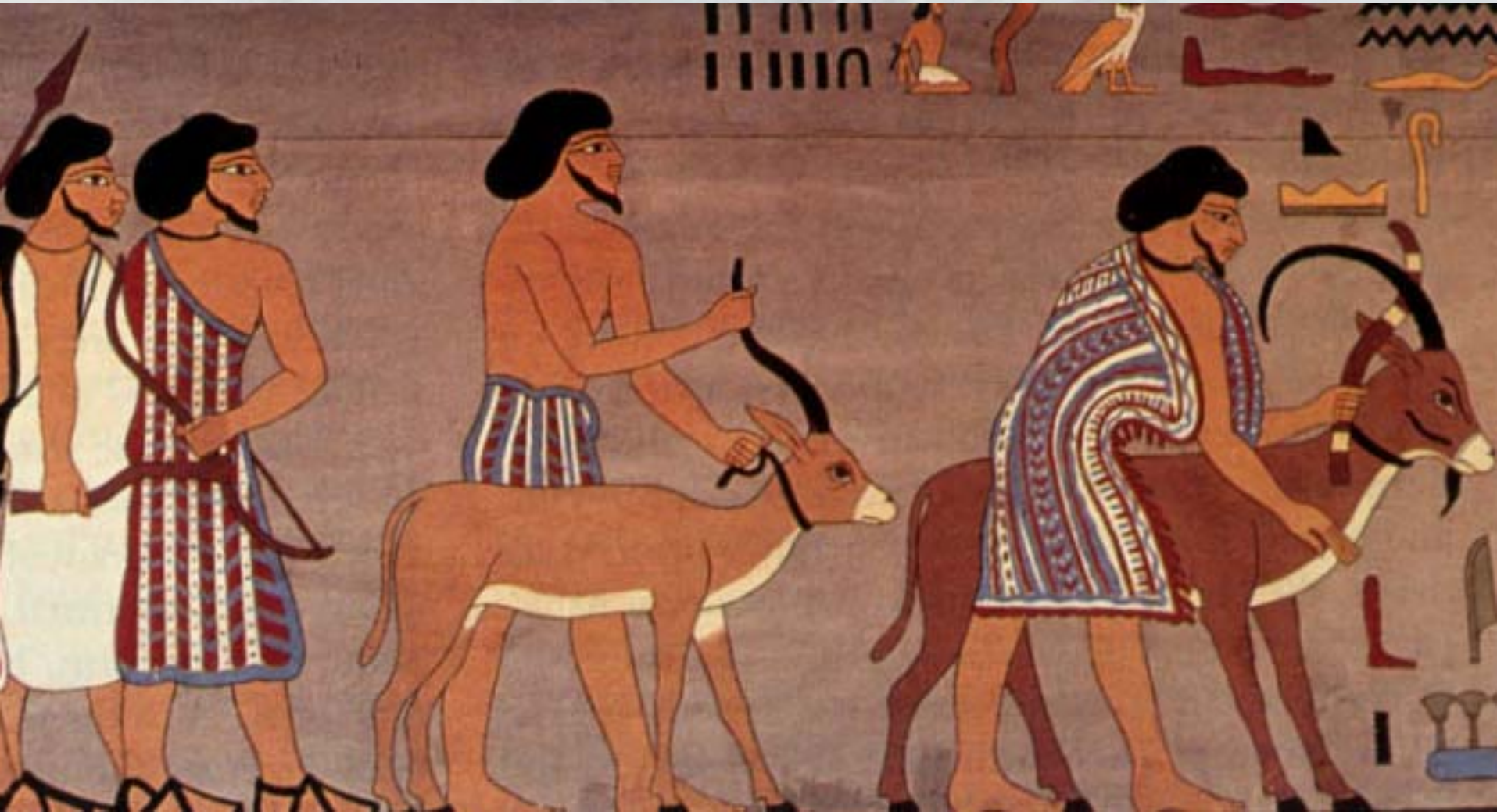


# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- the Hebrew Bible outlines a form of worship which is now called “**Ancient Israelite religion**”
  - based on the **Old Testament**
    - better, the **ancient Hebrew scriptures**
  - the Old Testament is actually a collation of texts written over a long period of time
    - ca. 1200-200 BCE
  - originally, there were more of these scriptures but many were lost over the ages

