

# The Development of the Hebrew Religion 1700 – 1200 BCE

Dr. Cindy Ausec  
October 4, 2012

# Learning Objectives

- Understand the three phases of Hebrew religion
  - Abraham to Moses
  - Moses to the united kingdom of Israel
  - The divided kingdom to the Babylonian capture
- Understand how the Hebrew religion moves from a covenant between God and one man's family to a covenant between Yhwh and the Israelites (a people)
- Understand how the Hebrew religion moves from a monolatry to monotheism
- Understand how Yhwh became the god of all man kind

# Hebrew View of History

- Hebrew History and Religion inseparable
  - History is the act of God – drives the history of his people
  - Their history was the record of their interactions with God






# Major Periods of Israelite History

- Abraham to Moses (ca (2200 )1650-1220 BCE)
- Exodus under Moses to the unified kingdom of Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon (1220 -933 BCE)
- From the division of the kingdom to the final deportation of the southern tribes to Babylon (933-586 BCE)



# Patriarchs' Lives and Religion



- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
|  | Mycenaean Expansion          |
|  | Hittite Empire               |
|  | Egyptian Empire              |
|  | Kingdom of the Mitanni       |
|  | Babylonia under the Kassites |

300 MILES  
 300 KILOMETERS

# Abraham

- Nomad following his flocks from place to place
- Citizen of Ur of the Chaldees – who left his home to follow the voice of God to the land of Canaan
  - Historically – could have been one of the Amorites in the Fertile Crescent between 2000 and 1750 BCE
  - Mari letters from Mesopotamia - names as *Benjamin* and *Jacob* among the Amorites

# Religion of the Patriarchs

- Covenant between God and one man and his family
- Worshipped one God (out of many) who guided their destinies
- Generic name for God among ancient Semitic peoples was El - used in combinations to describe God
  - El Shaddai (God of the mountains); El Elyon (God Most High); El Olam (God Everlasting), and most frequently, Elohim (Gods)
- God was worshipped by burning animal sacrifices on altars built in the open
- No temples until the time of Solomon (961-922 BCE)

# Indications of Animistic Practices

- Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech in Beersheba
  - To seal the covenant, Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba
  - God appeared to Isaac and reaffirmed the covenant while Isaac was digging wells near Beersheba (Genesis 26:17-25)
- Jacob slept on certain stones; in his dream God spoke to him and renewed the covenant
- The connection between the appearance of God, the reaffirmation of the covenant, and typical animistic symbols of trees, wells, and stones

# Other Religious Practices

- Circumcision – – part of the covenant
  - Genesis traces it back to Abraham (Gen 17:10, 11)
  - Circumcision very ancient and widespread religious custom
- Practice of keeping a Sabbath may have been part of the worship of the Patriarchs
  - Attached to the creation
  - Not clear what the Sabbath practices of the Patriarchs were

# Joseph in Egypt

- Ca 1650 Semites called Arameans from Palestine began to move into the Egyptian Delta
- They eventually take over the Delta and rule as the Hyksos
- Eventually routed by Ahmose I
- Semitic Vizier at the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty



