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The Origins of Judaism

MAIN IDEA

RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS The Israelites 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

- 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 called **Canaan** (KAY•nuhn). The Phoenicians were not the only ancient people to live in the area; for example, the Philistines were another people who lived in the region. Canaan was the ancient home of the Israelites, 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 Canaan'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. Its seaports opened onto the two most important waterways of that time: the Mediterranean and the Red seas. The Israelites settled in Canaan, which lay between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, the Israelites often used the word *Canaan* to refer to all of ancient Canaan. According to the Hebrew Bible, Canaan was the land God had promised to the Israelites.

From Ur to Egypt Most of what we know about the early history of the Israelites 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 Jewish people. God's words to Abraham expressed a promise of land and a pledge:

PRIMARY SOURCE

The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from 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; I will make your name great; and you shall be a blessing."

Genesis 12:1–2 (Hebrew Bible)

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.



Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on the major Jewish leaders.



▲ In this 14th-century painting, Moses holds a scroll inscribed with the story of God's appearance to Moses and commandment to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

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

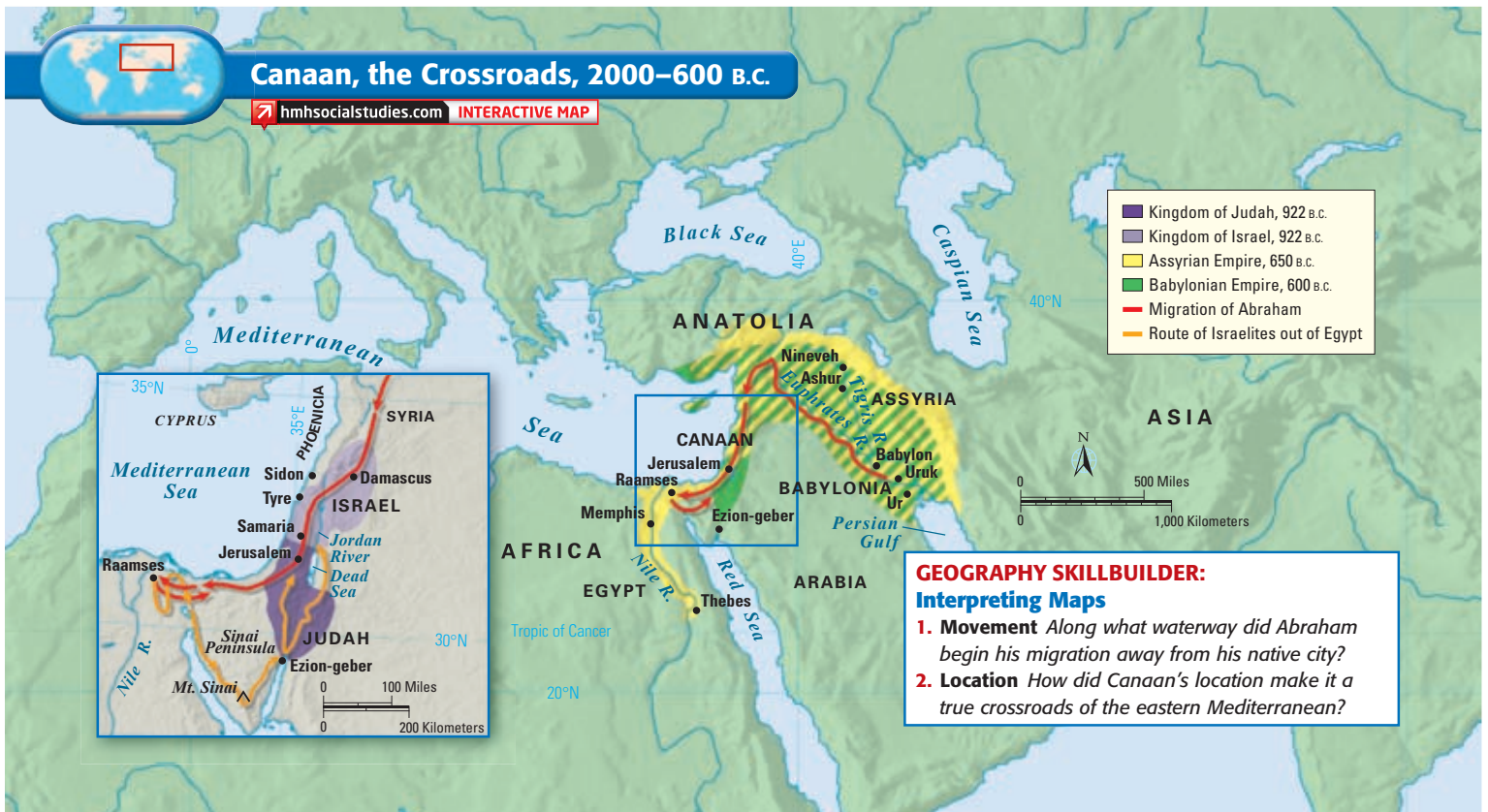
Unlike the other groups around them, who were polytheists, the Israelites were monotheists. They prayed to only one God. **Monotheism** (MAHN•uh•thee•IHZ•uhm), a belief in a single god, comes from the Greek words *mono*, meaning “one,” and *theism*, meaning “god-worship.” The Israelites proclaimed that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

