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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Introduction

- Ancient Jews or Hebrews proclaimed a transcendent deity who was working out His purposes in history through the career of his people Israel (Jew, Hebrew, Israelite are synonymous)
  - Revelation, not the rhythms of nature became the norm for explaining life.
  - The problem of being objective and historical.
  - Revelation made the Hebrew achievement possible.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe Question

- I have just made the statement that one has to put his faith, or lack of it, aside when thinking about the Hebrews. Do you agree? Why, or why not?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Historical Background

- Hebrews wrote their own history.
  - Nomadic beginnings: “A wandering Aramean was my father” ([Deut 26:5](#)).
  - Hapiru (2000 B.C.) Patriarchally organized families. Covenant.
  - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel).
  - Egypt and the Exodus under Moses.
    - Yahweh and the Covenant
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

Mount Sinai-Traditional Site of the Giving of the Ten Commandments



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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Historical Background

- The Judges and the Conquest (1200 B.C.)
    - Clash with the Canaanites and their values
    - Tribal government vs. National monarchy.
  - Saul (1020-1005)
  - David (1005-965)
  - Military successes. Jerusalem.
  - Solomon (965-925)
  - Mixed memory: magnificence and splendor; patronage of arts; temple; but also for tolerating other religions.
  - The Divided Kingdom: Israel centering on Samaria; Judah centering on Jerusalem. Political decline but spiritual and intellectual creativity.
  - Israel and political instability
  - The Omride dynasty-Ahab and Jezebel.
  - Jehu and his line.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Historical Background

- The Prophets (800's-700's)
    - Elijah
    - Amos: the Covenant demands social justice growing out of inner purity.
  - The Assyrians destroy Israel in 722.
  - Judah. Conditions similar to those in Israel.
    - Under the threat of Assyria and enjoying prosperity, Judah also welcomes the worship of Baal and Astarte and Assur.
    - Josiah in the 6th century tries to reform Temple worship and purge Judah of alien religions.
    - The Babylonian Conquest and Exile (586-539).
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe Historical Background

- The Prophets
  - Isaiah and Micah (700's)
  - The Second Isaiah (500's)
- After the Exile the primary force in Judaism was the Law.



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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation and the Covenant

- God -Yahweh- is not a nature god. He is transcendent and yet a personality of ethical perfection who chose to reveal Himself.
  - As God acts he reveals Himself and His Purpose.
  - Revelation is always incomplete; man knows more as history unfolds.
  - Revelation is open and historical, not private and mystical.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Questions

- How does someone first conceive of a God who is perfect and holy? Was Moses or whoever first thought of God in those terms a spiritual and intellectual genius? What accounts for the idea of revelation? Environment again?
  - Am I wrong-headed to ask the question?
  - Do you agree with my thesis that revelation made the difference in shaping Hebrew or Judaic culture?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation and the Covenant

- God is above and beyond all: idolatry is forbidden.
  - Even God's name is unutterable.
  - God chose to place limits on Himself in the Covenant. (See Abraham's Covenant in Genesis 15; Also Exodus 24: 1- 8.).
  - What did the Covenant mean? Exodus 20  
Deuteronomy 6: 4.
  - Micah 6:8 sums it up.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Question

- It doesn't make sense that a God who was transcendent would limit Himself, does it? Why did Hebrews believe this?
  - "Nature is not our mother, but our sister." Think about the implications of that. Created, like everything else, by God, but not a model for human conduct.
  - In a press release dated April 6, 2007, the Speaker of the U.S. House said "In this Holy Week, we are reminded of these words in the Old Testament: 'To minister to the needs of God's creation is an act of worship. To ignore those needs is to dishonor the God who made us.' We must move quickly to honor God's creation by reducing greenhouse gas pollution in the United States and around the world." Where in the Old Testament did the Speaker find this passage? (If you can find the passage, you get 100 bonus points.) Is there anything about preserving the environment in the Bible?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation, the Covenant and the Social Order

- Unlike the myth-making peoples, Hebrews developed an instrumental theory of the social order.
    - Only God is holy. The social order serves a higher purpose which is God's purpose and the Hebrews' part in it.
    - The hallmark of society is justice.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Questions

- The instrumental theory of the state has a long and significant history for us. What difference does it make whether the state is an end, or the ruler is an end, rather than a means to an end? Think about it. Can you resist something that is an end?
  - What can you do except obey?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation, the Covenant and the Social Order