# Exodus

# Exodus

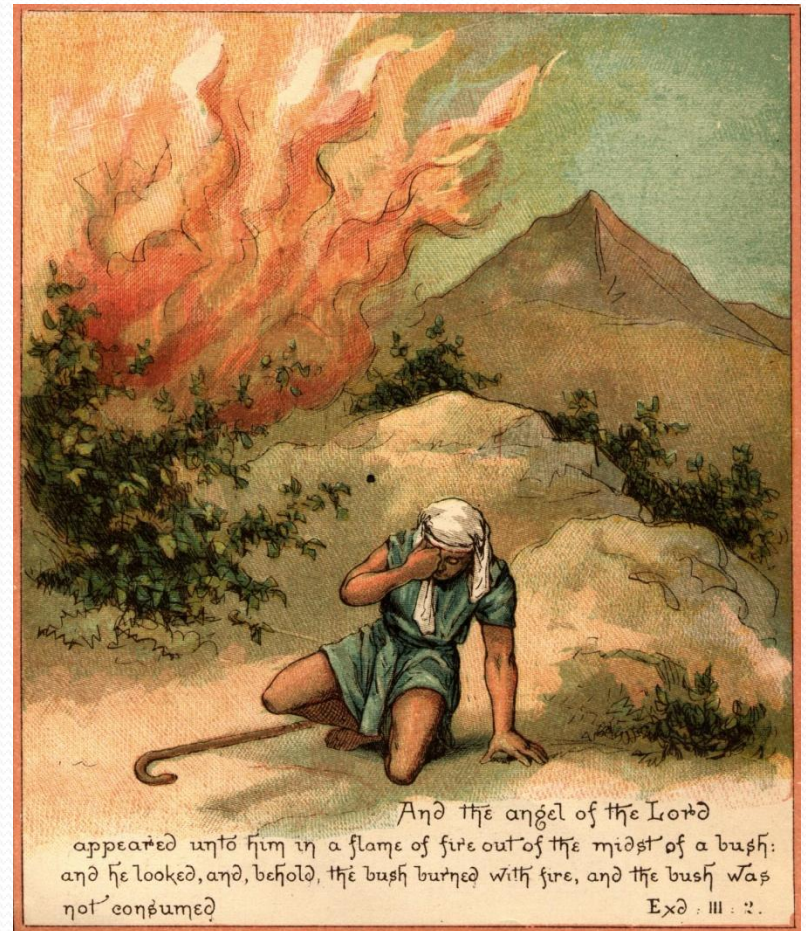
- Events of the Exodus became the core of the Jewish religion
- God acted to save his chosen people, the Israelites
  - Miraculously delivered them from slavery
  - Revealed his name and laws
  - Brought the former slaves, as a conquering army, into Canaan
- Events are remembered annually in the various major holidays of Judaism
- Legal material, attributed to the Sinai experience, became the most important material in the Hebrew Bible

# Exodus

- Israelites, crying out for deliverance from their enslavement by the Egyptians
- Moses is the key figure
  - Endangered as an infant by the forces of evil
  - Rescued and reared by the daughter of pharaoh
- Moses recognized his heritage and kills an Egyptian in defense of a slave
- Exiled to the Sinai Desert, where he lived for 40 years as a shepherd

# God of Abraham

- In the desert God revealed himself to Moses and spoke through a burning bush that was not consumed
- God declared that his name was YHWH
- Taboo associated with speaking the name
- Commanded Moses to lead the Israelites from slavery



# Moses Frees the Israelites

- Moses returned to Egypt
- Asked Pharaoh to release the Israelites – he refused
- Series of ten plagues
  - Final plague death of the firstborn
  - Israelites who ate a sacred meal and marked their door frames with blood were spared
- Pharaoh relented let the Israelites go
- Pharaoh pursued the Israelites
- Moses parts the Sea of Reeds – Israelites cross and Egyptians drown

# Sinai and the Law

- Israelites travel to Mt. Sinai on their journey to Canaan
  - YHWH gives the commandments to Moses
  - 10 absolute laws that were basic to Jewish life
  - Stress obedience and loyalty to YHWH and decent behavior towards members of the community
  - First and only case where a people and a god adopt each other in a contractual relationship



# History as an Act of God

- God act in response to Israel's keeping or breaking the covenant
- If they broke the covenant
  - Personal misfortunes
  - Losses in battle
- God no longer arbitrary – eternal guarantor of divine justice in the affairs of his people

# Other Sinai Concepts God as Holy

- God as Holy - Holiness understood as his power
  - Having by its very nature possible harmful effects
  - Moses set a boundary around the foot of the mountain beyond which the unsanctified people, even the priests, may not go
- Needed to take God with them
  - Yhwh, only one god among many, but chose the Israelites
  - Gods were territorial
  - Gods of particular people exercised power within geographical limits

