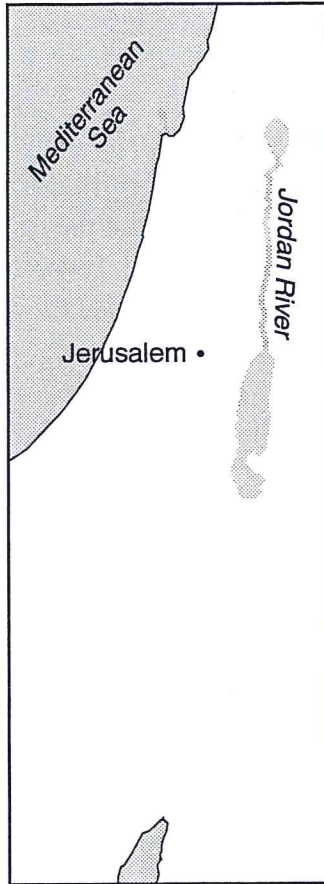




Information About Judaism

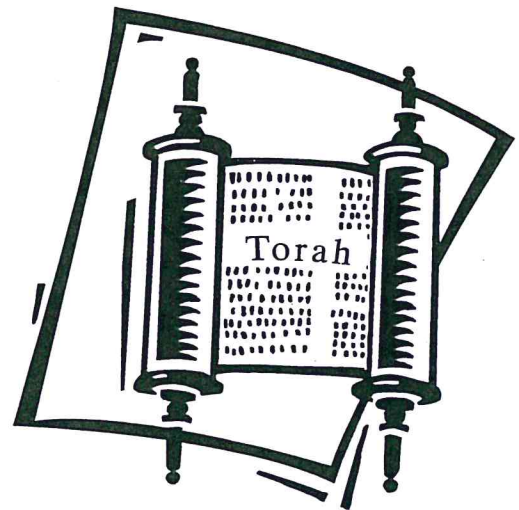


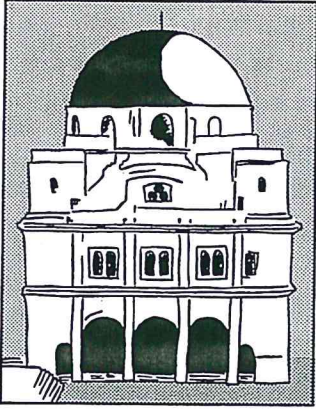
Land of the ancient Hebrews
in 3000 B.C.

Followers of Judaism, called Jews, believe in one God—the God of Abraham—called *Adonai* in Hebrew. Abraham lived in the Middle East about 4,000 years ago at a time when most people believed in many gods. Abraham believed that only one all-powerful God had created the world. Jews believe God made a covenant (agreement) with Abraham that Abraham’s descendants would be God’s chosen people, called Hebrews, and that they would dwell in a promised land called Canaan.

Jews base their religion on their holy book, called the TeNaKh. It is written in Hebrew, which is considered the sacred language of Judaism. The word *TeNaKh* is taken from the initials of the holy book’s three parts: the *Torah*—stories of the ancient Hebrews and the Hebrew law, the *Nevi'im*—the history of Hebrew prophets (messengers of God’s revelation), and the *Ketuvim*—writings, including psalms (prayers written in song or poem form). The Torah is the most important part of the TeNaKh because it is the law of God. Jews believe that about 3,000 years ago, God gave the Torah to Moses, Judaism’s most important prophet. In addition to the history of the early Hebrews, it includes 613 commandments (laws) about how to worship God and live a moral life.

The goal of Judaism is to live a good life according to the laws of the Torah and to pass on Jewish traditions to one’s family. An example of this combination is the Torah law that requires Jews to keep the day of *Shabbat*, or Sabbath, holy. This means that from Friday evening until Saturday evening Jews must rest and pray. Shabbat begins with a traditional family meal that includes practices such as breaking *challah*, or Shabbat bread, and sharing wine. On Friday evening and Saturday morning, Jews gather to pray together at a holy building called a synagogue. During the worship service a rabbi, or teacher, leads the congregation in prayers and readings from the TeNaKh. During Saturday’s service the rabbi also gives a sermon. Traditionally, rabbis were Torah scholars who also





Exterior of a synagogue

kept everyday jobs and only acted as rabbis when working at the synagogue. About 2,000 years ago rabbis began to speak about the *Talmud*, or oral law. Jews believe the Talmud continues to unfold in every generation, meaning that God's teachings are a continuing revelation. Rabbis work to understand the ongoing revelation of God's laws and adapt them to the modern world.

The Torah's laws direct many aspects of Jewish religious and social life. For instance, the Torah commands all Jews to fast (refrain from eating and drinking) during the holiday of *Yom Kippur*, the day of atonement (being sorry for bad acts). The Torah also calls Jews to give alms to the needy to create justice in the world. The Torah includes the rules of *kashrut*, which outlines what a Jew can eat. Foods a Jew can eat are called *kosher* because they meet the Torah's requirements concerning the clean preparation of food. Food that is not kosher is called *tref*, and includes pork, shellfish, and meat prepared with dairy products. Today, Jews from different sects keep *kashrut* to varying degrees. The three main sects of Judaism are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed. All three have a special reverence for Jerusalem because it is the sacred city of the prophets.