

Lesson 8

Judaism

AN OVERVIEW OF JEWISH HISTORY

Jewish history goes back at least two thousand years or far longer, depending on your point of view. This difference of opinion revolves around a major historical event the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. This event brought about the end of the temple-based ceremonial religion of that region, and it encouraged the widespread dispersion of people to lands far away from Israel. Following the calamity of the temple's destruction, the earlier religion had to develop in new ways to survive. From the centralized, temple-based religion practiced in Israel, another form of religion arose that could be practiced among the Jews who lived outside of Israel. Jews anywhere in the world could now practice their religion in the home and synagogue. In recognition of this fundamental religious reorientation, a distinction is often made between biblical Judaism and rabbinical Judaism. When we study the Judaism practiced today, what we are really studying are the forms of Jewish belief and religious practice that largely came into existence after the destruction of the Second Temple.

The two great spans of time before and after the destruction of the Second Temple are also commonly subdivided into two periods each. Over the first great span of time, a landless people established a homeland in Israel and made Jerusalem the capital of its kingdom. However, great change occurred and a second period began. When the Babylonians destroyed the kingdom of Judah and the First Temple (586 BCE), the Israelite people went into exile in Babylonia (in present-day Iraq) for nearly fifty years. These events made clear to the exiled people that religious law and history had to be put into written form in order to guarantee their survival. As a result, the Hebrew Bible was created, and study of the scriptures and prayer in synagogues became important, even after the temple was rebuilt.

The second great span of time comprises the two thousand years in which Judaism developed in the Common Era. This great span can also be subdivided into two periods. The first period marks the evolution of rabbinical Judaism and traditional Jewish life. It lasted from about 100 CE to approximately 1800 CE.

The final period started about two hundred years ago, when a new movement began in Judaism. It was a response to several developments: (1) the new thinking of the European Enlightenment, (2) the liberal thought of the American and French Revolutions, and (3) the laws of Napoleon, which were carried widely beyond France. This new movement, called the Reform, questioned and modernized traditional Judaism. It helped to produce the diverse branches within Judaism that exist today. It also raised the issue of Jewish identity. Who is a Jew? What is essential to being a Jew? These are two questions to which we will return later.

The Hebrew Bible records that the roots of Judaism go back far into the past to a landless people, sometimes called Hebrews or Israelites, who traced themselves to an ancestor named Abraham. Because much of what we know of the first span of Hebrew history comes from the Hebrew Bible, we will examine it first. We should note, though, that the Hebrew Bible is not a history book in the modern sense. Instead, it presents what might better be called sacred history. It is the Israelites' view of their God's relationship with them in the midst of historical events.

We should note, too, that the Hebrew Bible is significant not only in terms of the history of the Hebrews, but also in terms of its role in the development of Judaism over the past two thousand years. When the ceremonial religion of the Jerusalem Temple ended in the first century

CE, it was the Hebrew scriptures that provided a foundation for the development of rabbinical Judaism. The scriptures offered a firm basis for Jewish rabbis (teachers) to offer their midrash (interpretation) of biblical laws and practices: the books outlined the Ten Commandments and other ethical teachings; they established the major yearly festivals that would guide and sanctify the lives of Jews; and they preserved the psalms, which became the everyday prayers of Jews everywhere.

We thus turn first to the Hebrew Bible, to understand its structure and to examine the laws and history of the Hebrew people. After looking at the Hebrew Bible and at Hebrew and Jewish history, we will then consider Jewish belief, practice, and influence.

THE HEBREW BIBLE

Judaism is often associated with the land of Israel, but Judaism is perhaps better associated with its most important book, the Hebrew Bible. Although nowadays the Hebrew Bible is published as a single volume, it actually is made up of individual books, which were once separate written scrolls.

The word Bible, in fact, comes from the Greek term *biblia*, which means “books”. The individual books were originally oral material that was subsequently written down in some form perhaps as early as 900 BCE, although the final form was not achieved until about 200 BCE. It was once thought that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible the Torah but this is no longer commonly held. Instead, scholars see the Torah as composed of four strands of material, which arose in different periods but that have been skillfully intertwined by later biblical editors.

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections: the Torah (the Teaching), Nevi'im (the Prophets), and Ketuvim (the Writings). Considered as a whole, the Hebrew Bible is often called Tanakh (or Tanak). This is an acronym, made up of the first letters of the Hebrew names for the three sections: t, n, k.

The Torah is the sacred core of the Hebrew Bible. There you find stories of the creation of the world, Adam and Eve, Noah, and the Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs the early ancestors of the Hebrew people. The Torah introduces Moses, the great liberator and lawgiver, and his brother Aaron, the founder of the priesthood. It includes laws about daily conduct and religious ritual material that would be of great importance to the later development of Judaism. Because the Torah comprises five books, it is sometimes called the Pentateuch (Greek: five scrolls). (We should also recognize that the term Torah is sometimes used more widely to refer to all teachings, both written and orally transmitted, that are thought to have been revealed by God.)

The second part of the Tanakh, called the Prophets, is named for those individuals who spoke in God’s name to the Jewish people. The books that concentrate on the history of the Israelite kingdom are called the Former Prophets. These books are followed by additional books, which are called the Latter (or Later) Prophets. In the Latter Prophets, the voices of the individual prophets tend to predominate.

The third part of the Tanakh, called the Writings, is closer to what we think of as imaginative literature. Although this section includes some late historical books, it primarily contains short stories, proverbs, reflections on life, hymn lyrics (the psalms), and poetry.

We will use the term Hebrew Bible for all of this material. (Jews do not refer to the Hebrew scriptures as the Old Testament, as do Christians, because the title implies that the Jewish books have meaning only in relation to the Christian books, collectively called the New Testament. Also, the order of books in the Hebrew Bible, in the format that it assumed by the end of the tenth

century CE, differs somewhat from the general order that is found in Christian Bibles.) The commonly used titles of some of the books are Greek, based on early Greek translations.

The historical accuracy of the Hebrew Bible is not always certain, because not all biblical accounts can be verified by archeological finds or references in other historical records. We can assume that many of the accounts particularly those of events after the Jewish kingdom was established are based on historical fact. However, we must also recognize that the stories were recorded by the Jews themselves, who naturally viewed historical events from their own special perspective. Furthermore, many accounts were transmitted orally long before they were written down or assembled in final form. These facts naturally affected the way the stories were recounted.

BIBLICAL HISTORY

Whatever the historical accuracy of biblical accounts, the heroic and mythic power of the Hebrew Bible cannot be denied. It is filled with astonishing people and powerful images. Adam and Eve, for example, stand naked and suddenly aware among the trees and streams of the Garden of Eden. Noah and his wife are surrounded by animals in their big wooden boat, riding out a long flood. Moses climbs to the top of cloud-covered Mount Sinai to speak with God and receive the Ten Commandments. These images and ideas are not only unforgettable. They are also an important part of Western culture, and they have influenced its laws, art, literature, and ways of living.

In the Beginning: Stories of Origins

The earliest stories of the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 1-11) have a mythic quality that is universally appealing. The story of the origin of the world presents God as an intelligent, active, masculine power who overcomes primeval chaos. To create order, God imposes separations separating light from darkness and land from water and he completes his work of creation in stages, spread over six days. At the end of each day, God views what he has done and sees that it is good. Finally, satisfied with the result of all his labor, God rests on the seventh day.

This account which shows parallels with the creation story in the Babylonian epic poem Enuma Elish appears in the first chapter of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. This first account is cosmic and measured possibly written that way in order to be read out solemnly by a priest at temple ceremonies. The second account, perhaps written earlier than the first, begins in the second chapter of Genesis. This account is more human, utilizes colorful dialogue, and focuses on the first human parents, Adam and Eve, and on their moral dilemma.

The Garden of Eden, which God has created for his refreshment, is based on the pattern of a walled garden, complete with fruit trees, birds, exotic animals, a central fountain, and streams to cool the air. God creates Adam to live in the garden as its gardener and caretaker, forming Adam's body from the dust of the earth and breathing life into Adam with God's own breath. In some way, Adam is a copy of God himself, for the human being, the Bible says, is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Adam thus bears some of the dignity of God. Soon, though, because Adam is lonely, God decides to give him a companion. Taking a bone from Adam while he is in a deep sleep, God forms Eve around it. In the first account of creation, male and female were created simultaneously, but in the second account, the male is created first and the female afterward. This has sometimes led to the interpretation that while the male is a copy of God, the female is a copy of the male.

Interestingly, the conception of God in the creation stories is somewhat different from many later views. For one thing, although the biblical God has no apparent rivals, he does not appear to be alone. When he declares "Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26), he is most likely addressing his

heavenly counselors some of whom are identified in later texts, such as Psalms and Job. In addition, God is not represented as pure spirit. The account in chapter two of Genesis says that God walks and eats; and having made the garden to enjoy, he strolls in it when he wants to enjoy its cool breezes. God allows Adam and Eve to eat from almost all the trees, but he forbids them to eat fruit from one of the trees that he especially needs to nourish his supernatural life and insight. Eve, though, is tempted to eat from the forbidden tree. She does this. She then urges Adam to do the same. For their disobedient act, they are exiled from God's garden. God can no longer trust them, knowing that if they were to remain they might become his rivals. Now they must live outside the garden, where they will work and suffer for the rest of their amazingly long lives.