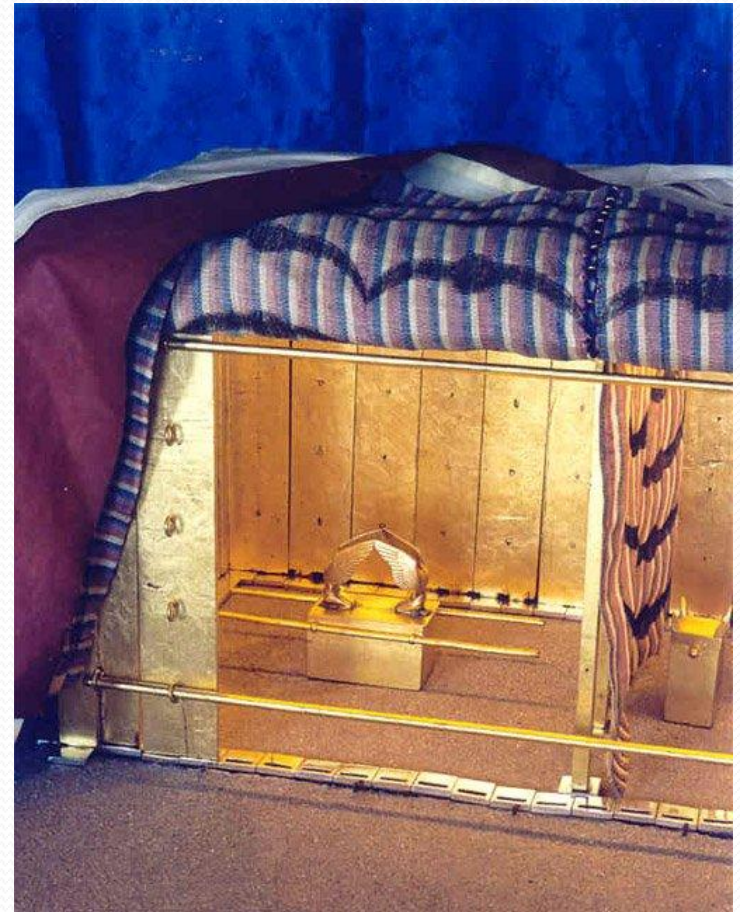
# Ark of the Covenant

- Ark of the Covenant – may have been the portable throne of YHWH
- Most treasured sacred possession of the Israelites
- Eventually placed in Solomon's temple in the Holy of Holies 10<sup>th</sup> Century BCE
- Remained in the temple until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE



# Tabernacle - Tent of Meeting

- A tent that could be moved from place to place
- Elaborate instructions on its construction, furnishings, and rituals
- Provided a place to worship YHWH
- After the Israelites enter Canaan it is mentioned only once



# Israelites Enter Canaan

- Israelites conquered territories on the East Bank of the Jordan River – Moses dies at Mt. Nebo
- Joshua, Moses' successor, leads them into Canaan
- Two conflicting accounts
  - Book of Joshua, Israelites swept across the country and destroyed the Canaanites
  - Book of Judges - worshippers of YHWH lived alongside the Canaanites and sometimes even being subject to them.

# Israelites and YHWH

- Renewed their covenant with YHWH
- Cult of YHWH, its ark, its priests, and its sacrifices were centered in Shiloh
- Worship at this times seems to have been a rather informal matter
  - Cultic priests attended to those who came on special days to the sanctuary for special needs
  - Priests supported by the donations of various tribal groups and gifts of those who came to worship



