

WEEK #1 “JUDAIC ROOTS” (HANDOUT #1 OF 2)

History of Christianity—By Pastor Daren Erisman

WHY STUDY THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY?

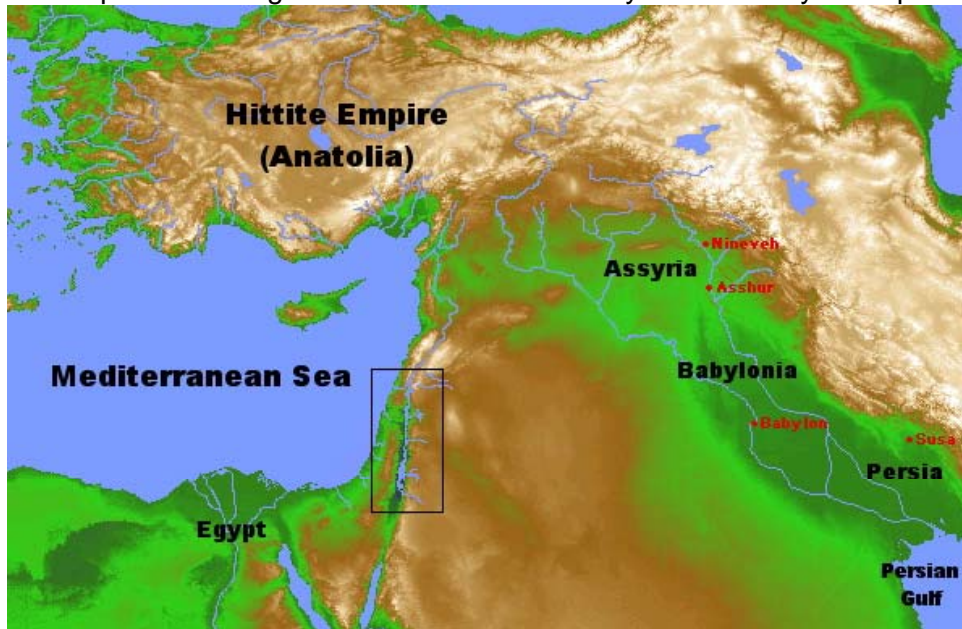
- **To understand our faith better.**
 - Understanding the historical circumstances surrounding the events of the Bible helps us to understand the context of Biblical stories.
 - Example: The context of a Roman empire occupying a Jewish land shaped the events of Christ's crucifixion.
 - Understanding the historical circumstances of when the individual books of the Bible were written helps us in our interpretation of them.
 - Example: The Book of Revelation at first reading appears very cryptic and strange. However, if one considers that this language comes in the context of tremendous persecution by the Romans and that it is purposely obscure for the protection of the writer and the writer's community, such difficult language makes more sense.
- **To understand the faith of other Christians is to better understand our own.**
 - Every Christian denomination and “non-denomination” interprets the Bible given a particular context.
 - Example: For Martin Luther, it was the context of being a German Catholic Augustinian Priest Professor whose research into the O.T. and frustration with Papal practices that shaped a grace-oriented, Christo-centric view of the Bible.
 - Our own Christian faith can be enriched by knowing how other Christians have interpreted the same stories at different times and places.
 - Example: St. Francis of Assisi spoke and lived the reality of God's love for all creatures.
 - Awareness of other Christian interpretations of the Bible makes us less susceptible to narrow interpretations by a particular religious leader or group.
 - Example: Cults such as the one founded by Jim Jones is an extreme example.
- **To gain perspective on how non-Christians perceive Christianity.**
 - Christians (as with other religious people) tend to minimize or take no responsibility for what Christians are doing or have done that is less than “Christ-like.”
 - History humbles us to the reality that we have always and will always need God.
 - This helps us to truly share the “good news” of Jesus Christ.