- The tribal society is the ideal society for fulfilling the Covenant.
  - Moses led the Israelites into a national union centering on the worship of Yahweh and held together by the Law.
  - Problems during the Conquest of Canaan.
  - The monarchy as a stronger form of union.
  - Hebrew memory of the monarchy as man-made.  
Why the Israelite monarchy never became despotic.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation, the Covenant and the Social Order

- 2 Samuel 5: 1-3 illustrates that the king's elevation as king occurred only after he agreed to a covenant with his people. Notice the sequence:
  - All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.' "
  - When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel.
  - What do you think?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Questions

- How important is the tradition that even the king is subject to the law and to ethical and moral standards? What modern legal principle can be traced back to that tradition?
  - Lord Acton said in the 19th century "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." Abraham Lincoln said "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." Would the Old Testament writers agree?
  - Doing good or doing well: which is the responsibility of those in power?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Questions

- The Old Testament prophets seemed to have a bias against the kings and wealthy, didn't they? Why? Do you agree that those with power over others have special responsibilities with that power?
  - Leviticus 25:10 contains the words on the American Liberty Bell: "Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants." Political freedom is part of the Judaic heritage too, isn't it?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation, the Covenant, and the Good Life

- Hebrew ideas about human nature and the Good Life were even more radical than their ideas about society.
    - Man is a human being with unique, personal obligations to God.
  - Man is basically good.
    - Made in the image of God, he partakes of the dignity of God.
    - And yet he is not God and is, therefore, sinful.
    - Sources: [Psalms 8:5](#) ; [Psalms 139](#) ; [Isaiah 64:6](#)
  - Man is sinful because free to choose.
  - Out of this view of man grows a rich tradition of biography.
  - Life is to be enjoyed: family, food, property, children.
  - The Good Life is meeting ethical responsibilities to God and others: Micah 6:8.
  - God: Be ye holy as I am holy. ([Lev 11:44-45](#))
  - “Israel” means “one who wrestles with God” ([Genesis 32: 20-30](#)), a fitting name for these people.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Questions

- How can man be both little lower than God and yet sinful? Basically good, yet evil?
  - What do you make of the following three passages about God's knowledge of the individual: Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;" and Psalm 139:16: "You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed." Isaiah 49: 1: "The Lord called me before my birth; from within the womb he called me by name."
  - Do you agree with the statement that it is man's freedom to choose that makes him sinful?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Questions

