

Section 1: The Early Hebrews

ABRAHAM AND MOSES LEAD THE HEBREWS

A people called the Hebrews (HEE-brooz) appeared in Southwest Asia sometime between 2000 and 1500 BC. Their writings describe the laws of their religion, **Judaism** (JOO-dee-i-zuhm). The Hebrew Bible, or Torah, traces the Hebrews back to a man named **Abraham**. The Bible says that God told Abraham to leave his home. God promised to lead him to a new land and to make his children into a mighty nation. Abraham moved to Canaan (KAY-nuhn). The Hebrews lived there for many years.

Some Hebrews later moved to Egypt. In time Egypt's ruler, the pharaoh, made them slaves. In the 1200s BC, God then told a man named **Moses** to demand the Hebrews' freedom. The pharaoh agreed only after a series of plagues struck Egypt.

Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt in a journey called the **Exodus**. The Bible says that during this journey, God gave Moses two stone tablets with laws written on them, known as the **Ten Commandments**. The Hebrews were to worship only God and to value human life, self-control, and justice. The Hebrews reached Canaan after 40 years. They became the Israelites.

KINGS UNITE THE ISRAELITES

A man named Saul fought the Philistines (FI-listeenz) and became the first king of Israel. After Saul died a former outlaw named **David** became king. David was well-loved. He defeated the Philistines and other Jewish enemies. He captured the city of Jerusalem. It became Israel's new capital. David's son **Solomon** (SAHL-uh-muhn) became king next around 965 BC. Solomon was a strong king. He built a great temple in Jerusalem.

INVADERS CONQUER AND RULE

Soon after Solomon's death in 930 BC, Israel split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah (JOO-duh). The people of Judah were known as Jews. Over the centuries the Jewish people were often conquered and enslaved. The scattering of the Jews outside of Canaan is known as the **Diaspora**. Jerusalem was conquered by the Greeks during the 330s BC. Judah regained independence for a time, but was conquered again in 63 BC, this time by the Romans.

WOMEN IN HEBREW SOCIETY

Men dominated Hebrew society, but some Hebrew women made great contributions to the culture.

Summary:

Section 2: Jewish Beliefs and Texts

JEWISH BELIEFS ANCHOR THEIR SOCIETY

Jewish society is founded upon religion. Judaism's main beliefs are beliefs in God, education, justice, and obedience.

Judaism is the oldest known religion to practice **monotheism**, the belief in only one god. The Jews call this god Yahweh (YAH-way). They believe that they are Yahweh's chosen people. The Jews say their history was guided through God's relationship with Abraham, Moses, and other leaders. Moral and religious laws, believed to be handed down from God, have guided Jewish society through their history and continue to do so today.

Besides the Ten Commandments, Jews believe that Moses recorded a whole set of laws governing Jewish behavior. These laws are called Mosaic law. These laws set down rules for everything including what to eat, when to work, and how to pray. Today Orthodox Jews continue to follow all of the Mosaic laws. Reform Jews choose not to follow many of the ancient rules. Conservative Jews fall in between.

TEXTS LIST JEWISH BELIEFS

The laws and principles of Judaism are written down in sacred texts. The most important text is the **Torah**. The five books of the Torah record most of the laws and the history of Judaism until the death of Moses. Every **synagogue**, or place of Jewish worship, has at least one Torah.

The Torah is one of the three parts of the Hebrew Bible, or Tanakh (tah-NAKH). The second part contains messages from **prophets**, people who are said to receive messages directly from God. The third part is a collection of poems, songs, stories, lessons, and histories.

The **Talmud** is a collection of commentaries, folktales, and stories written by scholars. These are intended to help people understand and analyze the laws described in the Hebrew Bible.

SCROLLS REVEAL PAST BELIEFS

Another set of ancient texts, the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, was discovered in 1947. These scrolls, written by Jewish scholars about 2,000 years ago, contain commentaries and stories, and offer more information about ancient Jewish life.

JUDAISM AND LATER CULTURES

Jewish ideas have helped shape two other major world religions, Christianity and Islam. The Ten Commandments are reflected in our laws and in modern society's rules of behavior.

Summary:

Section 3: Judaism over the Centuries

REVOLT, DEFEAT, AND MIGRATION

The teachings of Judaism helped unite the ancient Jews. But many Jews were unhappy with the Roman rule of Jerusalem. Tensions increased. Some Jews refused to obey Roman officials. In AD 66, a group called the **Zealots** (ze-LUHTS) led a rebellion against Rome. After four years of fierce fighting, the rebellion failed. The Jews' main temple was destroyed in AD 70. The Romans put down another Jewish rebellion 60 years later. After this uprising, Jews were banned from living in Jerusalem. So they migrated to other parts of the world.

TWO CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Because Jews could not worship at a central temple anymore, their traditions changed. Everywhere Jews went, they built local temples. They also appointed **rabbis**, religious leaders responsible for teaching Judaism. Even with a similar culture and background, Jewish traditions grew differently depending on where they moved. Two major Jewish cultures developed that still exist today. The Ashkenazim (ahsh-kuh-NAH-zuhm) are descended from Jews who moved to France, Germany, and Eastern Europe. These Jews maintained separate customs from the region's residents. They even developed their own language, called Yiddish.

The Sephardim (suh-FAHR-duhm) moved to Spain and Portugal. Unlike the Ashkenazim, these Jews mixed with their non-Jewish neighbors. This melding of language and culture produced a Jewish golden age in Spain and Portugal. Many Jews contributed to artistic achievement and scientific discovery.

TRADITIONS AND HOLY DAYS

No matter where Jews live, common traditions and holy days help them maintain and celebrate their long history. Many of these holidays honor the Jews' freedom.

Passover, for example, celebrates the Jews' flight from slavery in Egypt during the Exodus. Hanukkah commemorates the successful rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem during the successful revolt against the Greeks in 160 BC.

The most important holidays are the **High Holy Days**. These holy days are Rosh Hashanah (rahshuhSHAH-nuh), which celebrates the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur (yohm-ki-POOHR), when Jews ask God to forgive their sins.

Summary: