

Hebrew and mesopotamia

Religion



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The Jews lived to preserve their culture; that essentially represented the fundamental goal of life to the Jews. The Jews observed the decadence of the Sumerians as a cause of cultural diffusion, and wanted to make sure that same thing would not happen to them. Eventually, the Jews did become vulnerable to cultural diffusion around the 4th century CE when the Greek-Macedonians from the West came; the great and advanced Greek culture was adopted by the Jews, and as a result, the Greeks Hellenized the Jews.

The Hellenized Jews and Greeks eventually translated the Torah and the Tanakh from the Hebrew language, to Greek. Before the Greeks, the Jews resisted cultural diffusion between many civilizations. The Jews culturally diffused with the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, and the Persians religiously, culturally, and politically, as did the Hebrews also represent continuity with these civilizations. The Sumerians culturally diffused and represented continuity religiously, culturally, and politically with the Jews.

First, cultural diffusion occurs with the story of Abraham, a Hebrew patriarch and the founder of Judaism, who originates from the city of Ur in Sumer. Around 2200 BCE, during the invasions among the Sumerian city-states, Abraham believes his Sumerian God had abandoned him, so he abandoned the Sumerian Gods, and founded Judaism. This accounts for the continuity and parallels between the Sumerians and the Hebrews. A second one of these instances of continuity occurs in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh and the Flood story in the Genesis.

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the hero Utnapishtim tells the great king Gilgamesh of how he built a boat and survived a great flood that lasted for six days and

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six nights. In the Genesis story of "Noah's Ark", God tells Noah to build an ark and take all the animals on board, for he wants to flood the Hebrews for forty days, to teach them to be loyal to their God. In both stories, the great flood happens, and Utnapishtim and Noah build boats to be safe from the ravaging waters; also, in both stories, the destruction of human kind happens.

The Hebrews must have adapted the Epic of Gilgamesh, before writing "Noah's Ark". Lastly, around 1300 BCE, the twelve Jewish tribes fought over territory with one another; though, when these disputes stopped, and the Jews abandoned this tribal government structure, they adapted to a monarchy like the Sumerians', a type of government which unified the twelve tribes. The Babylonians represent continuity and cultural diffusion culturally and religiously with the Jews. First, the Code of Hammurabi and the Ten Commandments represent cultural continuity and cultural diffusion.

The Code of Hammurabi, the laws that dictated the lines along with the Babylonians should live, influenced the Hebrews in the creation of the Ten Commandments. In the Code of Hammurabi, the Babylonians utilized the concept of *lex talionis*, or the law of retaliation equal to offense; the Hebrews used this same concept in the creation of the Ten Commandments. The Hebrew priest wrote the Ten Commandments on steles; the Babylonians first found these steles, and wrote the Code of Hammurabi on them. The Ten Commandments paralleled the purpose of the Code of Hammurabi: to explain the relationship between man and God.

Just as how Hammurabi climbed a mountain and received the Code of Hammurabi from the Babylonian chief God, Marduk, Moses climbed Mount

Sinai, encountered God, and received the Ten Commandments. Second, Lilith the Goddess of the Euphrates River in Babylonian religion, represented continuity from the Babylonians to the Jews; the Jews however invoked the Goddess Lilith with a different meaning from the Babylonians. The Assyrians represented cultural diffusion and continuity with the Jews politically and culturally.

First, in the 7th century BCE, the Assyrians arose, and conquered the Kingdom of Israel, representing cultural diffusion; the Assyrian rulers used a reign terror, or ruled by fear, which ultimately led to their military success. The Assyrians did not conquer the Kingdom of Judah, for they agreed to pay tribute. Second, the Assyrians developed an efficient imperial government, and constructed magnificent cities; the Assyrians built a city Nineveh in Babylon, and preserved many Sumerian books and literature in huge libraries there, representing continuity from Sumerian culture to Assyrian culture.

Lastly, the Assyrians constructed roads and highways, which acted as agents of cultural diffusion, and allowed for contact with other peoples, such as the Hebrews. The Jews and the Neo-Babylonians culturally diffused and participated in continuity of religious, cultural, and political ideas with the Jews. First, the Assyrian Empire, who previously conquered the Jews, fell to King Nebuchadnezzar of the Neo-Babylonians.

Nebuchadnezzar strongly disliked the Jews, and did not allow them religious tolerance, leading to the Babylonian Captivity. In this period in the 6th century BCE, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem, and enslaved the Jews in Babylon. Second, during the Babylonian Captivity,

Nebuchadnezzar built a magnificent palace and ziggurat in Babylon, decorated with blue tile; this represents continuity from the Sumerians, who first built ziggurats as temples of worship, and frequently traded and used blue tiles in their art.

Lastly, during the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews represented continuity in the fact that they wrote down stories in the Torah, and Jewish priests ritualized common Jewish worship, such as Passover and Seder. The fact that the Torah, compiled in this setting, has been passed down in writing until present day, and that the Jews were able to preserve their culture and religion, and resisted cultural diffusion during the captivity demonstrate the continuity of the Jews until present day.

The Persians represented cultural diffusion and continuity with the Jews religiously, politically, and culturally. First, Cyrus the Great of the Persians eventually conquered the Neo-Babylonians in 550 BCE, and expands the Jewish empire, representing cultural diffusion. He believes in religious tolerance, and thus frees the Jews from their captivity, and allows the Jews to return home and practice their religion freely, as long as they obey him; Cyrus the Great also allows the Jews to build the Second Temple of Jerusalem.

Second, the Persians build the first main road in the Mesopotamian region, which allowed for the transfer of information and for cultural diffusion. Lastly, a wise man named Zoroaster founded the religion Zoroastrianism. He saw the force of light, good as Ahura Mazda, and the force of dark, bad as Angra Mainya. The Jews favored this religion, and liked that there was a counterforce which attempted to undermine God's will, so they incorporated

that idea into Judaism, and called the bad force Satan. This represents syncretism, or religious cultural diffusion between Zoroastrianism and Judaism.

The Jews culturally diffused with the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, and Persians and Zoroastrians religiously, culturally, and politically, as did the Jews use ideas from these civilizations. The Jews fulfilled the purpose of their life, to resist cultural diffusion and maintain their own culture and religion, until the 4th century CE at the time of the Greek-Macedonian invasion. The Greek-Macedonians eventually lured the Jews into combining ideas and culturally diffusing, with their highly intellectual and great civilization from the West.

Eventually, the Greeks Hellenized the Jews, and the Hellenized Jews translated the Torah, written during the Babylonian Captivity, and the Tanakh from Hebrew, to Greek. The Jews were remarkable in the fact that they resisted cultural diffusion even during times of invasion, as in the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian conquests. The Jews have been remembered for their great advancements and contributions, most profoundly, the Hebrew Bible that has been compiled from the Torah and the Tanakh.