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- “ancient Israelite religion” as such is not a practiced anywhere in the world today
  - especially the specific animal sacrifices and detailed rituals laid out in Leviticus
  - the reason is simple: the Temple in Jerusalem no longer exists
  - ancient Israelite religion has, however, spawned three major world faiths today: modern Judaism, Christianity and Islam



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- in antiquity, the Old Testament was just one of many religions in the larger world of the Ancient Near East
  - these other religions also recorded their myths and ceremonies in scriptures of their own
  - e.g. the **Canaanites (Canaan)** who were close neighbors and relatives of the Hebrews
    - archaeologists have recovered a number of Canaanites texts which inform our understanding of the Old Testament in its larger cultural context

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- why did the particular texts which now make up the Old Testament survive when others didn't?
  - there is no common theme to the books of the Old Testament:
    - creation stories (Genesis)
    - historical chronicles (First and Second Kings)
    - law codes and religious manuals (Leviticus)
    - wisdom literature (Proverbs)
    - genealogies (Numbers)

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- there is no common theme to the books of the Old Testament:
  - hymns (Psalms)
  - romances (Ruth)
  - heroic epic (Daniel)
  - erotic poetry (Song of Songs)
- written in a wide variety of forms: from song to common prose
- clearly, the differences in these texts make it very difficult to ascribe them to a single author

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- so what selective force produced this peculiar body of texts?
  - it must have been random, to some extent
- best answer: the **Babylonian Captivity** (586-537 BCE)



# Timeline of Ancient Israel

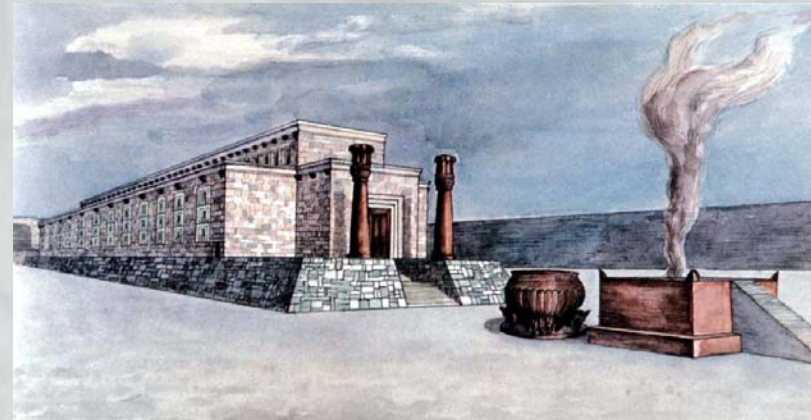
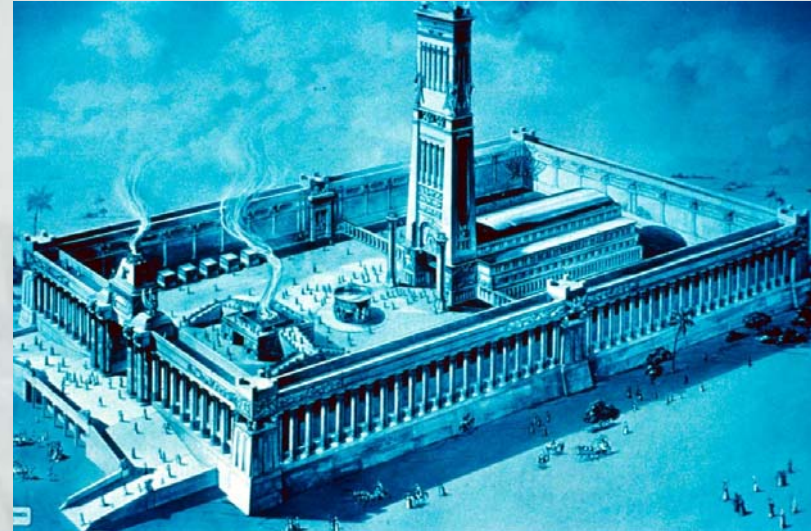
- ca. 1950 BCE Abraham migrates from Ur to Palestine
- 1600-1350 Hebrew tribes in Egypt (“Egyptian Captivity”)
- 1350-1300 Exodus: Moses leads Hebrews back to Palestine
- 1300-1020 Rules of Judges
  
- 1020-1005 Union of Hebrew Tribes under Saul
- 1005-965 Reign of David
- 965-925 Reign of Solomon; Construction of First Temple
- ca. 925 Division into Two Kingdom: Israel (N) and Judea (S)
- 722 Assyrians capture/enslave Israel
- 586 Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar defeat Judeans
- 586-537 Babylonian Captivity**
- 537 Cyrus restores Hebrews to Palestine; Second Temple
  
- 70 CE Roman General Titus destroys the Second Temple



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- the Hebrews betrayed **Nebuchadnezzar**, the King of Babylon (r. 605-562 BCE)
  - the Sack of Jerusalem (586 BCE)
  - this was followed by the destruction of the **First Temple** and the Babylonian Captivity



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- in the course of this siege, someone (or some ones) rescued certain documents
- during the Babylonian Captivity, Hebrew religion evolved dramatically
  - from a ritual-based belief system to one centered on text
  - two important consequences:
    - morality superceded ceremony
    - written texts became sacred and “immutable”

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## INTRODUCTION: THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- the Babylonian Captivity ended in 537 BCE, when the Persian King Cyrus returned the Jews to their homeland
  - the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt
    - the so-called Second Temple
- but the Hebrew religion had been forever changed
  - now it was a mixture of reading text and performing ritual



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- there is now a consensus among historians: the best way to explain the different “voices” of the Bible is that they come from different sources originally
  - e.g. **Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy**
  - actually, a quilt composed of older texts which were stitched together at some later date into a (semi-)coherent narrative
    - called a “**composite text**,” cf. Homeric epic



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- these different sources are not so much discrete authors as distinct “voices”
  - better, different “schools of thought”
  - and, no doubt, they were originally “oral texts”
    - which were revised several times both before and after being written down
    - cf. Homer again

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- thus, it's impossible to date the different texts of the Bible firmly
  - and relative dating is possible only when one text cites another, as when Lamentations cites Job
  - thus, Lamentations — or that passage — must have been composed later than Job

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- the distinct voices are visible in the different attitudes of various texts
  - e.g. the two accounts of creation
    - Genesis 1:1 - 2:3: *how* God created man, i.e. “in his own image”
    - Genesis 2:4 (and on): *what* God used to create man, i.e. “the dust of the earth” (pun on “Adam”)
  - n.b. these different accounts are not incompatible, but not entirely coherent either
  - conclusion: these were once different texts

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

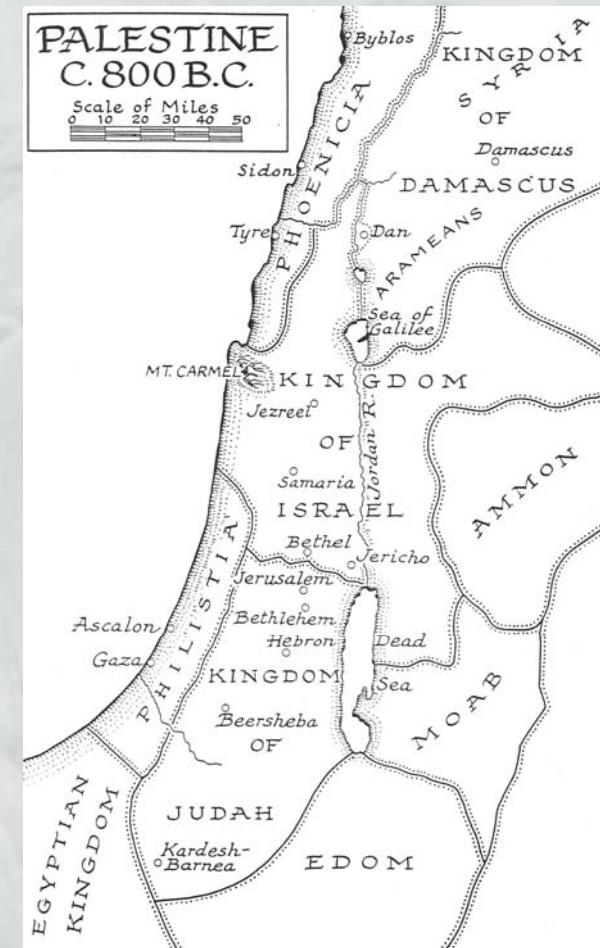
- let's look at the distinct “voices” visible in the Pentateuch
  - biblical scholars have detected at least four and have given them the following designations: J, E, P, D



