

covenant an agreement or promise

This map shows the route that Abraham may have taken when God told him to leave his home in Ur and go to the land of Canaan. What is one physical feature you would pass while traveling from Mesopotamia to Canaan?

3. The Life of Abraham: Father of the Jews

Some scholars believe that Abraham, originally named Abram (AY-brum), was born about 2000 B.C.E. in Ur in Mesopotamia. The people of Ur worshiped many gods. But Abram came to believe that there was one true God. This belief would set Judaism apart from other ancient religions. Abram's special relationship to God would become the foundation of the Jewish faith.

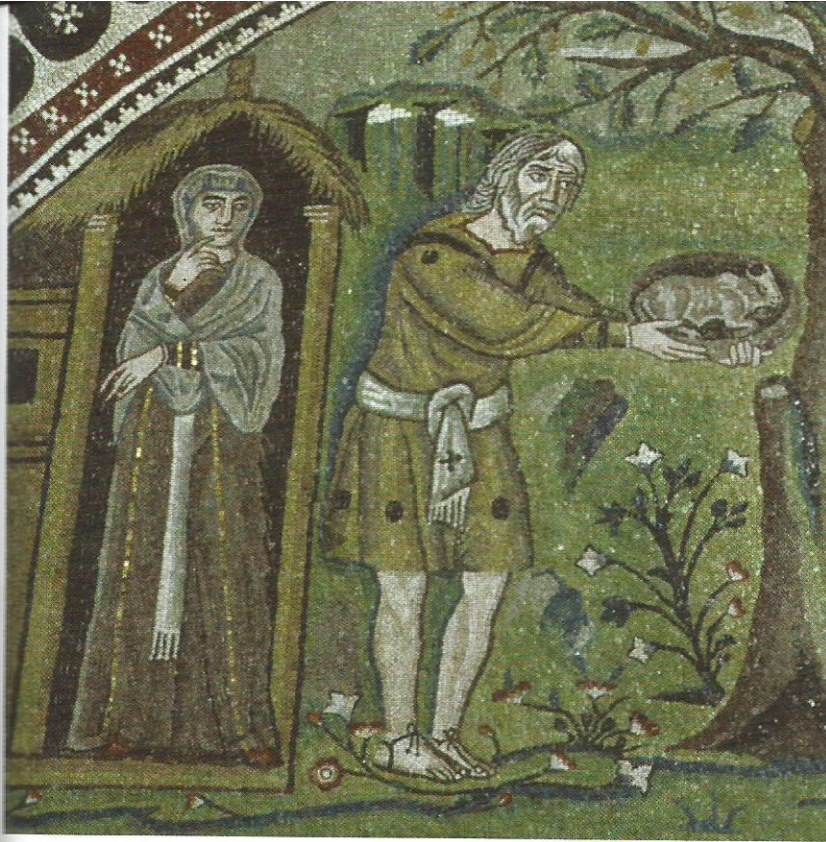
Abraham's Covenant with God According to the Torah, the faith that would become Judaism began with a sacred agreement, or **covenant**, between God and Abram. The Torah says that when Abram was about 75 years old, God spoke to him. God said to him, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." God promised to make Abram the father of a great nation of people.

Abram obeyed. He gathered his many relatives and went west into the land of Canaan.

The Torah says that when Abram was 99 years old, God spoke to him again: "I will make a covenant between myself and you." God promised to love and protect Abram's descendants, meaning Abram's children and the generations that would follow. In return, Abram agreed that he and his people would always devote themselves to God.

To mark their covenant, the Torah says, God gave Abram a new name, Abraham, which means "father of many." God also promised the land of Canaan to Abraham's people. For Jews, Canaan became the "Promised Land." According to the Torah, the covenant meant that Jews would live in a way that pleased God.





According to the Hebrew Bible, God sent angels to Abraham (right) and Sarah (left) to tell them that they would have a son.

