The Evolution of the Alphabet

This table shows how many of the world's languages use alphabets derived from the Phoenician alphabet. The English alphabet is based on the Greek version; it came to us by way of Etruscan and Latin. The Russian Cyrillic alphabet was taken directly from the Greek. Note that Hebrew also developed from the Phoenician alphabet.

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<th>Phoenician</th>
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2 The Jews developed a distinct culture of enduring significance.

South of Phoenicia, in present-day Israel, was the land of the ancient Jews, or Israelites. Their language was Hebrew, a Semitic language closely related to Phoenician and written in the same script. Although the ancient Jews shared many cultural traditions with other Mesopotamians, their religion was quite different. The religious ideas they developed are known as Judaism, which grew into one of the world's great religions.

Judaism profoundly influenced two other major religions, Christianity and Islam. The religious and ethical values of the West are deeply rooted in Judaism. Whatever your religious beliefs, chances are that your ideas of right and wrong and of justice derive from the teachings of the ancient Jews.

The Israelites fled slavery and established the kingdom of Israel.

Early Jewish history is recorded in the Bible, a collection of writings sacred to both Jews and Christians. The Jewish writings, written in Hebrew, are known as the Old Testament to distinguish them from the New Testament, which deals with the teachings of Jesus. According to the Bible, the founder of Judaism was the patriarch Abraham, who led his people out of Mesopotamia into Canaan around 1900 or 1800 B.C. This was shortly before the time of Hammurabi's rule in Babylon. Abraham and his followers reached the land of Canaan, the biblical name for Palestine, which according to the Bible was the land promised to Abraham's descendants.

Three generations later, under the leadership of Jacob, many of the Jews left Canaan and migrated into northeastern Egypt to escape drought and famine. Jacob was also called "Israel," and his descendants later organized themselves into a confederation of 12 tribes, called Israelites. The Israelites, or ancient Jews, remained in Egypt for more than 400 years. At first they prospered as cattle herders, but then they were enslaved by the pharaoh and forced to build monuments for the Egyptians.

According to the Bible, a great leader named Moses liberated the Israelites from slavery in the 1200s B.C. and led them out of Egypt back toward the promised land of Canaan. Known as the Exodus, the liberation of the Israelites from slavery is a cornerstone of Jewish history and religion.

Returning to Canaan, the task of winning the land from the Canaanites fell to Moses' successor, Joshua. The conquest of Canaan took about 200
years, and during this time the Israelites found themselves facing a new and more powerful enemy, the Philistines, a people armed with iron weapons who had moved into southern Canaan around 1200 B.C. In their hour of desperation, the Israelite leaders, who were called judges, decided to unify their tribes under a king. They chose a young soldier named Saul, who became the first king of Israel. He ruled from 1020 to 1000 B.C.

**David and Solomon ruled a united kingdom.**

Saul was followed on the throne by David, who captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of his kingdom. Under David’s son Solomon, who ruled from 972 to 932 B.C., the kingdom of Israel reached the height of its political power.

Solomon, who is renowned for his wisdom, began a vast building program. He built a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem—the first for the worship of one God—as well as cities, palaces, fortresses, and roads. He sent ships to trade in distant places and maintained good relations with neighboring states. To pay for his ambitious building program, Solomon levied very heavy taxes. After his death, the ten northern tribes revolted against this heavy taxation and set up the independent kingdom of Israel. The southern tribes made up the kingdom of Judah, which was ruled from Jerusalem by the descendants of David. Although the two kingdoms divided, the people considered themselves a single people and followed the same religion. The word Jew comes from the name of the people of Judah—the Judeans.

The two kingdoms are shown on the map on page 44. Weakened by the division, both kingdoms were open to invaders. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom and scattered its inhabitants throughout the vast Assyrian Empire. Absorbed by other peoples, they lost their identity and became known to history as the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. In 586 B.C. the Chaldeans conquered the southern kingdom, burned the Temple at Jerusalem, and carried the citizens off into exile in Babylon. They remained there for about 50 years until Cyrus the Persian conquered the Chaldeans and permitted the Jews to return home. However, many thousands remained in Babylon, where their descendants formed a large Jewish community that lasted until the 20th century.

**Moses taught the high spiritual and ethical standards of Judaism.**

From the time of Abraham, the Israelites worshiped one God, who held them to a very high standard of ethical and ritual behavior. According to Judaism, there is only one God in the universe who rules over all peoples and who demands high moral conduct from all peoples. This belief in one God is called monotheism. It stood in sharp contrast to the beliefs of neighboring peoples—Egyptians and Mesopotamians—who worshiped many gods.

Moses was a major figure in the development of monotheism and of the Jewish faith. During the Exodus from Egypt, Moses taught the Israelites that they had made an eternally binding covenant, or formal agreement, with God. The covenant assured them of God’s love and protection but made them especially accountable for their sins and shortcomings.

The Bible describes how God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and accepted the Israelites as His chosen people. As you can see from the excerpt on the facing page, the Ten Commandments required the Jews to worship one God and to follow a strict code of conduct. They were forbidden to steal, murder, lie, or commit adultery. They were also to honor their parents and to observe the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, as a holy day of rest and worship.

Starting with Moses, a code of Jewish law and
The Ten Commandments as revealed to Moses are rules for living and for worship. The commandments are not numbered in the Bible, and their numbering and the exact wording differ slightly in the different versions of the Bible. I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. . . . Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. . . . Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . Honor thy father and thy mother. . . . Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shalt not covet [desire] thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

Exodus 20:2–17

custom evolved from the Ten Commandments. Much of this code was recorded in the Bible, the outstanding literary achievement of the Jews. The Bible is divided into 24 books. The first five books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—make up the Jewish Torah and contain the early history of the Israelites as well as the basic laws of Judaism. The Torah, which means “teaching,” emphasizes the ideas of the promised land and the covenant with God. A second group of books develops this message with the words of the Prophets, and the remaining books contain various writings, such as Psalms, Ruth, and Job.

The Prophets taught a new concept of Judaism.

Between 750 and 550 B.C., Judaism was further refined by a series of great prophets—religious leaders who claimed to communicate God's will to the people. According to Jeremiah, for example, God demanded righteousness and protection for the weak and helpless. The prophet Micah emphasized mercy and justice:

He has shown you, O Man, 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.

The prophets saw Jewish history and, indeed, all history as being governed by the sovereign will of God. According to their view, the Assyrian and Chaldean conquests was God's way of punishing the Jews for their sins. The prophet Isaiah, who lived to see the end of the Babylonian Exile, declared that Israel was God's “righteous servant,” purified through suffering and ready now to guide the world to the worship of God. Thus, the Jews who returned from the Babylonian Exile gained a faith in their destiny that would sustain and inspire them through the centuries.

Section 2 Review

Identify Judaism, Bible, Abraham, Moses, Torah

Main Ideas

1. Describe briefly the events leading to the establishment of the kingdom of Israel.
2. Which of Saul's successors ruled over a united kingdom? Why was the kingdom divided?
3. What role did Moses play in the development of Judaism?
4. How did the prophets influence Judaism?

Critical Thinking

Predicting Effects: Observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship was an important Jewish contribution to civilization. How might life in the United States be different if the need for rest from labor at least once a week were not generally accepted?
The decline of a great empire and the rise of a great religion happen slowly. The decline of the Roman Empire and the growth of Christianity both took centuries.

There are many reasons for the decline of the Roman Empire. Corruption and immorality among the Romans themselves weakened the empire. Powerful German tribes threatened to overrun the empire and drained Roman military resources.

As early as the 1st century A.D., the Roman historian Tacitus [tas’ə təs] sensed what might happen. An admirer of the republican form of government, Tacitus was extremely critical of the decline in Roman moral standards. To show how these were weakening the empire, he wrote a book called Germania that described the German tribes to the north. Almost as a warning to Rome, he noted the German drive for constant military action:

If their native state sinks into the sloth of prolonged peace and repose, many of its noble youths voluntarily seek those tribes which are waging some war, both because inaction is odious [hateful] to their race, and because they win renown [fame] more readily in the midst of peril, and cannot maintain a numerous following except by violence and war. . . . Nor are they as easily persuaded to plow the earth and to wait for the year’s produce as to challenge an enemy and earn the honor of wounds. Nay, they actually think it tame and stupid to acquire by the sweat of toil what they might win by their blood.

The Roman Empire survived for another 300 years. However, Tacitus’s description of the Germans helps us understand why those northern people were eventually able to conquer Rome.

In the year 800, a Germanic king named Charlemagne was proclaimed emperor of a new Roman Empire. He established a strong central government in much of Europe and represented the forces that would reshape western Christendom.
Reading Preview

In this chapter you will read about the rise of Christianity and the decline of Rome.

1. Christianity became a strong religion in the Roman world.
2. The Roman Empire collapsed under attacks from Germanic tribes.
3. The Church became a force in preserving civilization.
4. An alliance of popes and Franks helped western Christendom grow and prosper.

