

## Researching the Roots of a Religion

Complete the following assignments to gather information about Judaism, its beginnings, and applications of those beginnings to the present time. Keep your notes on these topics for future reference.

1. Use your textbook, a dictionary, or other resources to define the following terms.

kosher	Yahweh	Torah	Purim
rabbi	Messiah	ark	Hanukkah
cantor	Sabbath	Passover	Mishnah
yeshivah	Talmud	Rosh Hashanah	Semite
covenant	synagogue	Yom Kippur	Zionism

2. Research the following elements of Judaism. Connect the terms you researched with the appropriate categories in the outline.

I. Laws

- A. Written
- B. Oral

II. Instruction

- A. Kinds of teachers, early sects, their particular focuses
- B. Books used
- C. Methods; people permitted to learn

III. Kinds of Judaism

- A. Orthodox (give description)
- B. Conservative (give description)
- C. Reformed (give description)

IV. Cultural contributions

- A. Before the Diaspora
- B. After the Diaspora

V. Famous personages and battles in Jewish history

- A. Moses
- B. David
- C. Philo of Alexandria
- D. Moses Maimonides
- E. Seleucids
- F. Philistines
- G. Masada

VI. The destruction of the temple of Jerusalem

- A. By the Romans in A.D. 70
- B. Jews hold fervent regard for the temple

VII. Recreation of Israel

- A. Creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine
- B. Immigration
- C. Palestinian and Arab resistance
- D. Status today

### Out of the Desert, Across the World

Read the following passage, and answer the questions. Be prepared for class discussion.

Although the Hebrews spoke Aramaic, their earliest language was Hebrew, and their first writings were recorded about 900 B.C. These writings tell of the beginnings of their people, the Great Flood, their leaders—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses—and their journey out of Egypt. Modern archaeologists continue to find evidence supporting this ancient history, confirming that the Hebrews were indeed in Egypt around 1200 B.C.

Before that time, between 2000 and 1600 B.C., the early Hebrews were nomadic herders. They worshiped many gods at that time, and it is believed they left their home in Ur (located in Mesopotamia, or what is known today as Iraq). Under the leadership of Abraham, who preached from his divine revelation that there was only one God, they went forth into the land of Canaan (today the modern state of Israel), the land promised to them by their God.

When Abraham's grandson Jacob became the leader, he was renamed Israel, and it is from this name that the Jewish people took the name Israelites, or children of Israel. Jacob (for Israel) had twelve sons, and their descendants later became known as the twelve tribes of Israel.

One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his brothers and, as a slave in Egypt, won the pharaoh's favor. Eventually Joseph won his freedom. Joseph and other Israelites, to whom he had returned, went back to Egypt. Many Israelites settled there. This was a long and costly mistake in later years, for the Hebrews were enslaved by the Egyptians and forced to work on the pharaoh's building projects, first for Seti I and later for his son Ramses II, in 1300 and 1200 B.C.

In later years, a child was born among the Israelites and raised by an Egyptian princess. He returned to his people as the prophet Moses and threatened pharaoh with the anger of Moses's God if the pharaoh did not let the Israelites go. The pharaoh was eventually persuaded, and the Israelites were led out of Egypt and back to Canaan by Moses. The journey is known as the Exodus, and it is remembered today during the Jewish feast of Passover.

On the journey to Canaan, which took forty years, Moses left the group and climbed to the heights of Mount Sinai, where he received the Tablets of the Law. This teaching is included in the Torah, and it is a source of strength and wisdom for the Jews.

Moses died before the Israelites completed their journey. Joshua led them into Canaan and divided the land among the twelve tribes.

There were few years of peace in Canaan. Under military leaders they called Judges, the Israelites fought the Philistines, Phoenicians, and Arameans. (It was from the name *Philistine* that the land of Canaan became known as Palestine.)

The years between 1000 and 900 B.C., which included the reigns of King David and King Solomon, were the greatest in Israel's history. During that time, David's poetry became the Book of Psalms in the Bible. David's son, Solomon, was famous for his proverbs and his wisdom, and he built the first temple in Jerusalem.

After the death of Solomon, a division among the Hebrews resulted in the formation of two different kingdoms (some historians say the division was due to

over-taxation). The two southern tribes became the kingdom of Judah, and their capital was at Jerusalem. These people were called the Jews. The other kingdom, to the north, belonged to the ten tribes who called their area the kingdom of Israel. They were overrun in about 721 B.C. by the Assyrians and taken as slaves. Scattered all over the Middle East, they were known as the ten lost tribes of Israel, and their descendants eventually spread across the world.

In 586 B.C., the Chaldeans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, taking most of the Jews to Babylon. When Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon, he permitted the Jews to return to their homeland, and by 539 B.C., they had rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple.

In 332 B.C., the Jews came under the rule of Alexander the Great. The Jews fought, though to no avail. Still, a stand against bondage had been taken. In 168 B.C., the Jews revolted against the Seleucid dynasty that had assumed control of Alexander's rule there and won the right to found their own dynasty, the Hasmonean dynasty of the Maccabees. Chanukah (also called Hanukkah), the festival of lights, commemorates the victory over the Seleucids.

By 63 B.C., the Romans had marched into the area. They controlled Palestine and its people. However, the new Jewish tradition of freedom fighting was still evident, and there were many revolts until A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed the temple at Jerusalem. That act crushed the rebellion, and it was not until A.D. 135 that Jewish rebels mounted a new revolt. This time the Romans retaliated by scattering the Jews throughout the empire. This scattering is known as the Diaspora, and from that time until 1948, when the independent state of Israel was established, the Jews had no home of their own. They wandered across the world, sometimes accepted, often persecuted, but always making contributions wherever they went.

1. Where can we learn much of the early history of the Hebrews?

2. Why is it so hard to distinguish Jewish history from the Jewish faith?

3. What is the Torah?

4. How has Judaism been kept strong over the centuries?

5. Who are some of the famous biblical Jews, and what did they do?

6. Before exploring the basic tenets of Jewish religion and the history of Jews beyond the Diaspora, what conclusions can be drawn about the contributions of Judaism to civilization?