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Hebrew Heritage Learning Center

Online Magazine

In this issue of the Online Magazine we will briefly look at the most important figures in the biblical narrative, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

—David D. Mahoney

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1. The Patriarchs

The concept of the *patriarchs* is an important one in both Judaism and Christianity. Patriarch means “father,” but usually used in reference to a particularly significant progenitor; such as the founder of a family or race. The Eastern Orthodox Church even uses it as a title for their leading bishop; and in the Roman tradition the lead bishop is known as the Pope, which also means “father” in Latin.

From the beginning of the Bible, one element that is most significant is lineage. Genealogies are an important part of the Bible and arguably the most fundamental to its message. On a very basic level, human beings (all human beings) are special and have the ability to relate to the Creator in a way that other entities do not (such as animals) simply because they are descended from Adam, the first human, the first Patriarch. On a more defined level, the status of certain individuals of quality throughout the biblical narrative was determined by their lineage, from whom they were descended. Ostensibly, Noah was chosen because he was descended from Seth. Of course, he had to be virtuous, but then why wasn't a virtuous man chosen from Cain's lineage to survive the Flood? So was Noah chosen because he was virtuous, or because he was a virtuous child of Seth? Further, was he virtuous because he chose to be or because he was a descendent of Seth? No one will probably ever be able to answer these questions with certainty. What is certain is that in the Bible it matters what family or race you are born into.

In our present society that tends to struggle for egalitarianism, such an emphasis on pedigree could be (and often is) viewed as a part of an ancient and barbaric world ruled by the whims of monarchs and priests. Nonetheless, what lineage we were born into was completely out of our choosing, and completely significant. In some way it defines who we are, and to a certain degree what we are able to accomplish in this world. Among much else, it determines what kind of society and therefore what values a young person will be compelled to embrace. Such influence is created by ancestors who carry extraordinary influence. The founders of America, for instance, are even called the “Founding Fathers,” because of their significant contributions to the creation of the United States of America. This kind of influence is what the biblical patriarchs contributed in the view of the religions of Judaism and Christianity.

Moreover, the most significant patriarchs are the three men known as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. According to the Bible and tradition, these three men founded the religion of Judaism as well as being the physical progenitors of the Arab and Jewish ethnicities, as well as many other peoples mostly untraceable. They are viewed as prophets and priests in their own right. Although, according to tradition, they all learned from Noah, Shem, and Eber (their ancestors), it was they who pioneered a new spiritual way of life and practice in worshipping the One Creator of the universe. For this, they are recognized as *the* Patriarchs within Judaism and Christianity. They are the most important persons in the whole Bible.

One would go a long way in comprehending the Bible and the religions it supports by studying the lives of these three men recorded in the first book, called Genesis. Their lives, their deeds, and the land and relationships they acquired shaped the course of the religion they defined and the nations they established; and hence set in motion a set values and beliefs that still holds a continuing influence in the world today.

2. Patriarch Biography: Abraham

Among the three most significant patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,—Abraham is at the top, being the father of Isaac, and the grandfather of Jacob. It is with Abraham that the Creator made his everlasting covenant of friendship. The promise the Creator made with him was to make him the father of many nations (Genesis 17:4-5).

Abraham is depicted in the Bible as a man who was fair and just, but not without his faults. He lied about his wife, Sarah, that she was his sister and thus put her life in peril. Though not perfect, God chose him because he kept all his commandments (Genesis 26:1-5). He raised his children to fear the Creator of the universe rather than idols, stars, or animals, which he knew only to be creations of a singular Deity.

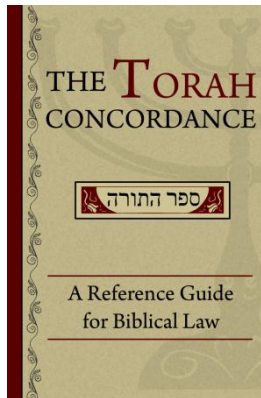
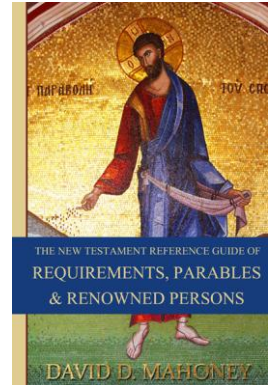
There are traditions told of Abraham, when he lived with his father in the land of the Chaldeans who worshipped idols and were astrologers. The stories tell of a young man who searched for meaning in the idols and the sun and stars, but ultimately reasoned that they could only be parts of God's creation, extensions of the creative power of a singular God. In this way, monotheism was born in a world that embraced polytheism. In the biblical tradition, this is Abraham's one resounding contribution to the world.

Since Abraham is the grandfather of Jacob (Israel), he is the ancestor of the Jewish people (as well as many other Israelite tribes now lost in history, having been mixed with many other nations). Being the father of Ishmael, he is also the ancestor of the Arabs. Finally, the Bible states that he married a third woman after Sarah had died, named Keturah, and begot more children who were sent to the East. So if the accounts be true, Abraham is not only the founder of the monotheistic religion, but also the progenitor of many ethnicities, some known and some unknown.

3. Products

The New Testament Reference Guide of Requirements, Parables & Renowned Persons carefully documents the essential teachings of the New Testament and the major players and books of the earliest centuries of Church history.

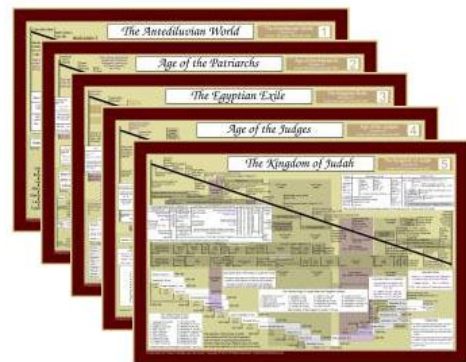
ISBN: 978-1479115273



The Torah Concordance: A Reference Guide for Biblical Law is indispensable for studying the commandments of the Old Testament. It contains a catalog of all commands put upon the people of Israel in the first five books of the Bible. For ease of use, the laws have been arranged under relevant categories and subheadings, complete with biblical references.

ISBN: 978-1479128242

The Chronology of the Hebrew Bible Charts, gloss printed on 17x11 inch poster stock, detail each successive period of the Old Testament in chronological order, with dates indicating the year from creation. They can be purchased as a set or individually.



**For more information on these products or to purchase, please visit the *Hebrew Heritage Learning Center* website:
www.HHLC.info**

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