- Many biblical scholars believe that one finds the first "sense of the self" in King David, in the Psalms. David uses "I" freely in his poetry, naturally, as a modern would. Significance?
  - Are you surprised that Hebrews did not think about an afterlife until late in their history?
  - Can one lead a moral life without believing in an afterlife?
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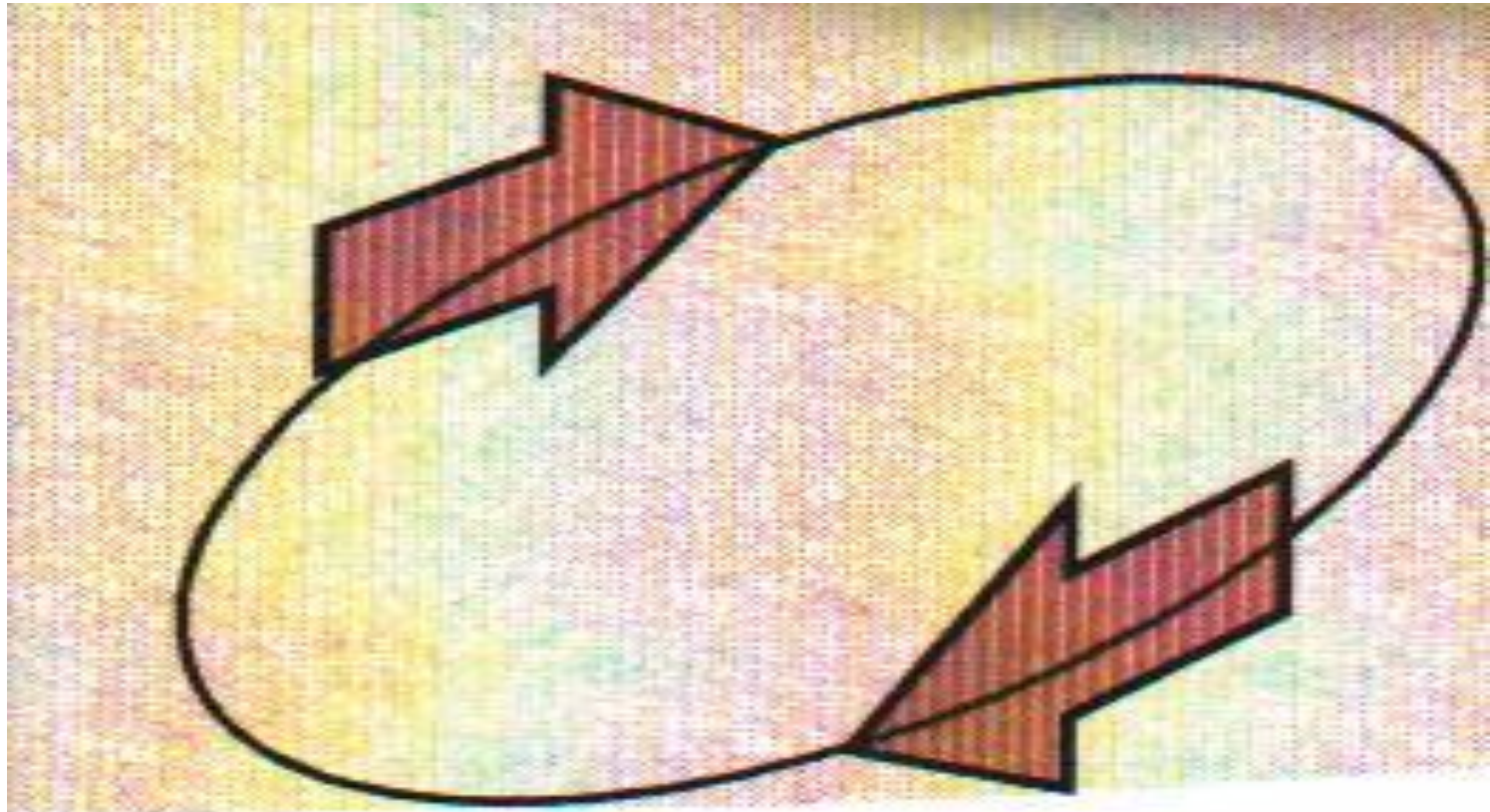
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Questions

