

Judeo-Christian Tradition

MAIN IDEA

CULTURAL INTERACTION

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

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

These ideals continue to be important to democracy today.

TERMS & NAMES

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

SETTING THE STAGE Ideas from three monotheistic religions helped shape democratic traditions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all began in a small corner of southwest Asia, and later 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. More ideas about the value of the individual and the questioning of authority emerged during the periods of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

TAKING NOTES

Clarifying Use a chart to list one contribution to democracy with each item on the list.

| Category | Contribution |
|-------------|--------------|
| Judaism | |
| Islam | |
| Renaissance | |
| Reformation | |

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 Bible, 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 1800 B.C.

Created in God’s Image Other groups around the Hebrews were polytheists, people who believed in more than one God. The Hebrews, however, 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 Bible (the Old Testament, to Christians) states 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 states that God gave this

code to their leader Moses in the form of the **Ten Commandments** and other laws. This event occurred sometime between 1300 and 1200 B.C. Unlike the laws of other peoples, the Hebrews' code focused more on morality and ethics and less on politics. 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.

An 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:

PRIMARY SOURCE

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 Jews' 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. A

MAIN IDEA

Clarifying

A What did the prophets teach about injustice and oppression?

> Analyzing Primary Sources

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments are the ten orders or laws given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. These orders serve as the basis for Jewish laws.

PRIMARY SOURCE

1. I am the Lord thy God. . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. . .
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. . .
4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother. . .
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
10. Thou shalt not covet. . . anything that is thy neighbor's.

