

PART II THE GRECO-ROMAN AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ROOTS

Chapter 7 Judaism and Early Christianity

1. Judaism, as well as two other religions that adopted the God of the Hebrews, Christianity and Islam, established cultures centered on an all-powerful God instead of on human beings.
2. As Christianity developed from Judaism, it brought elements of Greco-Roman culture to bear on the Hebraic core.

I. The Ancient Hebrews and the Bible

A. The Patriarchs

1. According to Hebrew tradition, Abraham was the original founder of the Hebrew people in around 2000 B.C.
2. Abraham established the worship of one god.
3. The Jews were initially tolerated in Egypt but, eventually, they were enslaved and left Egypt under the leadership of Moses.
4. Joshua led the people into the promised land, and they became a settled people, no longer nomads.
5. The Hebrews believed that history was the means by which God revealed his will.
6. The Israelites underwent a series of wars and battles to bring the promised land of Canaan under their control.

B. Kings

1. The tribes of Israel at last became united under a single king, King Saul, about a 1,000 years after Abraham's covenant with God.
2. David, the second and most famous king, founded the capital of Jerusalem.
3. David established a splendid and luxurious court, unprecedented in Jewish history.
4. Under David, what is now known as the Bible became a written work for the first time.
5. David's son, Solomon, built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem.
6. Written works attributed to Solomon were likely written later by others.

II. The Prophets and the Fall of Israel

1. From the mid-eighth to the sixth century B.C., the spiritual life of Jews was dominated by a succession of *prophets*.
2. Through the teachings of these prophets, the Judaic concept of God changed from one of a single people to a universal God of all mankind.
3. The age of the prophets was a difficult time for Israel.
4. It split into two parts, Israel and Judah, and then was conquered, first by the Assyrians, and then by the Babylonians.

A. Biblical Literature

1. A revolt against Syria lasting almost three decades brought independence in 141 B.C.
2. Two rival religious groups, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, competed for control of Jewish society.
3. The Sadducees were a more conservative group that only considered “Biblical Law” authoritative.
4. The Sadducees disappeared after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
5. All modern Jews derive from the sect of the Pharisees.
6. The destruction of the temple marks the beginning of the Jewish *diaspora*.

III. Early Christianity

1. Jesus was born in the Roman province of Judea in Nazareth during the reign of the emperor Augustus.
2. Judea had both a Roman governor and a Jewish king, Herod.
3. The original followers of Jesus sought to radically reform Judaism, not establish a new religion.

A. Paul of Tarsus and the Spread of Christianity

1. Paul was raised an Orthodox Jew who believed Christianity was a threat to Judaism and engaged in the persecution of Christians.
2. A vision of Jesus on a trip to Jerusalem led to Paul’s conversion to Christianity.
3. After Paul’s conversion, he devoted himself to missionary work and founded numerous Christian churches throughout the eastern half of the Roman Empire.
4. Some of his letters to these churches can be found in the *Epistles* of the New Testament.
5. Paul believed Christians were not bound to comply with traditional Judaic law, which gave Christianity more universal appeal and allowed it to emerge as a major faith in its own right, distinct from Judaism.

B. Persecution of Christians Under the Roman Empire

1. Christians were singled out for persecution by the Romans who were generally tolerant of religious differences.
2. The Roman elite feared the popularity of Christianity with slaves and the lower classes would make these groups difficult to control.
3. Persecution of the Christians did nothing to diminish its spread.

C. Religions in the Roman Empire

1. Hellenism had spread Greek secular traditions eastward but there was a corresponding diffusion of eastern mystery religions back into Europe. Christianity was just one of these.
2. Christianity was by far the most successful of the eastern religions that could be found in the Roman Empire.
3. Christianity was both exclusive and universal. Membership was open to all, but it demanded the rejection of all other doctrines and faiths.
4. Christianity gained a solid philosophical underpinning with time, which made it attractive to the more educated classes.

D. Early Christian Art

1. Christians initially gathered in private homes and later gathered secretly in the Roman catacombs to avoid persecution.

2. The walls of the catacombs were decorated with paintings depicting Biblical tales.

IV. The End of Antiquity

A. A New Era of Christianity

1. The Emperor of the then struggling Roman Empire, Constantine I, converted to Christianity in 312 A.D.
2. Constantine's conversion strengthened both Christianity and the Empire.
3. It was during this time that the Bishop of Rome claimed to be the spiritual leader of all Christendom.
4. Christianity went from an underground sect to an official state religion.

B. The First Church Buildings

1. The alliance of the church with the state led to the building of churches.
2. Old St. Peter's of Rome was a complex of buildings that included a large courtyard.

C. Early Christian Sculpture

1. *Sarcophagi* (caskets) from the fourth century A.D. attest to the growing power of Christianity within the Roman Empire.
2. At the same time, the sculpture demonstrated a state of transition, as artists attempted to establish a visual tradition for the new faith.

D. The Founding of Constantinople

1. Constantine moved the capital of the Empire east to Byzantium.
2. Rome had already been abandoned for Milan as the seat of power.
3. Constantine's decision reflected the reality that the power and dynamism of the empire had shifted to its eastern half.
4. Although the spoken vernacular was Greek, the official language remained Roman, and the state and people clung to their Roman heritage for several centuries.

E. Saint Augustine (A.D. 354–430)

1. Saint Augustine was perhaps the greatest theologian of the Christian church.
2. Saint Augustine came from Carthage in North Africa and converted to Christianity as an adult.
3. Cicero and Platonism influenced Saint Augustine.
4. Augustine's *Confessions* was a significant work in the Western tradition and perhaps the first autobiography.

V. The Barbarian Influence in the Western Roman Empire

1. Upon the death of the emperor Theodosius (378–395), the Roman Empire was divided into an eastern and western half between the emperor's two sons.
2. Germanic tribes from the north, "the barbarians," occupied Roman Italy.
3. These Germanic tribes had been in contact with Rome for centuries, and left most of the city's art and buildings intact.
4. Their aim was not to destroy Roman culture but to garner its fruits for themselves.

5. The German kings were religious figures and conversion to Catholicism undermined their religious role and authority somewhat.
6. Still, German kings in the newly conquered lands expected to control not only the civic institutions but also the church and the monasteries.

A. Western Monasticism

1. Beginning in the third century, some Christians in the eastern half of the Empire chose to live alone and apart from the world as hermits.
2. Later, communities of people chose a spiritual life apart from the secular world in monasteries.
3. The “Rules of Saint Benedict” standardized monastery rules and culture.
4. Some monasteries became powerful economic and political forces.

B. Decline of Roman Centralization in the West

1. The Germanic “barbarians” who supplanted the Romans were unable to maintain the Roman Empire.
2. The structure of the empire demanded fealty to the institutions of the Empire rather than to the individual who was heading it up.
3. Barbarian culture was based on loyalty to individual leaders.
4. The European subsistence economy was inconsistent with a strong centralized government.

VI. Early Christian Music: Gregorian Chant

1. The informal nature of early Christian worship in the home of its adherents evolved over time into formal, elaborate, and beautiful liturgies and rituals.
2. Gregory I took measures to codify the numerous and varied elements of Christian worship including music.
3. Gregorian chants are the unaccompanied vocal music of the Christian church during the Middle Ages and Gothic era.
4. The music survived for hundreds of years without a written notation system.
5. All chants use melodies that avoid wide leaps and contrast, making the smoothly graceful melodies readily singable.
6. The chants were composed for all the feasts and festivals of the Christian year as well as the recurring services in the monasteries.