Zoroastrianism and Judaism

**Essential Questions**
- What are the origins and beliefs of Zoroastrianism?
- What are the roots of monotheism?
- What are the origins and geographic location of Judaism?
- What are the major principles of Judaism?
- What are the main elements of Abraham’s Covenant?
- What was the significance of Hebrew slavery in Egypt and the Exodus?
- Why were the kingdoms of Solomon and David significant?
- Which empires conquered and invaded the kingdoms of Israel and Judah?
- What were the primary events of Roman rule and the Jewish Diaspora?
- What are the Talmud’s main ideas?

**Keywords**
- Ahura Mazda
- Akhenaten
- Aten
- berit
- Diaspora
- King David
- King Solomon
- Israel
- Jerusalem
- Sabbath
- Solomon’s Temple
- Ten Commandments
- Yahweh
- Zarathushtra
**Set the Stage**

Across the ancient world, polytheistic religions and non-spiritual philosophies developed. People tried to understand the world around them, the cosmos, and the possibilities of what would happen after death. Many worshiped different gods to appease different elements in their lives. However, across the globe, other kinds of religions were growing. In Persia and the Middle East in particular, people became interested in religions worshipping single gods. These monotheistic religions, like many polytheistic religions and non-spiritual philosophies, emphasized moral behavior, virtue, and obedience. These new religions would offer people a different means of understanding the world around them. One such monotheistic religion, Judaism, would become extremely long-lasting and have a tremendous influence on other developing religions.

**The Origins and Beliefs of Zoroastrianism**

The ancient civilization of Persia nurtured its own religion, Zoroastrianism, one of the first known examples of monotheism. Zoroastrianism developed out of early Persian sects that worshipped the natural world. In many ways, these Persian sects had elements similar to Vedic, particularly Aryan religions: the Persians revered similar divinities through similar rites, such as sacrificial rituals and ritual utilization of mind-altering substances. The Persians had similar societal values too, emphasizing comfort in the present rather than looking forward to the afterlife.

These sects were the basis of Zoroastrianism, which was also based on the ideas of a thinker called Zarathushtra or Zoroaster (dates unknown; he could have been alive as early as the 1700s B.C.E., or as recently as the 500s B.C.E.). Not much is known about Zarathushtra; he was most likely a noble person who moved away from the religious sects and experienced his own epiphanies. Zarathushtra is believed to have had an epiphany in which he saw his God, Ahura Mazda (uh-hou-ruh-MAZ-duh). Zarathushtra devoted the rest of his life to spreading the word of Ahura Mazda, who also became known as the “wise lord.” He did so through a series of texts called the Gathas.

Originally, Zarathushtra’s disciples, called “magi,” shared the Gathas orally, and the holy texts were put in writing several centuries later. The Gathas are actually religious songs that honor Ahura Mazda and other divinities worshipped by Zarathushtra. Scholars believe Zarathushtra wrote many other texts about religious and philosophical subjects, several of which, unfortunately, were not preserved.

As the Gathas show, Zarathushtra and the Zoroastrians practiced polytheism, although they honored Ahura Mazda above their other gods. Ahura Mazda had many characteristics of the single omnipotent god worshiped in other cultures. However, Ahura Mazda shared the heavens with at least seven other supreme beings, including an evil being named Angra Mainyu. Ahura Mazda represented the forces of good in the world, and Angra Mainyu the forces of evil. Zarathushtra
preached that Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu would take part in a battle ranging over thousands of years—a battle which had already begun at the creation of the world. At the end of the battle, Ahura Mazda would win and a type of judgment day would take place, with people’s souls being assigned to places similar to the western versions of heaven and hell.

Unlike some other ancient religions, Zoroastrianism encouraged its followers to seek out and find pleasure in the world around them. Zoroastrians revered elements of the natural world like fire and water, similar to the sects that had preceded them. Fasting and other like practices were discouraged. However, like the Buddha, Zarathushtra encouraged his followers to live moderate lives. One of the primary principles of Zoroastrianism became a three-part slogan: “good words, good thoughts, good deeds.” They valued honesty above many things, and understood the world in terms of cycles, such as birth, death, and rebirth. The Zoroastrians believed in the possibility that spirituality and life did not necessarily stop in the earthly realm.