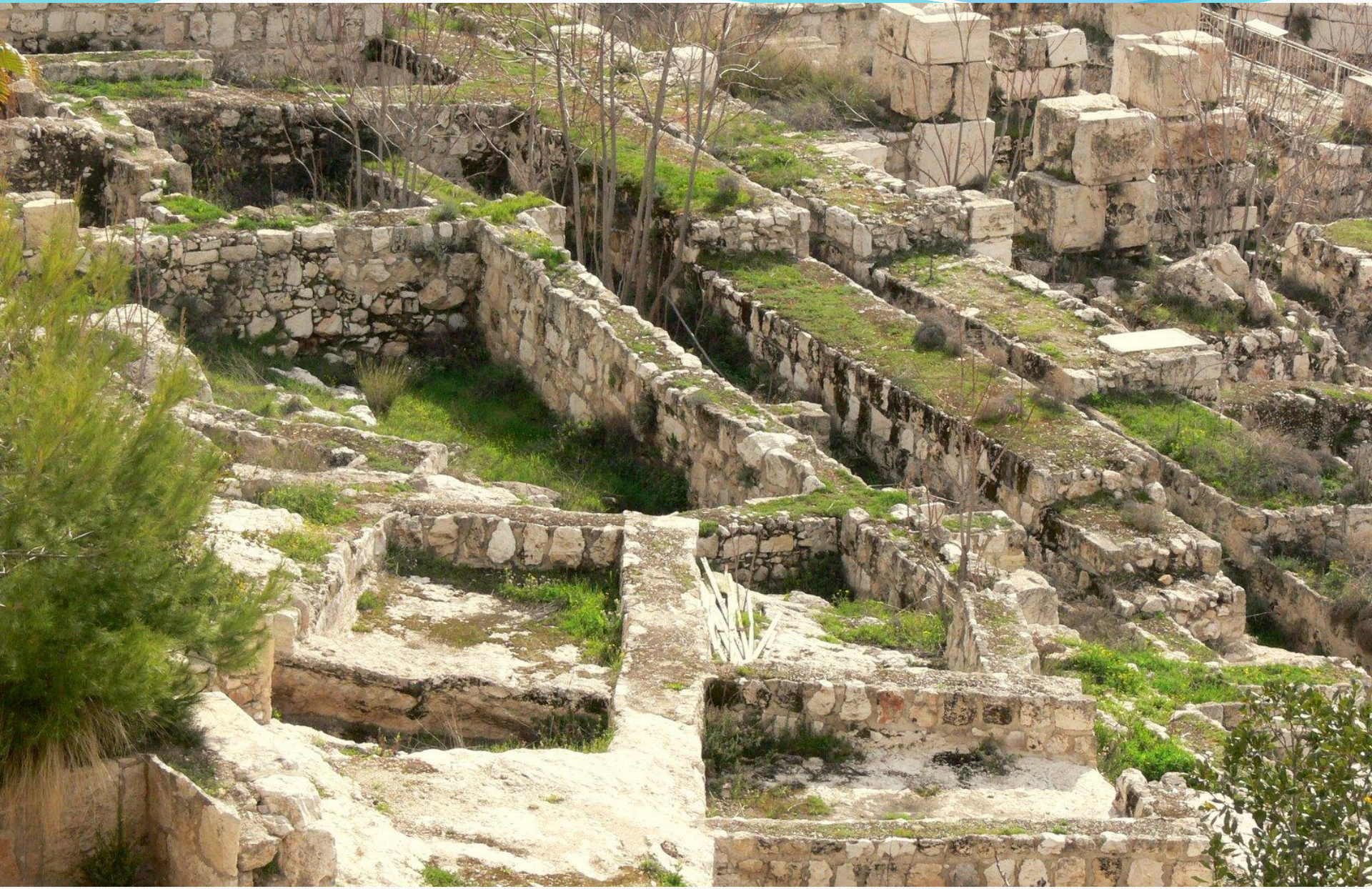
# Religion In The Time Of The Hebrew Monarchy

# King David

- Religion of Israel became more formal under David
- Captured Jerusalem in the central hill country and made it his capital
- Israel develop into a fairly powerful and wealthy small nation of the ancient Middle East
- David wished to build a magnificent temple in Jerusalem but was forbidden to do so by YHWH