1 Christianity became a strong religion in the Roman world.

By the middle of the 4th century, the once powerful and prosperous Roman Empire showed unmistakable signs of decay. The government was riddled with corruption. Barbarian tribes broke through the imperial frontiers time after time. Heavy taxes burdened the citizens. City mobs shouted for bread as food production continued to drop off. Confronted with these severe problems, many Romans lost confidence in the ability of mere humans to deal with life. Certainly they lost
faith in their human leaders. The Romans turned more and more to religion, though some turned to philosophy—particularly Stoicism. This Greek philosophy taught that people should accept their fate with quiet courage.

In the search for solace and divine support, many Romans called upon their old gods—Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva—for help. However, people began to doubt these gods also, given the terrible conditions of the times. Thousands began to look at other Middle Eastern religions, such as Judaism and Christianity.

The interest in Christianity was of major significance in the history of Western civilization. Christianity was a religion that had been founded in Palestine, then a Roman province, in the 1st century A.D. This faith was based on the teachings of a Jew named Jesus.

**Christianity began with Jesus.**

Most of what is known about Jesus comes from the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament. The **New Testament** is the part of the Bible that contains the life and teachings of Jesus. The Gospels—named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were written in Greek many years after Jesus lived. According to the Gospels, **Jesus** was born in Bethlehem, a town in Judea, and reared in

**What’s In a Name?**

**Bethlehem** Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, is located a few miles south of Jerusalem. It is one of the world’s most famous towns. The name comes from the Hebrew words bet lechem, which mean “house of bread.”
the village of Nazareth in the Galilee, a district to the north. Around the age of 30, Jesus stopped working as a carpenter and began to travel throughout Palestine, preaching his doctrines. (See the map, page 178.)

The teachings of Jesus had their roots in Judaism. In keeping with Judaism, Jesus condemned violence and selfishness and taught doctrines based on human brotherhood. His teachings, his personal examples of love and caring, and his sacrificial death on the Cross provided the foundations of the Christian faith. Jesus and his followers declared him the Messiah, or "anointed one." (Messiah is a Hebrew word; in Greek the same word is Christ.) Most Jews, however, did not accept Jesus' claim that he was the Messiah—the leader divinely chosen to usher in the final judgment at the end of time.

The Gospels report that Jesus developed a group of faithful followers and attracted crowds of people wherever he went. Both Roman rulers and Jewish leaders reacted against Jesus' preaching. To the Romans, who feared political turmoil in Palestine, Jesus seemed to be encouraging overthrow of the government. To Jewish leaders, proclaiming oneself the Messiah was blasphemy [blas'fa më], or contempt for sacred teachings.

Historians differ as to exactly what happened in the later years of Jesus' life. However, around A.D. 33 Jesus was put to death by crucifixion on the order of Pontius Pilate [pon'shəs pil'ət], the Roman governor of Judea.

The New Testament relates how Jesus reappeared to his disciples following the Crucifixion and confirmed his teachings of eternal life. The disciples, as missionaries of the new faith, spread the news of the Resurrection and the teaching that Jesus was the Son of God, sent to earth to show the way to eternal life through faith and Christian living. Followers of these teachings called themselves "brethren," brothers of "the way." Later, believers in "the way" were called Christians and their faith became known as Christianity.

Paul spread the teachings of Jesus.

The most important missionary or apostle [ə pōs'-əl], was Paul, a well-educated Jew from Tarsus in Asia Minor. (See map, page 178.) As a young man, Paul believed that Christian teachings went against Judaism, and he took part in the persecutions of Christians. According to the Acts of the Apostles (9:1-5) in the New Testament, Paul was on his way to arrest any men or women whom he found to be followers of "the way," when he was suddenly surrounded by "a light from heaven." After this experience, Paul became dedicated to Christianity.

Immediately, Paul set out to bring Jesus' teachings to as many people as possible—to Jews and gentiles (non-Jews) alike. He became the "Apostle" to the gentiles. From about A.D. 37 until his death in the year 67, Paul journeyed to many cities around the eastern Mediterranean, spreading the Christian gospel. (Note Paul's journeys on the map on page 178.)

Paul's letters to the small Christian communities he visited strengthened Christian beliefs among the persecuted believers. To this day, the letters of this apostle are considered fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Paul's life and teachings helped Christianity grow from a small Jewish sect in Palestine to a world religion.

Christianity triumphed over persecution.

Officials of the Roman government generally al-
lowed various religions to exist in the empire as long as the people accepted government authority. The Christians, however, were critical of the immoral behavior so widespread in the Roman world. Moreover, they refused to obey many of the Roman laws—particularly that of emperor worship. Roman officials, therefore, looked upon Christians as enemies of the state.

As you learned in Chapter 6, the Roman emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome in A.D. 64 and persecuted them severely. He and other emperors, seeking excuses for bad conditions during their reigns, used the Christians as scapegoats. These emperors crucified Christians, threw them to wild beasts in crowded arenas, or had them burned alive.