To some people, the portrait of Eve is distressing. She is a temptress who brings down punishment on Adam and on herself. Yet it should also be pointed out that Eve is the one with ambition and personality, while Adam seems far less colorful. Whatever the interpretation and there have been many the story of Adam and Eve has influenced views of women, men, and marriage for several thousand years.

Next is the story of Adam and Eve's children, Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-16). Their sibling rivalry ends in Cain's murder of Abel. This tale may reflect ancient rivalries between farmers and herders.

Following this is the story of the Great Flood (Gen. 6-9), which echoes a Mesopotamian tale, the Epic of Gilgamesh. Disgusted with the rapidly growing, immoral human population, God sends a flood to do away with humanity all of humanity, that is, except the righteous Noah and his family. God warns Noah to build a large wooden boat (an ark) and fill it with animals, because only those saved in the boat will survive the coming downpour. At the end of the flood, God makes a pact with Noah never again to destroy the earth by water. As a sign of this promise, God places his "bow" (perhaps an archer's bow) into the sky. The rainbow is a reminder of his solemn promise. Like several of the early stories, this account gives an explanation for a natural phenomenon, the rainbow. This story also explains how, from the three sons of Noah, different races arise.

Chapter eleven of Genesis tells the story of the tower of Babel (or Babylonia). Wanting to reach the heavenly realm that they believe exists above the skies, people begin building a very tall tower. Not willing to have his peaceful world invaded, God stops the construction by making the builders speak different languages. Since the builders can no longer understand each other, they cannot finish their tower. This story also gives a convenient answer to the question, Why are there different languages in the world?

Did Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Noah, and the others really exist? For centuries, Jews have thought of them as historical figures. Now, however, influenced by the views of scholars, many Jews view them instead as symbolic figures who set the stage for the events that follow. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are, in effect, a great allegorical introduction to the rest of the Hebrew Bible. There are many indications of this nonhistorical, symbolic purpose. For example, Adam and his immediate descendants are described as living to great ages Adam is said to have lived to be 930 years old (Gen. 5:5) and Methuselah, the longest-lived, 969 years old (Gen. 5:7). Moreover, many names are apparently symbolic. For example, Adam means "humankind" and Eve means "life". Scholars, as pointed out earlier, believe that the stories of the creation and the flood derive from earlier Mesopotamian tales. What is important to understand, though, is that these stories were given new meanings by the Israelite scribes who adapted them.

The World of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs

Abraham is the first Hebrew patriarch (Greek: father-source). He is introduced in chapter twelve of Genesis, the point at which the book becomes more seemingly historical. Abraham, first known as Abram, is called by God to leave his home for another land. Originally from Ur in present-day Iraq, Abraham migrates via Haran in Turkey to the land of Canaan. Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation' (Gen. 12:1-2a). This passage is significant to Judaism because it is seen as establishing a claim to the region now called Israel. Abraham's migration becomes a pilgrimage of great importance, making him, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob the patriarchs of Judaism.

After assuring Abraham of land and many descendants, God enters into a solemn covenant, a contract, with Abraham. In return for God's promise to provide land, protection, and descendants, Abraham and his male descendants must be circumcised. It will be a sign of their exclusive

The most famous story of Abraham concerns his son Isaac. Abraham has long been unable to have a son by his wife, Sarah. At Sarah's urging, he fathers a son by her maid, Hagar. The son is named Ishmael. Then, to the amazement of all, despite her age, Sarah herself has a son (Gen. 19). Soon, though, Sarah jealously demands that Ishmael and Hagar be sent away. (This aspect of the story will be important later on in Islam.) Shockingly, God then asks (in Gen. 22) that Abraham offer Isaac, the beloved son of his old age, as a sacrifice. (Perhaps this is a vestige of an earlier practice of human sacrifice.) Abraham agrees and sets out with his son to Mount Moriah, believed by Jews to be the hill on which Jerusalem now rests. Just before the boy is to die, God stops Abraham, and a ram, whose horns had become tangled in a bush nearby, is used as the sacrifice instead. God has thus tested Abraham's devotion, and in so proving his absolute loyalty to God, Abraham has shown himself worthy of land, wealth, fame, and the joy of knowing he will have innumerable descendants. (This passage may show the replacement of human sacrifice with the sacrifice of animals.)

Genesis also contains stories about some extremely memorable women, the matriarchs of the Hebrew people: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. Although these women are always linked with their husbands, they all have strong and carefully drawn personalities. Sarah, for example, stays modestly inside the tent when strangers arrive, but she laughs so loudly that they hear her and question why she is laughing (Gen. 18:10-15).

The stories in Genesis also tell of mysterious contacts with God called theophanies which are sometimes friendly in nature, but at other times are fierce and frightening. God appears to Isaac, for example, and promises him protection and many descendants (Gen. 26:24). One of Isaac's sons, Jacob, has a vision of God in a dream (Gen. 28). He sees a stairway leading from earth into the sky. God is at the top, and angels are ascending and descending, linking heaven and earth. A more unusual theophany occurs when Jacob wrestles all night long with a mysterious stranger God or God's angel. At dawn the fight is over, and Jacob receives from the stranger a new name: Israel (wrestles with God). Because Jacob and his sons would settle the land of Canaan, it came to be called Israel after his new name. Jacob, with his two wives and two concubines, has many sons, who would become the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joseph, Jacob's next-to-last son, is the focus of the final section of Genesis. Because Joseph's brothers sense that his father loves him best, they scheme to have him killed. Despite this plan, though, they sell him as a slave, and he is taken to Egypt. There, through his special gifts, he rises in importance to become a government minister. When a famine in Israel brings his brothers down to Egypt to look for grain, Joseph is not vengeful. Instead, he invites his brothers to bring their

father to Egypt and to settle there permanently. They do so and settle in the land of Goshen in northeastern Egypt. The Book of Genesis ends with the death of Jacob.

How historically true are these stories, especially that of Abraham? Traditional believers and some scholars think that the stories surrounding Abraham do express historical truth, though shaped by oral transmission. Other scholars, however, argue that the Israelites arose in Israel itself, possibly as a landless peasant class that revolted against its rulers. If that view is true, then the story of Abraham and his entry into Israel from elsewhere may not be historically accurate. In addition, no archeological evidence has yet been found to prove the existence of Abraham. The debate about the historical existence of Abraham may never be resolved.

Moses and the Law

The Book of Exodus records that the population of Hebrews in Egypt grew so large after several centuries that the Egyptians began to see them as a threat. As a solution, the pharaoh commands that all Hebrew baby boys be killed at birth. However, the baby Moses whose name is probably Egyptian is spared by being hidden. After three months, when his Hebrew mother is afraid to keep him any longer, she and her daughter fashion a watertight basket, put him inside it, and place the basket in the Nile River. There an Egyptian princess discovers him and raises him as her own. As a young adult, Moses sees an Egyptian foreman badly mistreating an Israelite slave. In trying to stop the cruelty, Moses kills the foreman. Moses then flees from Egypt.

Our next glimpse of Moses comes when he has found a new life beyond the borders of Egypt. There he is now a herdsman for a Midianite priest named Jethro, whose daughter he has married. One day, when Moses is out with his father-in-law's herds, he sees a strange sight: a large bush appears to be burning, but it is not consumed. As Moses approaches the bush, he hears the voice of God, who commands Moses to return to Egypt to help free the Hebrews.

Living in a world that believes in many gods, Moses is curious to know the name of the divine spirit speaking to him. The deity, however, refuses to give a clear name. Instead, the spirit says mysteriously, I will be who I will be. He then commands Moses to tell the Hebrews "that 'I will be' sent you" (Exod. 3:14). In Hebrew the mysterious answer provides an etymological clue to the name for God. The name for God, usually associated with the verb *hayah* (to be), is *Yhwh*, and it is often translated as I am. The name is usually written *Yahweh*, but the exact pronunciation is unknown.

Moses lived in an age when people believed in many gods, and he had grown up in the polytheistic culture of Egypt, as well. People everywhere believed in multiple gods and thought of them as guardian deities of particular groups and regions. Could Moses or the patriarchs and matriarchs before him have really been monotheistic? We do not know. A possibility is that Moses and the Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs believed in the existence of many gods, of whom one, possibly a major deity, declared himself the special protector of the Israelites. If this is true, monotheism was not the original belief system of the Israelites but evolved over time. Some scholars wonder whether the actions of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten (reigned c. 1352-1336 BCE) influenced the development of Jewish monotheism. Akhenaten gave sole worship to the sun god Aten, and he attempted to suppress the worship of all other Egyptian gods.

