

Chapter

1

The Early Israelites

Adapting to a Changing World

investigate

- How did our ancestors adapt to their new surroundings?
- What made it possible for them to maintain their religious identities?
- How have their lives influenced ours?

Key Words and Places

Judges	Babylonian Kingdom
Philistines	Exile
Jerusalem	Prophets
Holy Temple	Diaspora
Israel	Persians
Judah	Second Temple
Assyria	



The BIG Picture

Every year, when you enter a new grade, your life changes. You have new teachers, classmates, subjects, and lunch choices, maybe even a new school. To adjust, you may need to change. You may need to become more disciplined in studying, or be less picky about what you eat, or wake up earlier to get to school on time.

Just like individuals, communities often face the need to change. In fact, Jewish history is filled with such situations. It began with our ancestors. At first, local chieftains led the Israelites. When they could no longer provide adequate leadership, the Israelites united under a king. Over time, the Israelite kingdom was built, split in two, and destroyed. Many Israelites were forced out of our homeland. Some returned to rebuild it, while others continued to live in foreign lands.

But despite the numerous adaptations, our ancestors maintained their core religious beliefs and identities. While other ancient peoples were conquered, absorbed into the larger culture, and disappeared, the Israelites continued to survive and thrive. How the Jewish people continue to adapt and flourish is what this book is all about.

1200–1050 BCE

- Settlement of Canaan by Israelites, according to Bible

about 950 BCE

- First Temple built

928 BCE

- Kingdom of Israel divided into two minisates: Israel and Judah

776 BCE

- World History: First Olympic Games held in Greece

Time to Unite?

Early Israelite society was tribal. A village could be made up of a single clan, and a group of clans formed a tribe. Local judges, or chieftains, ruled over the tribes. Often, one judge had authority over a single tribe. Judges were responsible for settling disputes between people and also led their tribes in times of war.

But the neighboring Philistines developed superior military technology, such as iron-spoke chariots, and began pushing into Israelite territory. The Israelites needed a more centralized leadership than the local judges could provide. They needed one leader who could unite them in their fight for survival.

And so, the Bible tells us, at God's command, Saul was anointed the first king of Israel. But Saul was more like a tribal chief than a king. The territory he controlled was not very large and he had no palace or capital city. Although he was a great warrior, Saul was unable to unite the Israelites.



722 BCE

• Northern kingdom of Israel destroyed by Assyrians

586 BCE

• Judah defeated by Babylonians; Jerusalem and Temple burned to the ground

539 BCE

• Babylonian Empire falls to Persians

about 516 BCE

• Second Temple dedicated in Jerusalem

445 BCE

• Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem; helps Jews rebuild Judah