

## 9. God of Abraham

Around 3500 years ago, a small group of people in the Levant on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and west of the Syrian Desert began a religious revolution that fathered the great modern religions of the western world. For the first time in human history, the spirit world was populated by only one Supreme Being. Abraham is the name we give to the leader of the people, whom we call Jews, or Hebrews, and their religion is called Judaism.

Judaism dates to between 1500 BCE and 2000 BCE and, thus, vies with Hinduism as the oldest of modern religions. The *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible, and the rest of the *Tanakh* (the 'Hebrew Bible', which is called the 'Old Testament' by Christians), was written down around the same time the Hindu Vedas were. Time has expunged the original texts of both the *Tanakh* and Vedas from human records, so much of the modern view of the original versions is speculation. The oldest surviving text of the *Tanakh* dates to 1009 CE.

The uniqueness of the religion of Abraham (i.e., an island of monotheism in a sea of polytheism) has fostered a sense of oneness among the Jewish people, and such a sense of brotherhood inevitably includes a sense of separation from others. This sense of brotherhood and its separation has increased over the three millennia since Abraham. Thus, some people, such as Dr. Isaiah Gafni of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, suggest that Judaism is more than a religion: "The origins of the word Judaism also point to the ethnic and geographical roots of the phrase [term], rather than to a solely religious entity." To many Jews, Judaism thus refers to a specific Semitic people and a specific land in the Levant as well as to a particular view of God. Since the days of Abraham, Jews have been discouraged from marrying outside their ethnic group which emphasizes to them that they are all one family—the children of Abraham. Of course, biologically speaking, a closed gene pool is an unfavorable strategy, and enough marriages outside the group have occurred to retain vigor of the gene pool.

Of the four major modern religions, Judaism is, by far, the least spiritual. It's in stark contrast with Hinduism, in which the soul (*atman*) is all that matters and the spirit is the only reality. The *Tanakh* never speaks of a soul, heaven, or eternal damnation. It contains only two themes: the Jews must worship a single creator God and the land of Canaan is their reward for doing so. It commands Jews to worship God, offering land but no ever-

lasting life as a reward. There is something grand and noble about doing what is right without expectation of great reward, but it's inconsistent with the instinct to survive that has made we humans what we are. The only rewards the *Tanakh* offers is to live in a promised land flowing with milk and honey and to not be punished—the carrot and stick. The *Tanakh* relates numerous episodes of individuals disobedient to the will of God who were then consumed with fire, swallowed up by the Earth, or commanded to be stoned to death. The destruction of cities and the setbacks suffered by the Jews are all explained as punishment for disobeying God.

The *Tanakh* has three parts of unequal importance: the *Torah* (the written law), *Nevi'im* (the prophets), and *Ketuvim* (the writings). *Nevi'im* contains two sub-groups: the early Prophets, or *Nevi'im Rishonim* (the narrative books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the later Prophets, or *Nevi'im Aharonim* (the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets). The *Ketuvim* encompasses I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Job, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The *Tanakh* describes how the Jews viewed God and themselves during Judaism's early years.

Little is known about the early Hebrews including the source of the term 'Hebrew'. They lived during the late Bronze Age Collapse, a time of great unrest in the Middle East, especially in Mesopotamia east of the Syrian desert. Empires such as those of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Hittites rose and fell. The Jews of 2000 BCE were nomadic herders, living under the radar in the Levant west of the Syrian desert and staying in one place only as long as there was adequate pasture for their livestock. They were (and still are) basically a family and never established a political structure that could be a threat to any of the existing kingdoms or empires. They made no written record of themselves; neither did any of the more sedentary cultures of the time remark on them. The early Jews were sojourners, an invisible people.

Judaism began with Abraham, who was a Semite born in Ur and initially called Abram as best we understand Jewish history. Abram was the first person in history to believe that there is only one God, and the great monotheistic religions of the West (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) all trace their roots to him. Abram's God was his familial god in a sea of national gods, and maintaining his household's reverence of his God against the constant pressure from these national gods required Abram's constant attention and effort. This threat from outside gods was a constant theme of ancient Judaism.

The God of Abram was different from the God of the later prophets. It was a stern, demanding God to be feared. It was out of fear, not love, that Abraham acceded to God's demand that he sacrifice his son Isaac. Although evidence for the supposition is scant at best, some Biblical scholars suggest that Abram conceded that the gods of other peoples also existed but chose to believe in a single creator god that was more abstract and not tied to specific natural phenomena. The God of Abram held out no hope of

life after death—neither heaven nor hell. The early Jews didn't expect eternal bliss after death, but neither did they fear eternal damnation. The spirit returned to the dust from whence it came, then disappeared. The God of Abram was a god of the living, not a god of the dead.

Abram's antiquity has left him a shadowy figure. He lived at a time when writing was being invented, and no one had yet thought of recording history for future generations. Thus, we're left with the story of his life as recorded in the Bible's *Book of Genesis*, which is called *Book of Bereishit* by the Jews. The *Book of Bereishit* was written more than a millennium after the events it records.

Biblical scholars have long tried to place Abram within the context of Mesopotamian history by correlating events and personages in the Bible with known history. Perhaps the best correlation, though it is somewhat ambiguous, can be found in the description of famine that drove Abram down into Egypt for a couple of years. "And there was a famine in the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land." (Genesis 12:10 King James Version, or KJV) This famine could either refer to the 4.2 kiloyear event of 2200 to 2100 BCE, or the Late Bronze Age Collapse between 1200 and 900 BCE, both of which have been mentioned in Chapter 7. The more likely is the 4.2 kiloyear event because the Late Bronze Age Collapse happened much too late to have occurred during Abram's lifetime. However, Jewish tradition places Abram two to three hundred years later than the 4.2 kiloyear event. Of course, famines were probably common among people scratching out a meager existence from the land, but this one was severe enough to endure through generations of oral history and be mentioned in the Bible.

Although placing Abram within the context of Mesopotamian history is interesting to put flesh on religion's bare bones, it's really unimportant to understanding Judaism. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (the books of the *Torah*) need not be history (although there's doubtless some kernel of history in them) to reflect how the Jews saw themselves in relation to God and other peoples of the time. The *Torah* is religion, not history, and that's how it will be considered in these pages, which is, after all, not a history book. Any attempt to find the 'reality' behind religion contributes nothing to understanding it; no religion is based on reality.

Genesis records that Abram was not completely submissive to God: he was dubious when God told him that he would possess the land of Canaan, asking, "And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it" (Genesis 15:8 KJV); he laughed when God told him he would father a son when his life was more than half done (Genesis 17:16-17); Sarai (later Sarah) herself also 'laughed' at the idea (Genesis 18:12); he bargained with God over the fate of Sodom (Genesis 18:23-32). Thus, rhetoric aside, Abram's attitude toward God was very similar to that which people had always had about their gods: gods were supernatural and all powerful, but puny, powerless humans could still bargain with them. "I will sacrifice part

of the kill to you if you give me a successful hunt." Abram's ancient attitude toward God is to be expected; ancient feelings can not be upset overnight. We still try to bargain with the Creator of the Universe; "Get me out of my predicament, and I will do such and such." Although, the gap between all-powerful gods and powerless humankind was narrow among ancient religions and early Judaism, it has gradually widened.

Abram was not above being duplicitous. Fearing that he would be slain so his desirable wife, Sarai, could be taken from him, he twice told kings that she was his sister instead of his wife so they would take her into their harem without killing him to get her. Abram claims Sarai is his sister to Pharaoh (Genesis 12:11-20) and to Abimelech, king of Gerar, (Genesis 20:2-13). Apparently none of the kings ever consummated Sarai's position in their harem. Abram was not completely duplicitous, however, because she was actually his half sister; "And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." (Genesis 20:12)

Sarai was barren, so she offered her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, to Abram that he might have a son. Hagar bore him Ishmael (called Isma'il in the Qur'an), and Hagar's success at giving Abram a son caused considerable friction between her and Sarai.

Chapter 17 of Genesis describes God's commitment to Abram that he will father a nation and commands Abram henceforth be called Abraham. God said that Sarai would give birth to a son, Isaac, and be the mother of nations and be henceforth called Sarah. More importantly, the chapter also describes the covenant between God and Abraham, which God commanded to be symbolized by circumcision of the males of his household and of his progeny, so Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised when Abraham was 99 and Ishmael was 13. Circumcision is a distinctive mark of both Judaism and Islam.

The friction between Hagar and Sarah didn't abate after Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Eventually Sarah feared that Ishmael would supplant her son Isaac as Abram's heir, so she convinced the patriarch to turn Hagar and Ishmael out into the wilderness against his personal desires. The handmaid and her son were consequently exiled to the wilderness where they nearly died of thirst before being rescued by God (Genesis 21:8-21). Islamic traditions consider Ishmael to be the father of Arab people.

Belief in only one God didn't free early Judaism from the thrall of sacrifice that had held all religions from the beginning. Like the Hindu *Yajur Veda*, the *Book of Leviticus* and part of Exodus describe how sacrifice is to be performed. Both Hinduism and Judaism required that sacrifice be done with fire (deified as the god Agni by the Hindus), called a burnt offering by the Hebrews. Genesis records that, when Isaac was but a boy, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice him as a burnt offering. As Abraham poised the knife to slit Isaac's throat, Genesis 22:12-18 records that an Angel stayed his hand and told him that God favored him because he feared God such that he would sacrifice his son. It's interesting that fear of God was

more important than loving God. Abraham was going to offer Isaac because he feared rather than loved God. Though Abraham was told that he and his progeny were special, God at first stopped short of specifically and unambiguously declaring them to be people chosen above all others: "and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast hearkened to My voice." (Genesis 22:18 KJV)

Chapter 24 of Genesis describes how Abraham arranged for Isaac to marry Rebekah, a cousin from Sarah's people. Like Sarah, Rebekah was barren at first but eventually gave birth late in life to fraternal twin sons, Esau (the first born) and Jacob. According to Genesis, Jacob treated Esau ill, forcing Esau to sell his birthright for food in Chapter 25 and, in Chapter 27, gaining by subterfuge Isaac's blessing intended for Esau.

In Chapter 28, Jacob flees to Rebekah's brother, Laban, to escape Esau's wrath over his ill treatment. As Jacob slept one night during the journey, he dreamed that God came to him and renewed the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac, and when he awoke, he said, "And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." (Genesis 28:22 KJV) This verse is considered by many to be the source of the Christian rite of the tithe. And bargaining with the all-powerful creator of the Universe continues.