Deuteronomy 5:6–22

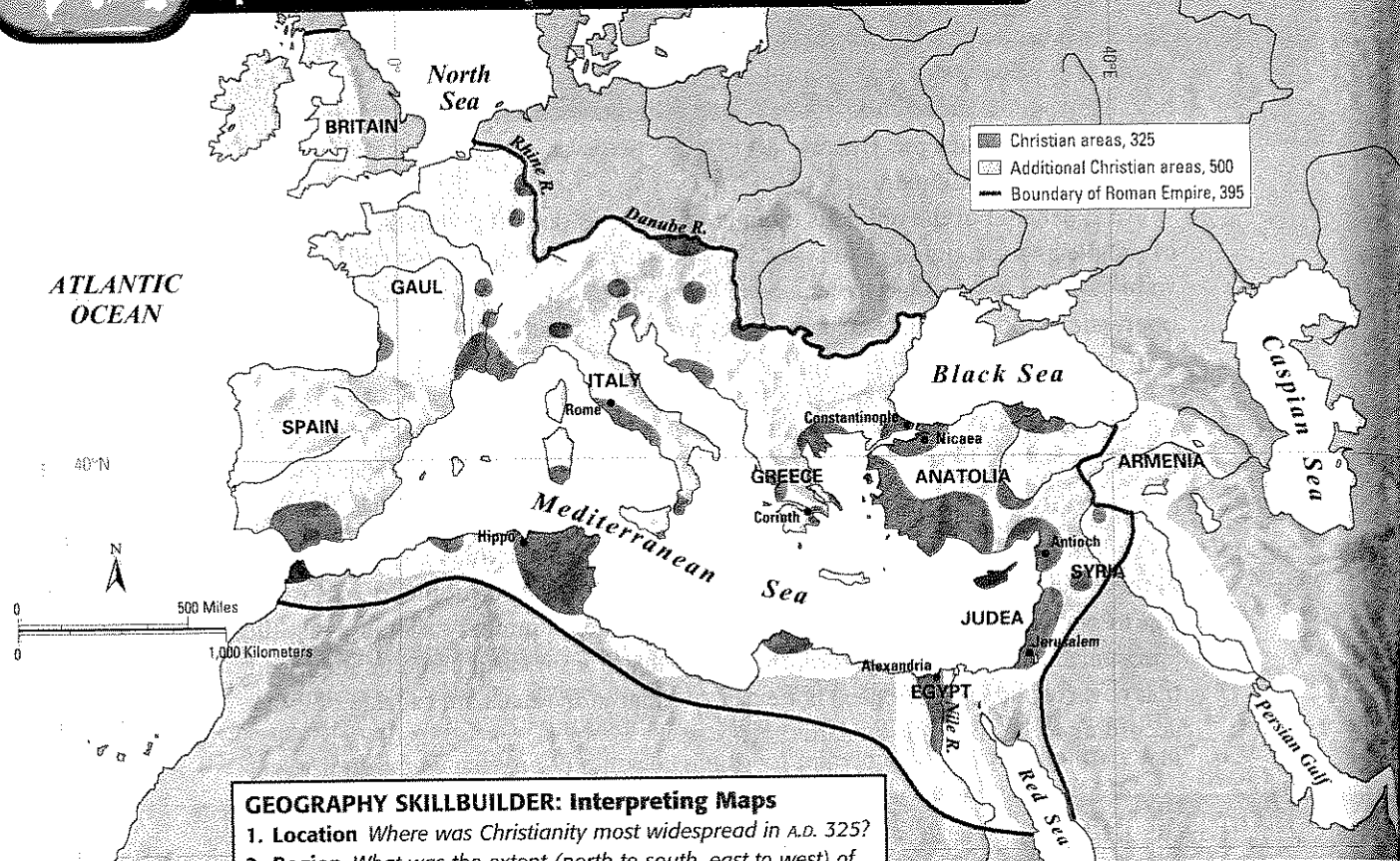


▲ An engraving from the 19th century shows Moses with the Ten Commandments.

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. **Comparing** Do the first four commandments concern themselves more with the Hebrews' relationship with God or with one another?
2. **Contrasting** What do the last six commandments have in common that distinguish them from the first four?

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



Christianity

As Rome expanded, its power spread throughout the Mediterranean. It took control of Judea, homeland of the Jews, around 63 B.C. By 6 B.C., the Romans ruled Judea directly as a part of their empire.

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.

The Teachings of Christianity 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. Jesus was 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.

Vocabulary

An *apostle* is one of the followers of Jesus who preached and spread his teaching.

The Spread 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 preached in cities around the eastern Mediterranean. He 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, where they shared 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 Roman persecution of Christians, 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.

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

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

Islam

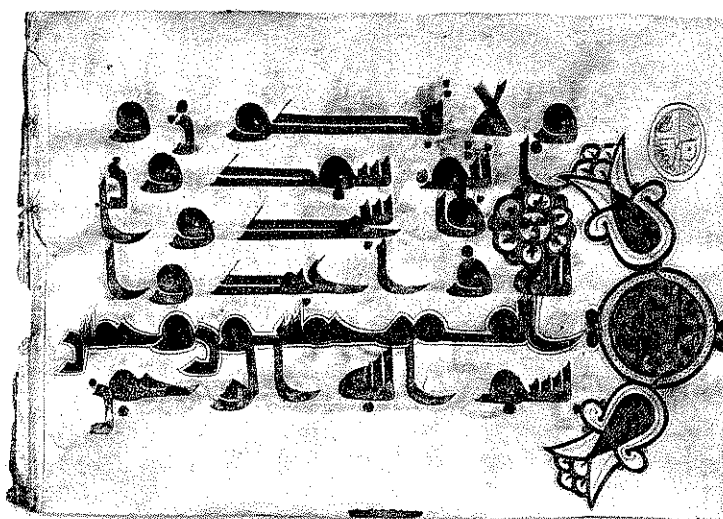
Another monotheistic religion that taught equality of all persons and individual worth also developed in southwest Asia in the early 600s. **Islam** was based on the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. Muhammad's teachings, which are the revealed word of God (Allah in Arabic), are found in the holy book called the Qur'an. 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.

Followers of Islam are called Muslims. 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. In lands controlled by Muslims, the Muslims were required to show tolerance for the religious practices of Jews and Christians.

The Legacy of Monotheistic Religions Several ideals crucial to the shaping of a democratic outlook emerged from the early monotheistic religions of southwest Asia. They include the following:

- the duty of the individual and the community to combat oppression
- the worth of the individual
- the equality of people before God

These ideas would form part of the basis of democratic thinking. More ideas about the value of the individual and about the questioning of authority would surface during the Renaissance and Reformation.



▲ An illustrated page of the Qur'an from the Ninth century

Global Impact



Printing Spreads Ideas

The development of a movable type printing press around 1440, shown above in a 16th-century French woodcut, revolutionized the sharing of ideas. The press made it possible to print books quickly and cheaply. This fueled Renaissance learning because scholars could read each other's works soon after they were written. The ideas of the Renaissance and, later, of the Enlightenment were spread through the printed word.

The spread of reading matter made literacy for large numbers of people suddenly possible. And an informed citizenry contributed to the rise of democracy. These informed citizens began to question authority. This ultimately spurred democratic revolutions in America and France in the late 1700s.

Renaissance and Reformation

The **Roman Catholic Church** developed from Roman Christianity. By the Middle Ages, it had become the most powerful institution in Europe. It influenced all aspects of life—religious, social, and political. It was strongly authoritarian in structure, that is, it expected unquestioned obedience to its authority.

Renaissance Revives Classical Ideas In the 1300s, a brilliant cultural movement arose in Italy. Over the next 300 years, it spread to the rest of Europe, helped by the development of the printing press. This movement was called the **Renaissance**, from the French word for “rebirth.” The Renaissance was marked by renewed interest in classical culture. This included the restoration of old monuments and works of art and the rediscovery of forgotten Greek and Latin manuscripts. Renaissance thinkers were interested in earthly life for its own sake. They rejected the medieval view that life was only a preparation for the afterlife.