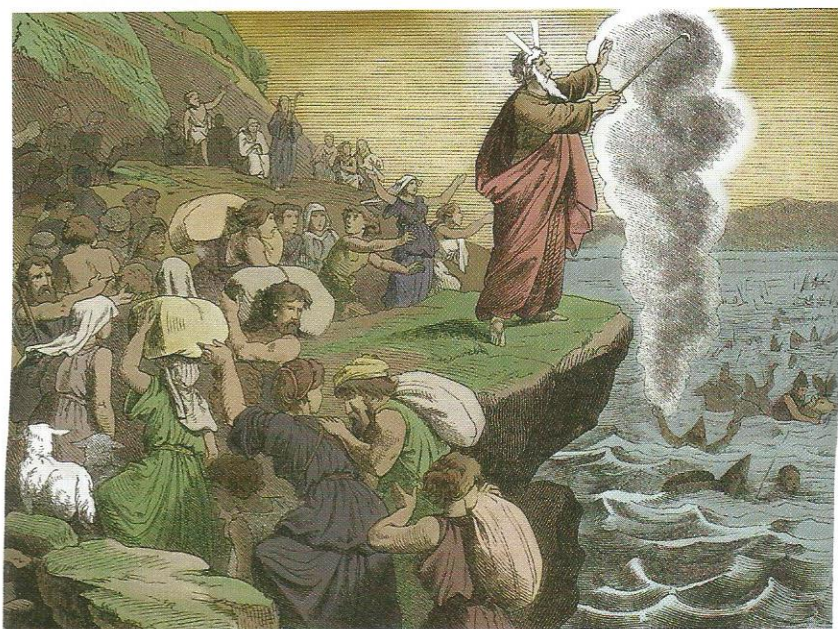
Abraham's Descendants Many years earlier, before Abram left the city of Ur, he had married a beautiful woman named Sarai. She endured many hardships as she traveled with Abraham to Canaan and Egypt. As the years passed, she did not have any children.

The Torah says that God promised that Abraham's wife would have a son. God gave Sarai a new name, Sarah, which means "princess." A year later, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. The Torah says that she was 90 and Abraham was 100 years old when their son was born. As Isaac's mother, Sarah was the ancestress of the Jewish people.

According to the Torah, the Jewish people are descended from Abraham and Sarah, through their son Isaac and his wife Rebekah. Rebekah gave birth to Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel. The descendants of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, were the Israelites. They flourished as a nation made up of 12 tribes.

Abraham made many contributions to the development of Judaism. Most famously, he introduced the belief in a single God. Because of his covenant with God, Jews believed that they were required to live by special rules. He also emphasized the importance of **hospitality**. Their reward was the Promised Land. These beliefs became a central part of Judaism.

To acknowledge his importance, many artists portray Moses with rays of light protruding from his head. According to the Torah, Moses parted the waters of the Sea of Reeds. Jews believe that this miracle proved that God was protecting them.



4. The Life of Moses: Leader of the Israelites

Moses was a great leader of the Israelites. The Torah tells how Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and gave them God's laws and teachings to live by.

The Exodus from Egypt By the time of Moses, estimated to be around the 1300s B.C.E., a large group of Abraham's descendants were living in Egypt. There, the Torah says, the Israelites increased in number and became very powerful. Fearful of their growing strength, the pharaoh forced them into slavery. According to the Torah, God told Moses, "I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

Moses went before the pharaoh, the Torah continues, and told him to free the Israelites. When the pharaoh refused, God punished Egypt with ten terrible plagues. Finally, the pharaoh gave in. Moses began to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

According to the Torah, the pharaoh soon changed his mind. The Egyptian army chased after the Israelites and nearly caught up with them at the edge of the Sea of Reeds. However, Moses raised his staff (a wooden rod), says the Torah, and the waters of the sea parted. The Israelites crossed the sea safely, escaping to the other side. When the Egyptians followed, the waters flooded over the army, drowning the soldiers and keeping the Jews safe.

The Torah calls the flight from Egypt to freedom the **Exodus**, which means "departure." The Exodus became a central event in the history of the Jewish people.

Exodus the escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to freedom

The Ten Commandments As it is told in the Torah, after the Israelites left Egypt, they traveled through a wilderness for 40 years. During this time, God gave Moses the laws and teachings that became the foundation of Judaism. The best known of these laws are called the **Ten Commandments**.