Ultimately, the god of the Jews would come to be proclaimed the one true God. We see two traditions in the Torah. In one tradition, *Yahweh* is embodied and appears directly to human beings. In another tradition that is possibly later, *Yahweh* exists as a spirit, separate from human beings. The notion of God as being transcendent and distant grew stronger over time. Transformation was complete when *Yahweh* came to be considered pure spirit. Then any reference to his body was considered to be metaphorical. In addition, God's name eventually was

considered too sacred to be pronounced. Instead of speaking the name Yahweh, priests and lectors substituted the Hebrew word Adonay (the Lord). Ultimately, all other gods were considered false gods; images of anything that could be construed as a god were prohibited; and Yahweh at last was considered the one God of the entire universe.

These changes, though, would all occur after the time of Moses. In the Book of Exodus, Yahweh, the god of the Hebrews, simply needs to show himself to be more powerful than any of the gods of the Egyptians (Exod. 12:12). It is by his power that ten plagues strike the Egyptians and convince the pharaoh (possibly the great builder Ramesses II, c. 1292-1225 BCE) to let his Israelite slaves leave.

The last and greatest of the plagues is the death of the first-born sons of the Egyptians. The Israelites' sons are spared because they have followed Yahweh's warning and have marked the doors of their homes with the blood of a substitute a sacrificial lamb (Exod. 12:13). Because God has passed over Egypt, the event is thereafter called the Passover (Pesach), and its yearly memorial has become one of the major Jewish festivals.

The Bible tells of the Hebrews' journey out of Egypt through a large body of water, the Red Sea, on their way to the Sinai Peninsula. (The Hebrew term may be translated as either Red Sea or Reed Sea. The second translation may refer to the reed-filled marshes of northeastern Egypt.) Movies have dramatized the event, showing two walls of water held back as the Hebrews marched between them. Yet the reality was possibly less dramatic. Although Egyptian records do not mention it, the exodus from Egypt has become a central theme of Judaism. A whole people, protected by God, leaves a land of oppression and begins the march toward freedom.

The Books of Exodus and Numbers describe in detail the migration back to Israel a migration that lasted a full generation, about forty years. The most significant event during this period of passage is God's encounter with Moses at Mount Sinai. The Book of Exodus (chap. 19) paints a terrifying picture: the mountain is covered with cloud and smoke; lightning and thunder come from the cloud; and the sound of a trumpet splits the air. The people are warned to keep their distance, for only Moses may go to meet God at the top of the mountain. Moses enters the cloud and speaks with God.

When Moses at last descends, he returns to his people with rules for living the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20). The strong moral orientation of Judaism is apparent here, for Moses does not return with an explanation of the universe, with science, or with art, but rather with ethical precepts. Parallels of the moral codes have been drawn to several other early codes, particularly that of the Babylonian King Hammurabi (c. 1792-1750 BCE).

Undergirding the commandments is the conviction that a covenant a contract exists between Yahweh and his people. He will care for them, but they must fulfill their half of the bargain by following his laws and giving him sole worship. Such an agreement had already been made between God and Noah, and later it would be made with Abraham. The covenant is reaffirmed with Moses and solidified by the laws and commandments, which give it legal form.

The Book of Leviticus begins with detailed laws about animal sacrifice (chaps. 1-7) and then takes up the complexities of ritual purity. In addition to laws about general honesty and humaneness, Leviticus outlines many special laws that would be important to the later development of Judaism: laws specifying which animals may and may not be eaten (chap. 11), laws prohibiting the consumption of meat that has blood in it (17:10) or the cutting of one's beard (19:27), and laws governing the observance of the major religious festivals (chap. 23). The Book of Numbers returns to historical themes, recounting specifically the years of wandering before the Hebrews entered Canaan. It also spells out laws about ritual purity and the keeping of vows. The

Torah ends with the Book of Deuteronomy, which repeats the Ten Commandments and describes the death of Moses an event that occurs just before the Hebrews enter the Promised Land of Canaan.

The historicity of Moses is, like that of Abraham, another focus of debate. Virtually all Jews believe him to have been a real person. So far, however, no Egyptian archeological records have been found that mention Moses, a slave rebellion, or an exodus from Egypt. Specialists in mythology point out parallels between the story of Moses and Egyptian religious tales. Also, no archeological evidence has yet been found to give proof of the forty years of wandering in the desert. The lack of historical evidence, however, does not disprove the historicity of Moses. A common view sees the biblical account as representing basic historical truth that has been magnified and embellished over time.

The Judges and Kings

After Moses's death, the Israelites were led by men and women who had both military and legal power, called judges. It is more accurate to think of them as military generals than as modern-day courtroom judges.

The Books of Joshua and Judges describe this period and give accounts of Israelite expansion and the eventual division of Canaan among eleven tribes. Realizing that they needed to be unified for their protection, the people of Israel soon established a king, selected a capital city, imposed a system of laws, and built a temple for centralized worship. The biblical Books of 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings describe the process.

The first king, Saul (whose reign began c. 1025 BCE), became a tragic figure, suffering repeatedly from depression and then dying after a battle one tradition says from suicide (1 Sam. 31:4). After a civil war divided the country's allegiance, a new king emerged to lead Israel. David (c. 1013-973 BCE) was a young man from Bethlehem, a town in the tribal area of Judah. As an accomplished military leader, David oversaw the buildup of the kingdom. Recognizing the need for a central city, he took over the hilltop town of Jebus, renaming it Jerusalem and establishing it as the national capital.

Archeological evidence seems to confirm the historical existence of David and his son Solomon, who constructed the temple envisioned by David. The Book of Chronicles records how Solomon built and dedicated the First Temple in Jerusalem. In this way he created a home for Yahweh, whose presence, it was hoped, would protect the kingdom. Services included prayers and hymns, accompanied by musical instruments such as trumpets and cymbals (see Ps. 150). Incense and grain were common offerings, and animals were ritually killed and offered as burnt sacrifices to Yahweh.

Having a royal palace and the national temple in Jerusalem unified the separate Hebrew tribes for a time, but the taxes required to fund these and other extensive building projects quickly made the people rebellious. After the death of Solomon, the northern tribes broke away from the control of the king in Jerusalem and set up their own kingdom.

Division weakened the two kingdoms, and in 721 BCE Assyria, an expanding power in the northeast, took over the northern kingdom. A theological explanation for the destruction of the northern kingdom came from prophets of the time. Prophets human beings who spoke in God's name were significant figures, both as groups and as individuals. They were active from the earliest days of the kingdom. Individual prophets, though, became especially important in the three hundred years after 800 BCE. Typically the prophet experienced a life-changing revelation from God, then felt commissioned by God to speak his message to the people. The prophet Isaiah, who was active in the eighth century BCE, is possibly the best known. He had a vision of God in the

Temple of Jerusalem, which he described as being filled with smoke a symbol of the divine presence. In his experience there, Isaiah heard the voices of angels. They were crying out Holy, holy, holy in the presence of God (Isa. 6). Isaiah's feeling of unworthiness dissolved when an angel touched a lighted coal to his lips. This purified and empowered him. From then on, he could speak his message. Isaiah and other prophets explained that political losses were punishment from Yahweh for worshiping other gods and for not having kept his laws. The losses were not a sign of God's weakness, but rather of his justice and strength.

The southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, carried on alone for more than another century although with constant anxiety. Unfortunately, another power had emerged Babylonia and at first the southern kingdom paid tribute; but when tribute was refused, Babylonia took control. In 586 BCE Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed Solomon's Temple, tore down the city walls of Jerusalem, and took the aristocracy and a great part of the Jewish population off to exile in Babylonia. Their exile would last almost fifty years, and many people remained there. Because the kingdom had ended and temple worship was no longer possible, the religion of Israel seemed to lose its heart.

Exile and Captivity

The period of exile in Babylonia (586-539 BCE) was a monumental turning point and one of the most emotional chapters in the history of Judaism. Psalm 137 describes the sorrow that was felt by the Jews during their captivity. It tells of their inability to sing happy songs as long as they were in exile: By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

Without a temple, public ritual had come to an end, but in its place the written word took on new importance. During their exile in Babylonia, the Jews began to meet weekly to discuss the scriptures and to pray. What developed was the Sabbath service of worship, study, sermon, and psalms, performed in a meetinghouse, or synagogue (Greek: lead together). The period of exile also made it clear that the oral Hebrew religious traditions had to be put into writing if the Jews were to survive.

During their exile, the Jewish people began to assimilate influences from the surrounding Babylonian culture. Knowledge of the Hebrew language declined, while Aramaic, a sister language, emerged as the common tongue. Aramaic eventually even crept into the sacred literature. Also emerging at this time was a growing sense of an active spirit of evil, often called Satan, and of a cosmic antagonism between good and evil. Although the sense of moral opposition was present in the Israelite religion from an early time, it may have been sharpened by the pain of exile.

Return to Jerusalem and the Second Temple

In 540 BCE, Cyrus came to the throne of the Persian Empire and, after taking over Babylonia, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. The returning exiles rebuilt their temple, dedicating it in 515 BCE, and the sacrificial cult was reestablished. The Book of Psalms, containing the lyrics of 150 hymns, is often called the hymnbook of the Second Temple, and when we read in the closing psalms of all the instruments used in temple worship, we get a sense of the splendor of the ceremonies performed there.