THREE SIGNIFICANT CULTURES INFLUENCE EARLY CHRISTIANITY

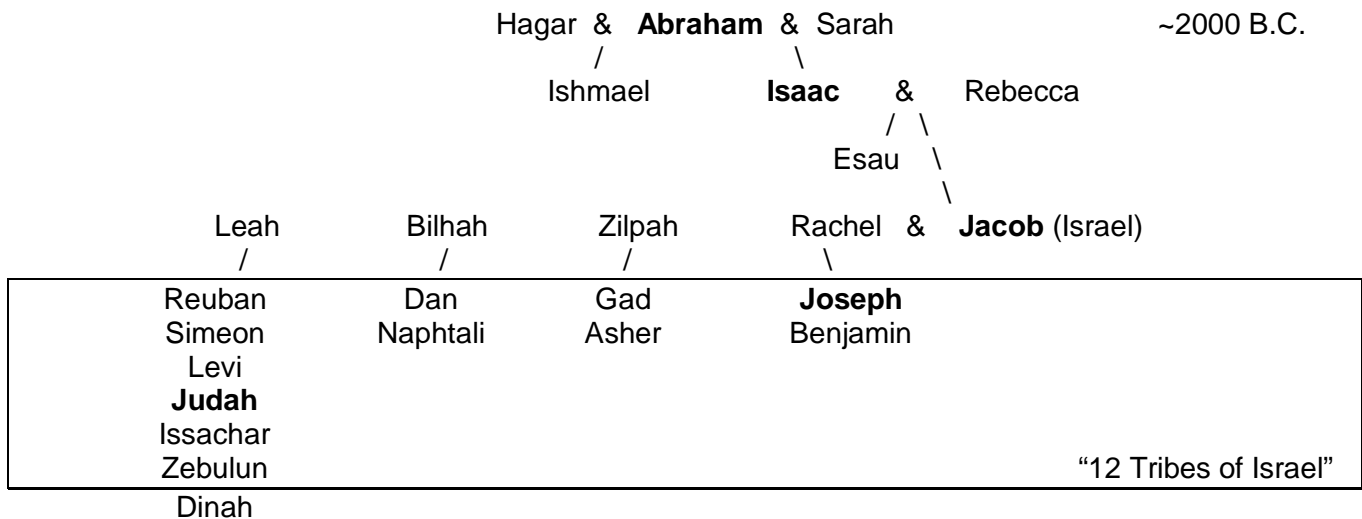
- **Judaic:** Jesus and his disciples were Jews
 - They studied, worshipped and understood themselves as Jews
 - Jesus as the Messiah was understood as the fulfillment of Jewish scripture
- **Greek (Hellenism):** Cultural legacy of the Greek control of Palestine
 - Greek the language of commerce (akin to English in the world)
 - N.T. written in Greek → “Christ” from the Greek word, “*Christos*” (anointed)
- **Roman:** Palestine a province of the Roman Empire
 - The overarching military power during Jesus' public ministry
 - Jesus was crucified according to Roman law for being subversive to the state

JUDAIC ROOTS

- **Geography**—Crossroads for empires & commerce
 - Susceptible to being taken over or economically controlled by other powers



- **Judaism's beginnings are innately tribal** *(refer to Genesis 12-50)*
 - Semitic tribes held together by common lineage and language—**Hebrew**
 - Note: Aramaic (the everyday language Jesus spoke) and Arabic are Semitic languages as well.



- Jesus is from the lineage of King David, from the tribe of Judah:
Judah → ... → King David → King Solomon →
 ... → Mary & Joseph (Jesus' adoptive father) → **Jesus**

- **Abrahamic Covenant with God** *(refer to Genesis 12-17)*
 - God makes covenant with Abram (Abraham): Blessing & curse of all peoples through Abram (12:1-3); Abram's descendents promised land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (15:13-21); "father of many nations" (17:1-8); circumcision as sign (17:9-14)
 - God makes promise to Hagar: many descendents, a nation (21:18).
 - Later, Christians will understand God making a new covenant with the world through Christ → "this cup is the new covenant in my blood."