Zoroastrians applied their principles to two of the central elements of life: marriage and death. Both took on great significance in Zoroastrian tradition. First, the Zoroastrians did not permit intermarriage. Its practitioners could only marry other practitioners. This law was set up to keep the religion and the ethnicity of Zoroastrians intact. Second, deaths had to be memorialized in a specific and exact way. According to Zoroastrian practice, bodies of the dead were memorialized through a ritual known as Dakhmanashini. The title of this practice is partially a reference to a stone building called a dakhma, in which a dead body was placed for burial. Dakhmases had open tops so that animals could enter and help dispose of the bodies. As animals consumed the bodies, the bodies disintegrated and returned to the earth. The Zoroastrians believed this practice helped perpetuate the cycle of life. However, this religious practice also had a practical purpose, in that the dakhmas kept dead bodies away from the bodies of water the Zoroastrians relied upon.

While Zarathustra’s exact timeline is unclear, scholars have determined that the religion he founded became popular during the 500s B.C.E. Zoroastrianism was first practiced by higher class Persian citizens, who supported the religion financially. During Persian Emperor Darius’s reign (541–486 B.C.E.), Zoroastrianism became formally linked to the Persian government. Darius claimed that Ahura Mazda gave him the divine right to rule Persia, and used his connections with the religion to attempt the increase of his empire. During his reign, Darius supported Zoroastrianism financially and built several religious spaces and inscriptions detailing his relationship with the primary god.
Meanwhile, Darius increased the size of the Persian Empire in several directions, until it included Macedonia and parts of India. At its peak, Darius’s empire measured 1,865 miles by 933 miles and contained upwards of 35 million people. Darius built his capital city in Persepolis, building a grand center of arts and culture that also functioned smoothly as the bureaucratic center of an empire. Darius also made several bureaucratic innovations in how the Persian government ran and found another way of funding his court by systemizing taxes. In addition, Darius made improvements to his empire’s legal system.

By the end of the Achaemenid dynasty, of which Darius was a part, people had started practicing Zoroastrianism in places as diverse as Iran and Egypt, and in countries throughout the western regions of the Asian continent. Zoroastrianism probably influenced Judaic and Christian belief systems because it emphasized a supreme god, salvation, and good vs. evil, and because it had a major effect on religion across the globe. As early as the 600s B.C.E., however, Zoroastrianism fell out of favor and began to be replaced by the rising religion of Islam. Zoroastrianism is hardly practiced at all in the twenty-first century, except in some small parts of India and Iran.

**Manichaeism**

Prior to its dissipation, Zoroastrianism led to the development of another religion, Manichaeism. Manichaeism stemmed from the ideas of a man named Mani (216–272 C.E.) who combined his Zoroastrian principles with ideas from other religions such as Buddhism and Christianity. Mani believed all three of these religions had commonalities, which he tried to bring into his new faith, Manichaeism. Manichaeism thus included many of the ideas popularized in these other religions, such as the opposition between good and evil, the practice of living simply, and the belief in being saved at the end of life.

Mani encouraged the Manichaeists to live sparingly and modestly in order to achieve spiritual fulfillment. He voyaged great distances to share his new religion and attempted to convert many to his cause. Within decades, people had started practicing Manichaeism throughout the Roman Empire. In the two hundred years following Mani’s death, the religion fell out of favor in many areas, with the exception of the middle region of Asia.

