

# The Origins of Judaism

## MAIN IDEA

**RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS** The Hebrews maintained monotheistic religious beliefs that were unique in the ancient world.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

From this tradition, Judaism, the religion of the Jews, evolved. Judaism is one of the world's major religions.

## TERMS & NAMES

- Palestine
- Canaan
- Torah
- Abraham
- monotheism
- covenant
- Moses
- Israel
- Judah
- tribute

**SETTING THE STAGE** The Phoenicians lived in a region at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea that was later called **Palestine**. The Phoenicians were not the only ancient people to live in Palestine. The Romans had given the area that name after the Philistines, another people who lived in the region. **Canaan** (KAY•nuhn) was the ancient home of the Hebrews, later called the Jews, in this area. Their history, legends, and moral laws are a major influence on Western culture, and they began a tradition also shared by Christianity and Islam.

## The Search for a Promised Land

Ancient Palestine's location made it a cultural crossroads of the ancient world. By land, it connected Asia and Africa and two great empires, both eager to expand. To the east lay Assyria and Babylonia and to the west Egypt. Palestine's seaports opened onto the two most important waterways of that time: the Mediterranean and the Red seas. The Hebrews settled in Canaan, which lay between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. According to the Bible, Canaan was the land God had promised to the Hebrew people.

**From Ur to Egypt** Most of what we know about the early history of the Hebrews is contained in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Jews call these books the **Torah** (TAWR•uh) and consider them the most sacred writings in their tradition. Christians respect them as part of the Old Testament.

In the Torah, God chose **Abraham** (AY•bruh•HAM) to be the “father” of the Hebrew people. God's words to Abraham expressed a promise of land and a pledge:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great.

Genesis 12:1–2

Abraham was a shepherd who lived in the city of Ur, in Mesopotamia. The Book of Genesis tells that God commanded him to move his people to Canaan. Around 1800 B.C., Abraham, his family, and their herds made their way to Canaan. Then, around 1650 B.C., the descendants of Abraham moved to Egypt.

### TAKING NOTES

#### Following Chronological Order

Use a time line to show major Hebrew leaders and one fact about each.

2000 B.C.

Abraham:  
father of  
Jewish people.



▲ This statue of Moses was carved by Michelangelo.

**The God of Abraham** The Bible tells how Abraham and his family roamed for many years from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt and back to Canaan. All the while, their God, whose name was Yahweh, watched over them. Gods worshiped by other people were often local, and were associated with a specific place.

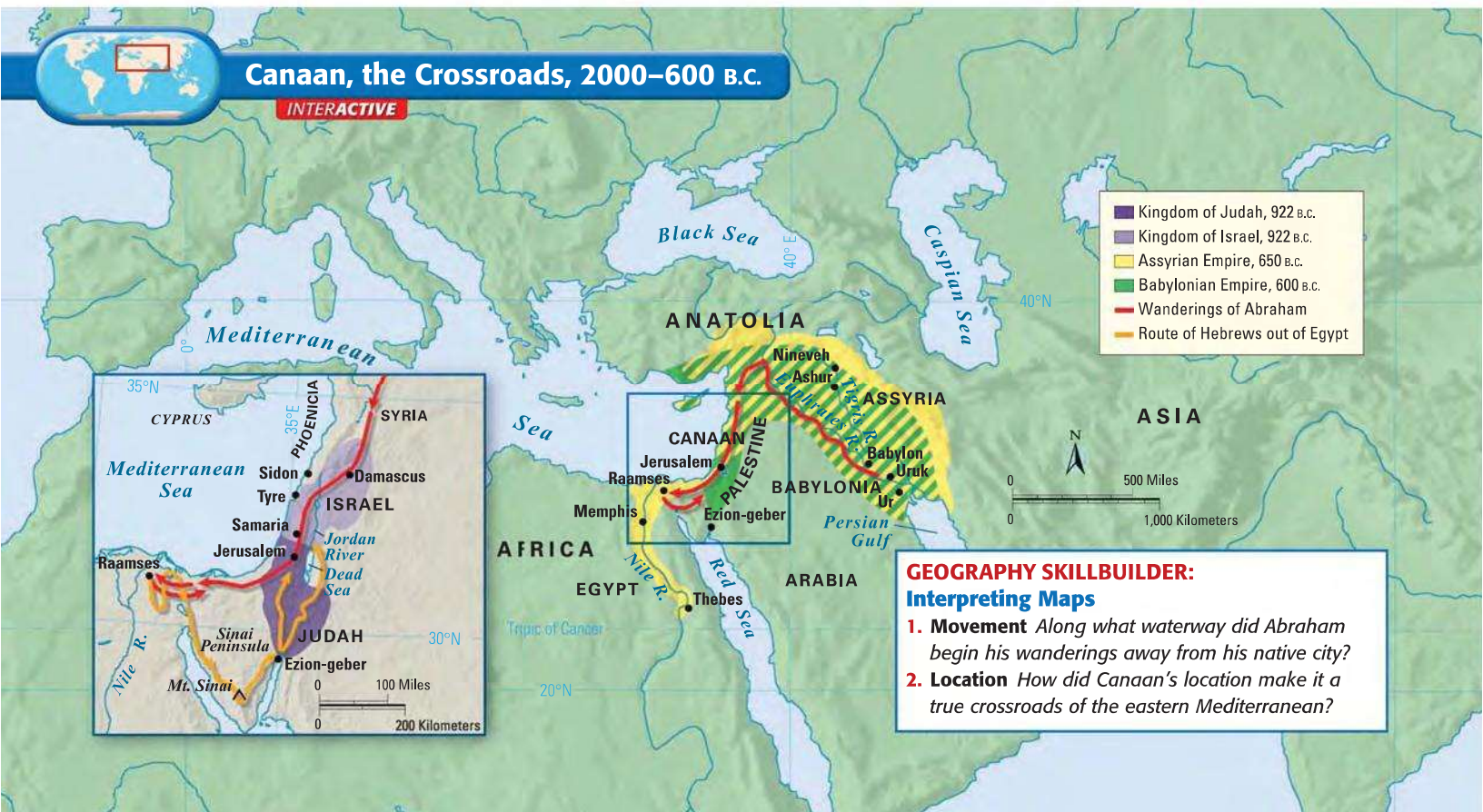
Unlike the other groups around them, who were polytheists, the Hebrews were monotheists. They prayed to only one God. **Monotheism** (MAHN•uh•thee•IHZ•uhm), a belief in a single god, comes from the Greek words *mono*, meaning “one,” and *theism*, meaning “god-worship.” The Hebrews proclaimed Yahweh as the one and only God. In their eyes, Yahweh had power over all peoples, everywhere. To the Hebrews, God was not a physical being, and no physical images were to be made of him.