In Chapter 29, Jacob saw Laban's daughter Rachel who "was of beautiful form and fair to look upon" and wanted her for his wife. Among women, beauty is an ancient lure for men. Jacob agreed to work seven years for Rachel's hand, but Laban tricked Jacob and substituted the older, less beautiful daughter, Leah, during the wedding, saying that in their culture, the younger sister could not marry before the older. Jacob was forced to work seven more years for Rachel. Leah's lack of beauty didn't prevent Jacob from lying with her (in the dark, all women are fair). She bore him six sons altogether, but was ever aware that Jacob preferred Rachel even though, like her aunts Sarah and Rebekah, she was barren until late in life. Perhaps a genetic tendency for fibroid tumors ran in the family, making conception difficult. Eventually, however, she bore him Joseph and Benjamin, dying during Benjamin's birth. Difficult labor is another symptom of fibroid tumors. Altogether Jacob sired twelve sons: Reuben (with Leah), Simeon (with Leah), Levi (with Leah), Judah (with Leah), Dan (with Rachel's maid-servant Bilhah), Naphtali (with Bilhah), Gad (with Leah's maidservant Zilpah), Asher (with Zilpah), Issachar (with Leah), Zebulun (with Leah), Joseph (with Rachel), and Benjamin (with Rachel). Leah also bore Dinah, a daughter.

After completing his years of service to Laban in payment for his two wives, Jacob returned to his native land. In Chapter 35 of Genesis, God changed Jacob's name to Israel, and his twelve sons thus became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. According to Jewish tradition, some time between 1500 and 1200 BCE, during Egypt's Eighteenth or Nineteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom, Jacob and the Jews fled to Egypt to escape a famine that ravaged the Levant. This famine might have been associated with the Late Bronze Age Collapse. Some Biblical scholars ques-

tion that the Jews ever went down to Egypt. However, historicity has nothing to do with how the Jews view themselves, which is fundamental to the development of Judaism.

The great saga recorded in the *Book of Shemot* (Exodus) of the Jew's escape from the famine, their subsequent enslavement by the Egyptians, and final release was too insignificant to the Egyptians for them to record even though the plagues visited upon Egypt would have been major catastrophes. To the Egyptians, the Jewish problem was simply a minor blip not worth mentioning compared with the succession of kings, the jousting of religious cults, and war. As Britton Alden Million once said, "You see what you see from where you're sitting." Jacob died while in Egypt, and his sons took him back to the Levant to be buried alongside Abraham and Isaac.

Neither Egyptians nor the *Tanakh* have anything to say about the Jew's time in Egypt between the death of Joseph and the arrival of Moses. That period, which was during the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Dynasties of Egypt's New Kingdom and which Jewish tradition says was as much as 400 years, is a blank. Tradition says that they were slaves, but they had flocks of sheep when Moses led them out of Egypt. They took gold and silver from the Egyptians when they left, so they also might have taken sheep as well. "And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians." (Exodus 12:36 KJV) The Jew's escape from Egypt and their entry into Canaan was during a period when Assyria and Babylon were struggling for dominance in Mesopotamia, east of the Syrian desert.

With Moses, the history of the Jews becomes a little clearer. According to the *Tanakh*, he was a Jew who had been raised as an Egyptian in the Pharaoh's household; the name of the Pharaoh is unclear because it's extremely difficult to correlate the uncertain dates of the Egyptian kings with the equally uncertain dates of Jewish history. However, it's probably either the Eighteenth Dynasty's Amenhotep II or Tutmosis (Tuthmosis) IV. It could even be the nineteenth Dynasty's Ramesses I or Seti I.

Moses fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian and managed to make his way to Midian. According to Genesis 25:1-2, the Midianites were the descendants of Midian, who was a son of Abraham by his wife Keturah, whom he had married after Sarah died. Thus, Moses and the Midianites were both descendants of Abraham. Midian lay in the shadow of Mt. Horeb, which some equate with Mt. Sinai although others suggest the two are different mountains. The location of Midian and Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai) is also the source of some disagreement among Bible scholars. Some place them in the Sinai Peninsula west of the Gulf of Aqaba, whereas others place them east of the Gulf of Aqaba on the edge of the Arabian desert.

The *Book of Shemot* (Exodus) describes Moses as befriending a Midianite priest named Reuel, or Jethro as he is called in some places of the *Tanakh*, and ultimately marrying Jethro's daughter Zipporah. After many years living in Midian, God calls Moses to go to Egypt and free the Jews there. Chapter 3, verse 7 of the *Book of Shemot* (Exodus) is the first time the people of Israel are referred clearly as God's people: "And the Lord said, I

have surely seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;" (Exodus 3:7 KJV). Moses' brother, Aaron, meets him in the wilderness to accompany him in his confrontations with the Pharaoh. Both Moses and Aaron were Levites, descendants of Levi, the third son of Jacob and Leah.

Chapters 7 through 12 of the *Book of Shemot* (Exodus) describes the plagues God visited upon Egypt, culminating in the death of Egypt's first-born sons from Pharaoh to the beasts in the field. The Jews escaped this final plague by marking the door posts and lintel of their houses with lamb's blood so the angel of death would know them and pass over their houses. The hours of that night are perhaps the most important event in Judaism and have been solemnly celebrated as Passover each year for over 3000 years. It's the longest-running continuously celebrated religious observance of all modern faiths.

Tradition says that after their release from bondage in Egypt, the Hebrews wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before they reached the promised land, and much of the *Book of Shemot* (Exodus) is a brief description of the this wandering, which is further elaborated in the *Book of Bamidbar* (Numbers). The *Book of Shemot* (Exodus) reiterates the Deity's declaration that the Jews are God's chosen people: "Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:5-6 KJV) That the Jews were a 'chosen people' did not imply that they were superior but simply that they were a kingdom of priests. After all, they alone recognized the single creator.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the *Torah* is that it doesn't picture the Jews as unflinchingly pious and obedient. It describes Hebrews as often demonstrating a lack of faith in their Deity and grumbling about God's commands, claiming following them was uncomfortable. The grumbling began on the fifteenth day of the second month after leaving Egypt because they were hungry. "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness; and the children of Israel said unto them: 'Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'" (Exodus 16:2-3 KJV) Perhaps they had already eaten much of the livestock they brought out of Egypt. "And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle." (Exodus 12:38 KJV) God eased their hunger by daily supplying a sort of bread called mana.

Later the people murmured against Moses in the wilderness of Sin because they ran out of water. "And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said: Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" (Exodus 17:3 KJV) Then God commanded Moses to strike a rock with his rod, and water poured forth. This episode was soon followed

### Moses Breaking the Tablets of the Ten Commandments

This print by Gustave Dore illustrates Moses breaking the tablets of the ten commandments upon seeing that the stiff-necked Jews had lost their faith and defiled God



by the first combat the Jews had during their exodus. They fought their first of several battles with the Amalekites, which some consider to have been descendants of Amalek, who was a son of Esau's first born son Eliphaz and the concubine Timna and, thus, Isaac's great nephew. However, other references suggest that they had an even older heritage.

The third month after leaving Egypt, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Moses ascended the mountain alone and received the law, then came down and reported it all to the people. Like the gods of all religions that have ever been, the God of the Jews in the wilderness had some human characteristics: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me;" (Exodus 20:5 KJV). No man anywhere on Earth three millennia ago had yet developed the wit to imagine a God that's above all human nature, and many still have not these three millennia later.

The Law he had received on the mountain included detailed instructions on how to build the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle and its furnishings, who should do the work building them, and how to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests. Moses was on the mountain 40 days and nights. When Moses didn't return right away, the people grew impatient, feared that Moses had abandoned them, lost faith in Abraham's God, and prevailed upon Aaron to make them a god. So Aaron made them a golden calf to worship. When Moses came down from the mountain and saw what they had done, he threw down the stone tablets bearing the ten commandments, breaking the tablets to pieces. "And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made." (Exodus 32:35 KJV) This event is partly the source of the Jews' portrayal of themselves as an impatient, "stiffnecked" people. "For the Lord said unto Moses: Say unto the children of Israel: Ye are a stiffnecked people; I will up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee; therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee." (Exodus 33:5 KJV)

Moses went back onto 'God's Mountain' and again received stone tablets of the Ten commandments. Both the broken and unbroken tablets were kept in the Ark of the Covenant. It was on the slopes of Mt. Sinai that the Abraham's familial God became the god of the Hebrew nation through the agency of Moses.

The God of the Hebrews in the wilderness was a stern, uncompromising Deity. "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." (Leviticus 10:1-2 KJV) "And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up; and the stranger [one translation says 'common man', meaning someone other than a Levite] that cometh nigh shall be put to death." (Numbers 1:51 KJV) "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks upon the Sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it had not been declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses: The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died, as the Lord commanded Moses." (Numbers 15:32-36 KJV)

After a few years in the wilderness, a certain group became impatient with the lack of progress and dissatisfied with the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They rebelled, believing that Moses was leading according to his own will rather than that of God. Their leader was Korah, a fellow Levite of Moses and Aaron. "Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown; and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them: 'Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?'" (Numbers 16:1-3 KJV) Moses challenged them to appear in front of the tabernacle with fire pots of incense and let God decide the proper leader. When all were assembled, the ground opened up and all 250 who rebelled, along with their entire families, were swallowed into a huge pit which then close over them, burying them all alive. The next day a much larger group complained to Moses over the harsh punishment meted out to the rebels, and God slew the 14,700 who complained.

Then God devised a sign by which all would know who was selected to be priests of the tabernacle. A prince of each of the eleven tribes inscribed his name on a rod, and Aaron inscribed his name on one representing the

Levites. The twelve rods were placed in the tabernacle overnight. "And it came to pass, that on the morrow, Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, [only] the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." (Numbers 17:8 KJV) Thus, the tribe of Levi became the most favored among the chosen people, and only their numbers served as priests in the tabernacle and the temple in Jerusalem. However, they received no land in Canaan, although they were given cities throughout the land from which they could exercise their priestly duties.

As Moses prepared the people to enter Canaan, he sent spies, one from each of the twelve tribes, to find if the land was a good land and if the people there were weak or strong. They reported that the land was rich and the vineyards and groves were fruitful, but ten of the twelve reported that the people were strong and the cities well fortified. Once again, the people murmured against Moses, and sought a captain who would take them back to Egypt that they don't fall by the sword. But Joshua and Caleb disagreed with the ten, rallying the people, saying that the Hebrews could overcome the inhabitants and take the land because God was with them.

The Israelites defeated the Amorites and Og, the king of Bashan, in a couple of battles in the wilderness outside the Promised Land. These battles caused Balak, king of Moab, to be concerned for the welfare of his kingdom, and he sought an alliance with the Midianites, among whom Moses had dwelled after he fled Egypt and who were his wife's people. In a story that's prominent in Jewish lore, Balak elicited the aid of a gentile prophet and the greatest magician of those days named Balaam, who was conversant with God. Balak offered Balaam a great reward if he placed a curse on the Israelites. But Balaam answered, "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? And how shall I defy, whom the Lord hath not defied?" (Numbers 23:8 KJV) Three times Balak asked Balaam to place a curse on the Israelites, but three times Balaam blessed them instead. "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together; and Balak said unto Balaam: I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times." (Numbers 24:10 KJV) But the Israelites began whoring after the Moabite women and offering sacrifice to their god and, thus, Balak's wish to curse the Israelites was brought to fruition by the Israelites themselves. So God sent a plague among the children of Israel killing 24,000 before a priest got it lifted. A war with Midian followed later.

