

Judeo-Christian Tradition

TERMS & NAMES

- Judaism
- Ten Commandments
- prophet
- Christianity
- Roman Catholic Church
- Renaissance
- Reformation

MAIN IDEA

Judaism and Christianity taught individual worth, ethical standards, and the need to fight injustice.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

These ideals continue to be important to democracy today.

SETTING THE STAGE Judaism and Christianity both began in a small corner of southwest Asia. Later, as they spread across the world, their ideas about the worth of individuals and the responsibility of individuals to the community had a strong impact on the development of democracy.

Judaism

Much of what we know about the early history of the Hebrews, later called the Jews, is contained in the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Torah. In the Torah, God chose Abraham to be the “father,” or ancestor, of the Hebrew people. God commanded Abraham to move his people to Canaan, an area of ancient Palestine. This occurred around 2000 B.C.

In this engraving from the 19th century, Moses holds the Ten Commandments, which, according to Hebrew Scriptures, were given to him by God on Mount Sinai.



Created in God’s Image Unlike the other groups around them, who were polytheists—people who believed in more than one god—the Hebrews were monotheists. They believed in one god. This God was perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful, and eternal. Earlier, people had generally thought that what the gods wanted from human beings was the performance of rituals and sacrifices in their honor. The Hebrews believed that it was God’s wish for people to live moral lives. The religion of the Hebrews was called **Judaism**.

The Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament, to Christians) state that human beings are created in God’s image. (The Hebrews interpreted this to mean that each human being has a divine spark that gives him or her a dignity that can never be taken away. For the Greeks and Romans, the individual had dignity because of his or her ability to reason. For the Hebrews, each person had dignity simply by being a child of God.)

The Hebrews believed that God had given human beings moral freedom—the capacity to choose between good and evil. Therefore, each person was responsible for the choices he or she made. These beliefs led to a new emphasis on the worth of the individual.

Jewish Law Teaches Morality Like the Greeks, the Romans, and other ancient peoples, the Jews had a written code of laws. The Bible

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Drawing

Conclusions What religious beliefs made the Hebrews different from other groups around them?

Background

The religion of the Hebrews was called Judaism after the Hebrew kingdom of Judah.

states that God gave this code to their leader Moses in about 1200 B.C., in the form of the **Ten Commandments** and other laws. Unlike the laws of other peoples, the Hebrews' code focused more on morality and ethics and less on political laws. The code included rules of social and religious behavior to which even rulers were subject. While the Hebrew code of justice was strict, it was softened by expressions of God's mercy.

A creative expansion of the religious thought of the Jews occurred with the emergence of prophets in the eighth century B.C. The **prophets** were leaders and teachers who were believed by the Jews to be messengers from God. The prophets attacked war, oppression, and greed in statements such as these from the Old Testament:

THE BIBLE

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah, 6:8

The prophets strengthened the Jewish faith's social conscience, which has become part of the Western tradition. The Jews believed that it is the responsibility of every person to oppose injustice and oppression and that the community should assist the unfortunate. The prophets held out the hope that life on earth could be improved, that poverty and injustice need not exist, and that individuals are capable of living according to high moral standards.

Christianity

As Rome expanded, its power spread throughout the Mediterranean. It took control of Judea, homeland of the Jews, around 63 B.C. By A.D. 6, the Romans ruled Judea directly.

According to the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth was born around 6 to 4 B.C. He was both a Jew and a Roman subject. He began his public ministry at the age of 30. His preaching contained many ideas from Jewish tradition, such as monotheism and the principles of the Ten Commandments. Jesus emphasized God's personal relationship to each human being.

But Jesus' ideas went beyond traditional morality. He stressed the importance of people's love for God, their neighbors, their enemies, and themselves. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the people, "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." He also taught that God would eventually end wickedness in the world and would establish an eternal kingdom in which he would reign. People who sincerely repented their sins would find life after death in this kingdom.

About A.D. 29, Jesus visited Jerusalem. Because some referred to him as the "king of the Jews," the Roman governor considered him a political threat. They had him put to death by crucifixion. According to Jesus' followers, he rose from the dead three days later and ascended into heaven. His followers believed he was the Messiah, or savior. Jesus came to be referred to as Jesus Christ. *Christos* is a Greek word meaning "messiah" or "savior." The word **Christianity**, the name of the religion founded by Jesus, was derived from the name Christ.

The Teachings of Christianity In the first century after Jesus' death, his followers began to teach this new religion based on his message. Christianity spread slowly but steadily across the Roman Empire. One man, the apostle Paul, had enormous influence on Christianity's development.

Paul traveled from city to city around the eastern Mediterranean to preach. He

HISTORY MAKERS

Moses

c. 13th century B.C.