Renaissance education was intended to prepare some men for public service rather than just for service to the Church. Scholars placed increasing value on subjects concerned with humankind and culture. The study of classical texts led to an intellectual movement that encouraged ideas about human potential and achievement. Some Christian writers were critical of the failure of the Church to encourage people to live a life that was moral and ethical. They also discussed ways in which the lives of all in society could improve.

Renaissance thinkers and writers began to explore ideas about political power and the role of government in the lives of ordinary people. The Greek and Roman ideas about democracy were quite different from the oligarchic governments they were experiencing.

During the Renaissance, individualism became deeply rooted in Western culture. Artists expressed it by seeking to capture individual character. Explorers and conquerors demonstrated it by venturing into uncharted seas and by carving out vast empires in the Americas. It also was shown by merchant-capitalists, who amassed huge fortunes by taking great economic risks.

The Reformation Challenges Church Power Although Christianity remained a strong force in Europe during the Renaissance, people began to be more critical of the Church. The spirit of questioning that started during the Renaissance came to full bloom in the **Reformation**. The Reformation was a religious reform movement that began in the 16th century. Those who wanted to reform the Catholic Church were called Protestants, because they protested against the power and abuses of the Church. Reformers stressed the importance of a direct relationship with God.

The Reformation started in Germany. In 1517, a monk and teacher named Martin Luther criticized the Church's practice of selling pardons for sins. Soon, Luther went further. He contradicted the Church's position that salvation came through faith and good works. He said people could be saved only through faith in God. What began as a reform movement ended up as a new division of Christianity—Protestantism.

Vocabulary

Individualism is the belief in the importance of the individual and in the virtues of self-reliance and personal independence.

Vocabulary

A **pardon** is a cancellation of punishment still due for a sin that has been forgiven.

Because Protestantism encouraged people to make their own religious judgments, Protestants began to have differences of belief. They then established new churches in addition to the already-formed Lutheran Church. These included the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Calvinist churches.

Catholics and Protestants differed on many issues. The Catholic Church claimed the right to interpret the Bible for all Christians. Protestants called on believers to interpret the Bible for themselves. The Catholic Church said the only way to salvation was through the Church. Protestants said that the clergy had no special powers; people could find individual paths to God. The Protestant emphasis on private judgment in religious matters—on a sense of conviction rather than a reliance on authority—strengthened the importance of the individual even more. It also led to a questioning of political authority. (See History in Depth on this page.)

Legacy of the Renaissance and Reformation The Reformation and the other changes that swept Europe during and after the Middle Ages greatly influenced the shaping of the modern world. By challenging the authority of monarchs and popes, the Reformation indirectly contributed to the growth of democracy. Also, by calling on believers to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, it introduced individuals to reading and exposed them to more than just religious ideas.

Both the Renaissance and the Reformation placed emphasis on the importance of the individual. This was an important idea in the democratic revolutions that followed and in the growth of political liberty in modern times.

History in Depth



The Peasants' Revolt

Luther questioned Church authority. But peasants in southern Germany took Luther's example further. In 1524, they questioned political and social authority. They wanted an end to serfdom, or being forced to serve a master. They stormed the castles of the nobles, forcing them, at least initially, to give in to their demands.

It was the largest mass uprising in the history of Germany. The peasants looked to Luther to support their rights, but Luther supported the nobles instead. As many as 100,000 peasants were killed during the rebellion.

IN IDEA

Synthesizing

How did the Renaissance and the Reformation shape ideas about democracy?

SECTION

2

ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

• Judaism • Ten Commandments • Christianity • Islam • Roman Catholic Church • Renaissance • Reformation

USING YOUR NOTES

2. How do the contributions listed on your chart support the ideals of democracy?

| Category | Contribution |
|--------------|--------------|
| Christianity | |
| Judaism | |
| Islam | |
| Renaissance | |
| Reformation | |

MAIN IDEAS

- How are the Ten Commandments different from the laws of other groups?
- Which of the Christian teachings supports the central idea of democracy?
- How did the Reformation indirectly contribute to the growth of democracy?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

- COMPARING** What ideas crucial to the shaping of democracy did Judaism and Christianity share?
- DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** How did the Reformation promote the idea of individualism?
- SYNTHESIZING** How did the printing press help promote the ideas of democracy?
- WRITING ACTIVITY** **CULTURAL INTERACTION** Write a **summary paragraph** that illustrates how the Judeo-Christian view of reason and faith, and the duties of the individual and community contributed to the development of democratic thought.

CONNECT TO TODAY CREATING A COLLAGE

Using newspapers or magazines, create a **collage** showing modern nations practicing ideas of democracy. You might include headlines, pictures, or articles about equality of all people and community efforts to combat oppression.