Aaron and Moses both died in the wilderness, never entering Canaan, the Promised Land. The *Tanakh* has two versions of Aaron's death: Chapter 20 of Numbers says he died on Mt. Hor whereas Deuteronomy 10:6 says that he died much earlier, at Mosera. Both descriptions identify Aaron's older remaining son, Eleazar, as successor rather than the younger son, Ithamar. The position of chief priest was always inherited by Aaron's sons, but it shifted between the progeny of the two sons depending on their faithfulness to God's instructions.



### The Central Levant ca. 1000 BCE

These are the various kingdoms that occupied the central Levant around 1000 BCE.

Only a few Israelites who had lived in Egypt (such as Joshua, who had simply been born there) survived to enter the Promised Land. "And the Lord spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against Me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against Me. Say unto them: As truly as I live, saith the Lord, surely as ye have spoken in Mine ears, so will I do to you: your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness, and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against Me; Doubtless ye shall not come into this land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness." (Numbers 14:26-32 KJV) "For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord: unto whom the Lord swore that he would not shew them the land, which the Lord swore unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey." (Joshua 5:6 KJV)

One of Moses' last acts was to name Joshua as his successor. This was an excellent choice because Joshua was both religiously correct and militarily adept. According to the Book of Joshua, Canaan was acquired by a combination of military victories and the intervention of God. Like all ancient peoples (and modern ones for that matter), the Hebrews expected their god to help them in warfare as well as peace. However, no archaeological evidence supports the view that Canaan was a military conquest.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses says that God commanded the Jews to take no prisoners, to kill everyone. "But of all the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth; but thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee: that they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 20:16-18 KJV) The threat that the children of Israel would abandon God and whore after pagan deities was very real. After all, their history was one of easily breaking the covenant. The *Book of Yehoshua* (Joshua) says that the Jews often killed everyone as Moses said God commanded: "And the city [Jericho] shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent." (Joshua 6:17 KJV) "For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the Lord commanded Moses. And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities." (Joshua 11:20-21 KJV)

The *Tanakh* does not instruct the Jews to utterly destroy all non-Jews everywhere as a matter of policy. The instructions are limited to the Promised Land, which has specific borders as described in Numbers 34. Even in the Promised Land, the Jews did not put everyone to the sword. The inhabitants of many cities were spared as long as they paid tribute to the Hebrews. "As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day." (Joshua 15:63 KJV) The continued existence of pagans within their borders would be a source of constant turmoil for the Hebrews as Moses feared.

When the fighting was over, Joshua divided the land among the tribes of Israel according to the allotment prescribed by Moses. He also pitched the tabernacle of the congregation at Shiloh to serve as a central point of worship for all the children of Israel. "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them." (Joshua 18:1 KJV) Because they were consecrated as priests of God, the Levites received no tract of land but, rather, cities scattered throughout Canaan where they could help the local people walk in the way of Yahweh.

Joshua died around 1245 BCE without appointing a successor, and although no great leader of Joshua's stature appeared after he died, the people of that generation faithfully worshiped Yahweh because they had seen that God had fought for them. However, the next generation, lacking that first-hand knowledge, began to intermarry with the pagans and wor-

ship pagan gods as Moses had feared, so Yahweh became angry with them and allowed the pagans to subdue the Israelites. Apparently the Levite priests in cities scattered throughout the land were unable to keep the tribes faithful to Yahweh.

After several years under the yoke of their enemies, the Jews cried out to Yahweh for deliverance, and God responded by raising one of their number, Othniel, to free them from tyranny. As long as Othniel lived, the people worshiped Yahweh faithfully, but they began to sin against Yahweh again as soon as he died.

This cycle repeated for around 200 years, and fifteen temporary leaders like Othniel, which were called Judges (perhaps a peculiar name), appeared to lead the people back to Yahweh in each cycle. Again, it's instructive that the *Tanakh* does not portray the ancient Hebrews as unfalteringly pious and unflinchingly faithful to God, and the prophets attributed their repeated subjugation to this faltering faith.

The last Judge was Samuel. The Philistines had despoiled the Hebrews and carried off the Ark of the Covenant. Apparently God was so wroth with the Jews over their lack of faith that the Ark ceased to be sacred. Samuel was elevated to Judge in order to guide the Jews in their efforts to free themselves from the Philistines. Even though Eli, the Head Priest, was a descendant of Aaron through his son Ithamar, God chose to speak to the people through Samuel. Eli's sons were wicked men, and Eli was the last descendant of Ithamar to be Head Priest.

It became apparent to many Jews that, if left to their own devices, the individual tribes would always be at the mercy of the pagans in their midst, and many Israelites felt that a central government, rather than unerring obedience to Yahweh, was necessary to keep them from being repeatedly subjugated. The Hebrews approached Samuel and demanded a king who would war with their enemies.

The Book of I Samuel makes clear that both Samuel and Yahweh considered the desire for a king to demonstrate a lack of faith and to be an act of disobedience towards Yahweh; Yahweh was their king and would protect them as long as they were faithful. Samuel told the people that a king would use them grievously, taxing them and taking the best for himself, but the people persisted. So Yahweh, as had happened with Moses and all other deliverers in Hebrew history, selected a king for them: Saul. Samuel formally anointed him with oil to symbolize his selection as monarch. The monarchical period in Israel's history began around 1020 BCE with Saul.

And it came to pass that the perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing Lord of Hosts soon realized that selecting Saul as king was a mistake.

Thus, the Book of I Samuel records that God told Samuel to anoint a shepherd boy named David as king even while Saul ruled. Obviously, this created Saul's deep enmity toward David, whom he tried to kill several times over the following years. David, however, refused to raise his hand against the king because Saul was anointed by God. However, Saul was eventually killed in battle against the Philistines, and David was declared

king sometime between 1010 BCE and 1004 BCE. David firmly united the Jews and led them to a final victory over the Philistines.

By the time David was selected to be King of Israel, Egypt had been an empire for two thousand years and twenty dynasties of kings had come and gone. The Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, and New Kingdom had risen and collapsed. Israel was simply a new star in the constellation of kingdoms, and it wasn't even of the first magnitude.

We now come to the time when the Jews begin to be evident in history through archeology and the written records of various Middle Eastern kings. There are no written records or archeological evidence of a lengthy Jewish presence in Egypt or of their wandering in the Sinai peninsula for 40 years. Instead, archeology supports the hypothesis that the Jews rose from hill people indigenous to the Levant. Moreover, Biblical scholarship in the mid- to late-twentieth century casts doubt on the historical existence of the twelve tribes of Israel as described in the *Tanakh*. However, such historical accuracy is irrelevant to understanding the development of Judaism, or of any other religion; all that's relevant to that understanding is how the Jews viewed themselves as they built their faith.

David made Jerusalem the capital of the united Jewish people. After building a palace and fortifying the city's walls, he moved the religious center from Shiloh to Jerusalem and brought the Ark of the Covenant there. The people began to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year on holy days. He also made Jerusalem the secular center of the country. He established civil and military administrations in Jerusalem similar to those of the Canaanites and Egyptians. He divided the country into districts, each with its own civil, military, and religious institutions. Each district paid taxes to Jerusalem.

This was the time when prophets began to appear bearing messages that they claimed were from God. The first was probably Nathan, who berated David for breaking one of God's commandments by sleeping with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers. Nathan told David that he would not be allowed to build a temple to God because of this transgression. David arranged to have Bathsheba's husband killed in battle so he could marry her. The Temple was built by Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba.

Eventually, David's son Absalom attempted to take the throne from him, but Zadok, a descendant of the Aaron's son and former head priest, Eleazar, aided David in his resistance. Zadok remained David's advisor and eventually anointed Solomon as the next king. When Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem, Zadok became Head Priest there, establishing a Zadokite dynasty of chief priests. The Temple became the central place for worship; it was the only place where sacrifices to Yahweh could be performed.

When Solomon died, the ten northern tribes refused to accept his son Rehoboam as king and seceded, forming the Kingdom of Israel in the north with its capital first, briefly, at Tizrah then at Samaria. However, in Chapter 11, verses 31-39 of *The Book of Malachim I* (Kings 1), Ahijah, a prophet



### Samaritans Worshiping on Mt. Gerizim

Samaritans believe that Mt. Gerizim is the true abode of God. Modern Samaritans number less than one thousand believers.

from Shiloh, describes the rift as the punishment rendered to Israel because Solomon had taken many wives from among the pagans and worshiped their gods. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the Kingdom of Judah in the south with its capital at Jerusalem.

During its existence, the Kingdom of Israel was often in political turmoil that would have made ancient Rome proud. Six of its kings were assassinated, Zachariah and Shallum after only a few months of rule and Zimri after only a few days of his reign. On the other hand the Kingdom of Judah was quite stable politically; most of its kings died of natural causes while on the throne. Most Biblical scholars attribute this disparity in political stability between the northern and southern kingdoms to the difference in population profiles of the two kingdoms: the northern kingdom was a heterogeneous mixture of ten tribes whereas the southern kingdom was a relatively homogenous population primarily of Judah alone.

The period of the divided monarchy was the time when Nathan and Ahijah were followed by numerous other prophets who rose up to castigate the kings and people for whoring after pagan women and their beliefs. The most famous was Elijah. Elijah rose to prominence because King Ahab of the northern kingdom had married princess Jezebel, a priestess of Baal and the daughter of the king of Sidon and Tyre in Phoenicia, and had allowed her to proselytize her cult in the kingdom. Elijah was an unyielding opponent of Baal, and his tenacious, profound, unshakable belief in God has made him an important figure in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Perhaps it was the northern kingdom's political instability that tempted Assyria to remove this small thorn in its side around 720 BCE. A three year siege of Samaria was begun by Shalmaneser V and completed by Sargon II. As they had done with all previous defeated enemies, the Assyrians

removed all the Hebrew religious, political, and economic elite from the kingdom (primarily Samaria), scattered them throughout Assyria, and replaced them with Assyrians from other parts of the empire. Thus, the Judaism of Samaria became infected by Assyrian cults. However, the influence of the Jews, more numerous than the intruders, eventually eliminated the foreign cults, although a Judaism unique to Samaria developed.

This Samaritan Judaism persists to this day. The Samaritans have a version of the *Torah* that's slightly different from that in the *Tanakh*. They reject all the books of the *Tanakh* but the *Torah* and deny the validity of the Temple in Jerusalem as the house of God, preferring Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans believe that the changes in the Judaism that had come about since the fall of the Kingdom of Israel, such as the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, violate the religion of Abraham and Moses and refuse to acknowledge post-kingdom Judaism as the true faith. Although they originally rejected the Samaritans and refused to associate with them, Jews eventually accepted the Samaritan faith as an unorthodox form of Judaism.

Until the the Kingdom of Israel came to an end, the Hebrew's worship and beliefs had been unchanged from the time of Moses: worshiping through sacrifice, following the Law of Moses, and not addressing the concept of the immortality of the soul. However, among the peoples that the Assyrians settled in the former Kingdom of Israel were Zoroastrians from what is now Iran. The Jewish people, if not the priests, found the Zoroastrian ideas of an immortal soul and an eternal reward for living a life of goodness to be comforting and not conflicting with Moses' God. Zoroastrian spiritualism softened the stern Law of Moses and ground down its sharp edges. Universally, people are drawn to the notion of living forever and being rewarded for living a life of goodness, so the Zoroastrian influence spread throughout the beliefs of the common people in the former Kingdom of Israel. Judaism began to be spiritual.

Jewish lore says that the Assyrians scattered the ten tribes of the Kingdom of Israel so effectively that they never again formed a cultural unit. They have become known among the Hebrews as the ten lost tribes. The Kingdom of Judah survived by accepting the status of an Assyrian client state and paying tribute. However, in 627 BCE, Assurbanipal, the last strong Assyrian ruler, died, and Assyria began to disintegrate as its client states began successful revolts. Babylonia was the strongest, and replaced Assyria as the dominant power in the Middle East. In 587 BCE, the Kingdom of Judah came to an end as the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem. King Zedekiah and thousands of his fellow Jews were deported to Babylon, and Solomon's Temple was razed to the ground. Unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonians didn't replace the exiled Jews with foreigners.

Temple priests (Zadokites descended from King David's advisor and King Solomon's chief priest, Zadok) and the political and economic elite, primarily from Jerusalem, were the only ones exiled; the commoners remained behind although some fled the area, settling as far afield as Elephantine far up the Nile River by the sixth century before the current era.

The exile, though psychologically damaging, was hardly an onerous situation. The deported Jews formed their own community in Babylon and retained their religion, practices, and philosophies. Without their customary temple at which they could worship, the exiles resorted to *ad hoc* services, probably in private homes. These services were doubtless somewhat disorganized at first, but eventually developed into rituals that perhaps became the model for synagogue worship of the Roman diaspora in centuries to come when, for the next two thousand years, Jews had to make their homes in foreign lands. Some evidence suggests that the exiles in Babylonia were permitted to farm, to marry and raise families, to buy property, and to accumulate wealth. No bloody persecutions are reported. Conditions were good enough that some elected to stay in Babylon when Cyrus the Great gave them permission to return. The Babylonian Jews created an important center for Jewish studies that was perhaps the first 'think tank' in history. The Babylonian *Talmud* is preferred over the Jerusalem version.

Like the Jews in the former Kingdom of Israel 200 years before, the Babylonian exiles came into contact with Zoroastrian spiritualism, and the Zoroastrian idea of Satan as an evil adversary to God slowly crept into their beliefs. "And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." (Zechariah, 3:1, KJV) Satan was a convenient explanation for the tendency to stray from Yahweh. The Zoroastrian concepts of an immortal soul and an eternal reward for living a life of goodness also slowly became part of the belief system of some of the exiles from Judah. Spiritualism began to spread among the common people throughout Judaism, which was no longer strictly the religion of Moses. The office of scribe was strengthened in Babylon, and the written language overhauled. A version of the *Torah* was transcribed. This version is called the Priestly Source and was probably the last independent version recorded before all early versions were combined into the modern one. The Babylonian exile was an event in Jewish history that's almost as significant as the Egyptian captivity and the exodus therefrom although the exile lasted for only 50 years before Cyrus the Great invaded Babylonia in 539 BCE. He soon returned the Jews to their homeland, Judea (no longer a kingdom), to rebuild the Temple.

The returnees from exile found that some of the people left behind had forsaken their faith. Just as the opinions of any group of people anywhere vary widely on any issue, the Jews' attitude toward the God of Abraham had always run the gamut from complete rejection to total, unquestioned acceptance. Thus, without leadership to keep the brotherhood together, some of the people had begun to intermarry with gentiles and had ceased to observe the Law of Moses.

Rebuilding the Temple was the first step in the lengthy process of bringing the Jews who had strayed back to their faith. The returnees were not simply permitted to rebuild the Temple; they were specifically commissioned to do so with a little financial support from the Persian central government. This was part of Persian policy that they exercised in more instances than the Hebrew question. The Persians were interested in govern-

ing an empire, not proselytizing a religion, and they believed that their people would be more manageable if they were allowed to practice their own faiths. Moreover, a reasonably strong Jewish people would be a valuable buffer between Persia and an increasingly hostile and energetic Egypt. The term 'canon fodder' comes to mind.

However, rebuilding the Temple was fraught with conflict. The returnees believed that those who had been left behind and not exiled should have no part in the reconstruction. Of course, the Samaritans believed the Temple was an abomination that was not true to the faith at all. Construction remained in limbo for over a decade as the Jews squabbled among themselves. The urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah was instrumental in finally getting the construction finished in 515 BCE. The Zadokites returned to their former duties as priests of the Temple.

Simply rebuilding the Temple was not enough to return the people to observing the Law of Moses; some men still married pagan women and holy days were not well observed. A strong religious leader was found in the person of the prophet Ezra, who was given a mandate by King Artaxerxes I in 458 BCE to leave Babylon, go to Jerusalem, and bring the Law to the people. Ezra ended the marriage between Hebrew men and pagan women, but the most important institution he began was the public reading of the *Torah*, which he had brought with him from Babylon. This is an institution that remains a part of Judaic worship even to modern times.

During the exile, the faithful among the common people in Judea outside Jerusalem tried to maintain their worship as best they could. This worship was possibly centered around the places established in cities scattered throughout the land that were maintained by Levites (Aaronite priests) ever since the Jews first occupied Canaan. The worshipers often followed advice on the *Torah* that they sought from learned men because the *Torah* was not clear on many, many issues. This situation is similar to that in Hinduism in which learned men sought to explain the enigmatic Vedas through the Brahmanas. These Judaic learned men sometimes shared among themselves the best advice, which was passed down to their successors for over two hundred years. This collection of ancient sages is called The Great Assembly in Judaic tradition.

After the Temple was rebuilt, there was a resurgence in worship encouraged by prophets such as Ezra. The common people outside of Jerusalem maintained the practices they had developed during the exile, and the accumulated advice of the learned men of The Great Assembly became increasingly important, eventually becoming almost as important as the *Torah* itself, which came to be a somewhat remote, though sacred, ideal. Judaism began to split into two traditions: one, the Pharisees, declared the oral interpretations of the *Torah* that had been accumulated by learned men were as valid as the written law and the other, the Sadducees, perhaps in response to the liberalism of the Pharisees, promoted a literal interpretation of the *Torah*. The Sadducees, perhaps influenced by Aristotle, believed that God took no part in the unfolding of the Universe. The Sadducees were closely allied with the Zadokite priests of the Temple be-

cause they shared a common view of the *Torah*. On the other hand, the common people found the practical interpretations of the *Torah* maintained by the Pharisees to be more understandable and useful.

The Pharisees and Sadducees both served on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court of law and religious matters. Each city had a Lesser Sanhedrin composed of 23 members, and the nation had one Greater Sanhedrin composed of 71 members. The term 'Sanhedrin', when used alone without the adjective 'lesser', refers to the Greater Sanhedrin. Jewish tradition identifies the Sanhedrin as founded by Moses, at the command of God: "And the Lord said unto Moses, gather unto Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee." (Numbers 11:16 KJV) The Sanhedrin stood as the religious and civil supreme court until the great Roman dispora.

The final redaction of the *Torah* was done in Jerusalem after the exiles returned. By examining the subject matter, writing style, and word usage Biblical scholars have proposed the Documentary Hypothesis that the *Torah* we know is an amalgam of four original sources: the Jahwist (or J) that was written around 850 BCE in the southern Kingdom of Judah and tells the story of national origin; the Elohist (or E) source written in the northern Kingdom of Israel around 750 BCE and also tells the story of national origin; the Deuteronomist (or D) that was written sometime during the seventh century BCE and is concerned primarily with the Law; and the Priestly source (or P) that written during or after the exile and is concerned primarily with religious ritual. The *Torah* that Ezra read before the people is generally considered to have been the Priestly version. The seeming inconsistencies, such as calling God Yahweh sometimes and Elohim other times, and duplications in the text are a result of imperfect blending of the sources by the final redactors. The Yahwist source is characterized, in part, by the use of the name Yahweh for God, Moses's father-in-law being called Reuel, and the holy mountain being called Sinai. The Elohist source uses the name Elohim for God, Moses's father-in-law is called Jethro, and the holy mountain is called Horeb. On the other hand, Jews consider the *Torah* to be divinely authored and to have been transmitted in its entirety to Moses, who then wrote it down. Some go so far as to believe that, similar to Hindu belief in the Vedas, it has existed forever and that it's the blueprint God used to make the Universe. Sometime around 450 BCE the *Torah* began to be recognized as Scripture rather than merely a handbook of practices. This elevation of stature was probably instrumental in solidifying their religion in the hearts and minds of the Jews.

Beginning in the late Monarchy, prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah not only castigated the people as Nathan had done for abandoning the law of Moses but also began to speak of the coming of a mashiach, the Jewish messiah, and the advent of a messianic age. In keeping with the Jewish focus on worldly, rather than spiritual, matters, the Jews believe this mashiach will not be a spiritual deliverer but, rather, a

great leader who will permanently free the Jews from their enemies and usher in a lasting period of material plenty and world peace (Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-9). The mashiach will bring the Jewish people back to Israel from the four corners of the Earth and restore Jerusalem (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3). "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." (Hosea 3:4-5) He will establish a government in Israel that will be the center of all world government, both for Jews and gentiles (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:10; 42:1). He will rebuild the Temple and reestablish its worship (Jeremiah 33:18). He will be from the House of David.

Once the belief in a mashiach became established, it has become a central tenant of Judaism and one of the thirteen principles of faith identified by Maimonides. It is said that some Jews in Nazi death camps went to the gas chambers singing of the mashiach. The longing of Jews for a mashiach was so powerful that early followers of Jesus seized upon it to proclaim him the messiah, although he became a spiritual rather than mortal leader in their hands thereby making him impossible to be accepted as the mashiach by Jews.

The prophets also reshaped fundamental beliefs. God in the Mosaic view was capable of anger, capriciousness, and injustice, but the prophets saw God as righteous and just. The good are always rewarded, and the evil are always punished. They viewed ritual practices as unimportant compared with ethical demands of doing right, showing mercy, punishing evil, and dispensing justice: "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart." (Zechariah, 7:9-10 KJV) This change in emphasis is similar to the revolution in Hinduism that the Upanishads brought to the Vedas. Both changed the fundamental nature of their religion: Hinduism changed from a sacrifice oriented practice to a philosophical belief and Judaism changed from a worldly practice to a spiritual belief.

Around 333 BCE, Alexander the Great drove the Persians from the Levant. Because they had failed to protect their people from the Macedonians, the once-mighty gods of the Near East lost prestige and were relegated to the roles of minor local gods. El Elyon and the various incarnations of Baal ceased to lure Jews from worship of God. Contrarily, the Hebrew God remained strong not because the Deity was considered to be unworthy of the people, but because the people considered themselves unworthy of the Deity. The failure was in the people's lack of faith, not God's support. In the centuries since Moses had led them in the wilderness of Sinai, the Jews had evolved from a people only loosely attracted to their worship of God and often easily lured from it by paganism to a people who were deeply devoted

to their religion and its rites and traditions and ready to defend them by whatever means was necessary from those who sought to end them.

After Alexander died in 323 BCE, a struggle of succession among his generals followed for several years. The usual term is that Alexander's empire was "divided among his generals", which suggests a rather peaceful process. In truth, a half dozen wars, such as the First War of the Diadochi and the Fourth War of the Diadochi, were fought among Alexander's generals over a period of several decades. The two most powerful and most successful survivors of the turmoil were Seleucus I Nicator, who founded the Seleucid Empire in Mesopotamia in 312 BCE, and Ptolemy I Soter, who took control of Egypt in 305 BCE. The Levant was sandwiched between these two great empires, who fought for control of it for several years with the Seleucid Empire emerging victorious. In one of his World Civilizations Learning Modules, Richard Hooker of Washington State University wrote, "Between 319 and 302 BCE, Jerusalem changed hands seven times."

Although the ancient Middle East gods became irrelevant to Judaism, the Greek culture became very influential. Many Jews, while not abandoning their rites and traditions, easily found an accommodation with Greek culture and adopted some of their ways, becoming known as Hellenized Jews. Chief among these Hellenized Jews were the Sadducees, who would also find easy accommodation with Rome.

Egyptian Pharaoh Ptolemy II is traditionally credited with sponsoring, some time around 250 BCE, the translation of the *Torah* into Greek for Alexandrian Jews who were no longer fluent in Hebrew but were fluent in Greek. In the eastern Mediterranean and Near East regions, Greek had become the common 'bridge' language (the *lingua franca*) between people with different native tongues. This translation is known both as the Septuagint and by its Roman numeral abbreviation, LXX, which refers to the legendary seventy Jewish scholars who did the translation. The Septuagint was widely used among Hellenized Jews throughout the empire who were losing their Hebrew language. Over the next hundred years, books of the prophets were added to it because they were beginning to be considered as scripture along side the *Torah*.

By and large, the Seleucids didn't interfere in the rights of any of their people to worship their traditional gods. However, a series of events in Jerusalem around 167 BCE led Antiochus IV Epiphanes to withdraw his tolerance of Jewish worship of God. He desecrated the Temple by erecting an altar to the god Zeus, allowing the sacrifice of pigs, and opening the shrine to non Jews; killed many Jews; forbade them to practice any of their rites (including the Sabbath and circumcision); and required them to worship Greek gods. Mattathias, a Hasmonean priest, resisted these strictures by killing a Seleucid official who tried to force him to worship Greek gods (several versions of this episode exist). An uprising ensued that was led by Mattathias' sons, who were given the honorific name Maccabees, which is roughly translated as 'hammer'. The resistance was first directed mainly against Hellenized Jews, but the Seleucids sent a small army to enforce

Antiochus' decrees. The Maccabees primarily used guerrilla tactics, perhaps the first time in history such tactics were used, to defeat the army.

In 164 BCE Jerusalem was recaptured by Judas Maccabee who brought 'clean' priests to purify the Temple, an event that gave birth to the holiday of Chanukah. Antiochus IV died in 164 BCE while fighting the Parthians in the East. The death of Antiochus and rumbles within the empire caused the Seleucids to lose much of their interest in Judea. This was the birth of the Jews' Hasmonean kingdom although it was another two decades before the kingdom was completely secure. The Hasmonean kingdom brought Samaria, the capital, of the old northern Kingdom of Israel under its control and forced the Idumaeans, descendants of the ancient Edomites, to accept Judaism. From these converted Idumaeans would come king Herod of Jesus' day.

Hasmoneans served as both kings and Temple priests, which broke the line of descendants of Aaron as Temple priests. The Temple was still the focal point of Judaism as it had been in King Solomon's time, and burnt offerings made there were the primary method of worship for all Jews. Jews throughout Egypt and the Middle East sent money for its support and to purchase sacrifices. Jews from the Assyrian and Babylonian diaspora would also make pilgrimages to it. In 63 BCE the Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem, made the Hasmonean kingdom a Client state of Rome, ending this final 80 years of Jewish sovereignty, and the Hasmoneans disappeared from history.

Rome allowed the Jews to continue practicing their religion, and the Temple remained the focal point of it. However, prayer began to augment sacrifice as an accepted method of worship among the large Jewish population scattered throughout Egypt and the Middle East because sacrifice at the Temple was unavailable to them. The Temple was still considered in Roman times to be the only place where sacrifice rituals could be performed whereas prayer could be done anywhere. Thus, places of prayer, or synagogues, began to appear among the scattered people.

In 37 BCE Herod was appointed King of Judea by the Romans, who granted him almost unlimited autonomy in the country's internal affairs. He probably tried to walk a fine line between keeping both the Jews and the Romans happy, but such compromises between diverse elements inevitably fail. Although he was responsible for improvements in Judea such as construction of the Temple Mount, a portion of which remains today as the Western Wall, he never won the trust and support of his Jewish subjects.

Around 6 CE, Judea came under direct Roman administration, which increasingly suppressed Jewish life, especially the rite of circumcision, which, like the Greeks, the Romans felt to be a desecration of a divinely created body. Sporadic, violent Hebrew resistance escalated into a full scale revolt in 66 CE. The Romans, under the leadership of Titus, were the inevitable victors, razing the Temple to the ground in 70 CE and defeating the last Jewish outpost at Masada in 73 CE. Not one stone of the Temple was left standing atop another, and the Temple never stood again.

The Sadducees as a named sect disappeared sometime after the destruction of the Temple. Perhaps backlash toward their easy accommodation with Romans, the people who destroyed the Temple, was the instrument of the demise of the sect. The primary difference between the Sadducees and Pharisees was that Sadducees believed only the written law, the *Torah*, should be observed whereas the Pharisees believed that the oral law was equally binding. According to Christian Hebraist Herbert Danby, while applying the Mosaic code to daily life and Temple worship over the centuries, "a multitude of usages arising out of practical necessity or convenience or experience became part of the routine of observance of the code, and, in the course of time, shared the sanctity and authority which were inherent in the divinely inspired code itself." This is the oral law. However, the literal interpretation of scripture, such as favored by the Sadducees, has always had its followers in all religions; the views of the Sadducees has been revived by modern Karaite Jews. Modern Christian fundamentalists take a position within Christianity similar to that of the ancient Jewish Sadducees within Judaism.

Even before the Second Temple was destroyed, the seeds of modern Judaism were planted by a line of sages that began with Hillel the Elder, who lived in Jerusalem during the time of Herod. Hillel was recognized as the highest authority in Jewish Law among the Pharisees, ruling on such issues as the proper observance if Passover coincided with the Sabbath. He is reported to have described the *Torah* in this way: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole *Torah*; the rest is the explanation; go and learn." He was a devoted student of *Torah* and an ardent champion of its study, allegedly saying, "Say not, 'When I have free time I shall study'; for you may perhaps never have any free time." Hillel expressed an awareness of his own insufficiency, and perhaps that of others: "Don't trust yourself until the day you die," which is good advice to all people of all times. It has been said that "the personality of Hillel, in which wisdom was combined with righteousness, and humility with simplicity, became a model of conduct for subsequent generations." Hillel opened a school just as Socrates and Plato had done centuries earlier in Greece, but Hillel taught *Torah* rather than philosophy. His best student was Yohanan ben Zakkai, who witnessed the destruction of the Temple.

The Temple's destruction was, perhaps, the most traumatic event in Jewish history. With the exception of a 70-year interval, the Temple had stood for almost 1000 years as the home and symbol of Jewish worship, and its priests had been the ultimate authority on matters of belief. Suddenly, it and the priests were gone, perhaps forever. Some Jews entered "a state of perpetual mourning" and pursued "a life of ascetic abstinence." Both a new method of worship to replace sacrifice at the Temple and new authority figures to replace priests who were descendants of Aaron were necessary if Judaism was to survive.

The new model that developed was perhaps taken from the worship begun by Jews scattered by Assyria and Babylonia and brought back to

Jerusalem by returnees: worship through prayer and leadership by local men learned in the *Torah* and the oral law, who came to be called rabbi during the first century of the current era. This new paradigm is called rabbinic Judaism. Like the Hindu word 'guru', the word 'rabbi' means 'master', and both gurus and rabbis are deeply learned in their respective religious tradition and are teachers of that tradition. After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Sadducee sect disappeared, and the beliefs of the Pharisees became the foundation of rabbinic Judaism.

In 68 CE when the city was under siege by Vespasian, a general at that time, Jerusalem was controlled by the Zealots, people who would rather die than surrender to Rome. Ben Zakkai, a man of peace like his teacher Hillel, urged surrender, but the Zealots would not hear of it. Ben Zakkai managed to get a meeting with Vespasian in which he received a place in Yavneh where he could start a small school and study *Torah* in peace after the war.

Sometime during the first century CE, ben Zakkai acquired the title 'Rabban' (Rabbi) one of the first to gain that title. The school he opened was also the site where the Sanhedrin met for a few years. By referring to a passage in the Book of Hosea, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6 KJV), he helped persuade the Sanhedrin to replace animal sacrifice with prayer, a practice that continues in modern worship services. With the Temple gone, priests were replaced with Rabbis as the ultimate source of worship and the Law. Judaism had undergone an enormous change in its worship of God, and Rabbinic Judaism eventually emerged from the despair.

However, the Jews in Judea continued to chafe under pagan rule and frequently became violent, and this came to a head with Bar Kokhba's rebellion between 132 and 135 CE. A large number of Palestinian Jews followed Shimon Bar Kokhba, who some declared to be the mashiach (messiah). The rebellion managed to give the Jews a fleeting taste of independence while the surprised Romans marshaled their forces. Nothing could be done quickly in those days. Then somewhere in the neighborhood of 200,000 to 400,000 Jewish militiamen stood against 12 Roman legions totaling between 60,000 and 120,000 professional soldiers. The Jews inflicted massive casualties on the Romans: the XXII Legion was destroyed, and the IX Hispana Legion was so severely mauled that it was disbanded. However, militiamen were no match for professional soldiers, and the militiamen died to the last man.

Hadrian and the Roman Senate had enough of Jewish revolts. Historians contemporary with those times, such as Cassius Dio, recorded that 580,000 Jewish civilians were also massacred and several hundred thousand more sold into slavery, although the accuracy of these figures is uncertain. Following the suppression of Bar Kokhba's revolt, Hadrian made decrees forbidding *Torah* study, Jewish courts, meeting in synagogues, Sabbath observance, circumcision, and other ritual practices. Judaic scholars were executed, and the sacred scroll was ceremonially burned on the Temple Mount. At the former Temple sanctuary, he installed a statue of

Jupiter and one of himself. Hadrian changed the name of the province to Syria Palaestina, and Jerusalem became Aelia Capitolina. Jews were forbidden to live there and could enter the city only on the day of *Tisha B'Av* observance, which was an annual fast day commemorating a number of disasters in Jewish history such as the destruction of both of the Temples in Jerusalem. Perhaps the Romans felt that *Tisha B'Av* discouraged further revolts by reminding the Jews of their numerous defeats. After the revolt, the Jewish religious center shifted to the Babylonian Jewish community and its scholars because many scholars in Judea were killed. To escape persecution and continue their worship of God according to their own Laws, Jews began to slowly drift out of Palestine.

According to Rabbinical Jewish tradition, God gave both the Written Law (*Torah*) and the Oral Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. (Jewish law and custom is called *halakha*.) The Oral Law, as relayed by God to Moses, was taught to the sages of each subsequent generation. It explains how the 613 commandments in the *Torah* are to be applied to the Jew's daily lives and encompasses worship ritual, relationships between people and between God and man, dietary laws, Sabbath and festival observance, agricultural practices, and civil claims and damages. Its legitimacy was the central issue over which the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed; as previously mentioned, the Pharisees believed it to be as binding as the *Torah*, but the Sadducees did not. That the Oral Law is as binding as the *Torah* is also the central belief that binds Rabbinic Judaism to the ancient Pharisees.

So many rabbis were slain after Bar Kokhba's rebellion that the survivors became worried that the Oral Law would be forgotten, so they began to collect and record it. For centuries, Judaism's leading sages had resisted writing the Oral Law down. Like the sages of Hinduism, they believed teaching the law orally compelled students to maintain close relationships with teachers, and they considered teachers, not books, to be the best conveyors of the Jewish tradition. Collecting the Oral Law was, perhaps, begun by Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel II in the first century of the current era, although sages had been making notes on the application of the Oral Law for centuries. Before he died in 217 CE, Rabbi Judah the Prince, Rabbi Gamliel II's son, completed the work and recorded it as the *Mishna*, which is the first major work of Rabbinic literature.

The Oral Law (*Mishna*) is a legal commentary on the *Torah*, explaining how its commandments are to be carried out. For example, the Fourth Commandment ordains, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8 KJV). The *Torah* identifies what is forbidden on the Sabbath, but doesn't say how it should be celebrated. The *Mishna* does that. It's a guide that's of interest primarily to Rabbis; ordinary Jews don't usually read it, rather like a state legal code is of interest only to attorneys and judges; ordinary citizens don't usually read it. However, an old book saved from the millions burned by the Nazis, and now housed at the YIVO library in New York, bears the stamp THE SOCIETY OF WOODCHOPPERS FOR THE STUDY OF MISHNA IN BERDITCHEV. Some have assumed that the men who chopped

wood in Berditchev, an arduous job requiring no literacy, met regularly to study Jewish law. However and probably more likely, the book could also simply have been the property of the Society of Woodchoppers and had been purchased for their Rabbi's use.

The oldest extant copy of the *Mishna* was printed in Naples, Italy in 1492 and apparently contains some additions to the original redacted by Rabbi Judah, such as the proper way to celebrate Chanukah, which became a holiday long after Rabbi Judah died. The *Mishna* is organized by topic into six sections: (1) prayer and blessings, tithes, and agricultural laws; (2) the Sabbath and the Festivals; (3) marriage and divorce, some forms of oaths, and the laws of the nazirite (one who takes a special vow described in Numbers 6:1-21); (4) civil and criminal law, the functioning of the courts, and oaths; (5) sacrificial rites, the Temple, and the dietary laws; and (6) laws of purity and impurity, including the impurity of the dead, the laws of food purity, and bodily purity. The majority of the *Mishnah* is written in Mishnaic Hebrew, and some parts are in Aramaic.

During the centuries after Rabbi Judah the Prince compiled the *Mishna*, Rabbis in Babylonia and the land of Israel wrote commentaries that extended its explanations of the *Torah* through specific cases from reason and personal experience. Like Hindu philosophical schools, the Rabbis often used logical reasoning, sometimes called 'mathematical', in their commentaries. The Hindu Nyaya school did a detailed investigation of the reasoning processes themselves in order to be certain that their conclusions were sound, but the Rabbis did not, perhaps relying on the investigations of the Nyaya school. Some might consider such a detailed investigation an unnecessary distraction, but others might not. These commentaries on the *Mishna* are known as *Gemara*. Sometime around 350 CE to 400 CE, the Rabbis in Israel compiled their commentaries and recorded them together with the *Mishnah* into a single book called the *Jerusalem Talmud*. The *Gemara* doesn't extensively address questions of sacrifice and the Temple because the Temple hadn't existed for almost 300 years.

Approximately a hundred years later (ca. 500 CE), the Babylonian Rabbis compiled their commentaries into the Babylonian *Gemara* and, together with the *Mishna*, published the *Babylonian Talmud*. Both Talmuds incorporate the same *Mishnah*, but have different, though similar, *Gemara*. Like the Jerusalem *Gemara*, the Babylonian version doesn't extensively address questions of sacrifice and the Temple. Neither does it address agricultural laws, which are directed toward the land in Israel. However, the Babylonian *Gemara* is longer and more complete regarding other issues. Thus, the *Babylonian Talmud* has become the primary version; when one refers to 'the Talmud' with no further designation, the reference is assumed to be to the *Babylonian Talmud*. Unlike the Hebrew *Mishnah*, the *Gemara* is written primarily in Aramaic, the 'western' dialect for the Jerusalem version and the 'eastern' dialect for the Babylonian version.

The Talmuds contain one other class of writings, less formal and less rigorous than the *Mishnah*, called the *aggadah*, which are more extensive

in the *Babylonian Talmud* than in the Jerusalem version. The *aggadah* are texts that are different from the explanations of Jewish Law in the *Gemera* and that can be interpreted either literally or allegorically. The *aggadah* includes folklore, legends, historical anecdotes, moral exhortations, and practical advice on various subjects from business to medicine, the purpose always being to teach man the ways of God. Some are Judaized remnants of the folklore treasury of nearby and faraway peoples.

The Talmud gave Rabbis the information by which they could advise their people on what Jewish Law instructs about every aspect of their life from circumcision at birth to how to grieve at death. Jewish life had become well circumscribed. Judaism is not simply a set of beliefs about God, man, and the universe. It's a comprehensive way of life, filled with rules and practices that affect life's every aspect: what you do when you wake up in the morning, what you can and cannot eat, what you can and cannot wear, how to groom yourself, how to conduct business, whom you can marry, how to observe the holidays and the sabbath (*Shabbat*), and perhaps most important, how to treat God, other people, and animals. This set of rules and practices is known as *halakhah*. Some young Jewish males, and young Jewish females in some branches of Judaism, now study the Talmud because knowing it is the only road to the coveted position of Rabbi.

The *Midrash* is an interpretive text that seeks answers left unspoken to questions unasked in the *Tanakh*. The two basic types are the *Midrash Halakhah*, which is the exegesis (critical explanation or interpretation) of biblically related Jewish law, and the *Midrash Aggadah*, which is the explanation of the text from an ethical or spiritual point of view and is sometimes highly speculative. For example, it delves into the possible motivations behind Cain slaying Abel. The Genesis narrative doesn't give a specific reason for Abel's murder, but Rabbis have examined possible motives in depth in the *Midrash Aggadah* and even have gone so far as to suggest that God might be partly to blame for not accepting Cain's sacrifice and for creating evil in the first place. Other issues are explored by examining in great detail the meaning of the words of the *Torah*. The *Midrash* is organized similarly to the *Torah*, whereas the *Mishnah* is organized according to topics. Thus, it's easier to find Biblical views on a specific subject in the *Mishnah* than in the *Midrash*, making the *Mishnah* more useful. However, excerpts from the *Midrash* are included in the Talmud. The corpus of *Midrash* commentary has continued to expand in modern times as a wealth of literature and artwork has been created in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by people aspiring to create a contemporary *Midrash*.

With the publication of the Talmud and the establishment of Rabbinic Judaism, the foundation and structure of modern Judaism was complete. Jews spread throughout Europe and North Africa during the early centuries of the current era. They often worshiped in their homes but built synagogues and hired Rabbis wherever a sufficient population warranted such expenditure. Rabbis continued to write commentaries on the Law that increasingly defined how Jews were to live, from how they arise in the morn-

ing (e.g., "He should cover himself with a garment before getting up and should take care that the garment not turn inside out. He should put on his right shoe first and take it off last and should not go barefoot.") to how they retire at night (e.g., A person ... should not lie down to sleep in the east west direction). These commentaries reached a crescendo with the writings of Moses ben Maimon.

In 1138, Moses ben Maimon, called Maimonides by those who speak English and Rambam by Hebrews, was born in Cordova, Spain. At that time, Cordova was ruled by liberal Muslims who had made it one of the great intellectual centers of the world. However, a fundamentalist Islamic Berber dynasty, the Almohads, came in 1151 and offered all non Muslims the choice of conversion, exile, or death. Maimonides' family fled to Cairo where he spent the remainder of his life. Moses ben Maimon is widely considered to be the greatest Jewish philosopher of the middle ages, and perhaps of all time. (Spinoza was excommunicated.)

Moses ben Maimon published thirteen principle beliefs that he considered binding on every Jew: the existence of God, the absolute unity of God, the incorporeality of God, the eternity of God, God alone is to be worshiped, God communicates to prophets, Moses is the greatest prophet, the *Torah* was given by God, the *Torah* is immutable (not susceptible to change), there is divine providence, there is divine punishment and reward, there will be a Messiah, and the dead will be resurrected. This was the first attempt to introduce articles of faith to Judaism, and it set off a controversy that persists to this day. Maimonides' thirteen principles was a significant force in moving Judaism toward a more spiritual religion by proposing that there is divine punishment and reward and that the dead will be resurrected, two beliefs that were not officially present in Judaism before the current era.