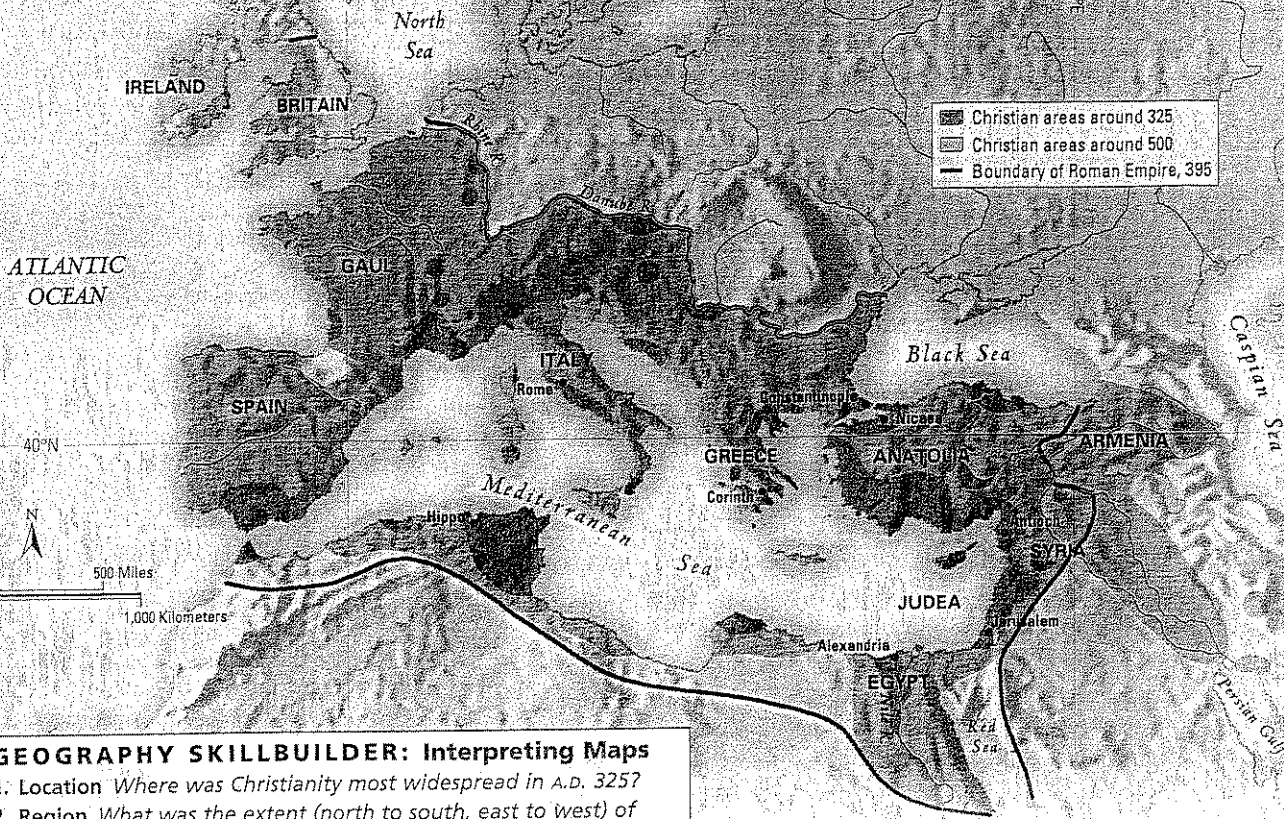
Moses is considered by many to be the greatest figure in Jewish history. He was a diplomat, a lawmaker, a political organizer, and a military leader, as well as a judge and religious leader. The Hebrew Scriptures record that Moses led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, perhaps between 1300 and 1200 B.C.

Through Moses, the Hebrews formed a covenant, an agreement with their God. According to Scriptures, they would become the chosen people of God. In exchange for God's love and protection, they agreed to be ruled by God and to obey God's laws. Moses brought the Ten Commandments down from Mount Sinai and delivered them to the Israelites. He also gave them the Book of the Covenant, in which God's rules and guidelines were written. These laws focus on the Israelites' relationship both with God and with each other.

Vocabulary

apostle: one of the followers of Jesus who preached and spread his teaching.

Spread of Christianity in the Roman World to A.D. 500



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

1. **Location** Where was Christianity most widespread in A.D. 325?
2. **Region** What was the extent (north to south, east to west) of Christianity's spread by A.D. 500?

stressed that Jesus was the son of God and that he had died for people's sins. Paul declared that Christianity was a universal religion. It should welcome all converts, Jew and non-Jew. He said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." He stressed the essential equality of all human beings, a belief central to democracy.

Rome Spreads Judeo-Christian Ideas In the beginning, the Roman Empire was hostile to the beliefs of Judaism and Christianity. Yet it was the empire that helped spread the ideas of these religions in two ways. The first way was indirect. After the Jews began to rebel against the Romans in the first century, they were exiled from their homeland in A.D. 70. This dispersal was called the *Diaspora*. The Jews then fled to many parts of the world. With them, they took their beliefs that all people had the right to be treated with justice and dignity.

The second way the empire spread Judeo-Christian ideas was more direct. Despite persecution of Christians over the years, Christianity became a powerful religion throughout the empire and beyond. By 380, it had become the official religion of the empire. Eventually it took root in Europe, the Near East, and northern Africa.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Summarizing

How were Judeo-Christian ideas spread throughout the Roman Empire?

Islam

Another monotheistic religion that taught equality of all persons and individual worth also developed in southwest Asia, in the early 600s. Islam, as it was called, was based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. He emphasized the dignity of all human beings and the brotherhood of all people. A belief in the bond of community and the unity of all people led to a tolerance of different groups within the community. Muslims were required by their religion to offer charity and help to those in need. Under Muslim law, rulers had to obey the same laws as those they ruled.