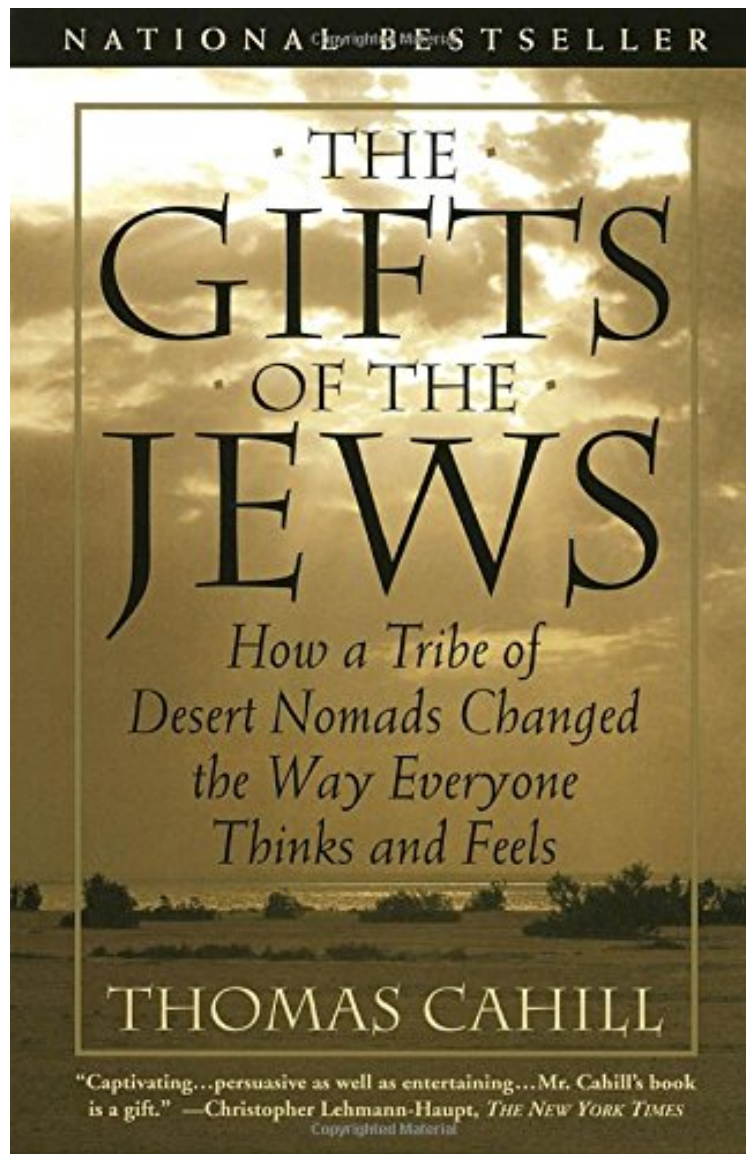


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The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels (Hinges of History)

Thomas Cahill

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The author of the runaway bestseller *How the Irish Saved Civilization* has done it again. In *The Gifts of the Jews* Thomas Cahill takes us on another enchanting journey into history, once again recreating a time when the actions of a small band of people had repercussions that are still felt today. *The Gifts of the Jews* reveals the critical change that made western civilization possible. Within the matrix of ancient religions and philosophies, life was seen as part of an endless cycle of birth and death; time was like a wheel, spinning ceaselessly. Yet somehow, the ancient Jews began to see time differently. For them, time had a beginning and an end; it was a narrative, whose triumphant conclusion would come in the future. From this insight came a new conception of men and women as individuals with unique destinies--a conception that would inform the Declaration of Independence--and our hopeful belief in progress and the sense that tomorrow can be better than today. As Thomas Cahill narrates this momentous shift, he also explains the real significance of such Biblical figures as Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the Pharaoh, Joshua, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Full of compelling stories, insights and humor, *The Gifts of the Jews* is an irresistible exploration of history as fascinating and fun as *How the Irish Saved Civilization*.

.com Thomas Cahill, author of the bestselling *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, continues his *Hinges of History* series with *The Gifts of the Jews*, a light-handed, popular account of ancient Jewish culture, the culture of the Bible. The book is written from a decidedly modern point of view. Cahill notes, for instance, that Abraham moved the Jews from Ur to the land of Canaan "to improve their prospects," and that the leering inhabitants of Sodom surrounded Lot's lodging "like the ghouls in *Night of the Living Dead*." *The Gifts of the Jews* nonetheless encourages us to see the Old Testament through ancient eyes--to see its characters not as our contemporaries but as those of Gilgamesh and Amenhotep. Cahill also lingers on often-overlooked books of the Bible, such as *Ruth*, to discuss changes in ancient sensibility. The result is a fine, speculative, eminently readable work of history. From *Library Journal* Cahill argues that the greatest gifts of the Jews are the linear theory of history (vs. the cyclical theory of other ancients), with its implication that life can get better and avoid decline and the idea of the equality and dignity of each individual that culminated in the declaration that "All men are created equal." Other gifts include the concepts of universal brotherhood, peace, and justice. (LJ 3/15/97) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* Cahill, the author of *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (1995), turns his attention to how the Jews' concept of one God changed world culture forever. Setting the scene, he offers an extended tour of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament), looking at the stories and characters found there with a keen and often-amusing eye. He begins with Avraham (Abraham), who heard a voice and was willing to follow it, and explores how that voice made Avraham's descendants think and believe in ways that were so radically different as to change even the concept of time. When Cahill directly addresses the thesis of his subtitle--the Jews' contributions to the evolution of society--his book is at its most interesting. Particularly insightful is his discussion of the Ten Commandments and how they changed the hearts as well as the behavior of humankind. Although there are numerous points here with which readers may disagree, they will enjoy the thought-provoking and spirited (in both senses of the word) discourse. Ilene Cooper