**The Roots of Monotheism**

Mesopotamia saw the rise of other faiths, such as Judaism, Buddhism, and Manichaeism, all of which threatened to supplant the fading Zoroastrianism. In later years, Christianity and Islam would also arrive. Over time, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would become the three primary religions practiced in the region. Mesopotamians would combine some elements of their previous Zoroastrian faith with these new religions. Although Zoroastrianism is hardly practiced today, it had a strong impact on Judaic beliefs—and, by extension, on Christian and Islamic beliefs. The Zoroastrians were some of the first to focus their beliefs on a supreme and good god who worked against evil in the world, and the first to begin believing that all people would be judged for their actions at the end of life, after which they would be sent to heaven or hell.
Thus, Zoroastrianism, in its emphasis on a single god who had more power and importance than other gods, can be seen as a precursor to religions that practice monotheism, or belief in a single god. These principles became fully integrated into the rising faith of Judaism, and this emphasis on a single god soon found its way to other cultures in Egypt, Africa, and Israel.

**Monotheism in Egypt**

In Egypt, a form of monotheism is thought to have emerged even earlier than it did in Israel, although it did not have similar staying power. Egypt had long been a society that worshipped many deities, including two important gods that had started to merge into one, Amon-Re. Amon and Re became united because they both had affiliations with the sun. Both Amon and Re had had separate followers and claims to worship, but because they were similar, many Egyptians started thinking of them as a unit that included both gods. The two gods became known by the encompassing name Amon-Re and temples were built in Amon-Re’s honor. In those temples, Amon-Re would stand for both gods, and people could worship both of them simultaneously by addressing only Amon-Re. However, one Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh Amenhotep IV (r. 1353–1335 B.C.E.), who was married to Nefertiti, worshipped a different sun god named Aten. The Pharaoh also became known as Akhenaten (ahk-NAH-tuhn), taking the name as a gesture of honor to his god. Akhenaton wished to practice a form of monotheism, with Aten as his supreme deity. Amon-Re was treated as the first god in a pantheon of many gods, but Akhenaten wanted Aten to be worshipped alone, and treated him as a king among gods.

While Akhenaten still acknowledged in writing the presence of other gods, including other sun gods or gods who signified non-concrete ideas, he wanted his people to focus primarily on Aten. Sometimes, Akhenaten and other worshipers would use the titles of other gods to depict and address Aten. During this time, people only had permission to worship Aten in temples. Akhenaten gave orders that references to other gods should be removed from many temples so that people would focus on Aten in even more detail.

To further this worship, Akhenaton employed many tactics, including proselytizing. He sent missionaries throughout his kingdom to support Aten and even created an entire city centered on Aten-worship. He forbade people from reverencing other gods, such as Amon-Re. The Pharaoh enjoyed great power, so while he reigned, Aten did too. As soon as Akhenaten relinquished his position as Pharaoh (by dying), the supporters of Amon-Re rebelled against the remaining supporters of Aten. Egypt returned to primarily polytheistic practices.

**Monotheism in Africa and the Middle East**

On the African continent, two types of monotheism emerged as early as 5000 B.C.E. First, in the Sudan, people honored an unnamed...
divinity that represented elements of good and evil. The divinity, although it was a single entity, could appear in many different guises as a sub-deity. People could worship these sub-deities and, by extension, worship the deity itself. Second, in Niger and the Congo, the people, including the Bantu, honored a deity named Nyamba. Nyamba, a creator god, was both powerful and removed. Like the Sudanese, monotheistic people who worshiped Nyamba would turn to sub-deities first and pray to them to intercede with the supreme power; unlike the Sudanese deities, these sub-deities were separate from the primary god.

However, religious practices in Africa changed and adapted frequently. When the Sudanese and Bantu cultures encountered one another in the years following 1000 B.C.E., the Bantu applied the paradigm of good and evil in the Sudanese belief system to their own beliefs.

**Monotheism in Israel: The Location and Origins of Judaism**

In Israel (formerly the region between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea), according to Hebrew religious texts, people first began to believe in monotheism under the leadership of Abraham (in approximately 1850 B.C.E.) and Moses (in the 1300s B.C.E.). Prior to their leadership, the Israelites had worshipped the natural world and participated in polytheistic practices. Abraham and Moses presented a single deity as an alternative, and referred to this god as **Yahweh**. Unlike Ahura Mazda, the Zoroastrian god, Yahweh ruled alone and did not share powers with any other divine figures. Abraham and Moses quickly rallied many followers to their cause.

