

Lecture 3: *The Ancient Near East: The Hebrews and Rise of the Persian Empire*

1. *The Levant Coast, 3000-1000BCE – Phoenicians, Canaanites and Hebrews*

- A. Geography & Trade
- B. The Phoenicians and the Alphabet, ca. 1600

2. *Hebrews and their History: Small States, Enduring Concepts*

- A. The Hebrews and the Tribes of Abraham
- B. Kingdoms of Israel and Judah
- C. The First Dispersion of the Jews

3. *The Religion of the Hebrews – Evolving Beliefs*

- A. The Texts: The Hebrew Bible
- B. The Jewish Covenant and Hebrew Law
- C. Hebrew Monotheism
- D. Ethical Monotheism

CODA: A Succession of Empires and the Rise of Persia Kingship, 1000-500 BC

- A. Neo-Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians
- B. Persian Kingship – A Looming Empire

Terms:

Torah – “the teachings”, the Law

Pentateuch – Five Books

The Written Word: First Languages

- Cuneiform – ca. 3100 B.C.E., Sumerian, first written language, on clay tablets.
 - Hieroglyphics – ca. 3100 B.C.E., system of writing developed in Egypt, “sacred letters,” employed around 700 pictorial forms.
 - Demotic script, a cursive script also employed in Egypt for everyday documents.
 - Phoenician Alphabet – ca. 1600 B.C.E. – one letter = one sound.
 - Greek Alphabet – ca. 700 B.C.E.
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The Hebrew Bible:

- 1) The Torah:** The first 5 Books, sometimes called the “Books of Moses” The Greeks referred to them as the Pentateuch (*Penta* meaning five) == the first five books of the Bible. Also called “the teachings” and ‘the laws” - included texts of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

- 2) The Prophets:** Contains the historical books – including the book of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles == those texts that tell of the unfolding relationship between Yahweh, the Hebrew God, and His People. They also include the texts of the Greater Prophets, including the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, as well as the Lesser Prophets such as Amos and Micah.

- 3) The Writings:** --A catchall designation or term for the poetic material such as the Psalms (attributed to King David); the Canticles, like the Song of Solomon, and the beautiful, descriptive, and moving literature including that of Proverbs and Wisdom – which has a long an enduring resonance throughout the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic poetic tradition.