

Judaism



Religion of the Fertile Crescent

From the time early humans developed religion, most people in the Fertile Crescent were **polytheistic** (or believed in many gods and goddesses). They believed these **deities** ruled the world they lived in, the heavens above, the sea, and even the underworld. These gods and goddesses came in many different forms and were often depicted larger than humans in ancient artwork. People believed that the gods controlled all aspects of our lives and it was our job to keep them happy. If we made them mad; they would cause storms, earthquakes, and could bring you ill fortune. City-states each selected a **patron** (or protector god). This meant that they worshipped all the gods, but held the chosen god in higher regard. They also built temples, made sacrifices, and worshipped them.

Origins of Judaism

Abraham lived in the Sumerian city-state of Ur. The people of Ur were polytheistic and worshiped many gods; in fact Abraham's dad was a merchant that sold **idols** (statues of gods and goddesses). From a very young age, Abraham disagreed with his parents religious beliefs. He was so opposed to their beliefs; that he took a hammer and smashed his dad's entire supply of idols except for one. The statue he did not break was the largest and Abraham placed the hammer in its hand. When confronted for his actions by his father, Abraham told him that the statue was of the only true god, **Yahweh**. He must have smashed the other false gods. Abraham was **monotheistic** (or believed in one god).

Question: Could you take a stand for something you believed in strongly, even if the majority of other students disagreed with you? Why or why not?

Abraham grew up to be an animal herder or shepherd in Ur. He continued to practice his monotheistic faith and shared it with others. One day, Yahweh will call upon Abraham and make him an offer. If Abraham will immediately leave his home/family and move to a faraway land called **Canaan**; Yahweh will bless him and make his ancestors into a great nation (called **Israel**). Yahweh and Abraham created a **covenant** or an agreement. Canaan symbolizes this relationship between Abraham and Yahweh and is thus called “**the promised land.**”



"WEA Episode Guide to the Bible - Episode 1 In the Beginning." WEA Episode Guide to the Bible. Lightworkers Media, 2013. Web. 16 June 2015.
<http://www.crystalinks.com/canaanmap.jpg>

Question: Could you leave your home and family behind based on your religious faith like Abraham did? Why? Why not?

Abraham packed up his belongings and left Mesopotamia. It was a long journey, but he eventually made it to “the promised land.” Here in Canaan, Abraham and his followers will thrive. His relatives and followers will multiply in number and become known as the **Hebrews**. All that Yahweh had told Abraham came to be. Abraham will be known as the “**Father of the Hebrews**” and as the founder of a new religion called **Judaism**. Judaism will become the first monotheistic religion in the world. It teaches there is only one God and he is all-knowing, all-powerful, merciful, and just.

The Hebrews were shepherds, farmers, and fisherman. They lived in Canaan for hundreds of years, until a severe drought hit the region. The Hebrews decided to migrate to Egypt; it was a land of **abundance** (or surplus). Initially, they were welcomed by the **Pharaoh** (the ruler) and allowed to stay. The Hebrews will live here for many years continuing to multiply in number. Eventually, the Pharaoh of Egypt takes notice of their growing numbers and begins to look at them as a threat. He has his powerful army enslave all of the Hebrews. They will stay in Egypt for many years and serve Pharaoh in bondage.

Question: Why do you think the Pharaoh saw the Hebrews as a threat?



"Daily Life." Daily Life. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 June 2014.

Law Giver

Eventually, a **prophet** (person god speaks through) named **Moses** will led the Hebrew nation out of Egypt and back through the wilderness towards Canaan. Along the way the Hebrews will camp underneath a mountain and Moses will climb the mountain to seek the guidance of Yahweh. On top of the mountain, he is given the **Ten Commandments**, a set of moral guidelines for how the Hebrews should live their lives. He will bring these laws back down the mountain and present them to the Hebrews. The Hebrews believed that God had chosen them and that they had to obey his rules. This is why the Hebrews still consider themselves to be the "chosen people" of God. Moses will become known as the "**Law Giver of the Hebrews.**" He will guide the Hebrews back to the "promised land", but will not be permitted to enter. He had accomplished his mission for God.