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **J**, or the Jahwehist
  - stands for **Jahweh (JHWH)**
    - burning bush (Exodus 3:2)
    - “He who causes to exist”
      - or “He who always exists”
  - stands for **Judea (Judah)**
    - southern part of Holy Lands
    - Judean places are central in J
    - vs. Israel (the northern part of Holy Lands)



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **J, or the Jahwehist**
  - very old, ca. 900 BCE
    - but it was probably revised a number of times
- **vision of God in J: relatively simple**
  - God appears, speaks, leaves
  - few discussions with humans
    - no substantive explanations
    - no angels in attendance

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **J, or the Jahwehist**
  - the name of God varies
    - “God of my father” (Gen. 32:9), i.e. Abraham
      - thus, a family-oriented, “localized” designation
  - also some of the best reading in the Pentateuch
    - Adam and Eve, Joseph, Moses, etc.
    - much of Exodus, especially the burning bush

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **J, or the Jahwehist**
  - also, J assumes that scripture has the duty to explain the human and natural world
    - Tower of Babel: why there are different languages
    - Sodom and Gomorrah: why there are salt pillars south of the Dead Sea
    - Adam and Eve: why women feel pain during birth and hate snakes



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **J, or the Jahwehist**
  - theme of J: the Israelites will one day triumph over all mankind
    - clearly, no knowledge of the Fall of Israel to the Assyrians (722 BCE)
    - or the Babylonian Captivity
  - all in all, J is essentially optimistic
    - asserts not only that the Israelites will eventually triumph, but that by studying God and the past it's possible to understand everything in the world
    - cf. Herodotus

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **E**, or the Elohist
  - stands for **Elohim**
    - the Semitic root \**el-* (“god”), cf. IE roots
      - cf. Beth-el, Allah
  - stands for **Ephraim** (= Israel)
    - to judge from the prominence of places in the northern part of the Holy Lands (vs. Judea), E was probably written in Israel

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **E, or the Elohist**
  - in E, manifestations of God are more complicated than those in J
    - God speaks longer, sometimes in dialogue
    - uses angels and dreams to communicate with men
  - but this does not mean J is older than E
    - they are probably roughly contemporaneous
    - at times, J appears to be responding to E
  - J and E are distinguished by their different perspectives on God, history and geography

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **E, or the Elohist**
  - ultimately, E lost this battle of perspectives
    - because Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians
  - thus, the preservation of the text of E had to be entrusted to the Jews living in Judea
  - the result was that E ended up with considerably less “stage time” than J in the Pentateuch



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **E**, or the Elohist
  - and because E arose in the northern part of Hebrew lands, it was more exposed to Canaanite culture
    - thus, E calls God **El** (“God”)
      - the same name used for the principal Canaanite deity
    - n.b. E does *not* use **Ba’al** (“Lord”)
      - Ba’al is the son of El in Canaanite myth
      - Ba’al replaced his father at the center of Canaanite religion in the late second millennium BCE
      - this suggests that E is very old, though it could be a false archaism to give E a traditional feel, cf. thou/thee

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **P**, or the Priestly Tradition
  - i.e. the cultic sector of ancient Hebrew society
  - P is one of the easier “voices” to identify
    - P has a clear agenda: to promote the priesthood!
  - P describes ritual in detail
    - e.g., treatments for gruesome medical conditions, cf. the long passage on pustulous wounds (Lev. 13)
    - but rarely explains the reasons underlying a practice, e.g. circumcision
    - it’s possible the author/s of P didn’t know why

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **P**, or the Priestly Tradition
  - largely responsible for the laws in Leviticus: “a complex forest of detail”
    - R.L. Fox: “a jungle of lists and rules”
    - mainly dietary and sexual restrictions
  - purpose of these laws: to ensure the purity of Hebrew society
    - but what’s the sense behind the particulars?
    - why can a Hebrew eat locusts but not lobsters?

