishment
- Government and war



Examples of laws

About fairness to the poor (Deuteronomy 24:14-15):

You should give poor workers their wage every day, because they need it right away.

About marriage

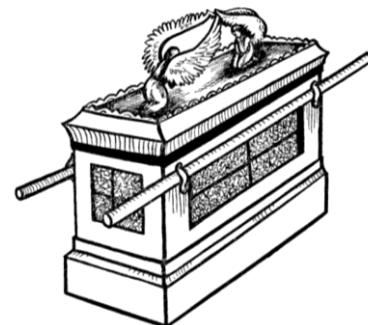
A man may not divorce his wife for trivial reasons. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

About marriage and war (Deuteronomy 24:5)

If a man has just married, he may not go off to war for one year so that he can devote himself to his home and the happiness of the woman he has married.

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20)

Given to Moses on stone tablets, and carried wherever the Israelites went in the Ark of the Covenant.



How do we know that the Bible is a true historical record?

Historians

Josephus, (AD 37 – 100), a Jewish historian wrote,

“We do not have an unnumerable multitude of books among us as the Greeks have – books that contradicts one another. Instead, we have only 22 books, which contain the records of all the past times, which are justly believed to be divine.”

Those 22 books are exactly the same as our 39 books of the Old Testament because some books were combined such as Kings, Chronicles and the 12 minor prophets. Josephus claimed, *“no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any changes in them”*.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Most original copies Hebrew of the Bible were lost, until in 1947, a shepherd boy found the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest surviving written copies of the Bible.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are considered by many to be the most significant archaeological find of the 20th century. From 1947 to 1956, thousands of scroll fragments were uncovered from the caves near Qumran, located on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Over the following decades, teams of scholars pieced these scrolls together to reconstruct an amazing library of texts from the third century BC to the first century AD.

Over the next decade, thousands of fragments were recovered from 11 caves near the Dead Sea. The scrolls include approximately 800–900 original manuscripts, preserved in over 15,000 fragments. They are primarily written in Hebrew, with some in Aramaic and a few in Greek.

The texts fall into two main categories:

- Copies of books from the Hebrew Bible, including nearly all books except Esther, some of which are the oldest known versions biblical manuscripts
- hymns, prayers, wisdom literature, apocalyptic texts, and legal or administrative documents, reflecting the beliefs and practices of specific Jewish communities.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are crucial for understanding the development of Judaism and early Christianity. They confirm the remarkable accuracy of biblical transmission over centuries and provide context for the religious, social, and political environment of Second Temple Judaism. They were preserved in clay jars in the arid desert climate, which allowed them to survive for nearly 2000 years. Scholars have painstakingly pieced together the fragments, translating and analyzing them to reconstruct the texts and understand their historical context.



The history of the Hebrews overlaps with the history of other cultures such as the Egyptians, Greeks and the Romans.

Map showing Israel's position in Europe and the Middle East



Map showing Israel in earlier times



Timeline of key events in the history of the Hebrews

4004 BC The Creation	Yahweh created the universe, including the earth, plants, animals and the first people, Adam and Eve in six days.
2348 BC The Flood	God punished the world because of people's wickedness. Noah was told to build a huge boat, (an ark), to save his family and 2 of every kind of animal. The flood lasted for 150 days.
2242 BC The Tower of Babel	People became proud and ignored God. They built a huge tower to attempt to reaching the heavens. God intervened, leading to the confusion of languages and the scattering of people across the earth.
1900s – 2108 BC	Abraham, living in Ur, Mesopotamia, was told by God to move his family from Mesopotamia to Canaan. Abraham, his son Isaac and grandson Jacob (Israel) became the founding fathers of the Hebrews. Israel had 12 sons who became leaders of 12 separate Hebrew tribes. At the end of a long drought, food was scarce, so the Hebrews travelled to Egypt.
1600s – 1200s BC	Several hundred years after the Hebrews settled in Egypt, the pharaoh believed that there were too many Hebrews in his country. He forced them into slavery and ordered all baby boys to be killed. One Hebrew mother, put her baby in a basket made of woven reeds and set it afloat on the Nile River. An Egyptian princess found the baby and raised him as her own. She called him Moses. When Moses grew up, God called him to rescue the Hebrews and lead them back to Canaan. When the pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews go, God sent 10 disasters on the Egyptians as a sign of His divine power. The pharaoh was finally convinced and let Moses lead the people out of Egypt, but then had second thoughts and sent his army after them. God parted the Red Sea and the Hebrews walked through it on the dry sea floor. Once they were through, God caused the sea to rush in again and the Egyptian army who were following, drown. This is called 'The Exodus'.
1200 BC	It took the Hebrews 40 years to travel back to Canaan. During their wanderings, God gave Moses two stone tablets on which He wrote 'The 10 Commandments'. The Ark of the Covenant was built during this time to contain the stone tablets on which the 10 Commandments were written. It was carried with them wherever they went.
1200s BC	The Hebrew tribes finally settled in Canaan, the land that God promised Abraham. They learnt how to build farms and towns. They were often defeated by their enemies. An enemy tribe, the Philistines, stole the Ark of the Covenant.
1020 – 928 BC	The Hebrew tribes decided to unite so that they could have a more powerful army. Saul became king of the first kingdom of Israel. When he died, his armour-bearer David became king. David defeated his enemies, including the powerful Philistines. As a young boy David killed the Philistine giant, Goliath with a stone from his slingshot. Under King David the tribes of Israel had their greatest kingdom. David recaptured the Ark of the Covenant and made Jerusalem the capital city. Solomon,