JERUSALEM A.D. 33





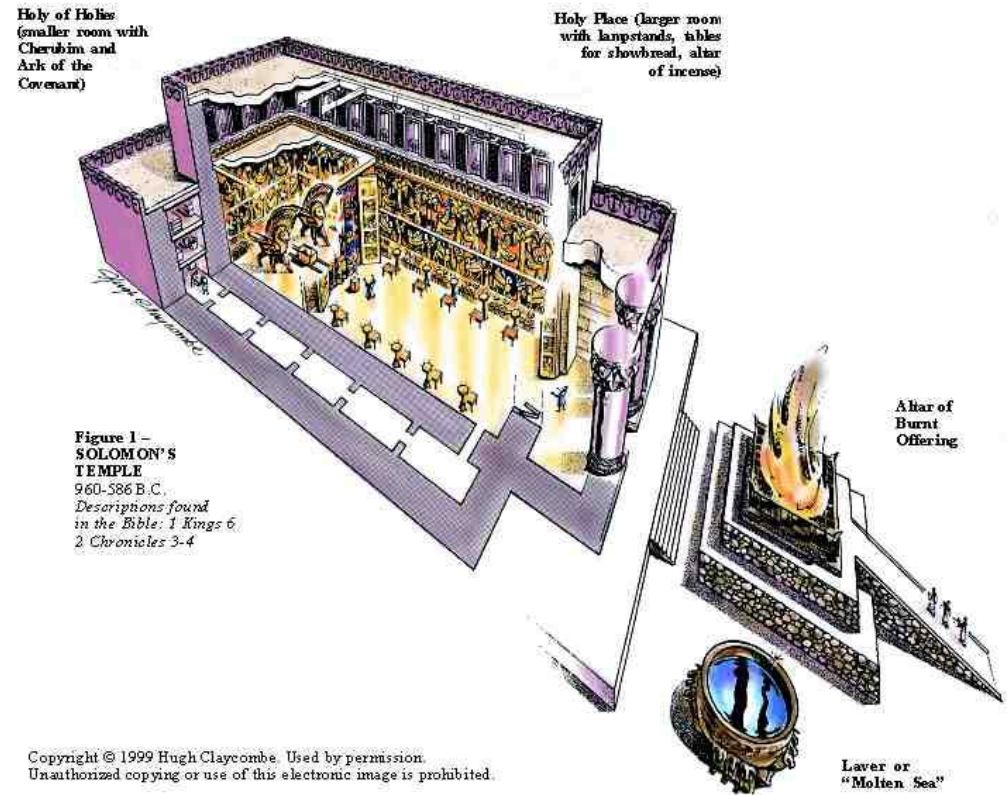
# The Jerusalem Temple

- Solomon (David's son) built a palace for himself and a temple for his God
  - Designed by Tyrian builders
  - The temple took the form of other Canaanite temples built for Baal



# The Temple

- Ark of the Covenant was placed in the temple
- Worship of YHWH more formal
- Main form remained the animal sacrifice, with its flesh burned in the courtyard
- In the temple, prayers were offered to YHWH
- May have also been sacred dancing before the Ark





# Prophetic Movement

# Prophets

- A portion of the Israelite prophetic movement became attached to the royal household
  - The first was Nathan who was part of the court of David
  - Others prophets attached to the royal houses, or at least had the ear of the kings, were Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah
- Other prophets were commoners who preached fiery denunciations against wickedness among peasants and royalty alike - Amos and Micah

# Eighth Century BCE Prophets

- Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah
  - Boldness with which they denounced the social injustices of their times
  - The beautiful, poetic language with which they bade the Israelites to return to their God
  - Men who were busy speaking the word of God to their people
  - Stands out as one of the major moral and literary contributions to any religion in the world



# Exile and Return

# Israel Divided

- 922 BCE after the reign of Solomon a rebellion split the nation of Israel into two nations
- Northern nation called Israel, was the larger and more productive of the two
  - Destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 BCE
  - Its people disappeared from history – either killed or deported or enslaved
  - They were never to be a distinctive people of Israel again; known as the ten lost tribes

# Israel Divided

- Southern nation called Judah
- Survived the Assyrian years but was destroyed in the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 586 BCE
  - Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple torn down
  - Citizens of Judah were either killed or deported
    - Held on to their identity, customs, and religion while in captivity – led by Ezekiel who was both a prophet and a priest
    - Able to return to Jerusalem in 538 BCE

# Babylonian Captivity

- Theological changes were forced upon the Jews
  - YHWH was the Israelites local deity perhaps residing in the temple
  - Now the temple was destroyed and the people were scattered - YHWH was now mobile
  - Isaiah stated that YHWH was no longer just the God of Israelites but was in fact the one true God of all the people of all the world
  - Mission of the Jews as YHWH's chosen people is to present his message to all the nations of the world

# Ezra (c. 428 BCE)

- Returned from Babylon with a copy of Scripture that he read to the citizens of the rebuilt Jerusalem
  - Exact nature and content of this book are unknown
  - Had a profound effect on the people
    - Reformed their lives according to the laws of this book
    - Jews became identified not only as a people of God's laws but also as a people of the book
  - Ezra probably began the process of canonizing books as the word of God
  - God no longer spoke through the prophets but through his book

# Learning Objectives

- Understand the three phases of Hebrew religion
  - Abraham to Moses
  - Moses to the united kingdom of Israel
  - The divided kingdom to the Babylonian capture
- Understand how the Hebrew religion moves from a covenant between God and one man's family to a covenant between Yhwh and the Israelites (a people)
- Understand how the Hebrew religion moves from a monolatry to monotheism
- Understand how Yhwh become the god of all man kind