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

Moses and the Exodus

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

“Let My People Go” The Israelites 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 a code of moral laws believed to have been given by God to Moses, which serve as the basis for Jewish law.

PRIMARY SOURCE

1. I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.
2. You shall have no other gods beside Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image. . . .
3. You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God. . . .
4. Observe 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.

Deuteronomy 5:6–18

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. **Comparing** Do the first four commandments concern themselves more with the Jews' 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 Israelites out of slavery was **Moses**. It is told that at the time of Moses' birth, the Egyptian pharaoh felt threatened by the number of Israelites in Egypt. He thus ordered all Israelite 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 Israelite birth. When God commanded him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he obeyed.

A New Covenant While the Israelites were traveling across the Sinai (SY•ny) Peninsula, Moses climbed to the top of Mount Sinai to pray. The Hebrew Bible says he spoke with God. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he brought down two stone tablets on which God 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 Israelites believed that these laws formed a new covenant between God and the Israelites. God promised to protect them. They promised to keep God's commandments. **A**

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

MAIN IDEA

Contrasting

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

When the Israelites 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 Hebrew Bible tells 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.

Israelite Law Deborah’s leadership was unusual for an Israelite woman. The roles of men and women were quite separate in most ancient societies. Women could not officiate at religious ceremonies. In general, an Israelite 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 statement “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” To Jews this meant to pay restitution and emphasize 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 Jews to stay true to their covenant with God.

The prophets taught that the Jews 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 Jewish idea that has influenced human behavior for thousands of years through Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. **B**

MAIN IDEA
Summarizing
B What does Jewish 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
Hebrew Bible	<p>Torah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • first five books of the Bible • recounts origins of humanity and Judaism • contains basic laws of Judaism <p>Prophets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stories about and writings by Jewish teachers • divided into Former Prophets and Latter Prophets • recounts Jewish history and calls for justice, kindness, right conduct, and faithfulness to God <p>Writings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a collection of various other writings • includes psalms, poetry, history and stories, proverbs, and philosophical writings called wisdom literature
Talmud	<p>Mishnah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written record of Jewish oral law <p>Gemara</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explanations and interpretations of the Mishnah

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

- 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?
- 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 Israelites 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 Canaan, the Israelites 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 Israelites' position in ancient Canaan. The Israelites got along somewhat better with their Canaanite neighbors.

From about 1020 to 922 B.C., the Israelites 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. Saul is portrayed in the Hebrew 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 Israelite 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 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 drafted to spend one month out of every three working on the temple. The expense and labor requirement 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. Eventually, the northern kingdom was destroyed and only the kingdom of Judah remained. As a result, the Israelites came to be called Jews, and their religion, *Judaism*. **C**

MAIN IDEA

Drawing Conclusions

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



VIDEO

King Solomon

hmhsocialstudies.com

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.

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RESEARCH WEB LINKS Go online for more on King Solomon.

The next 200 years were a time of upheaval 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 Israel revolted and withheld tribute 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 Judah, 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 Hebrew 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 Judah, now called Judea, and of 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?

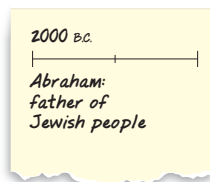
SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

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

- 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 Israelites between 1800 B.C. and 700 B.C.?
7. **ANALYZING ISSUES** What were some of the factors that made Canaan a good place for the Israelites 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.