As the Jews settled in new places, they naturally sought the company of others who lived as they did, forming Jewish enclaves. The continued expansion of the Law (*halakhah*) during the Middle Ages separated Jews more and more from the native citizens' culture in their new homelands. Expounding the Law reached a peak in 1563 when Rabbi Yosef Karo published the *Shulchan Aruch*, which is still regarded as the ultimate compendium of Jewish Law. The *Shulchan Aruch* comprises four sections (spellings vary with the source): *Orach Chayim* ('Way of Life'), covering laws of daily life, Sabbath, and holidays; *Even HaEzer* ('Stone of Help'), covering laws of procreation, marriage, and divorce; *Yoreh De'ah* ('It Teaches Knowledge'), covering laws about food, relations with non-Jews, usury, menstruation and immersion, vows and oaths, honoring parents and scholars, *Torah* study, charity, circumcision, proselytes and slaves, *Torah* and doorpost scrolls, new crops, mixtures, firstborn, offerings from bread, crops, and flocks, the ban, illness, death, burial, and mourning; and *Choshen Mishpat* ('Breastplate of Judgment'), covering laws about judges and witnesses, loans and claims, agents, partners and neighbors, acquisition, purchases and gifts, legacies and inheritance, lost and found property, depositing, renting, and

borrowing, theft, robbery, damage and injury. The *Shulchan Aruch* does not replace the Talmud, but was written to make the technical difficulties of the Talmud understandable to the average Jew. With the *Shulchan Aruch*, Jewish life was completely circumscribed, unified, and separated from the cultures of their non-Jewish neighbors.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, some German Jews, who were doubtless aware of Martin Luther's departure from the Catholic Church two centuries earlier, began to chafe at their separation from their non-Jewish neighbors and to question some aspects of Jewish Law and beliefs such as the divine authorship of the *Torah* and Oral Law. They began a new movement that came to be known as Reform Judaism. Those who declined to join the reform movement and chose to retain the old ways came to be called Orthodox Jews by some or as 'more observant' by others, reserving the term 'less observant' for Reform Jews.

Although Reform doesn't have an official list of fundamental principles, some that are part of the Reform movement include: belief in God as defined in the *Shema*, a prayer that's considered the centerpiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services; belief that the *Torah* is inspired by God but not divinely authored; and belief that the *Torah* is the foundation of Jewish life and that reinterpreting it in contemporary language is ongoing. *Tikkun olam* (repairing the world) is a hallmark of Reform Judaism. Modern Reform Judaism incorporates belief in the absolute equality of men and women in all areas of Jewish life, including women rabbis, cantors, and synagogue presidents, and belief in the full participation of gays, lesbians, bisexual, and transgender Jews in synagogue life. Reform doesn't believe in the resurrection of the body, so their version of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer praises God who "gives life to all" instead of God who "gives life to the dead" as in the Orthodox version.

'Orthodox Judaism' is a term that's used primarily in the United States, the term 'more observant' being used everywhere else. Orthodox Jews follow the *Torah* and *Shulchan Aruch* more rigorously than Reform Jews do; thus, the term 'more observant' naturally follows. Orthodox Jews are more likely to wear head covering such as hats or the *yarmulke* and have *tzitzis* (ritual cords knotted in a specific, precise way) attached like fringe to the edge of their clothing. The Hasidim, often called Ultra-Orthodox, wear even more distinctive clothing, and follow the Law even more rigorously than Orthodox Jews.

Conservative Judaism, with its center in the United States, occupies the middle ground between Orthodoxy and Reform. It rose in the early twentieth century in response to the feeling among many that Reform had strayed a little too far from traditional Jewish belief and practice. Like Reform, Conservative Jews don't accept that the *Torah* and the Oral Law were given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. They're receptive to scientific Biblical research, but they don't share Reform's mild antipathy for Jewish Law.

Although early Judaism disdained angels, the soul, and life after life, a mystical aspect rose during the Babylonian captivity as evidenced by Isaiah's

vision of God sitting on a throne and Ezekiel's visions (or hallucinations following long periods of ritual purification, self mortification, and ecstatic prayer and meditation) of a divine chariot powered by angel-like beings and of God on a sapphire throne. Mysticism remained on the fringe of Judaism until the thirteenth century when Moses ben ShemTov de Leon published the *Zohar*, which he claimed to be the product of second century rabbis. However, many believe the *Zohar* is his own work. Because the second century rabbinical work behind the *Zohar* was found by one lone individual, Moses de Leon, together with the fact that it refers to historical events that postdate the second century source, caused the authenticity of the work to be questioned from the beginning. The *Zohar* is the foundational text that the mystical Kabbalah uses to define the nature of the universe and human beings, the nature and purpose of existence, and the key to unlocking the alleged secret meanings hidden in the *Torah*.

The thirteenth century also saw the publication of the *Sefer ha Temunah*, which describes a doctrine of cosmic cycles similar to the cycles of the world's creation and destruction of Hinduism and the Maya. In the *Sefer ha Temunah*, the world is renewed every 7,000 years, at which times the letters of the *Torah* reassemble, and the *Torah* enters the new cycle bearing different words and meanings. A few Jews accept these mystical doctrines as the true meaning of Judaism, but most see them as heretical and opposed to Judaism. Thus, mysticism remains a backwater of Judaism, but a few Kabbalistic notions have crept into the mainstream, especially among the Hasidim.

As in any organization (religious, political, cultural, and so forth) unqualified belief in all the various tenants of any of the denominations varies widely among their followers. However, the one overriding belief that's universal in Judaism is the sanctity of life. All rituals and observances are suspended if they jeopardize life.

For observant Jewish men of any denomination (nearly all instructions are male oriented), worship begins upon arising in the morning by first reciting a blessing before leaving the bed then reciting the *Shema*, which is Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41. Deuteronomy 6:4 begins with "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." Deuteronomy 6:6-7 requires the first paragraph of the *Shema* to be recited before going to sleep. *Shema* derives its name, *Shema*, from *Sh'ma*, the first word of Deuteronomy 6:4, and thus the first word of the prayer.

A very large amount of Jewish worship is through such standardized, preordained prayers that are quotations from scripture, although a small allowance is made for individually worded prayers. Such standardized prayers contribute enormously to the feelings of oneness and solidarity for Jews to know that, the world over, they are all reciting the same prayers at the same times every day. According to Maimonides, all Jews composed their own prayers until the Babylonian exile, but after the return, the sages found the ability of the people insufficient to continue the practice and, therefore, composed the primary, accepted prayers themselves. The earli-

est existing codification of the prayer book (*siddur*) was drawn up by Rav Amram Gaon of Sura, Babylon, about 850 CE. By the Middle Ages the texts of the prayers were nearly fixed and were written down as a standardized prayer book in the form that is still used today.

Practicing Jewish men also pray in the afternoon and evening. Women are required to pray only once a day in consideration of their duties to raise children. The *Amidah* is the center piece of all daily prayer times. It's composed of nineteen blessings. The first three praise God. The next thirteen are petitions, the first six of which are personal appeals for knowledge, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, health, and economic prosperity; the next six are appeals on behalf of the Jewish people for ingathering of the exiled, restoration of justice, destruction of Israel's enemies, reward for the righteous, restoration of Jerusalem, and the coming of the Messiah; the thirteenth (sixteenth overall) is an appeal for the prayers to be heard. The closing three blessings give thanks to God and express the hope for peace and for return to Temple worship. Personal requests are inserted during the sixteenth blessing, which asks God to hear the prayers.

Communal prayers, which require a quorum (*minyan*) of at least ten adult males (females count toward a quorum in the Reform denomination), are preferred over praying individually. Thus, one or more of the daily prayers might be said at a synagogue.

The tone of synagogue worship is praise of God. Synagogue worship is held three times every day: the morning service, *Shacharit*; the afternoon, *Minchah*; and the evening, *Ma'ariv*. Some congregations also have a short service, called *Musaf*, immediately following *Shacharit*. Each service is guided by the prayer book, although not in an orderly way. The service jumps around in the prayer book, and worshipers sometimes get lost in the order. The services vary somewhat between the denominations, between the Sabbath (*Shabbat*) and the rest of the days, and from congregation to congregation, but they all have certain commonalities.

All begin with preliminary prayers that are quotations from the *Tanakh*, largely Psalms. The prayers vary somewhat in their length and the passages selected between the different services and the various denominations. *Shema* and its blessings follow the opening prayers during the morning and evening services. *Amidah* comes next and is different on the Sabbath: the middle thirteen petitions are left out because the Sabbath is for God, not people. Following the *Amidah*, the morning service includes a reading from the *Torah* on the Sabbath, holidays, Monday, and Thursday, which is a tradition instituted by the prophet Ezra 2500 years ago as previously noted. Specific parts are scheduled to be read each week such that the entire *Torah* is read during the year. The schedule is fixed and widely published, so Jews around the World read the same parts on the same week. The afternoon service includes *Torah* reading only on the Sabbath and *Yom Kippur*. Services conclude with additional prayers.

Devout Jews use a few items as part of their prayer ritual. A small cap, or *yarmulke*, is the most common, with a *Tallit*, or prayer shawl, the second most

### *Tefillin* Worn While Praying

A lieutenant in the Israeli Defense Force wearing a *yarmulke* and *tefillin* while reciting prayers from the *siddur* (prayer book).



common. The *Tallit* is fringed on both ends, and each corner has a *tzitzit*. The prayer shawl is draped over the shoulders as prayers are recited.

*Tefillin*, sometimes called phylacteries (although Jews don't prefer the term), are far less commonly worn. These are small, leather covered boxes that contain biblical passages (Exodus 13:1-10, Exodus 13:11-16, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Deuteronomy 11:13-21) written in a specific writing style on small pieces of parchment by a Hebrew scribe using special ink. Two *tefillin* are worn, one strapped to the left bicep by leather thongs according to a specific procedure and one on the forehead. The arm *tefillah* has one compartment containing all the passages on one piece of parchment, whereas the forehead *tefillah* has four compartments, each containing one of the passages. The leather used to cover and bind the *tefillin* is manufactured by Jews according to precise specifications.

Tradition requires that Jews bless the Lord for each detail of their daily experience, such as *birkat hamazon* (grace after meals), *la'asok be'divrei Torah* (blessing before *Torah* study), *she'asah et haiyam* (Upon Seeing an Ocean), and *n'tilat yadayim* (ritual washing of hands) among others. The ritual hand washing involves pouring water over the hands from a cup or glass twice over the right hand first and then twice over the left hand being careful that the unwashed hands do not touch the water used for the washing before it's poured and that none falls on the earth. Using soap is unacceptable; this is, after all, a ritual. These blessings and numerous others used on other, specific occasions are, like the *Shema* and *Amidah*, exactly worded. There are very, very few occasions in which extemporaneous prayers are offered.