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **P**, or the Priestly Tradition
  - Mary Douglas’ thesis: the laws of Leviticus depends on “**realms of existence**”
    - God created land, sea, and sky as inviolate
    - thus, creatures which straddle them are “**abominations**”
      - e.g. lobsters have legs but live in the sea, whereas locusts live on land where God originally put legged creatures
      - the same for birds of prey: they are creatures of the sky but they stride (vs. hopping like good and godly birds)



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **P**, or the Priestly Tradition
  - Mary Douglas’ theory of “realms of existence” also explains other restrictions which derive from P
    - not to wear clothing of mixed fabric (Lev. 19:19)
      - cf. the restriction against transvestism (Deut. 22:5)
    - not to sow a field with different types of grain or seed (Lev. 19:19)

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **P**, or the Priestly Tradition
  - sexual restrictions can also be explained by the theory of “realms of existence”
    - holy men cannot have sex with a woman who is menstruating: blood would then mix with semen
    - a priest cannot marry a widow, a divorcée or a prostitute
      - his semen would then end up in a place where other men’s semen had been deposited
    - explains the injunction against male homosexuality
      - n.b. no restriction against lesbianism

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **P**, or the Priestly Tradition
  - P is responsible for “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...” (Gen. 1:1)
    - n.b. stress on the holiness of the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2-3: “And God blessed the seventh day.”)
    - with a focus on ritual, as in most of Leviticus
  - P is also responsible for the story of the flood and God’s covenant with Noah (Gen. 9)
    - as well as the numerous genealogies of Genesis
    - “Priests can be pretty boring!”

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **P**, or the Priestly Tradition
  - the dating of P was once felt to be fairly secure
    - i.e. after the Babylonian Captivity: written in the wake of the restoration of the Priesthood to Jerusalem and the building of the Second Temple
  - but a small silver scroll was discovered with the **Priestly Blessing** on it (Num. 6:24-26)
    - “May the Lord bless you and keep you...”
    - the scroll dates to ca. pre-600 BCE!
      - so at least some part of the “Priestly Tradition” must go back to before the Babylonian Captivity



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **D**, or the Deuteronomist
  - mostly Deuteronomy
    - very little in the rest of the Pentateuch, especially Genesis
  - primary theme of D: the Hebrews' sins will one day land them in hot water with God who will then allow the fall of their state along with their enslavement to heathen outsiders as punishment

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **D**, or the Deuteronomist
  - clearly the author of D knew about the Fall of Israel to the Assyrians (722 BCE)
    - perhaps also the Babylonian Captivity
  - secondary theme of D: the centrality of the Temple in Jerusalem
    - to D, the Jerusalem Temple is the *only* valid site for Hebrew worship

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **D**, or the Deuteronomist
  - one of the most eloquent and refined pieces of writing in the Bible
    - clearly the work of a well-trained, literate speaker
      - a classic type: the haranguing orator who dreams of changing his people through the sheer power and beauty of the spoken word
    - no doubt, the author of D was a person trained as a scholar, someone who had studied Jewish histories and knew how to revise and re-use them
      - and how to speak from behind the mask of “**Moses**” and other former biblical greats

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **D**, or the Deuteronomist
  - dating of D: unique evidence for its writing during the reign of **Josiah** (ca. 640-625 BCE), when workers renovating the Temple dug up the text of an unknown law-code of “Moses”
    - this law-code specifically forbade certain practices that the Israelites had used before their fall in 722
    - it also played into Josiah’s inclination to support the Temple in Jerusalem as a house of worship over other religious sites



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE TEXTS OF THE BIBLE

- **D**, or the Deuteronomist
  - dating of D: unique evidence for its writing during the reign of **Josiah** (ca. 640-625 BCE), when workers renovating the Temple dug up the text of an unknown law-code of “Moses”
    - both the diagnosis of sins as leading to punishment and the centrality of the Temple would have looked prophetic after 586 and Nebuchadnezzar’s siege
    - thus, were passages that “predict” the Babylonian Captivity added later to make D look even better?