	David's son, succeeded him as king, and was famous for his wisdom. Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem. When Solomon died, the Hebrew tribes argued and divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. (map p26)
586 BC	With their powerful army, the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's temple. Many Hebrews were captured and taken to Babylon. This included Daniel.
539 BC	The Persian Empire (now Iran) conquered Babylon, and the Persian king gave the Hebrews permission to return to Canaan.
520 – 515 BC	The Hebrews rebuilt Solomon's temple.
322 BC	The Greek king, Alexander the Great conquered Canaan.
167 BC – 160 BC	The Maccabean Revolt was a Jewish uprising against the Seleucid (Greek Empire), led by the Maccabees to resist Greek oppression and restore Jewish religious freedom. This is celebrated by Jews with the Hannukah today. See the miracle that God performed on page 27.
63 BC	The Romans captured Judah, (the southern kingdom) and renamed the land Palestina. Palestina (or Palestine) was an insulting name derived from the Israelites enemies, the Philistines.
AD 2-4	Birth of Christ, (exact date unsure). Israel under Roman rule.
AD 41	Palestine became a Roman province. The Romans were strict and cruel, so the people of Palestine revolted against the Romans.
AD 70	The Jews continued to rebel against the Romans, so the Romans passed a law to prevent Jews from living in Jerusalem. For seven long months, the Roman military unleashed its full fury against the outnumbered Jewish rebels, culminating in the complete destruction of the Second Temple. The fall of Jerusalem resulted in widespread slaughter, enslavement, and dispersal of Jews to other places.
AD 135	The Romans finally destroyed Palestine. Many Jews left their country; those who stay were captured and sold as slaves.
AD 1930	By 1930, with no country of their own, Jews emigrated all over the world. The total world-wide Jewish population was approx. 15,000,000. The number of Jews in the following countries in 1930: USA 4,000,000; Poland 3,500,000; Soviet Union 2,700,000; Romania 1,000,000; Germany 500,000. In Palestine there were only 175,000.
AD 1933	Hitler took over Germany; his hatred for Jews was evident, prompting numerous Jews to emigrate to other countries.
AD 1938 - 1945	World War 2 and The Holocaust, resulted in the extermination of nearly 6 million Jews across Europe.
AD 1945 - 1947	The Jews across the world wanted to create their own state. Palestine was then controlled by the British. The United Nations approved the creation of a Jewish State and an Arab State in the British mandate of Palestine.
AD 1948 - 1949	The State of Israel declared itself as an independent Jewish state, with a new capital, Tel Aviv. Almost 250,000 Holocaust survivors made their way to Israel. "Operation Magic Carpet" brought thousands of European Jews to Israel. Almost 250,000 Holocaust survivors made their way to Israel.



The two kingdoms – divided 930 BC after the death of Solomon: the northern kingdom was Israel and the southern kingdom was Judah, (capital Jerusalem).



Israel today

The Maccabean Revolt

In 175 B.C., King Antiochus, whose ancient kingdom included Judea (located in present-day Israel), made it against the law for people who lived there to practice their religion, called Judaism. Instead, he wanted Jews to worship Greek gods. The Greeks made the Torah illegal for learning.