The Hebrews asked Yahweh for protection from their enemies, just as other people prayed to their gods to defend them. According to the Bible, Yahweh looked after the Hebrews not so much because of ritual ceremonies and sacrifices but because Abraham had promised to obey him. In return, Yahweh had promised to protect Abraham and his descendants. This mutual promise between God and the founder of the Hebrew people is called a **covenant** (KUH•uh•nuhnt).

## Moses and the Exodus

The Bible says the Hebrews migrated to Egypt because of a drought and threat of a famine. At first, the Hebrews were given places of honor in the Egyptian kingdom. Later, however, they were forced into slavery.

**“Let My People Go”** The Hebrews fled Egypt—perhaps between 1300 and 1200 B.C. Jews call this event “the Exodus,” and they remember it every year during the



## > Analyzing Primary Sources

### The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments are the ten orders or laws given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. These orders serve as the basis for Jewish laws.

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

1. I am the Lord your God. . . . You shall have no other gods besides me.
2. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image.
3. You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother. . . .
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet . . . anything that is your neighbor's.

Exodus 20: 2–14

#### DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. **Comparing** Do the first four commandments concern themselves more with the Hebrews' relationship with God or with one another?
2. **Contrasting** What do the last six commandments have in common that distinguishes them from the first four?



▲ Tradition dictates that the Torah be written on a scroll and kept at the synagogue in an ornamental chest called an ark.

festival of Passover. The Torah says that the man who led the Hebrews out of slavery was named **Moses**. It is told that at the time of Moses' birth, the Egyptian pharaoh felt threatened by the number of Hebrews in Egypt. He thus ordered all Hebrew male babies to be killed. Moses' mother hid her baby in the reeds along the banks of the Nile. There, an Egyptian princess found and adopted him. Though raised in luxury, he did not forget his Hebrew birth. When God commanded him to lead the Jews out of Egypt, he obeyed.

**A New Covenant** While the Hebrews were traveling across the Sinai (SY•ny) Peninsula, Moses climbed to the top of Mount Sinai to pray. The Bible says he spoke with God. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he brought down two stone tablets on which Yahweh had written the Ten Commandments.

These commandments and the other teachings that Moses delivered to his people became the basis for the civil and religious laws of Judaism. The Hebrews believed that these laws formed a new covenant between God and the Hebrew people. God promised to protect the Hebrews. They promised to keep God's commandments. **A**

**The Land and People of the Bible** The Torah reports that the Hebrews wandered for 40 years in the Sinai Desert. Later books of the Bible tell about the history of the Hebrews after their wanderings. After the death of Moses, they returned to Canaan, where Abraham had lived. The Hebrews made a change from a nomadic, tribal society to settled herders, farmers, and city dwellers. They learned new technologies from neighboring peoples in Canaan.

