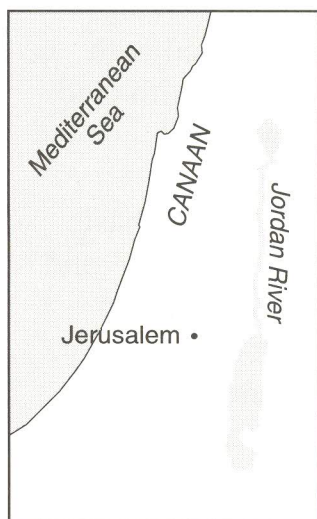




Information About Judaism



Land of the ancient Hebrews
in 3000 B.C.

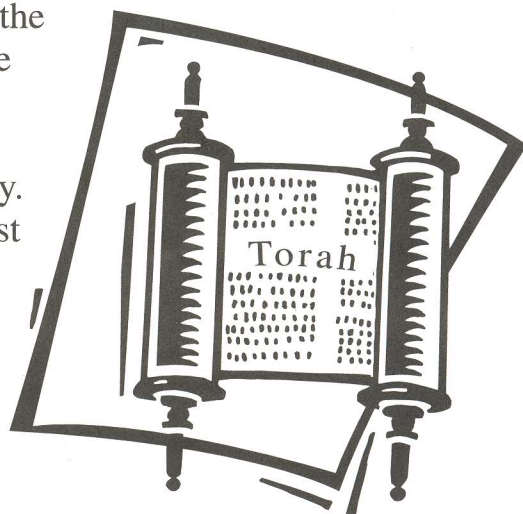
Followers of Judaism are called Jews. These people believe in one God—the God of Abraham—called *Adonai* in Hebrew. Abraham lived in the Middle East about 4,000 years ago at a time when most people believed in many Gods. Abraham believed that only one, all-powerful God had created the world. Jews believe that God made an agreement, or *covenant*, with Abraham. This agreement said that Abraham and the future generations of his family—his *descendants*—would be God’s chosen people in return for their faith and obedience. These people—called Hebrews—would live in a promised land called Canaan.

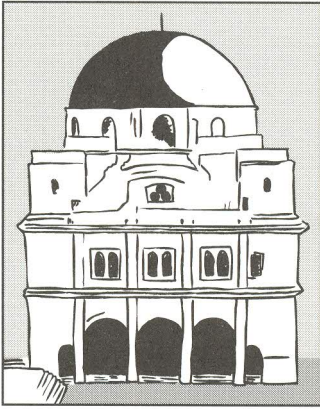
Jews base their religion on their holy book, called the TeNaKh. This holy book is written in Hebrew, the sacred language of Judaism. The word *TeNaKh* is taken from the

holy book’s three parts. The *Torah* contains stories of the ancient Hebrews and the Hebrew law. The *Nevi’im* contains the history of the Hebrew messengers of God’s word, or *prophets*. The *Ketuvim* contains 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 laws, called *commandments*. These commandments tell the followers of Judaism how to worship and how to live a moral (good) life.

The goal of Judaism is to live a good life according to the laws of the Torah. In addition, followers of Judaism are supposed to pass on Jewish traditions to their families. An example of this combination is the Torah law that requires Jews to keep the Sabbath day, or *Shabbat*, holy. From Friday evening until Saturday evening, Jews must rest and pray. Shabbat begins with a traditional family meal. This meal includes such practices as breaking the Shabbat bread, the *challah*, and sharing wine. On Friday evening and Saturday morning, Jews gather to pray at a holy building called a *synagogue*. During the worship service, a teacher, or *rabbi*, leads the congregation (worshippers) in prayers and readings





Exterior of a synagogue

from the TeNaKh. During Saturday's service the rabbi also gives a religious speech, or *sermon*.

Traditionally, rabbis were Torah scholars who also kept everyday jobs. They acted as rabbis only when working at the synagogue. About 2,000 years ago rabbis began to speak about the Jewish oral (spoken) law, or the *Talmud*. Jews believe that the Talmud continues to unfold in every generation. This means that God's teachings continue to be revealed. Rabbis work to understand the continual unfolding 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* by not eating or drinking during the holiday of *Yom Kippur*. This sacred holiday is a day Jews set aside for being sorry for bad acts, or a day of *atonement*. The Torah also calls upon Jews to give to the needy to create justice in the world. The Torah outlines what a Jew can eat, called the rules of *kashrut*. Jews only can eat only *kosher* foods, because they alone meet the Torah's requirements about the clean preparation of food. Food that is not kosher is called *tref*. These foods include pork, shellfish, and meat prepared with dairy products. Today, Jews from various sects follow kashrut to varying degrees.

The three main sects of Judaism are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed. All three sects have a special reverence for Jerusalem because it is the sacred city of the prophets.