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE EVOLUTION OF MONOTHEISM

- on the basis of this evidence alone, it's possible to reconstruct the rough contours of the evolution of Hebrew monotheism
  - clearly it was a long and complicated process
  - it took many years to figure out how to make monotheism work, particularly the details
    - why does God punish His chosen people, especially when He's not being challenged by rival deities?
    - what does He want? more sheep?
    - and where's the *do ut des* (“I give so you'll give”)?

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE EVOLUTION OF MONOTHEISM

- earliest (known) phase: nomadic patriarchs, e.g. Abraham, Jacob
  - God is a “local” deity, e.g. “God of my father”
    - or in Israel El
    - cf. other names seen in early biblical passages
      - El-elyom (“God on high”)
      - El-shaddai (“God of the mountains”)
      - El-roi (“God visible”)
      - El-olam (“God everlasting”)
    - n.b. no mention of God as the sole divine being
      - only that He’s special to Canaan and Abraham’s family

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE EVOLUTION OF MONOTHEISM

- first step toward monotheism:  
**henotheism**
  - “belief in one god (among many gods)”
    - i.e. putting one’s trust in a single deity, without disavowing the existence of others
      - cf. the First Commandment (an early text!): “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”
    - God is predominant, but not the only god in the universe
      - but clearly the groundwork has been laid for a barter system in which morality equals salvation



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE EVOLUTION OF MONOTHEISM

- the next step: **monolatry**
  - “worship of a single god”
  - other gods are acknowledged to exist, but they are irrelevant because they do not have real power or influence
  - cf. Hosea 13:4: “Thou shalt know no god but me.”

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE EVOLUTION OF MONOTHEISM

- the final step: full-blown **monotheism**
  - not expressed as such in the Bible in texts datable to before the Babylonian Captivity
    - though the idea may have begun to circulate as early as 750 BCE
  - cf. **Deutero-Isaiah** (“Second Isaiah,” Chapters 40-66 of the Book of Isaiah):

“I am the first and the last; beside me there is no god ... Is there any god beside me? There is no other rock; I know not one.”  
(Isaiah 44:6-8)

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## THE EVOLUTION OF MONOTHEISM

- cf. the age in which full-blown monotheism developed among the Hebrews
  - the Greeks: Homer, democracy, history, drama, the Classical Age
  - India and China: Confucius, Buddha
- clearly, it was a period of intellectual unrest and revolution across the globe
  - an age of both brilliance and stress!

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## CONCLUSION: ISRAEL AND CANAAN

- in the same way “conservative” Greeks in the Classical Age rejected and feared philosophy, many ancient Israelites were suspicious of and balked at monotheism
  - thus, the many tirades in the Bible — or **jeremiads** (“long lamentations”) — against those who were worshiping Ba’al
    - actually they were “relapsing” into traditional religious forms in their day
    - Ba’al worshipers were “conservatives” back then



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## CONCLUSION: ISRAEL AND CANAAN

- evidence of this stress in ancient Israel:  
presence of ***asherahs***
  - “a post or tree next to an altar”
  - Canaanite myth: **Asherah** is the wife of El

Mesopotamian  
cylinder seal  
depicting a  
sacred tree



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## CONCLUSION: ISRAEL AND CANAAN

- the Hebrew prophets' intense detestation of *asherahs* is clearer now
  - an *asherah* was a polytheistic symbol!

Mesopotamian  
cylinder seal  
depicting a  
sacred tree



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## CONCLUSION: ISRAEL AND CANAAN

- small offering found outside Jerusalem:  
“Blessed by Jahweh, and his wife Asherah”  
– a klutzy attempt by some “little guy” to flatter Jahweh by giving him the Canaanite El’s wife

Mesopotamian  
cylinder seal  
depicting a  
sacred tree



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## CONCLUSION: ISRAEL AND CANAAN

- the historical data show that the rise of monotheism was in actuality a long and hard-fought battle for the hearts and mind of the ancient Israelite people
  - yet another fight within a society over what-really-happened-in-the-past



# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS AUTHORS

## CONCLUSION: ISRAEL AND CANAAN

- it also shows that ancient Israelite religion and the Bible are deeply rooted in ancient Near Eastern culture
  - the monotheists changed their world slowly and with great difficulty
  - and, like all “great men,” they eventually triumphed over adversity, though not without inflicting their share of brutality and bloodshed