*Shabbat* (sabbath) is probably the most significant Jewish ritual and is celebrated in the same manner by all practicing Jews the world over. It's sometimes called the centerpiece of Judaism because it's the only one specifically commanded in the *Torah*. It begins at sundown on Friday, the time of which is defined by the Jewish calendar, and continues until three second

magnitude stars are visible in the Saturday night sky. This is also established by the Hebrew calendar in case the stars are not visible. Like the other great western religions, which after all, are derived from Judaism, the Sabbath celebrates the creation and God's subsequent day of rest.

Celebration of *Shabbat* is a fairly precise ritual that carries numerous restrictions on what can be done. These restrictions are identified in the *Torah*, and rabbis have interpreted the Biblical restrictions in light of modern society. For example, the Biblical injunction against lighting a fire has been interpreted to include an injunction against lighting candles, turning on electric lights, using the telephone, or driving a car (which involves burning petroleum). Thus, a considerable amount of planning and preparation are necessary before *Shabbat* begins. Meals must be prepared for the twenty four hour period, lights must be turned off or put on timers; even the refrigerator light must be unscrewed.

No later than eighteen minutes before sunset, two candles, representing the commandments to remember and observe, are lit by the woman of the house, and a specific blessing is recited. If a synagogue is close enough for walking, the family might attend a short service. Before dinner, everyone ritually washes their hands, and the man of the house recites *Kiddush*, a specific prayer, over wine sanctifying *Shabbat*. Then *hamotzi*, a specific prayer for eating bread, is recited over two loaves of *challah*, a sweet, eggy bread often shaped in a braid. Two loaves symbolizes the double portion of mana that fell from the sky on Friday morning during the Exodus. The family then eats their previously prepared dinner. After dinner, the *birkat hamazon* (a specific grace after meals) is recited. The *birkat hamazon* is recited by devout Jews after every meal in which bread has been eaten because eating bread officially constitutes a meal according to Jewish law. The rest of the evening is devoted to enjoying the family, studying *Torah*, or playing games.

Of course, Jews celebrate several holidays during the course of the year. The dates of these holidays are dictated by the Hebrew calendar, which is a lunisolar calendar. The length of the Hebrew months is the same as the lunar cycle (Moon's orbital period), which is almost exactly 29.5 days; thus, the Hebrew calendar months alternate 29 and 30 days long, which total 354 days for a lunar year of 12 months (Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Elul, Tishrei, Cheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, Adar I, Adar II intercalary month inserted every two or three years). An additional month is added periodically to bring the lunar year back in alignment with the solar year so Passover will always be celebrated when barley ripens in the spring. Months begin and end at the New Moon. Days begin at sundown, so 3:00 PM on 3 September is a different day of the Jewish calendar than 10:00 PM on 3 September. This makes converting back and forth between the normal Gregorian system and the Hebrew calendar somewhat confusing; strictly speaking, the time of day matters.

A further complication is created by the definition of the new year. The Hebrew month of *Tishrei* begins a new year number (year date) since the

Creation, and the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashanah* (literally 'head of the year'), occurs on 1 *Tishrei*, which generally comes in September of the Gregorian calendar. On the other hand, Moses appointed *Nisan* as the first month of the year for everything relating to divine worship. Thus, the religious calendar is not coincident with the secular calendar, and the Bible speaks of *Rosh Hashanah* as occurring on the first day of the seventh month (of the religious calendar). The Hebrew date 1 *Nisan* 5776, the first month of the religious calendar, occurred on 9 April 2016, but begins at sundown on 8 April 2016. The month that's inserted to keep the Hebrew calendar in alignment with the solar year is inserted in the spring right before *Nisan*.

*Rosh Hashanah* is considered to be one of the 'high holy days'. It's instituted in Leviticus 23:24-25. It's the day of judgement, a time of introspection, of looking back at the past year's mistakes and planning changes to make in the new year. The *Torah* defines *Rosh Hashanah* as a one day celebration, but around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, it was celebrated for two days because of the difficulty of communicating the date of the new moon to distant congregations. Orthodox and Conservative Judaism still generally observe *Rosh Hashanah* on the first two days of *Tishrei*. Much of the first day is spent in the synagogue. The service is guided by a special prayer book and is longer than the usual service on *Shabbat*, and a ram's horn (*shofar*) is frequently blown. Some believe that God opens 'books' in which he writes the names of those who will have a good life and who will have a bad life for the next year.

The ten days starting with *Rosh Hashanah* and ending with *Yom Kippur* are commonly known as the Days of Awe (*Yamim Noraim*), or the Days of Repentance. This is a time when serious introspection continues, a time to consider the sins of the previous year and to repent before *Yom Kippur*. Repentance, prayer, and good deeds during the Days of Awe can alter God's written decree.

*Yom Kippur* is a day of fasting and repentance through which man cleanses himself of his sins and renews his relationship with God. It is the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16:30. Coming ten days after *Rosh Hashanah*, it's the holiest day of the year and one of the most solemn holidays in the Jewish calendar. From several minutes before sunset on 9 *Tishrei* to after nightfall on 10 *Tishrei*, Jews abstain from all food and drink unless such a complete fast endangers life or health. Children younger than nine and women in childbirth are not permitted to fast. Older children and women from the third to the seventh day after childbirth are allowed to fast, but are permitted to break the fast if they feel the need to do so. Most of the holiday is spent praying in the synagogue. *Yom Kippur* has its own liturgy, which is much more extensive than for any other day of the year. Some believe that the 'books' in which God has written people's fates for the year are closed and sealed on this day.

The festival of *Sukkot* begins on the 15 *Tishri*, the fifth day after *Yom Kippur*. It's one of the most joyous holidays in the Jewish calendar, a marked change from the solemnity of *Yom Kippur*. It's a seven day remembrance of the

forty years the Hebrews spent wandering in the wilderness and living in temporary shelters. Jews construct temporary dwellings (*sukkah*) outdoors and take their meals in them. Some even sleep in them. It's rather like camping out. The festival is instituted in Leviticus 23:34, where it is called The Feast of Tabernacles. Like all other Jewish holidays, the prohibitions, commandments, and blessings are meticulous and firmly defined. No work is permitted on the first and second days, but work is permitted on the remaining days.

*Sukkot* is followed *Shemini Atzeret*. It's a two day holiday outside of Israel; the second day is known as *Simchat Torah* (The Joy of the *Torah*). This is a joyous holiday that celebrates the conclusion, and restart, of the annual *Torah* reading cycle. This is a major holiday when most forms of work are prohibited although cooking is permitted unless it is also *Shabbat*. The highlight of *Simchat Torah*, is the *hakafot*, held on both the eve and the morning of *Simchat Torah*, in which worshipers march and dance with the *Torah* scrolls around the reading table in the synagogue. In Israel, the celebration of the two days are compressed into one day.

*Chanukah*, or *Hanukkah*, called the Holiday of Lights, is an eight day celebration of the cleansing of the Temple by the Maccabees after the Greeks defiled it and of what is called the miracle of the oil. Lighting a seven branched *menorah* (candelabra) was an important part of the daily service in the Temple. According to legend, when the Maccabees liberated the Temple, they found an amount of undefiled olive oil sufficient to fuel the *menorah* for only one day, but eight days were necessary to produce new pure oil. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days and nights, which is why an eight armed (nine counting the attendant, or servant, candle that is used to light the others) *hanukia* is lit during the eight day celebration. (Technically, the term '*menorah*' refers only to the seven-branched candelabrum that was housed in the Temple.) On each of the eight nights of the festival, the attendant candle (*shamash*) is lit and used to light the others, one additional each night beginning with the right-most. *Chanukah* is generally not considered to be an important holiday. There are no restrictions on what can be done during the celebration.

The Tenth of *Tevet* is a minor fast day commemorating the day the Babylonians first laid siege on Jerusalem. It comes a week after the end of *Chanukah*. The fast is only for the daylight hours, and no restrictions are placed on daily activities. Maimonides wrote, "The fasting will serve as a reminder of our bad deeds and the deeds of our fathers which have caused us hard times. Remembering our misguided ways gives us the opportunity to be better people..."

*Purim*, Holiday of Joy, remembers how the Jews of Persia narrowly escaped annihilation thanks to Queen Esther. The story of *Purim* is told in the Biblical book of Esther. Haman, an advisor to the king, convinced the monarch that the Jews in his realm obeyed their own laws, not those of the king, so the king allowed Haman to kill them all. Esther, his queen and unbeknownst to the king a Jew, convinced the king that Jews were, in fact, loyal to the crown.

*Pesach* (Passover) is the oldest holiday of all contemporary religions. It lasts for seven days in Israel but eight days everywhere else. The first and last days of the holiday are days on which no work is permitted, although work is permitted on the intermediate days. It's one of the most commonly observed Jewish holidays, even by otherwise non observant Jews. It celebrates the Jew's release from bondage in Egypt. Its most striking ritual is its dissociation from leavened bread in remembrance of the haste with which the Jews left Egypt, such haste that they had no time to let bread rise. Proper observance of Passover requires that all traces of leavening be removed from the house. Observance is primarily a home affair centered around a ritual dinner called a *seder* that includes a vegetable (usually parsley) dipped in salt water, a bitter vegetable, and numerous blessings over wine and the various items of food. A highlight of the *seder* is a ritual tableau in which the youngest son asks four questions such as, "Why is this night different from all others?" By answering the questions, the father tells the story of the angel of death passing over the homes of the Jews during the final plague on Egypt.

*Shavuot* is seven weeks after Passover. It's one of the lesser known holidays among Jews outside of Israel, while those in Israel are more aware of it. The Feast of *Shavuot* celebrates the season of the grain harvest in Israel, but its main significance has become the celebration of the day on which the *Torah* was revealed by God to the Israelite nation.

*Tisha B'Av* is a major fast day mourning the days when the Temple in Jerusalem was twice destroyed.

Judaism could probably be considered the purest of modern religions because it's concerned primarily with worshiping God rather than finding the path to everlasting life for humankind. Only in the past few centuries has the issue of everlasting spiritual life after corporeal existence become of some importance among some Jews. The influence of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam is doubtless responsible.

The basic beliefs of Judaism are: there is only one God; humans have an immortal spiritual essence, or soul, separate from the corporal form, or body; all humans are descendants of an original man and woman who were created by God; this original pair lived without tribulation in a wondrous place of great comfort that is called the Garden of Eden; this original pair incurred God's disfavor, which is called sinning, by eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge contrary to God's command (ignorance is bliss); the original pair were banished from the Garden of Eden because they committed this Original Sin. Many Jews don't often think of an afterlife. That's God's domain.