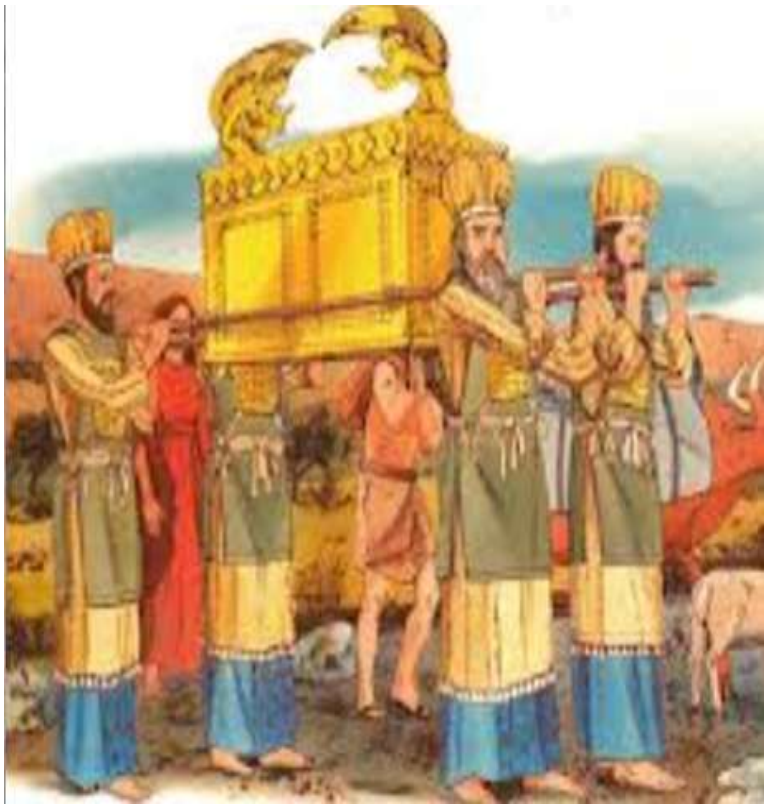
Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from Yahweh (God)



The Ten Commandments for Dummies

GOD	MAN
1: Do not worship any other gods	5: Honour your father & mother
2: Do not make any idols	6: Do not murder
3: Do not misuse the name of God	7: Do not commit adultery
4: Keep the Sabbath holy	8: Do not steal
	9: Do not lie
	10: Do not covet

These ten moral guidelines were easy for the Hebrews to understand



"David Danced - Abundant Life." Abundant Life. 2015. Web. 16 June 2015.

Did you know: The only Hebrews who had access to the Ten Commandments were the priests. The priests constructed an ark to carry them as they continued their long journey back to Canaan. They called this the Ark of the Covenant. It was plated with gold and had two angels on top of the lid. Legend said that anyone who touched the box itself would die. One story told of a time they were moving the ark and a priest tripped. A man rushed to help him, as to not drop the box and accidentally placed his hand on the side of the ark. He died immediately. It was also said that any army that carried the ark into battle could not be defeated. Nobody knows what happened to the ark or the Ten Commandments, they simply disappeared into history. There are countless theories to its whereabouts.

After the Hebrews reconquered Canaan from the people living there, they reestablished the kingdom of **Israel**. They turn an ancient city called **Jerusalem** into their capital city and built it up. On a hill in the center of the city, they built a magnificent temple called the Temple of Solomon to house all their sacred objects, such as the ark and the **menorah**. It was made of the finest stone, precious metals, and cedar wood from Phoenicia, they spared no expense. The temple mount was used for worship, sacrifice, as a marketplace, and a place for gathering. It was the center of their religious lives.



Artist's recreation of the temple of Solomon



The menorah has been a symbol of Judaism since ancient times

"History of Temples Article - MormonTemples.org." MormonTemples.org. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 2015. Web. 16 June 2015.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a4/Menorah_0307.jpg/250px-Menorah_0307.jpg

Core Beliefs

The sacred stories and knowledge of the Hebrews were written down on a scroll called the **Torah**. The Torah taught that Yahweh (God) rewarded people according to their actions. It also said that there will be a **Messiah** (savior) one day who will restore the great nation of Israel. The Torah also spoke of an afterlife, but the Hebrews put little emphasis on it in their religion.

Question: Why would the promise of a Messiah (savior) be so important to the Hebrews?



"Is Torah Just For Jews?" *Rabbis Without Borders My Jewish Learning*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 June 2014.

Diffusion

The religion of Judaism was mainly practiced by the Hebrew people and continues to be mainly practiced by their descendants. It is more than just a religion to them; it is a way of life and self preservation. Israel was conquered by many times in ancient history by powerful empires. This caused the dispersal of the **Jewish** people around the world. While the religion of Judaism is widespread, it is not a religion that actively seeks to convert others. You are either born Jewish or you are born not.

Question: Why do you think the Hebrews do not try to convert others to Judaism? Explain