

The Ancient Semitic Culture of the Hebrews

This is *Part 2 of Increasing Your Accuracy in Bible Reading*. **The First BHC Linguistic Model** states: "A word is a symbol or group of symbols with an attached bundle of associations, and those associations are a product of the Source's culture, historical time period, geographical location, and personal experiences."

- "**Culture**" is a comprehensive worldview of a large human collective: **kingdom, empire, nation, or religion**.
- Cultures do not spell everything out literally; they leave much to inference. But at the foundational level **a culture defines who is a member and how members are to relate to each other**.
- Cultures also define **how members are to relate to outsiders**.

The following information is linked to the book, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions* by the Late William Robertson Smith, Edited by Harry M. Orlinsky (pp. 1, 15, 28). Dr. Ike Tension considered Dr. Orlinsky a top scholar in **the field of the ancient culture of the Hebrew speaking peoples**.

Cultures of the Semitic People

The cultures of the Semitic peoples include the following kindred nations: **Arabs, Phoenicians, Aramaeans, Babylonians, Assyrians, and the Hebrews**. Among these peoples three of the great faiths of the world had their origin: **Judaism, Christianity, and Islam**. However, it must be clearly understood, *that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam did not grow up in and share cultures of a Semitic origin, but they must all trace their origin back to it.*

- The fundamental principle and basic presupposition of Semitic religion is **the solidarity of the community not the family but the clan or tribe which is the elemental social unit**.
- The primary religious fact is **the relationship of the god and his worshippers**.
- **Together they form an organic society, a single community of kinship**.
- **The only bond which has binding force in the community is blood. It unites men into a single social and cohesive whole**. One blood flows through the veins of parent and child and through every member of the clan or tribe.

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- Every clan has its own god, who is understood as its progenitor. According to the social organization of the particular clan, he is originally viewed as a mother under the primitive matriarchate. Later he is also viewed as a father under that primitive patriarchate.
- He is their protector against a common enemy and the participant in all their fortunes.
- As their ancestor, he is concerned for their welfare and survival.
- The relationship of the father to his descendants is moral as well as physical, and it is here that we may discern the origin of ethics.
- It is not fear that motivates the minds of the worshippers of the clan, but rather reverence and loyalty.

It was not propagated on individual authority. The Semitic origin was an inheritance from successive generations. The Semitic people grew up as it were instinctively, taking it as matter of course that they should believe and act as their fathers had done before them.

- The correct performance of a series of acts and observances by each person was necessary to secure the favor of the gods or to avert their anger.
- A man did not choose his religion or frame it for himself; it came to him as part of the general scheme of social obligations and ordinances laid upon him, as a matter of course, by his position in the family and in the nation.
- Individual men were more or less religious, as men now are more or less patriotic; that is, they discharged their religious duties with a greater or less degree of zeal according to their character and temperament; but there was no such thing as an absolutely irreligious man.
- A certain amount of religion was required of everybody; for the due performance of religious acts was a social obligation in which everyone had his appointed share.
- Intolerance in the modern sense of the word was unknown in these ancient societies.
- They never persecuted a man into particular beliefs for the good of his own soul.
- Religion did not exist for the saving of souls.

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The Semitic culture of the Hebrew people has much in common with the cultures of the other Semitic people. However, its differences set it apart from not only the cultures of other Semitic peoples, but apart from other cultures too.

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Shalom,
Jim Myers, President
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