When the people of Israel settled in **Jerusalem** and made it their capital city, the religious buildings they created were spaces where Yahweh would be honored. They built a civilization that emphasized patriarchy and privileged men over women, although women received honor in domestic spaces. According to their laws, people had an obligation to care for those less fortunate than themselves and contribute both to charity and to the organization of their community. Despite their emphasis on good works and charity, they still permitted slavery to some extent.

**Abraham’s Covenant**

One of the important stories in Hebrew religious texts is that of Abraham and his family. The man referred to in the Torah as Abraham is thought to have arrived in Mesopotamia in 1850 B.C.E., after emigrating from Ur, a place in Sumeria. He and his relatives became part of Hebrew society in Mesopotamia and took part in their cultures and traditions.

Perhaps the most important element of Judaism comes from the covenant that Abraham made with Yahweh, as described in the Torah. Jews also refer to the covenant as the **berit**. In the berit Abraham agreed that he and his progeny would worship Yahweh alone. In return, Yahweh promised that Abraham’s progeny would become the “chosen people” of God; Yahweh said he would show them the way to a holy and safe place, which at the time was called Canaan and today is called Israel.

Ultimately, the berit should be thought of in three ways. First, the berit is an agreement with Yahweh that defends Jews and marks them as the chosen people.

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**Yahweh** the Judaic god

**Jerusalem** the holy city, capital of Israel and of the Jewish faith

**berit** covenant with god
Agreeing to the berit is akin to committing to a holy oath with Yahweh. The berit is sacred. The Jews believed that by participating in the berit, only people of their own religious faith would ultimately be defended and loved by Yahweh. Second, the berit implies that the Jews will comply with Yahweh’s rule in all things. Abraham committed to the covenant without even knowing the extent of Yahweh’s precepts, which were detailed to Moses during the Exodus: Moses and his people could not make demands of their god. Third, the berit brings all Jews together as a group that is larger than their own families. Yahweh judges the group as a whole.

Abraham’s progeny, including Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, also have important roles in the Torah. After Abraham’s death, his son Isaac took over as leader of the followers of Yahweh. In time, Isaac’s son Jacob would also step forward as a leader. Jacob would eventually accept the new name of Israel, and his descendants would become the twelve tribes of Israel, who are also known as the “children of Israel.” In this way, “Israel” refers both to the descendants of Jacob and to the land promised those descendents by Yahweh himself. Abraham’s family, shepherds by trade, traveled through Israel and eventually to Egypt, where they founded Judaism.

Some historic evidence is slightly at odds with the version of events conveyed by Hebrew religious texts, which were originally oral instead of written, describe events after the fact, and have several unknown authors. Despite the discrepancies, most historians agree that the Israelites developed the original monotheistic religion, which became known as Judaism. Judaism began with the people of Mesopotamia, originally called the Hebrews. As early as 2000 B.C.E., the Hebrews lived off the land and did not stay in centralized locations. The belief system they began developing would eventually have a tremendous influence on religions around the world.

Hebrew religious texts show that the Israelites saw Yahweh as a multifunctional god who had enough power to build the cosmos but enough detailed attention to care for each of his worshippers. Unlike deities in other belief systems, Yahweh would not share disciples: those who wished to revere Yahweh could not become disciples of any other gods. Many of the early behavioral requirements for those who followed Yahweh were set down in the Ten Commandments, which include guidelines for living morally and honorably. These commandments, along with other religious instructions from Moses and other followers of Yahweh, were combined into a single text, the Torah, in the years from 800 to 400 B.C.E. According to the Torah, people who follow Yahweh’s instructions will benefit, and those who do not will suffer. In later years, practitioners of the Christian faith would add the Torah to their own religious texts as the first sections of the Old Testament.

Judaism’s Major Principles

The Jews clung to their religious ideals, especially their monotheistic belief in Yahweh, despite the fact that their country was small and had little political power. Unlike the Egyptian monotheist Akhenaton, they did not proselytize. Instead, they emphasized their individual and special relationship with their god.