At the same time, the work of recording oral traditions and editing written material also grew in importance. Scribes did not want the history of their people to be lost, and the result of their work was to become the Hebrew Bible. A final edition of the Torah (Pentateuch) was made, the prophetic books were compiled, and new books were written as well. Several of the last books written were literary such as Ecclesiastes, a dark meditation on life, and the Song of Songs, a collection of love poetry. The books that would eventually be accepted into the Hebrew canon were finished by about 200 BCE.

CULTURAL CONFLICT DURING THE SECOND TEMPLE ERA

The historical record in the canonical Hebrew scriptures ends with the building of the Second Temple. But the history of the region did not end here. Because of the geographic location of Israel, it seemed that the Jews in Israel would continually have to contend with invasions and in some cases conquests by foreign powers.

The Seleucid Period

When the army of Alexander the Great was on its way to conquer Egypt, it made Israel part of the Greek Empire, and after Alexander's death in 323 BCE, his generals divided up his empire. Israel at first was controlled by Egypt, which was ruled by the descendants of Alexander's general Ptolemy. Later, Israel was controlled by Syria, ruled by the descendants of Alexander's general Seleucus.

In 167 BCE a Seleucid ruler, Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes) took over the temple, apparently with the intention of introducing the worship of the Greek god Zeus to the site. He deliberately placed on the altar a dish of pork a forbidden meat. He also forbade circumcision. His acts caused such hatred among the Jews that they rebelled. Led by a Jewish family of five brothers, the Maccabees (or Hasmoneans), the Jews took back the rule of their country, and the temple was rededicated to the worship of Israel's one God. (The winter festival of Hanukkah, widely kept today, joyously memorializes that rededication of the Second Temple.) The country retained its autonomy for almost a century, until the Roman general Pompey took control in 63 BCE.

Antagonism between Jewish culture and the growing Greek-speaking culture in the region was inevitable, because Jewish culture had values and practices that made absorption into Greek culture difficult, if not impossible. For example, all Jewish males were circumcised, which meant they were easily identified in the public baths or while exercising in gymnasiums. There were also Jewish dietary restrictions that forbade the eating of pork and shellfish and strict prohibitions against doing work on the Sabbath. These practices conflicted with the sophisticated Greek-speaking culture called Hellenism (from Hellas, meaning Greece). This culture was becoming dominant in the entire Mediterranean area, even after the Romans took control of the region. Greek plays and literature were read everywhere around the Mediterranean; Greek history, science, medicine, and mathematics were considered the most advanced of their day; and Greek architecture and city planning were becoming the norm. Because of its sophistication, Hellenistic culture was hugely attractive to educated people.

Responses to Outside Influences

Contact with Hellenistic culture led to a variety of responses. Some people welcomed it; some rejected it, clinging passionately to their own ethnic and religious roots; and the rest took a position in between. Tensions led to the rise of several religious factions among the Jews in Israel, starting around 165 BCE.

The Sadducees were the first of the factions to emerge. They were members of the priestly families, living primarily in Jerusalem, and were in charge of the temple and its activities. The fact that they derived their living from temple worship would have made them traditional at least in their public behavior.

The Pharisees were the second faction that arose. Their focus was on preserving Hebrew piety through careful observation of religious laws and traditions. Later rabbinical Judaism would develop from and continue the work of the Pharisees.

A third faction, eventually called the Zealots, was opposed to foreign influences and after 6 CE bitterly opposed the Roman rule of Israel. The Romans, in fact, called them robbers. The name Zealots from the Greek word for zeal was given to them when wars began between the Jews and the Romans. The patriots sometimes used violent means to achieve their ends.

The Essenes were the fourth group. Not a great deal is known with certainty about them, although current interest in them is intense. Three authors of the classical world wrote about the Essenes: Philo (c. 10 BCE-50 CE), a Jewish theologian of Alexandria; Josephus (c. 37-100 CE), a Jewish general and historian; and Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE), a Roman writer. These classical writers indicate that the Essenes numbered several thousand; lived a communal, celibate life, primarily in the desert area near the Dead Sea; rejected animal sacrifice; and avoided meat and wine. We also are told that the Essenes were skilled in medicine, dressed in white, followed a solar calendar that was different from the lunar calendar used in the temple, studied the scriptures assiduously, and kept separate from the rest of society. Moreover, we now recognize that there may have been several varieties of Essenes and that a strict celibate core at Qumran (called the Covenanters) was supported by a noncelibate network of supporters and sympathizers throughout Israel.

The Essenes saw themselves as an advance guard, preparing for the time when God would end the old world of injustice and bring about a new world of mercy and peace. They described themselves as sons of light, fighting against the forces of darkness. Their center was close to Jerusalem about 15 miles (24 kilometers). Because of this proximity, they would have had some contact with the political currents of their day. They may also have shared some of the ideals of the Zealots and Pharisees.

Ancient scrolls and scroll fragments, now together called the Dead Sea Scrolls, were uncovered between 1947 and 1955. The scrolls were found in caves near Qumran, above the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Besides containing all or part of nearly every book of the Hebrew scriptures, the cache of scrolls contained works that commented on scriptural books, gave details about the organization and practices of the Essenes, and spoke of a coming judgment and end of the world. The Dead Sea Scrolls show that during the later part of the Second Temple period there was no universally accepted norm of correct religion, and the canon of scripture was still in the process of formation. Instead, there were many books and interpretations of correct practice, each competing for acceptance.

Although the Second Temple was flourishing, the older, ceremonial, temple-based religion was in fact giving way to a more decentralized religion, based on the Hebrew scriptures, on the practice of the Pharisees, and on religious practice in the synagogues.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RABBINICAL JUDAISM

The Roman Empire assumed direct political control of much of Israel in 6 CE, and it ruled with severity. Consequently, there was much anti-Roman fervor and a widespread hope that, as in the time of the Maccabees, the foreigners could be expelled and a Jewish kingdom reestablished. Although a major revolt broke out in 66 CE, Roman legions crushed it brutally in 70 CE, when they destroyed the Second Temple and much of Jerusalem.

The end of the Second Temple was a turning point for the Jewish faith, producing two major effects. It ended the power of the priesthood, whose sacrificial rituals were no longer possible. It also forced the religion to develop in a new direction away from temple ritual, moving Judaism toward a central focus on scripture and scriptural interpretation.

The Canon of Scripture and the Talmud

Once the temple-based religion had been destroyed, it was necessary to clearly define which religious books of the several hundred being revered and read by various groups constituted the sacred canon. Although certain scholars now question it, an old tradition holds that in about 90 CE, twenty years after the destruction of the Second Temple, Jewish rabbis gathered together in Israel at the town of Jamnia (Yavneh). There, it is said, they examined each book individually to decide which books would be included in the canon. Some books, such as the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes, were hotly debated and were almost excluded. The canon of the land of Israel resulted from this process of selection. A slightly larger number of books had already been accepted by Jews in Egypt and came to be known as the Alexandrian canon.

Another revolt began in Israel in 132 CE. Some declared its leader, Bar Kokhba, to be the Messiah, the long-awaited savior sent by God to the Jews. In 135 CE, the Romans put down this second revolt even more cruelly than the first, with many public executions. Jewish families who had remained in Israel even after the destruction of the Second Temple now fled. They not only went to Egypt but also settled around the Mediterranean, expanding the number of Jews living in the diaspora (dispersion of Jews beyond Israel). The existence of a canon of scripture, which could be copied and carried anywhere, brought victory out of apparent defeat. Rabbinical Judaism, based on interpreting sacred scripture and oral tradition, could spread and flourish.

Once the Hebrew scriptures were declared complete, the next logical development was their protection and explanation. Interpretive work, called midrash (seeking out), became a central focus in the evolution of Judaism. The work of interpreting the Hebrew scriptures and applying their principles to everyday problems went on in stages. By about 200 CE there existed a philosophical discussion in six parts of specific biblical laws and their application, called the Mishnah (repetition). By about 400 CE, the Mishnah had received further commentary in the Gemara (supplement), and the result was what has been called the Palestinian Talmud (study), or Talmud of the Land of Israel.

When people use the word Talmud, though they usually are referring to a second, larger collection of material, often called the Babylonian Talmud. It receives this name because it was compiled by religious specialists in Babylonia, which then had a large Jewish population. Completed by about 600 CE, the Babylonian Talmud consists of the earlier Mishnah and an extensive commentary. After the Hebrew Bible itself, the Babylonian Talmud became the second-most important body of Jewish literature, and it continued to be commented on over the centuries by rabbinical specialists.

The Babylonian Talmud is vast, sometimes being compared to an ocean in which a person can sail or swim. In the Babylonian Talmud, rabbis of different generations added their insights and solutions to problems. The growth of opinion is visible, because the earliest material is printed in the center of each page, and later commentary is arranged around it. The Babylonian Talmud contains legal material (halakhah, direction) and nonlegal anecdotes and tales (haggadah, tradition). It is really a large encyclopedia, organized into sections, or tractates, according to subject matter. Its size and complexity, along with the difficulty of mastering it, would contribute to a strong scholarly orientation in later Judaism.