The Torah says that Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the “Mountain of God.” Alone, Moses had climbed the mountain and returned carrying two tablets of stone. Engraved on the tablets were the Ten Commandments.

Some of the commandments listed the Israelites’ duties to God. For example, one commandment was, “You shall have no other gods before me.” This commandment reminded the Israelites of their promise to worship only one God. Another commandment told the Israelites to set aside one day a week, the Sabbath, for rest and worship.

Other commandments laid down basic moral teachings (ideas about the right way to live and treat others). For example, one stated, “You shall honor your father and mother.” Other commandments forbade stealing, lying, and murdering.

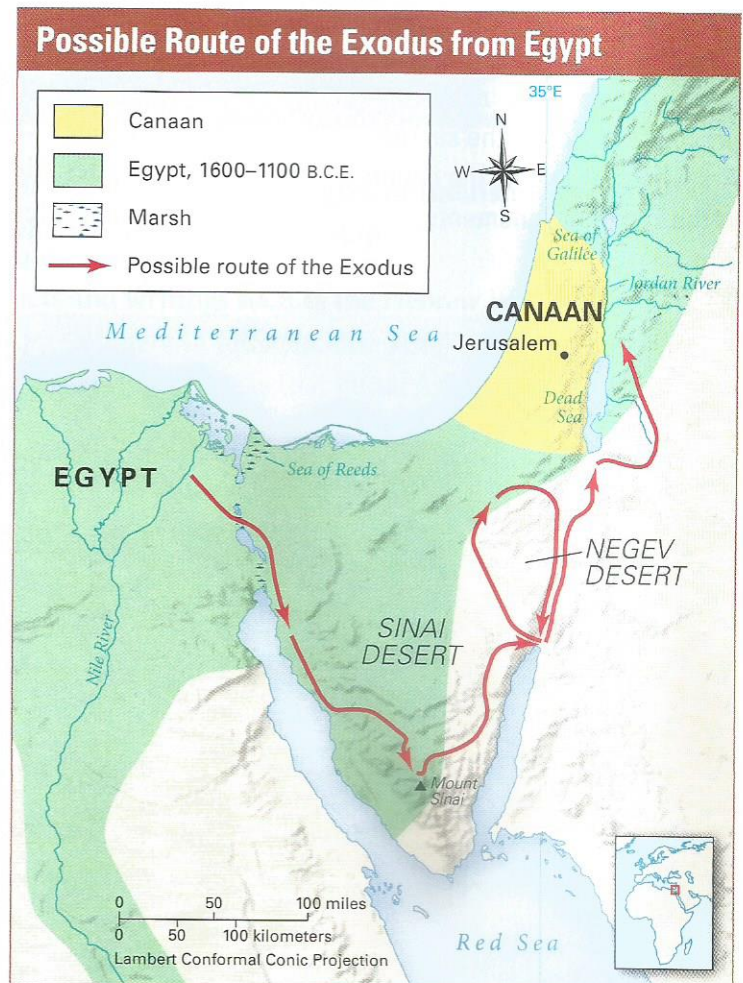
The Ten Commandments stated some of Judaism’s basic teachings. The Torah says that by obeying God’s commandments, the Jews would fulfill their part of this covenant with God. Their responsibility would be to make God’s moral teachings known to the world in exchange for God’s protection.

Moses made several key contributions to the development of Judaism. First, he led the Exodus out of Egypt, which Jews have celebrated ever since to remember the journey from slavery to freedom and as proof that God watched over them. Second, Moses gave Judaism some of its most fundamental laws and teachings, including those that Jews and Christians call the Ten Commandments. Third, Moses’s leadership offered a model from which Jews and Christians derive many lessons. Fourth, Moses forged the Israelites into a united people devoted to a single God.

Ten Commandments

ten laws and teachings said to have been given to Moses by God

Although historians do not know the exact course Moses took in the Exodus from Egypt, this map illustrates one possible route. Can you find where the Torah says he received the Ten Commandments?



5. The Lives of David and Solomon: Kings of Israel

After their travels in the wilderness, the Israelites settled once more in Canaan. The Hebrew Bible describes how they built a kingdom, called Israel, and the great First Temple during the reigns of two kings, David and Solomon.

