**APWH Key Concept 2.1**

I. Codifications and further developments of existing religious traditions provided a bond among people and an ethical code to live by.

A.



*Forced migration of Hebrews during Assyrian and Babylonian captivity.*

In the ancient era, the Hebrews developed a monotheistic faith. As their numbers grew and they became a more organized society, their beliefs, ceremonial laws, history, and hymns became **codified** (collected and classified) into a common body of scripture. This collection of scripture is called the **Torah** and will eventually become the first five books of the Old Testament of the Bible. The Torah prescribes detailed guidelines covering ethics, social and civil relations, and even rules about diet and personal hygiene. Taken together, the beliefs and practices codified in the Torah formed the religion of **Judaism**, a religion inexorably connected with a specific ethnic group, the Hebrews (or Jews). Central to this religion is the belief that the Hebrews entered into a special covenantal relation with their God through the patriarch Abraham.

These guidelines, compounded with the belief that the creator God had chosen them as a special ethnic group, endowed the Jewish people with a well-defined sense of identity. This sense of identity would follow them as foreign empires conquered the Hebrews and led them into captivity (see map). As captives of foreign empires, some cultural influence from their host civilizations was inevitable; nevertheless, even as **diasporic communities** the Hebrews attempted to preserve their identity through ceremonial and cultural traditions. This struggle to avoid assimilation helped maintain their identity but also sometimes brought them into conflict with their host cultures.



II. New belief systems and cultural traditions emerged and spread, often asserting universal truths.

D. **Christianity** grew directly out of Judaism, with its founder Jesus of Nazareth born and raised as a Jew in the area just east of the Mediterranean Sea. During his lifetime, the area was controlled by Rome as a province in the empire. Christianity originated partly from a long-standing Jewish belief in the coming of a Messiah, or a leader who would restore the Jewish kingdom to its former glory days.

Jesus’ followers came to believe that he was this Messiah, the **divine** son of God. He advocated a moral code based on love, charity, and humility. His disciples predicted a final judgment day when God would reward the righteous with immortality and condemn sinners to eternal hell. Christianity grew within the Roman Empire, including during the Pax Romana, but not without clashes with Roman authorities. Jesus was arrested and executed by Roman officials because he was seen by many as a dangerous rabble-rouser.

After his death, his apostles spread the faith. Especially important was Paul, a Jew who was familiar with Greco-Roman culture. He established churches all over the eastern end of the Mediterranean, and even as far away as Rome.

Christianity appealed broadly among the masses, due to concepts such as spiritual equality. In addition, conversion efforts by its early apostles meant that the religion grew steadily. Despite its early gains, by the beginning of the 4th century Christianity was still a minority belief comprising perhaps only 5 percent of the Roman population.



*Christianity spread primarily through missionaries such as St. Paul, who used Rome's transportation infrastructure to spread the religion.*

Eventually in the 4th century CE, the **Emperor Constantine** established a new capital in the eastern city of Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople. He converted to Christianity and gave it official acceptance in the eastern half of the Roman empire. As a result, the religion grew rapidly.

III. Some Buddhists and Christians practiced a monastic life.

Some followers of Buddhism and Christianity had tendencies toward **asceticism**, an extreme rejection of the materialistic values of the world and its luxuries. Such people avoided all material things except the bare necessities and simplest food. In their attempt to separate themselves from the sensual temptations of the world, some Buddhists and Christians developed **monasticism**, the lifestyle of living as monks in a monastery. Christian monks lived without worldly goods and worked to feed the poor and care for orphans and widows. Buddhist monks purged themselves of desire and aided the weak or poor while striving to attain enlightenment. Although the reality of monasticism could be quite different -the lust for power and wealth can infect every human institution - ideally, monasteries provided charitable services to the less fortunate by those who rejected the materialistic values of the world.