When they refused, he ordered his troops to destroy the Temple of Jerusalem, an important place of worship for Jews. He replaced the Jewish symbols with an altar dedicated to Zeus, the king of the Greek gods.

The Jews, led by Judah the Maccabee, rebelled against King Antiochus. Many historians believe that they battled for about three years to become an independent region so they could practice their religion. Finally, around 164 B.C., the Maccabees, as they were called, defeated King Antiochus and his troops.

When the Maccabees returned to their ransacked temple, they found only one jar of oil—just enough to light the temple’s candles for one day. But according to the Talmud (one of Judaism’s holy texts), the oil miraculously burned for eight days—enough time for the victorious Maccabees to find more oil for their sacred candles.

Restoring the temple and driving out King Antiochus didn’t end the conflict. His followers continued to battle with the Jews for more than 22 years. Finally, in the year 142, the warring groups signed a peace treaty, and the Jews formed their own independent region.

Hanukkah

Lasting eight days, the joyous Jewish holiday celebrates a miracle from more than 2,000 years ago.

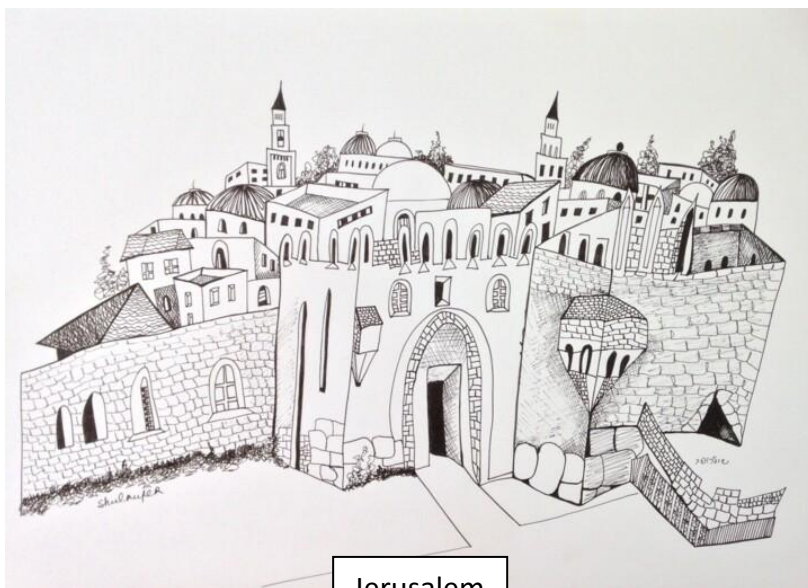
The Jewish festival of lights, called Hanukkah, is celebrated around the world today, close to the time when Christians celebrate Christmas.

To celebrate the ancient miracle of the oil burning a candle for eight nights, Jews celebrating Hanukkah light a candleholder called a menorah for eight nights. The menorah holds nine candles—one for each night plus a candle in the centre, called the shamash, used to light the other candles.



Activities

1. How do we know that the Bible is a true historical record?
2. What is the name for the God of the Bible in Hebrew?
3. What was the covenant God made with the Hebrews?
4. Why did the priests make sacrifices?
5. What changed the need for sacrifices?
6. On what were the Ten Commandments originally recorded?
7. What is the Ark of the Covenant and what was it used for?
8. Name three countries that adjoin Israel today.
8. Make a series of pictures to illustrate the 7 events of the first seven sections of the timeline on page 24.
9. 1020 – 928 BC – Who were the enemies of Israel and who helped to defeat them?
10. Who built the first temple in Jerusalem during this time?
11. When was this temple destroyed?
12. When was it rebuilt?
13. In 322 BC, which nation conquered the land of the Israelites and who was the king?
14. In your own words, what was the Maccabean revolt?
15. Who captured Israel in 63 BC?
16. From your own knowledge of the New Testament, what can you say about Roman rule in the time of Jesus?
17. When was the second temple, and Jerusalem, destroyed?
18. What new name did the Romans give to Israel?
19. In 1930, which countries of the world had the most Jews living there? Make a bar graph to show this.
20. What did Hitler want to do to the Jews in World War 2?
22. How many Jews were killed?
23. How did the Jews get their land back?
24. What is the capital of Israel today?



Jerusalem