#### MAIN IDEA

##### Contrasting

**A** How did the religion of the Hebrews differ from many of the religions of their neighbors?

When the Hebrews arrived in Canaan, they were loosely organized into twelve tribes. These tribes lived in separate territories and were self-governing. In times of emergency, the Bible reports that God would raise up judges. They would unite the tribes and provide judicial and military leadership during a crisis. In the course of time, God chose a series of judges, one of the most prominent of whom was a woman, Deborah.

**Hebrew Law** Deborah’s leadership was unusual for a Hebrew woman. The roles of men and women were quite separate in Hebrew society. Women could not officiate at religious ceremonies. In general, a Hebrew woman’s most important duty was to raise her children and provide moral leadership for them.

The Ten Commandments were part of a code of laws delivered to Moses. The code included other rules regulating social and religious behavior. In some ways, this code resembled Hammurabi’s Code with its attitude of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” However, its strict justice was softened by expressions of God’s mercy. The code was later interpreted by religious teachers called prophets. These interpretations tended to emphasize greater equality before the law than did other codes of the time. The prophets constantly urged the Hebrews to stay true to their covenant with God.

The prophets taught that the Hebrews had a duty to worship God and live justly with one another. The goal was a moral life lived in accordance with God’s laws. In the words of the prophet Micah, “He has told you, O mortal 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?” This emphasis on right conduct and the worship of one God is called ethical monotheism—a Hebrew idea that has influenced human behavior for thousands of years through Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. **B**

**MAIN IDEA**

**Summarizing**

**B** What does Hebrew law require of believers?

**> Analyzing Key Concepts**

**Judaism**

Judaism is the religion of the Jewish people. In Judaism, one of the most important ways for a person to please God is to study the scriptures, or sacred writings, and to live according to what they teach. Many Jews keep a scroll of an important scripture passage in a mezuzah (a holder attached to a doorpost) like the one shown here.



**The Sacred Writings of Judaism**

Sacred Writings	Contents
<p><b>Hebrew Bible</b></p>	<p><b>Torah</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• first five books of the Bible</li> <li>• recounts origins of humanity and Judaism</li> <li>• contains basic laws of Judaism</li> </ul> <p><b>Prophets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stories about and writings by Jewish teachers</li> <li>• divided into Former Prophets and Latter Prophets</li> <li>• recounts Jewish history and calls for repentance and obedience</li> </ul> <p><b>Writings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a collection of various other writings</li> <li>• includes poetry, history and stories, and philosophical writings called wisdom literature</li> </ul>
<p><b>Talmud</b></p>	<p><b>Mishnah</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• written versions of Jewish oral law</li> </ul> <p><b>Gemara</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explanations and interpretations of the Mishnah</li> </ul>

**SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts**

- 1. Contrasting** *What is contained in the Hebrew Bible that is not in the Talmud? What is in the Talmud that is not in the Hebrew Bible?*
- 2. Hypothesizing** *What kind of poetry would you expect to find in the Hebrew Bible? Explain what you think the subjects or themes of the poems might be.*

## The Kingdom of Israel

Canaan—the land that the Hebrews believed had been promised them by God—combined largely harsh features such as arid desert, rocky wilderness, grassy hills, and the dry, hot valley of the Jordan River. Water was never plentiful; even the numerous limestone formations soaked up any excess rainfall. After first settling in the south-central area of ancient Palestine, the Hebrews expanded south and north.

**Saul and David Establish a Kingdom** The judges occasionally pulled together the widely scattered tribes for a united military effort. Nonetheless, the Philistines, another people in the area, threatened the Hebrews' position in ancient Palestine. The Hebrews got along somewhat better with their Canaanite neighbors. Eventually, the only large tribe left of the 12 tribes was the tribe of Judah. As a result, Hebrews came to be called *Jews*, and their religion, *Judaism*.

From about 1020 to 922 B.C., the Hebrews united under three able kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. The new kingdom was called **Israel** (IHZ•ree•uhl). For 100 years, Israel enjoyed its greatest period of power and independence.

Saul, the first of the three kings, was chosen largely because of his success in driving out the Philistines from the central hills of ancient Palestine. Saul is portrayed in the Bible as a tragic man, who was given to bouts of jealousy. After his death, he was succeeded by his son-in-law, David. King David, an extremely popular leader, united the tribes, established Jerusalem as the capital, and founded a dynasty.