David Expands the Kingdom of Israel In David's time, about 1000 B.C.E., the Israelites were at war with a rival people, the Philistines (FIH-lih-steen-z). According to the Hebrew Bible, the Philistines promised to be the Israelites' slaves if an Israelite could beat their fiercest warrior, the giant Goliath (guh-LIE-uhth).

As it is told in the Hebrew Bible, David was not yet a grown man, but he was outraged at Goliath's mockery of God. Bravely, he stepped forward. His only weapon was a sling. With one mighty toss, he felled Goliath with a single stone.

David's courage and faith were rewarded when he became king of the Israelites after the first king, Saul, fell in battle. According to the Hebrew Bible, God said, "I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever."

As king, David completed the defeat of the Philistines as well as other enemies. He united the Israelites into a single nation known as Israel. He created a strong central government and gave the new kingdom its own army, courts, and officials. He was

also a poet and a musician. Many of the Psalms in the Writings in the Hebrew Bible are attributed to David.

David chose Jerusalem as the capital city. Under his rule, this city became the center of Israel's political and religious life. David brought the Israelites' most sacred object, the Ark of the Covenant, to Jerusalem. The Ark was a wood and gold chest that held the tablets of the Ten Commandments. As the home of the Ark, Jerusalem became a holy city.

David became a king. In this painting, King David leads a procession to bring the sacred Ark, which is holding the tablets of the Ten Commandments, into Jerusalem.

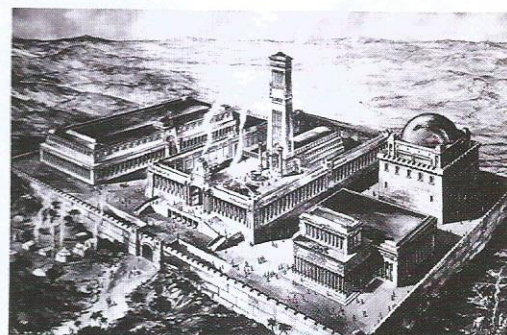


Solomon Builds the Great Temple of Jerusalem

After David's death, his son, Solomon, became king in about 965 B.C.E. Solomon built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant and to serve as the center of Jewish worship. According to the Hebrew Bible, he told God that all the peoples of the earth would know his name.

Building the First Temple in Jerusalem was King Solomon's major achievement. He also strengthened the kingdom of Israel by making treaties with neighboring kingdoms, increased foreign trade, and developed industries such as copper mining. Solomon was famous for his wisdom. The Book of Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes in the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible are attributed to him.

King David and King Solomon made major contributions to Judaism, laying the foundation for kings to govern Israel for more than 400 years. David established Jerusalem as a holy city. Solomon built the great First Temple of Jerusalem. Because of the acts of David and Solomon, Jerusalem would always be the most holy city to the Jews, as well as a powerful symbol of their faith.



Solomon built the magnificent First Temple in Jerusalem. Today, Jews regard the site of the Temple of Jerusalem as the holiest place in the world.

Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you read about the ancient Israelites and the origins of Judaism. You learned about four Jewish leaders who helped Judaism develop.

Ancient Israelites Historians study artifacts and writings such as the Hebrew Bible to learn about the ancient Israelites and the development of Judaism. The Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, contains the commandments that guide Jewish life.

Abraham, Father of the Jews Abraham introduced the belief in one God. He made a covenant with God to go to Canaan, and in turn God made him the father of the Jews. The Jews believed they should behave in a way that would fulfill God's covenant.

Moses, Leader of the Israelites Moses led the Israelites in the Exodus out of slavery in Egypt to freedom. At Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, basic laws and teachings of Judaism. Moses united the Jews as a people who worshiped one God.

Kings David and Solomon King David defeated the Philistines, united the Israelites in a new kingdom called Israel, and made Jerusalem the capital and a holy city. King Solomon, David's son, is known for his wisdom. He built the First Temple in Jerusalem, signed treaties, and increased trade. Both men were also poets with parts of the Hebrew Bible attributed to them.