Islam and Medieval Judaism

The diaspora introduced Jewish vitality to places far from Israel, such as Spain and Iraq. After the ninth century, this Jewish presence was possible because of the tolerance with which Islam now dominant in Spain, North Africa, and the Middle East usually treated the Jews. Islam has held that

Jews and Christians have a special status: called people of the book, they are members with Muslims in the same extended religious family. The result was that cities such as Alexandria, Cairo, Baghdad, and Cordoba became havens for Jewish thought.

Foremost among the Jewish medieval thinkers was Moses Maimonides (called Rambam, 1135-1204). Maimonides was born in Córdoba, but he and his family fled that city when it was occupied by Muslim forces that were hostile to both Jews and Christians. He eventually settled in Cairo, where he practiced medicine at the court of Salah al-Din (Saladin). The work that made him famous was his book *The Guide of the Perplexed*, in which he argued that Judaism was a rational religion and that faith and reason were complementary. He wrote this work in Arabic in order to make it accessible to a wide readership. Maimonides is also known for his *Mishneh Torah*, a scholarly work written in Hebrew, which is a summary of the Talmud and other rabbinical writings. Maimonides is renowned for his list of the basic principles of Jewish belief, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Jewish thought has consistently shown several approaches in its interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. The more conservative tendency, which produced the Talmud, has interpreted the Hebrew scriptures fairly strictly, using them as a guide for ethical living. Another trend has been speculative, using the scriptures imaginatively as a way to understand more about the nature of God and the universe. Out of this second tendency came works of Jewish mysticism, which we look at next.

The Kabbalah

The Middle Ages saw renewed interest in Jewish mysticism. The whole body of Jewish mystical literature, called Kabbalah (received, handed down), began to emerge even before the Common Era. The writings particularly speculated on mysterious passages of the Hebrew Bible. For example, kabbalistic literature speculated about Enoch, who was an early descendant of Adam. It also focused attention on the prophet Elijah, who had not died, but had simply been transported upward to God's realm (Gen. 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:11). It speculated about Yahweh's throne (merkebah) and the sound of the surrounding angels (see Isa. 6:2). The kabbalistic literature used the Hebrew scriptures as a tool for trying to understand the reality of God and the hidden structure of the universe. A frequent mystical assumption was that the Hebrew Bible was written in coded language that could be interpreted by those who knew the code. Much biblical language, this view held, was to be read not literally but symbolically.

New mystical speculation arose in the medieval period, sometimes as a response to the growing persecution of Jews. Common themes were the divine origin of the world, God's care for the Jews, and the eventual coming of the Messiah (spoken of in Dan. 7 and elsewhere). The human world was frequently seen as the microcosm of a greater heavenly world beyond the earth, and of the human being as a microcosm of the universe: the superior and inferior worlds are bound together under the form of the Holy Body, and the worlds are associated together.

The most famous book of the Kabbalah is the *Zohar* (splendor). It was long believed to have been written in the first centuries of the Common Era, but in actuality it was probably written about 1280 in Spain by Rabbi Moses de Leon. The *Zohar* sees the universe as having emerged from a pure, boundless, spiritual reality. From the divine Unity come the ten sefirot: ten active, divine powers, such as wisdom, intelligence, love, and beauty. The *Zohar* compares them to colors, and sees the sefirot as links between God and his creation. Human beings are particularly significant in creation, because they blend the divine and the earthly. The Kabbalah teaches that within their bodies is a spark of divine light that seeks liberation and a return to God. Other kabbalistic texts included the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Formation) and the *Sefer Hasidim* (Book

of the Pious). Some Jewish circles valued the mystical texts of the Kabbalah as much as, or even more than, the Talmud.

Christianity and Medieval Judaism

The mystical movements gave comfort to European Jews as their persecution increased. Christianity had become the dominant religion in all of Europe by the late thirteenth century. Yet Christianity carried with it an anti-Jewish prejudice that had been present since the first century CE, when Christianity was separating sometimes angrily from its Jewish origins (see, for example, Matt. 27:25 and Acts 7:31-60 in the Christian New Testament).

The dominant role of Christianity in medieval Europe also had political implications: Christians were thought of as loyal citizens, whereas Jews were treated as suspicious and even traitorous. Because so much of Jewish religious practice was carried out in the home, superstitious stories circulated among Christians that Jews secretly obtained the blood of Christian children for their Passover meal or that they stole and misused the consecrated Christian communion bread. Because Jews were often forbidden to own farmland, they were excluded from agriculture; and because they were kept out of the guilds (the medieval craft unions), they were excluded from many types of urban work. In addition, since Christians in the Middle Ages were generally prohibited from lending money at interest, this role became a Jewish occupation. Unfortunately, moneylending could generate ill will among those to whom money was lent. Jews were singled out and watched carefully. In many places, Jews were forced to wear a special cap or display some other identifying detail. They were sometimes also forced to live in a separate section of town, later called a ghetto, which might be walled so that Jews could be locked in at night.

Jews were persecuted regularly. At the time of the First Crusade, for example, some were killed by crusaders traveling to Israel through what is now Germany. During the period of the bubonic plague, also known as the Black Death (1347-1351), Jews sometimes were blamed for the deaths. In retaliation, many Jews were killed; some were even burned alive in their synagogues.

Beginning in the late Middle Ages, European Jews were forced into exile. Often the motive was economic as much as religious, because exiling the Jews would allow the Christian rulers and other debtors to confiscate Jewish property and to be freed of debt to them. Over a period of two centuries, Jews were expelled from England, France, Spain, and Portugal. In Spain, they were forced in 1492 to become Christians or to leave. Some Spanish Jews, called conversos, publicly converted to Christianity, but they continued Jewish practice in their homes. As a result of the Spanish Inquisition, which sought out Jews who had converted for the sole purpose of remaining in Spain, Jews fled elsewhere to Morocco, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, England, Holland, central Europe, and the New World. It is at this time that two great cultural divisions of Judaism emerged Sephardic Judaism in the Mediterranean region, North Africa, and the Middle East, and Ashkenazic Judaism in Germany, central Europe, and France. You will look at their cultural differences later, during an examination of the branches of Judaism.

QUESTIONING AND REFORM

The Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries began a new era for Europe. As people began to travel more, they were exposed to a multitude of previously unknown religions, cultures, and regions of the world. The invention of printing with movable type quickened this process by making written material widely available. Discoveries in science and instruments such as the telescope revolutionized people's perception of the earth and its relationship to the larger universe. These changes, which presented challenges to the Christian worldview, also affected Judaism.

After the Renaissance, Judaism began to move in two directions, both of which continue today. One direction cherished traditional ways; the other saw a need for modernization. The traditionalist way, strong in eastern Europe, offered refuge from an uncertain world. In central Europe, traditionalism expressed itself both in Talmudic scholarship and in the devotional movement Hasidism (devotion, piety). The Hasidic movement was founded by Israel ben Eliezer (c. 1700-1760), a mystic and faith healer known affectionately as the Baal Shem Tov (master of the Good Name). He felt that living according to the rules of the Torah and Talmud was important, but he also felt that devout practice should be accompanied by an ecstatic sense of the God who is present everywhere. Hasidism emphasized the beauty of everyday life and the physical world, teaching that only in tangible things can you see or hear God. Mystical schools were sometimes considered suspicious, for they could easily supplant traditional practices with those of the school, and they could encourage disciples to proclaim their master as the long-awaited messiah. Hasidism, however, made it possible for mystical interest to be accepted in mainstream Judaism. Hasidism continued to inspire Jews for centuries and remains one of the most vital movements in Judaism today.

The other direction in which Judaism moved was toward modernization. The liberal direction, which was strongest in Germany and France, urged Jews to move out of the ghettos, gain a secular education, and enter the mainstream of their respective countries. In Germany, the modernizing movement, called the Reform, began in the late eighteenth century. With the goal of making worship more accessible, the Reform movement translated many of the Hebrew prayers into German and introduced elements such as organ and choir music. The Reform movement, however, generated many counter-responses among them, an attempt to preserve traditional Judaism (Orthodox Judaism) and an attempt to maintain the best of tradition with some modern elements (Conservative Judaism). You will look at these movements later in more detail.

JUDAISM AND THE MODERN WORLD

The growth of freedom for European Jews over the nineteenth century did not end anti-Jewish activity. The Russian Empire, where Eastern Orthodox Christianity was the established religion, continued its restrictions on Jews, and there were occasional outbreaks of persecution. In response, Jews from Russia, Poland, and the Baltic area emigrated. From 1880 to 1920 more than a million Jews came to the United States most coming to or through New York City. Their children and grandchildren sometimes moved farther, settling particularly in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami. Jews also emigrated to other large cities in North America and Latin America, such as Montreal, Toronto, Mexico City, and Buenos Aires. This brought a new freedom to Judaism but at a price. Jewish identity was compromised because many Jews wished to assimilate with the surrounding culture, and intermarriage grew in frequency.