**Solomon Builds the Kingdom** About the year 962 B.C., David was succeeded by his son Solomon, whose mother was Bathsheba. Solomon was the most powerful of the Hebrew kings. He built a trading empire with the help of his friend Hiram, the king of the Phoenician city of Tyre. Solomon also beautified the capital city of Jerusalem. The crowning achievement of his extensive building program in Jerusalem was a great temple, which he built to glorify God. The temple was also to be a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of Moses' law.

The temple that Solomon built was not large, but it gleamed like a precious gem. Bronze pillars stood at the temple's entrance. The temple was stone on the outside, while its inner walls were made of cedar covered in gold. The main hall was richly decorated with brass and gold. Solomon also built a royal palace even more costly and more magnificent than the temple.


**The Kingdom Divides** Solomon's building projects required high taxes and badly strained the kingdom's finances. In addition, men were forced to spend one month out of every three working on the temple. The expense and forced labor caused much discontent. As a result, after Solomon's death, the Jews in the northern part of the kingdom, which was located far from the south, revolted. By 922 B.C., the kingdom had divided in two. Israel was in the north and **Judah** (JOO•duh) was in the south. 🕒

### MAIN IDEA

#### Drawing Conclusions

🕒 How might geographical distance make the split of Israel and Judah more likely?

### History Makers



**King Solomon**  
962?–922? B.C.

In the Bible, Solomon prays to God for “an understanding mind,” which God grants him.

Soon after, the story goes, two women and a baby boy were brought before him. Each woman claimed the baby was hers. After hearing their testimony, Solomon declared, “Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one and half to the other.”

One said: “Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!” However, the other woman accepted: “It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.”

Solomon knew that the woman who would give up the child to save it was the real mother.

**INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY**  
**RESEARCH LINKS** For more on King Solomon, go to [classzone.com](http://classzone.com)

The next 200 years were confusing for the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Sometimes they fought each other; sometimes they joined together to fight common enemies. Each of the kingdoms had periods of prosperity, followed by low periods of conflict and decline.

## The Babylonian Captivity

Disaster finally struck as the two kingdoms lost their independence. In 738 B.C., both Israel and Judah began paying **tribute**—peace money paid by a weaker power to a stronger—to Assyria. By paying tribute, Israel and Judah hoped to ensure that the mighty Assyrian empire would not attack. But this tribute was not enough and in 725 B.C. the Assyrians began a relentless siege of Samaria, the capital of Israel. By 722 B.C., the whole northern kingdom had fallen to the Assyrians' ferocious assault.

The southern kingdom of Judah resisted for another 150 years before it too was destroyed. The destruction of Judah was to come at the hands of the Babylonians. After conquering Israel, the Assyrians rapidly lost power to a rising Babylonian empire. The great Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (nehb•uh•kuhd•NEHZ•uhr) ran the Egyptians out of Syria and ancient Palestine, and he twice attacked Jerusalem. The city finally fell in 586 B.C. Solomon's temple was destroyed in the Babylonian victory. Many of the survivors were exiled to Babylon. During the exile in Babylon, the Bible describes how the prophet Ezekiel urged his people to keep their religion alive in a foreign land.

Then about 50 years after the fall of Judah, another change in fortune occurred: in 539 B.C., the Persian king Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon. The next year, Cyrus allowed some 40,000 exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Many, however, stayed in Babylonia.

Work on the second temple was completed in 515 B.C. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in 445 B.C. Soon, however, other empires dominated the region—first the Persians, then the Greeks, and then the Romans. These new empires would take control both of ancient Palestine and the destiny of the Jewish people. **D**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Making Inferences

**D** The temple was rebuilt before the walls of Jerusalem. What does this fact indicate about the Jews after the Babylonian captivity?

## SECTION

# 4

## ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Palestine
- Canaan
- Torah
- Abraham
- monotheism
- covenant
- Moses
- Israel
- Judah
- tribute

### USING YOUR NOTES

2. Which of these leaders do you think was the most important? Why?



### MAIN IDEAS

3. Where did Abraham and his family originally come from?  
 4. What were some of the achievements of Solomon?  
 5. What was the Babylonian Captivity?

### CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

6. **DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** What were the main problems faced by the Hebrews between 2000 B.C. and 700 B.C.?  
 7. **ANALYZING ISSUES** What were some of the factors that made Canaan a good place for the Hebrews to settle?  
 8. **COMPARING** In what ways are the laws delivered to Moses similar to Hammurabi's Code?  
 9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS** What might have been the advantages of monotheism? Write a **paragraph** in which you support your opinions.

### CONNECT TO TODAY CREATING A PIE GRAPH

What are some of the important monotheistic religions in the world today? Create a **pie graph** in which you show the relative size of various monotheistic religions.