The first widespread persecution of the Christians was carried on between A.D. 249 and 251. The last mass persecution was ordered in 303 and ended in 313. During these years Christians lived a hunted existence and were forced to practice their religion hidden in catacombs, which were underground rooms where tombs were placed.

Still, even with all the suffering, the religion could not be wiped out. In fact, the courage with which Christians met death inspired a Roman writer of the 2nd century to say that "the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church."

In 311 Christianity was made a legal religion in the eastern Roman Empire. About two years later, in the western empire, the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which legalized Christianity throughout the empire. In 395, as you read earlier in Chapter 6, the Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion.

**Christianity was strengthened by its appealing creed.**

There are several reasons for the successful growth of the early Christian Church. First, Christianity had the Bible, which was regarded as the Word of God. Second, Christians believed that Jesus was the Son of God, which gave believers a special closeness to God. Third, Christianity taught an appealing code of conduct based on love and held out the promise of eternal life for those who followed that code. Fourth, in addition to teaching general morals, the code also guided people in very practical ways—such as how to behave toward equals and superiors. Finally, Christianity gave people spiritual comfort in a troubled world filled with inequality and injustice.

Early Christians held different views of the substance of God and Christ. To resolve this conflict, the Emperor Constantine called the Council of Nicaea [nɪˈsɛə] in the year 325. This body put together a creed that said God and Christ were of the same substance.

All members of the council agreed to the Nicene [nɪˈsɛn] Creed except for a priest named Arius and a few of his followers. This group, called Arians, believed that God and Christ were of different substances. The Arians were therefore banished from the Church as heretics [ˈhərətiks], or persons who hold a belief different from the accepted view. However, many people continued to cling to Arian beliefs. As the years passed, the Nicenes and the Arians struggled for leadership in the Church. The Nicenes were finally victorious.

In addition to the Nicene Creed, the early Church developed an official book of sacred writings. The holy writings of the Jews, which the early Christians called the Old Testament, were combined with religious writings collected after
the death of Jesus. Twenty-seven of these collections, or books, were selected to make up what became the New Testament.

The letters of advice and encouragement that Paul wrote to Christians in various cities were also included in this book. In fact, these letters, or epistles, make up some of the most important books of the New Testament.

The official teaching, or theology, of the Christian Church was organized by a group of men known as the Church Fathers. Saint Jerome, one of the most famous of the Church Fathers, lived from about 340 to 420. From the Hebrew original, he made a Latin translation of the Bible called the Vulgate. Including both the Old and New Testaments, the Vulgate Bible is still the official version used in the Roman Catholic Church.

In 426 another Church Father, Saint Augustine [ə'gəstən], finished a work called The City of God. This book provided much of the foundation of Christian theology.

The Christian Church became very well organized.

At first, Christians met in small groups, often in their homes. As time went by and more people became Christians, a tighter organization developed, based on Roman governmental units.

Presbyters [prēz'bo tərz], later known as priests, were ordained, or officially consecrated, to conduct both services and the business of village churches. Several villages in a region made up a diocese [di'oir sēs'], which was placed under the direction of a bishop. Bishops were priests who administered the religious affairs of a church district.

A number of dioceses made up a province, which was placed under the authority of an archbishop. A group of provinces in turn made up a patriarchate. The title of patriarch [pā'trē ārk] was given to the bishop of a large city, such as Rome, Constantinople, or Alexandria. Gradually, in the western Roman world the Bishop of Rome assumed leadership as pope [pōp], from a Greek word meaning "father."

Church leadership in the West developed in Rome partly because Rome was the capital of the empire. As the emperors' authority declined in the western part of the empire, Roman bishops performed more and more governmental duties. Eventually the popes claimed supremacy of the Christian Church on the basis of the Petrine Theory. This theory said that the pope in Rome was the heir to Peter, the first Bishop of Rome.

Acceptance of the Petrine Theory contributed greatly to making the Church in Rome the center of western Christendom. By 600 Rome was in fact the capital of the western Church and the pope its head. The eastern Christian Church, however, rejected the Petrine Theory and refused to recognize the pope as its leader.

Section 1 Review

Identify Palestine, New Testament, Jesus, Messiah, Christianity, pope

Main Ideas
1. Why did the Roman rulers and Jewish authorities in Jerusalem disapprove of Jesus' teachings?
2. How did Paul the Apostle help spread the Christian religion?
3. Why were Christians persecuted more than followers of some other religions?
4. Name three reasons for the strength of the early Christian church.
5. Why did Rome become the capital city of western Christianity?

Critical Thinking Assessing Cause and Effect: Consider the following statement: Conditions in the Roman world helped strengthen Christianity. List reasons why you agree or disagree with this statement.