Traditional Jewish life continued in Europe until the end of the 1930s. A center of this lifestyle was Poland and the Baltic region, where there were still more than three million Jews. Beautiful evocations of this warm, traditional lifestyle are evident in the paintings of Marc Chagall and in the book that he and his wife Bella created, *Burning Lights*. This centuries-old culture, however, would be destroyed within ten years by Adolf Hitler.

Hitler and the Holocaust

The rise of Adolf Hitler in 1933 as German chancellor and head of the Nazi Party began a prolonged wave of anti-Jewish activity, which ended in the most dreadful sufferings. Hitler was fueled by several irrational notions. One was a theory of racial classes, which imagined Jews and Gypsies (Roma) to be subhuman polluters of a pure but mythical Aryan race. Another was Hitler's

belief that Jewish financiers and industrialists had conspired against Germany and helped make possible the Allied victory over the Germans during World War I. Hitler sought both an imaginary racial purity and political revenge.

At first, the Nazis put pressure on Jews to emigrate. They forced them out of government and university positions, boycotted their stores, and eventually began to harm them physically. Many Jews did emigrate, particularly to North America. Albert Einstein is a well-known example. After the annexation of Austria and the invasion of Poland (1939), Nazi control spread to Holland, Norway, northern France, and Czechoslovakia. As Nazi domination spread to these countries, so too did the persecution of Jews. Jews who wanted to flee found it hard to find refuge, because many countries, including the United States, refused to take in large numbers of Jews. France and England did not forcefully protest Hitler's policies against the Jews, and the Catholic leader Pope Pius XII earlier had signed a concordat of understanding with Hitler. The Jews were without strong defenders, and when World War II was declared, they were caught in a trap.

The Nazis put into effect plans to exterminate all European Jews. Jews in countries under Nazi control were officially identified, made to wear yellow stars in public, and eventually deported via train to concentration camps. Upon arrival at the camps, Jews were often divided into two groups: (1) those who were strong enough to work and (2) the rest—mostly women, children, the sick, and the elderly—who were to be killed immediately. (The psychologist Viktor Frankl has described the process in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*.) At first, internees were shot to death; but as the number of prisoners increased, gas chambers and crematoria were constructed to kill them and incinerate their bodies. Those who were kept as workers lived in horrible conditions and were routinely starved, insufficiently clothed, and attacked by all kinds of vermin and disease. Few ultimately survived.

By the end of World War II in 1945, about twelve million people—Jews, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, prisoners of war, and political enemies—had died in the concentration camps. Of these, it is estimated that as many as six million were Jews, and of that number about a million and a half were Jewish children. This immense loss is called the Holocaust (Greek: completely burned) or Shoah (Hebrew: extermination). It is one of the greatest crimes ever committed against humanity.

The extermination has left a shadow on civilization and a great scar on Judaism. About a third of the world's Jews were killed during the Holocaust, and of those who died, a large number had been devout traditional Jews. Their deaths, under such painful circumstances, raised haunting questions about the faith and the future of Judaism.

Creation of the State of Israel

A major result of the Holocaust was the creation of the state of Israel after more than a century of hope, thought, and work. Centuries of virulent anti-Jewish restriction and persecution had created in many Jews a desire for a Jewish nation, where they hoped to live freely in the traditional historic home of their faith. The movement came to be called Zionism, after Mount Zion, the mountain on which Jerusalem is built.

The state of Israel emerged through several steps. The first was the notion of a separate Jewish nation. It was popularized by the influential book *The Jewish State*, written by the Hungarian-born Austrian writer Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), following an outbreak of anti-Semitism in France. The second step was the Balfour Declaration, a political statement issued in 1917 by the British government, which endorsed the notion of a Jewish homeland. When World War I ended, the British received control of the area then called Palestine and authorized a limited immigration of Jews to their territory, called the British Mandate of Palestine. The third step came

after World War II, when the newly created United Nations voted to divide the British Mandate of Palestine into two states, one for Jews and the other for the Palestinians, the Arab residents of the mandate. The Jews accepted the U.N. plan and created the state of Israel when the Mandate ended in 1948. The Palestinians, who had opposed Jewish immigration into the region under the British, rejected the U.N. plan and, along with neighboring Arab nations, resisted the creation of Israel.

The difficult relationship between Jews and Palestinians has continued to the present day. There have been repeated wars and an exchange of terrorist activities between Israelis and Palestinians. The conflict has grown more horrifying in recent years. So far it has not been resolved.

Because European Judaism was almost completely destroyed, Jewish life today has two centers: Israel and the United States. The estimated Jewish population of Israel is about five million and that of the United States is roughly six million. Judaism in the United States is largely liberal and enjoys general freedom of practice. In Israel, Judaism encompasses a wide spectrum of opinions and practices, ranging from liberal and even atheistic to highly conservative and traditionally religious. Some important control of government policy and daily life is in the hands of traditionalists, but for perhaps a majority of the population, Judaism is more a culture than a religion.

Before we leave, we visit an even later layer of the history of Masada. On the eastern part of the mesa, the ruins of housing for a group of hermits remain. The view to the east, over the Dead Sea, is one of the most striking natural sights in the world. It is austere but uniquely beautiful.

JEWISH BELIEF

There is no official Jewish creed, but there is a set of central beliefs, first formulated by the medieval scholar Maimonides. Among them are

Belief in God. God is one, formless, all-knowing, and eternal. God is master of the universe as its creator and judge. God is both loving and just.

Belief in the words of the prophets.

Belief that God gave the law to Moses.

Belief that the Messiah, the savior to be sent by God, will come someday.

Belief that there will be a resurrection of the good in the world to come.

Regarding these beliefs, there is no universal agreement about the precise nature of the Messiah, the resurrection of the good, or the world to come. In the past, these were understood literally. The Messiah would be a heaven-sent, powerful leader who would inaugurate a new age, and at that time the deceased who had followed God's laws would come back to life. Some Jews no longer interpret these beliefs literally. Instead, they see them as symbols of the ultimate triumph of goodness in the world.

Belief in personal immortality or in the resurrection of the dead has been a frequent topic of debate among Jews. Although the notions of resurrection and even of an immortal soul have been defended by many within the Jewish faith, Judaism more strongly emphasizes the kind of immortality that comes from acting virtuously in this world, living on in one's children, and leaving behind some charitable contribution to the world.

In Judaism, human beings have a special role. Because they are created in God's image, they have the ability to reason, to will, to speak, to create, and to care; and they have the responsibility to manifest these divine characteristics in the world. Jews believe that among human beings, the Jewish people have a special role a role that some people believe is to witness to the one God and to do his will in the world. Others believe that their role is to suffer for a purpose known only to

God. And others have said that their role is to bring a sense of justice to a world that often has none. Although there is no agreement about the Jewish role, there is general consensus among Jews that they hold a unique place in this world, and there is great pride in knowing that they have made many contributions to world culture.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

To be a Jew, however, does not come only from holding a set of beliefs. It is even more a way of living. Scholars explain this by saying that Judaism is less interested in orthodoxy (correct belief) and far more interested in orthopraxy (correct practice). The Ten Commandments, of course, are at the heart of Jewish morality, and they direct behavior. Yet there are many additional laws and specific customs that dictate how time is to be used, what foods are to be eaten, and how prayer is to be conducted. And although Judaism promotes congregational worship, many Jewish celebrations are carried on in the home. Moving like wheels within wheels, the week, month, and year all have their devotional rhythms, established by religious laws and customs. The goal of all laws, however, is the recognition of God's presence and the sanctification of human life.

The Jewish Sabbath

Central to all forms of Judaism is keeping the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, as a special day. The Sabbath, when kept properly, is thought to sanctify the entire week. Recalling the royal rest of God after the six laborious days of creation, the Sabbath is a day of special prayer and of human relaxation (see Exod. 20:11 and 31:12-17). In earlier times, before watches and clocks had been invented, a day began in the evening at sundown. Thus, the Jewish Sabbath begins on Friday at sunset and lasts until Saturday just after sunset.

The traditional purpose of the Sabbath was a compassionate one: it was to allow everyone, even slaves and animals, regular rest. The prohibition against work has been interpreted in many ways over the centuries. Traditionally, fires could not be built on the Sabbath, because of the labor involved. This meant that food would have to be cooked beforehand or eaten uncooked (see Exod. 35:1-3). Shops, of course, would be closed. Interpreting the requirement of rest in the modern world, some traditionalist Jews will not operate light switches or kitchen stoves, nor will they drive a car or use the telephone during the Sabbath. Although some sabbath restrictions might seem excessive, their purpose is to separate the everyday world of labor from the one day of the week in which everyone can enjoy leisure.

The Sabbath is meant to be joyous, and it is often remembered that way by adults who have grown up in traditional households. The Talmud recommends that the mother of the household should light candles on Friday evening to welcome the Sabbath, and it recommends that the family drink wine at the Sabbath meal as a sign of happiness. During the Jewish exile in Babylonia, synagogue study and worship became a regular way to mark the Sabbath, and today it is common for religious Jews to attend a synagogue service on Friday night or Saturday morning. Friends are often invited over to share the main Sabbath meal, and on Saturday evening the Sabbath is at last bid farewell. There is an old Jewish adage: More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, has the Sabbath kept the Jews.

