



ISRAEL'S IMPACT ON MODERN SOCIETY

Without saying that the Jewish religion is the only one that has provided the following benefits, one can confidently state that the Jewish religion has, through Christianity, greatly impacted western civilization in several different ways:

(1) Ethical values

- a. When Jesus gave the Golden Rule as one of the two greatest commandments, He was simply quoting an Old Testament verse (Leviticus 19.18). This background in the Old Testament was carried over into the early Christian era, when the early church decided to include the Old Testament scriptures in the canon.
- b. One can see how ethics has impacted societies by looking at the behavior of various nations and tribes before they became Christian.

(2) Emphasis on covenants

- a. The Bible records several covenants that Yahweh made: with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.
- b. Much later on in history, during the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin and his followers emphasized these covenants when creating their own theology. They used covenants to form their own churches, and they then turned this emphasis on covenants to the political realm. They insisted that any government should be established by a covenant, just like the ancient Israelite government was.

(3) Split between religious and political authority

- a. Tends to keep both of the two separate spheres weaker, instead of combining both roles into one office, or to be held by one person/family.
- b. Although some people mistakenly believe that the “biblical” form of government is monarchy, the formation of the Israelite monarchy came some 400 years after the Exodus from Egypt. In fact, the prophet Samuel (I Sam 8) tried to convince the Israelites *not* to demand a king, telling them all the bad things kings would do. The record in the Old Testament of the *Israelite* kings is pretty mixed, at best.
- c. Echoing the Old Testament prophets confronting Israelite kings, the New Testament saw Jesus fight the authority of the priests, lawyers, and scribes of his day. Early Christians in the Roman empire were quick to acknowledge the Roman emperors as legitimate political rulers, but were still quick to confront them when the rulers did wrong
- d. This eventually led to the struggle for religious freedom during the Protestant Reformation, which evolved into the struggle for religious toleration (for everyone)