



ISRAEL'S IMPACT ON MODERN SOCIETY

Ethical Values

What has become known as the Golden Rule, taught by Jesus in more than one formulation, was actually a verse from the Jewish scriptures (Leviticus 19.18).

The teaching of the Israelite prophets during the Axial Age was very much oriented towards treating other people ethically. See, for example, Micah 6.6-8, 11-13:

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?.... Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights? Your rich men are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore I strike you with a grievous blow, making you desolate because of your sins.

Also, Isaiah 58.6-8: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Despite the small number of Jewish people in the world, Judaism has dramatically impacted the western world (and now, nonwestern societies to a lesser extent), through the values that Christianity inherited from Judaism.

Without saying that Christians were the only group pushing these reforms, Christians have historically supported many efforts to better society, foremost through education (Christians have been instrumental in promoting education wherever they have gone in the world, establishing the first universities in Europe and America) and in the abolition of social evils such as gladiator combat to the death in ancient Rome, and slavery in more recent centuries. The abolition of slavery was promoted by predominantly Christian nations in the late 1700s and 1800s. The United States fought a civil war to end slavery in its own nation, and Britain prompted other nations into allowing it to end the Atlantic slave trade, both in the mid-1800s.