Jews speak with pride of their observance of the Sabbath, pointing out that the great gift of Judaism to the world has not been the creation of a beautiful temple in physical space, but rather the creation of a beautiful temple in time. Jews were once called lazy by the Romans for stopping their work one day out of every seven. Yet the Jewish practice has triumphed, and one day of the week is generally set aside as a day of rest everywhere throughout the world.

Holy Days

Just as the week is sanctified by the Sabbath, so the months and the entire year are sanctified by regular holy days and periods. Each is marked by a distinctive emotional tone—happiness, sadness, repentance, gratitude.

Before discussing specific festivals, it is important to know the Jewish religious calendar is basically lunar—meaning that each month begins with the new moon. Adjustment, though, has to be made in order to keep the lunar years in general harmony with the regular, solar calendar. Because a year of twelve lunar months lasts 354 days, one lunar year is eleven days shorter than one solar year. Therefore, in the Jewish religious calendar an extra month is added approximately every three years. The lunar months of the Jewish year thus vary somewhat, as do the holy days.

New Year's Day is Rosh Hashanah (head of the year). The Jewish religious year begins at the end of harvest season, when all debts can be paid off. Thus the religious New Year occurs in the autumn, in late September or early October. The New Year period of ten days, called the High Holy Days, ends with Yom Kippur (day of covering). Called the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur is the most solemn day of the year. It is a day of fasting, prayer, and reflection, meant to cleanse people for the new religious year that is ahead.

Following soon after the High Holy Days comes the late-harvest festival of Sukkot (shelters, booths). Temporary outdoor shelters were once set up in the fields as a way of protecting crops at harvest time. Devout families still construct them, eat in them, and occasionally even sleep in them. Nowadays the shelters often are constructed in backyards or even on porches and balconies. The festival of Sukkot recalls the wandering of the early Hebrews, after they left Egypt.

A winter festival is Hanukkah (dedication). It is also called the Feast of Lights because the festival recalls a time when the Second Temple was rededicated and oil lamps are said to have burned miraculously for eight days. To commemorate this December festival, families gather on eight evenings, light candles on a special menorah, and on each night give their children small presents. The role of the mother is especially important in these festivals that are celebrated in the home.

In February Jews celebrate Purim (lots). The festival recalls the divine protection given to the Jews at the time of Esther and her uncle, Mordecai. Purim is marked with the giving of food and money, a reading of the Book of Esther, and a festive meal.

The springtime festival of Pesach (passover), or Passover, recalls the Hebrews' departure from Egypt. It is a feast of freedom, kept with prayers and a special meal, called the Seder (order). The Seder includes several traditional foods. Among them are breads without yeast (matzoh), wine, parsley, a hard-boiled egg (symbolizing new life), saltwater (symbolizing tears), and an animal bone (representing the paschal lamb). After recalling the liberation from Egypt, the diners share a festive meal and sing songs of liberation.

Jewish Dietary Practices

From its earliest biblical origins, Judaism has valued cleanliness and care regarding food. What were once basic rules of hygiene developed into rules about ritual purity. In recent centuries, some Jews have relaxed their observance of certain dietary rules, keeping them to a greater or lesser degree as they think suitable and according to the branch of Judaism to which they belong.

One of the basic tenets of traditional Jewish dietary practice is that food consumption and food handling be done according to religious laws. The term kosher (Hebrew: kasher) means ritually correct and it particularly applies to food preparation and consumption. In regard to meat, all blood must be drained before the meat is cooked and eaten, because blood, which gives life, is

sacred to God. In temple services, blood was offered on the altar separately from the rest of the sacrificed animal, and only meat without blood could be eaten by the priests and other sharers in the sacred meal (see Lev. 17). This rule also ensured that animals that had died in the field or were killed by larger animals carcasses that might be unsafe to eat could not be consumed (see Exod. 22:31). In practice, there are very specific methods of kosher slaughter, inspection, and preservation.

Pork and shellfish are forbidden (see Lev. 11). This is probably because these animals were considered scavengers and thus easily contaminated by what they ate. (Pork sometimes contains a parasite, *Trichinella spiralis*, which can be killed only by cooking at high temperatures, and shellfish may be contaminated, as well.) For traditional Jews, meat and dairy products may not be mixed or eaten together at the same meal. This also means that a household that keeps kosher must maintain separate sets of cooking implements, pans, dishes, and utensils one for meat and one for dairy products. Some households even have separate sinks and separate refrigerators. These practices derive from a rule of uncertain origin that forbids the cooking of a baby goat or lamb in its mother's milk (Exod. 34:26). It is possible that the practice was forbidden for being cruel some fetal animals, cut from the womb before birth, were considered tender delicacies. The practice of cooking a kid in its mother's milk may also have been associated with non-Hebrew religious practice and therefore forbidden.

Other Religious Practices

Devout Jews practice regular daily prayer in the morning, at noon, at dusk, and often at bedtime. When they pray in the morning during the week, traditionalist males use the tefillin, or phylacteries, which are two small boxes containing scriptural passages. One of them is attached to the forehead by leather straps tied around the head, and the other is attached to the upper left arm by straps wound down around the arm and hand. They signify quite literally that God's law is in the mind and heart of the person at prayer (see Deut. 6:8). The tallit (a prayer shawl) white, generally with dark stripes and fringes covers the man's head and body during morning prayer and signifies humility in the sight of God. In less traditional forms of Judaism, the prayer shawl is sometimes not used, but men wear the skullcap (kippah in Hebrew and yarmulke in Yiddish, the old language of eastern European Jews). Devout males sometimes express their reverence before God during their waking hours by covering their heads continually with a skullcap.

Remembrance of God is also assisted by the presence of a mezuzah, which is placed on the doorpost of the entrance to a home and sometimes on the doorposts of interior rooms (see Deut. 6:9). Like the tefillin, the mezuzah is a small container that holds scriptural words. It is touched reverently when one enters a house or room. Unlike the tefillin, it is used even by secular Jews.

Perhaps because sexuality and the origin of life are considered especially sacred, Judaism has a number of practices relating to them. Eight days after birth, when a male receives his name, he is circumcised the foreskin of the boy's penis is cut off by a specialist. The ceremony recalls God's covenant with the Hebrew people (see Gen. 17 and Lev. 12:3). The origin of this practice in Judaism is uncertain. It possibly began as a health measure, in order to prevent infection commonly brought about by hot climates. It is also possible that circumcision began as a way of recognizing divine control over sex and generation. Males mark puberty with a coming-of-age ceremony at age 13, when a young man legally becomes an adult, or son of the commandment (bar mitzvah).

In some branches of Judaism, girls ages 12 to 18 are honored in a coming-of-age ceremony called a bat mitzvah. For women, menstruation and childbirth have also been considered special occasions, celebrated with a ritual bath (mikvah) and purification.

Although in ancient days temporary celibacy was expected of priests on duty in the temple and soldiers in the field, sex has been viewed positively in Judaism. With the exception of the Essenes, Jews have honored marriage and considered children a major goal of life (see Gen. 1:28 and 12:2).

The view of women's roles is expanding quickly, although with argument. The most liberal strands of Judaism accept complete gender equality. The most conservative traditions, however, maintain the earlier restrictions. Actual practice can fall somewhere in between.

Traditionalist groups have argued that men and women are equal but separate. The great emphasis on family life has allowed women to be seen as the natural and best nurturers of children. Therefore, their main role has been homemaking. Men, by contrast, have been the ones who carry on study and public prayer. Men read Torah aloud in services, act as rabbis and cantors, and study Talmud and other religious texts.

This division of labor began to change in the last century. As women started to question their traditional image, barricades fell. In some traditions females can now become cantors and are ordained as rabbis.

Rejection of this change, however, is particularly strong among the Orthodox. In North America, where the Orthodox constitute a small percentage of the Jewish population, their stance is not so influential. But in Israel, where the Orthodox make up a larger percentage of the Jewish population, they play a major governmental role in defining rules for Sabbath observance, food preparation, and marriage. Currently attempts are being made to include non-Orthodox leaders and female rabbis in this official machinery, but so far these efforts have had little success. The Orthodox continue to argue that the role of the woman is to be the good wife and wise mother. They fear that women's working outside the home will damage the warmth and effectiveness of traditional family life.

DIVISIONS WITHIN CONTEMPORARY JUDAISM

We find in Judaism both cultural differences and differences in the observance of traditional rules. Some commentators, as a result, talk not of "Judaism" but of "Judaisms".

Culturally Based Divisions

The great ethnic diversity among Jews has resulted in a number of cultural divisions within Judaism. It is important to understand these divisions in order to appreciate the richness of Judaism, as well as the challenges that face the state of Israel, where members of these groups must live closely together.