WEEK #1 “JUDAIC ROOTS” (HANDOUT #2 OF 2)

History of Christianity—By Pastor Daren Erisman

- **Exodus** *(refer to Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy)*
 - The exodus from Egypt a pivotal moment for the Hebrews → **Law and Worship**
 - Now a loosely united Hebrew People
 - Temple worship developed and laws given (10 commandments & ~600 laws)
 - **Establish boundaries: Sacred & Profane** (Ex: Kosher food)
- **Kings and Kingdoms** *(refer to 1,2 Samuel and 1, 2 Kings, 1, 2 Chronicles)*
 - The twelve tribes of Israel were briefly united under the Kings **Saul, David** and **Solomon** in a United Monarchy (around 1010 to 931 BCE) or the **Kingdom of Israel**.
 - Unfortunately, Solomon, who built the **1st Temple** in Jerusalem, spent the Kingdom's resources on extravagant projects and shortly after his death, there was a revolt and the southern part of the kingdom split itself off from the rest of Israel.
 - This southern or lower kingdom was inhabited mostly by the tribe of Judah and therefore became known as the **Kingdom of Judah** (region of Judea). The tribes of Simeon, Benjamin and part of the tribe of Levi were also within the southern kingdom.
 - The northern or upper kingdom remained as the **Kingdom of Israel**
 - Made of the remaining tribes and the rest of the tribe of Levi.

Kingdom of Israel (or United Monarchy) → **Kingdom of Israel** (upper kingdom)
→ **Kingdom of Judah** (lower kingdom)

- **TODAY:** We tend to think of ancient Israel as always being a kind of sovereign, independent nation. Rather, it was a group of tribes who for centuries interacted closely with other neighboring tribes, both Hebrew and other. Ironically, the modern state of Israel has existed almost as long as the United Monarchy.



Map of the two Kingdoms in 830s BCE after the split of the United Monarchy

- **Diaspora —“Dispersion” from their homeland** *(refer to Isaiah, Jeremiah)*
 - In order to literally dismantle a people’s resistance or influence, and/or out of punishment, conquering powers would disperse the conquered people into other lands—a Diaspora.
 - This would occur over and over for the Jewish people, but there were three diasporas that would be most significant:
 - 722 BCE **Assyrians** disperse the people of the **Kingdom of Israel**
 - After this, only the Kingdom of Judah remained and by extension, everyone of the faith began to be called “**Jews**”
 - 588 BCE **Babylonians** disperse the people of the **Kingdom of Judah**
 - The 1st Temple is destroyed and many of the Jews are sent to Babylon.
 - After the **Persians** defeated the Babylonians in 539 BCE, the Persian leader **Cyrus the Great** allowed Diaspora Jews from Babylon to return to Judea (520 BCE) and rebuild the temple. It was completed in 515 BCE and is historically known as the **2nd Temple**.
 - **Influence of Babylonian captivity: Defining/Redefining Identity**
 - **Radical monotheism**
 - Not one God among others, but the only God.
 - Exposure to **Zoroastrianism**
 - A dualistic view of Good verses Evil, Light verses Darkness
 - Cosmic battle, judgment and general resurrection
 - Much of the **oral tradition was written down**.
 - 70 CE **Romans** destroy the 2nd Temple and over the years disperse the Jews from Jerusalem and Judea
 - Worship would turn from the central Temple in Jerusalem to the local synagogue.
 - Over the years, Jewish political power was suppressed and became non-existent under Roman rule.
 - **TODAY:**
 - Over the following centuries, the scattered Jewish communities would be forced from region-to-region, country-to-country through economic pressure, direct persecution and horrific pogroms (often by Christians).
 - The formation of the modern state of Israel in Palestine is the reaction of a scattered and persecuted Jewish people seeking a “homeland.”
 - There are conservative Christians who believe that when a **3rd Temple** is built, Christ will return. This is influenced by orthodox Jewish thought that the temple will be rebuilt during the time of the Messiah. Christian extremists called “Third Templars” desire to blow up the current temple mount in Jerusalem (with the Islamic Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque) and build a third temple.