- The Hebraic conception of the good life for man went against all the principles commonly accepted in the ancient Near East: polytheism, fertility rites, human sacrifice and the infallibility of kings and priests. For the first time men chose unreachable ideals and persisted in trying to reach them nonetheless. In the process they came to a new understanding of human life as a constant moral struggle and to a deeper ethical awareness than the Ancient Near East would see again until Christianity.”
  - Do you agree with those three sentences? Why? Why not?
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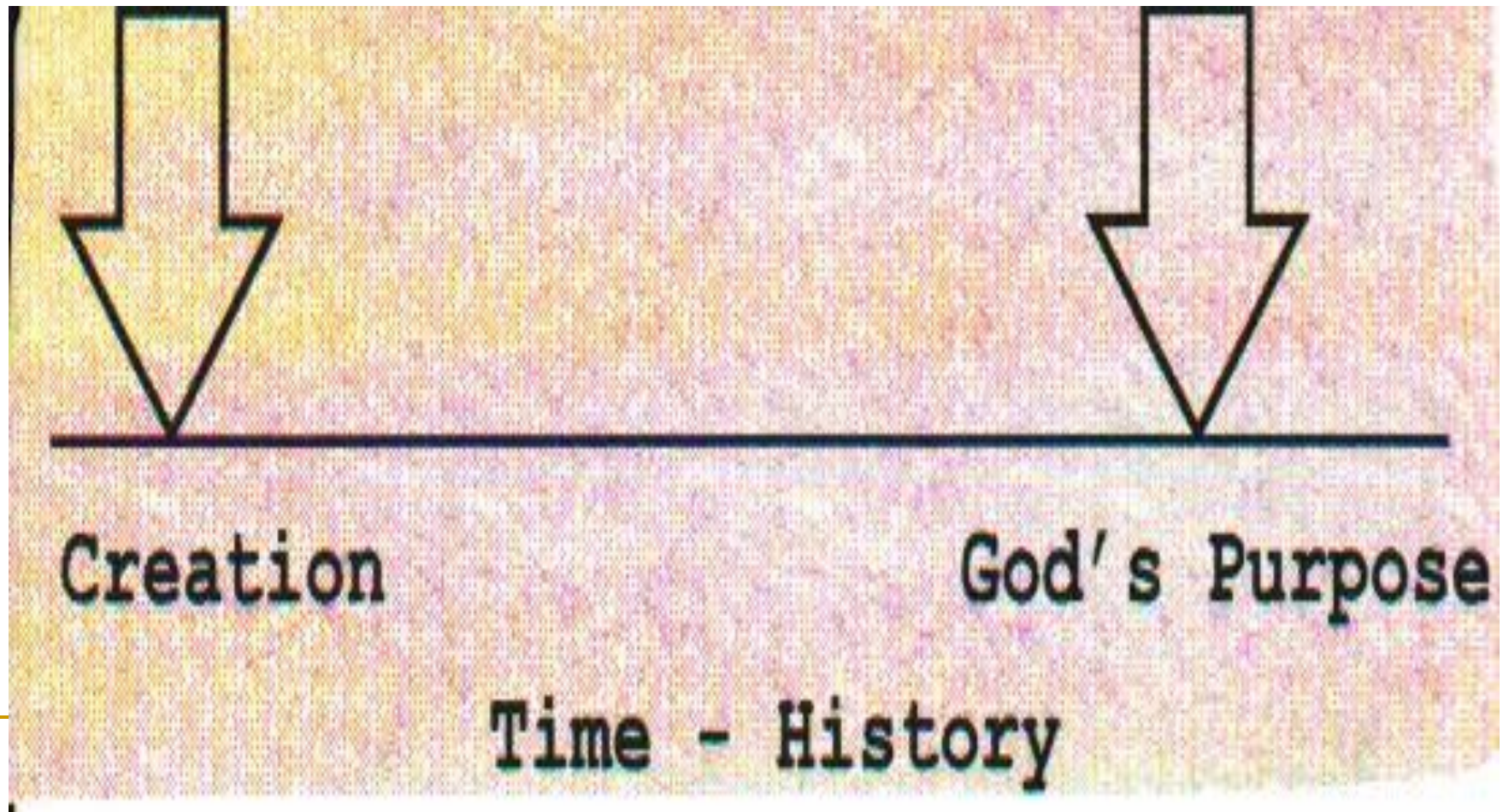
# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe Revelation, History and Time: Cyclical Time



# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation, History and Time:

### Linear Time



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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation, History, and Time

- Theories of history and linear time grow out of the attempt to understand Revelation and the Covenant
  - History and time begin with creation and move toward an end: the triumph of God's purpose.
  - God assigned value to time and history by acting in them to reveal Himself in unrepeatabe events.
  - Israel's whole national life was historically oriented.
  - The Exodus - the Passover; The Conquest of Canaan; the creation of the monarchy
  - The Hebrew philosophy of history is a belief in progress.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Revelation, History, and Time

- Isaiah in Chapter 65: "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth...I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight." Gone would be disease and early death; God's people would enjoy all the good things of life in abundance and security. And they would live in perfect harmony with God: "Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear." And then at the end of the chapter, the timeless and classic promise of God quoted afterwards by all those who have envisioned a future heaven on earth: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent--its food shall be dust!"
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe Questions

- We are sitting in this class doing history because of the Hebrews. Agree?
  - Do you believe the future is going to be better than the present or past? Why? Why not?
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Summary

- Ancient Jews contributed much to Europe as a culture.
  - They believed it important to remember and learn from history because God revealed Himself in historical events.
  - They believed in a future unlike the past or present.
  - They affirmed a transcendent deity who was yet a personality of ethical perfection and holiness.
  - The world is God's creation given to man to be subdued. It reveals God and takes its order from Him.
  - Society should also reflect God's nature and purpose. God is offended by injustice and tyranny.
  - Hebrews also asserted the dignity and worth of man.
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# Ancient Judaism as a Basis for Europe

## Questions

- Am I making too much of the Hebrew achievement?
  - I have had students say that I talk too much about religion in this course. Are they right? Or is this necessary if you are to understand the roots of your culture?
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