Sephardic Jews The name Sephardic comes from a mythic land of Sephar (or Sepharad), once thought to exist in the distant west of Israel, and often identified with Spain. After the Roman victories over the Jews in Israel (70 and 135 CE), Jews emigrated from Israel and settled in lands far away. Southern Spain particularly became a center of flourishing Jewish life, especially under Muslim rule. This ended, however, in 1492 CE, with the expulsion of the Muslims and Jews by the Christian rulers. Sephardic Jews ([Sephardim](#)) carried their language and culture to Morocco, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Mediterranean region, as well as to Holland and England. The common language of the Sephardic Jews, termed Ladino in recognition of its ultimate derivation from Latin, was a type of Spanish mixed with Hebrew words, often written in

Hebrew characters. Until recent times Sephardic Jews lived in significant numbers in Morocco, but most have now emigrated to Israel. More than half of the Jews of Israel are now of Sephardic background.

Ashkenazic Jews The name Ashkenazic comes from Ashkenaz, a descendant of Noah who settled in a distant northern land (see Gen. 10:3). The term Ashkenazim refers to those Jews who at one time lived in or came from central Europe. A very large population of Jews flourished for centuries in Poland, the Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, and Hungary. Before the Holocaust, three million Jews lived in Poland alone, where sometimes entire towns (called shtetls) were Jewish. The origin of Ashkenazic Judaism is unclear. The most common opinion is that it arose when Jews migrated from France and other countries of Western Europe to central Europe, after 1000 CE.

The common language of central European Judaism was Yiddish (Jewish), a medieval form of German, mixed with Hebrew words and written in Hebrew characters. While it flourished, Ashkenazic Judaism produced a rich culture of books, stories, songs, and theater in Yiddish. Ashkenazic culture virtually ended in Europe with the Holocaust, but Yiddish language and culture lived on in the United States, Canada, and Israel, and although they once seemed to be rapidly declining, there are recent signs of revival.

Other Jewish Cultures A mysterious form of Judaism exists in Ethiopia among the Beta Israel (House of Israel ; these people are also called Falashas). The Beta Israel practice a religion that accepts a somewhat different canon of scripture than most Jews. Many Ethiopian Jews emigrated to the state of Israel, beginning in 1980, and the number of those still in Ethiopia is quite small. Judaism also established itself in communities on the western coast of India, although Jews in India have mostly also moved to Israel. Nonetheless, a few synagogues there remain. Distinctive Jewish cultures also exist in Yemen, Iraq, and elsewhere.

Observance-Based Divisions

Within Judaism today, divisions also exist based on variations in religious observance. Although some Jews have held to traditional practices, other branches have developed out of the conviction that Judaism will stay vital only if it reinterprets its traditions. Four branches have emerged. We begin with the most traditional and move to the least traditional, although the branches did not emerge in this order.

Orthodox Judaism Traditional Judaism is often called Orthodox. We might recall, however, that until the Reform movement began, there was no need to give a special name to traditional Judaism, since all Jews were traditional in belief and practice. In a sense, Orthodox Judaism came into being only after the Reform began, and as a traditionalist response to it. When we use the term Orthodox to refer to traditional Jews, we should also recognize the great variety among Orthodox Jews particularly regarding social and political positions. Some, termed integrationists, seek to play a role in civil society, whereas others, called separatists, want to live their traditional lifestyle apart from society. Orthodox Jews also differ in their support for the state of Israel and the need for secular education.

With this said, we can describe Orthodoxy as a branch of Judaism committed to retaining traditional practice and belief. Some specific practices follow.

- Orthodox synagogues separate males and females, with females often sitting in an upstairs gallery.
- For a service to take place, there must be a quorum (minyan) of ten Jewish males.
- Services are conducted completely in Hebrew and are led by male rabbis.

- Only males celebrate the coming-of-age ceremony (bar mitzvah).
- Men use the tallit and tefillin at weekday morning prayer.
- Males must keep their heads covered (with the skullcap, prayer shawl, or hat) as a reminder that God is above all.
- Social roles (especially among ultra-Orthodox Jews) are strictly separate. Men are the breadwinners of the family, and women are responsible for running the household.
- The hair of the beard and in front of the ears is sometimes left uncut by males, in response to a command in the Torah (Lev. 19:27).
- Some Orthodox Jewish males and particularly those affiliated with a specific Hasidic community also wear a style of dress that developed in central Europe during the nineteenth century. It is a black hat and black coat (originally a beaver-skin hat and a black smock).
- Orthodox women who are married sometimes cover their heads with a kerchief when outside the home. The hair is covered as an expression of modesty, because a woman's hair is considered to be seductive to men.
- The Orthodox household keeps strictly the traditional laws about kosher diet.
- Orthodox Jews closely follow rules that prohibit any manual labor on the Sabbath. Cooking is not allowed, nor is driving a car, walking long distances, using a telephone, or even turning on an electric light.

Outsiders might consider the strictness of this lifestyle burdensome. But the Orthodox themselves both women and men who have been raised as Orthodox say that it is not difficult. They say that it is even fulfilling, because every waking moment is consciously devoted to the worship of God. In continental Europe, Orthodox Judaism was nearly destroyed by the Nazis. In Israel, although only a tenth of the population can be considered traditionalist or Orthodox, that segment has considerable political power. In the United States, Orthodoxy constitutes a small minority among those who practice Judaism, but it has gained recognition and visibility particularly through the efforts of Hasidic communities.

Conservative Judaism For some Jews, the European movement for reform seemed too radical. Conservative Judaism traces its origins back to Germany, but it took strong root in the United States among Jews who desired moderate change that was coupled with a protection of beloved traditions, such as the use of Hebrew in services. Thus this branch of Judaism accepts change, but it uses study and discussion to guide change carefully. In the United States, almost half of all practicing Jews belong to this branch.

Reform Judaism Reform Judaism began in Germany out of a desire of some Jews to leave ghetto life completely and enter the mainstream of European culture. An early influence on this movement was Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), a major thinker and writer. Mendelssohn, although he was not a Reform Jew, helped shape Reform and Orthodox Judaism. He argued for religious tolerance, held that Judaism could be combined with civil culture, and embraced many of the ideals of the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century human dignity, equality, individual liberty, democracy, secular education, and the development of science. These ideals brought radical changes in the Jewish circles that espoused them, because in the name of reform, every traditional Jewish belief and practice could be questioned.

The result has been that in Reform synagogue worship, women and men do not sit separately, services are conducted in both the native language and Hebrew, choirs and organ music are common, and use of the tallit and tefillin has either been dropped or made optional. Traditional ways of dressing, common among the Orthodox, have disappeared. Perhaps more important,

equality is espoused for men and women. As a result, women may become rabbis, and girls have coming-of-age ceremonies in which each becomes a "daughter of the commandment" (bat mitzvah).

Reconstructionist Judaism This newest and smallest branch of Judaism grew out of the thought of its founder, Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983), a Lithuanian who came to the United States as a child. Kaplan was influenced by the American ideals of democracy and practicality. As a leader in the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, Kaplan promoted a secular vision that encourages Jews to become familiar with as many elements of traditional Judaism as possible, but that allows them the freedom of individual interpretation. Elements of belief that traditional Jews interpret literally – such as angels, prophecy, revealed law, and the Messiah are taken as useful symbols by Reconstructionism. Even the notion of God is seen from a pragmatic viewpoint as the Power which makes me follow ever higher ideals. Instead of searching for a minimum number of beliefs and practices that are the unchanging essence of Judaism, Reconstructionism sees Judaism as a changing cultural force, with many elements and manifestations. Judaism, in this view, is a whole civilization which expresses itself... in literature, art, music, even cuisine. It never stands still but evolves.

JEWISH IDENTITY AND THE FUTURE OF JUDAISM

Judaism today is particularly concerned with two great questions, which are inescapably linked. What is essential to being a Jew? Will Judaism survive?

Appreciating the cultural and religious divisions among Jews demonstrates how difficult it is today to define what makes a Jew. Three hundred years ago, the question of identity was nonexistent, because Jews were those people who practiced traditional Judaism. Now, however, Jewish identity is no longer so easy to ascertain. Although Orthodox Judaism holds that a person is born a Jew if his or her mother is Jewish, this does not address the matter of practice, and today there are many nonobservant Jews. A person may also convert to Judaism. However, some Orthodox rabbis have refused to accept conversions to non-Orthodox branches of Judaism. Judaism is certainly a religion, but there is great disagreement about the essentials of belief and practice, and many people consider themselves Jews even though they do not practice the religion.

Furthermore, any attempt to define a Jew as a person belonging to a single culture or ethnic group is virtually impossible. Jews are as ethnically diverse as they are ideologically diverse – a fact that becomes quite clear when one visits Israel. Although there is as yet no clear answer to the question of Jewish identity, the topic becomes more important as Jews increasingly intermarry with non-Jews.

The history of Judaism has been marked by displacement and disasters. In the past century, nearly a third of the world's Jewish population was destroyed. Nevertheless, Jewish history has also been marked by the will to endure. The resilience of Judaism has in large part resided in its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and environments. This ability suggests that in the decades ahead, Judaism will again take new forms and gain new life.