Judaism instructs its followers in many ways. First, Jews believe in a single god, Yahweh, and do not worship any false idols. Jews are required to behave morally and virtuously, following the strictures set forth in the Ten Commandments and...
the guidelines detailed in the Torah. Evil acts such as stealing and killing are forbidden, while acts of charity and kindness are encouraged. Paradoxically, some slavery was permitted. The worshippers who behave according to Yahweh’s guidelines will be recompensed, and those who do not will suffer. The Ten Commandments also encourage people to venerate their ancestors and celebrate a day of rest each week on the Sabbath. This day honors Yahweh, who took a day of rest after making the world in six days.

Other regulations for living proper Jewish life are set out in a text called the Talmud. Judaism started out as a patriarchal religion. Its observers are supposed to marry only those individuals who share their faith. Judaism also set forth specific rules about ceremonial bathing for purification and for eating, known as keeping kosher (flesh of cloven-hoofed animals and shellfish is forbidden, and meat and milk cannot be eaten at the same meal).

Ultimately, the Jews’ monotheism taught the world to think of God as a supreme being who balanced humanity, morality, and fairness. The trials the people suffered, by undergoing outside rule, made most Jews’ faith in Yahweh grow stronger. Wherever Jews went in Mesopotamia and Asia, they took their faith with them. Their religion continued to grow in depth and significance.

**Hebrew Slavery in Egypt and the Exodus**

Much of what people know about these events is taken from accounts in the Torah, which state that Hebrews traveled to Egypt in the 1700s B.C.E. In particular, the Torah describes how Joseph and Moses aided their fellow Hebrews against the Egyptian captors. The section from the Torah called the Exodus shows how Moses—the same Moses who encouraged monotheism—helped lead an uprising and bring the Hebrews out of Egypt to Canaan in about 1200 or 1300 B.C.E. Moses led the Hebrews from Egypt only after the Egyptians suffered several plagues, inflicted by Yahweh. To release his fellows from Egypt, Moses is supposed to have parted the Red Sea. The Torah states that this Exodus, begun by Moses and finished by Joshua, lasted four decades. During this time, Moses received the Ten Commandments, and his followers made a pact with Yahweh that they would venerate him alone as their supreme god. The Ten Commandments require the followers of Yahweh to do the following: one, to worship no other gods but Yahweh; two, to refrain from creating any false idols; three, not to take God’s name in vain; four, to observe the Sabbath one day per week; five, to honor one’s parents; six, to refrain from committing murder; seven, to refrain from practicing adultery; eight, to refrain from stealing; nine, to refrain from lying; and ten, to refrain from desiring the possessions of others.

In later years, the Exodus became part of Judaic religious observance, highlighted as the Passover holiday. Passover is celebrated once a year in the spring and lasts eight days and nights. Its title comes from the idea of “passing over,” a reference to one of the plagues Yahweh inflicted on the Egyptians to encourage them to release the Jews. In this particular plague, Yahweh killed the first male child in each Egyptian home, but he “passed over” the homes of his own people, the Jews. During the Passover holiday, Jews do not eat any leavened bread as a way of honoring the Israelites who had to leave Egypt on such short notice that they had no time for their bread to rise. On the first two nights of Passover, Jews have
a ceremonial meal called a seder. Each food eaten at the meal references an element of the Exodus, and the food is consumed in accordance with special prayers.

While historians debate whether enough evidence exists to support the presence of Hebrews in Egypt, many Hebrews were enslaved by the Egyptians according to the Torah. Historic evidence suggests that more than 400 years after this exodus from Egypt, people of Israel or of Semitic descent came to the Mediterranean region of Canaan (now Israel and Palestine) in the years following 1200 B.C.E. Historic evidence pinpoints the rise of monotheism and worship of Yahweh later than Hebrew religious texts do, positing that it occurred in the 700s B.C.E.

**The Kingdoms of Solomon and David**

After arriving in Canaan, the Hebrews became the Israelites. The Israelites divided themselves into twelve groups or family tribes and ruled themselves that way for about two hundred years. The Torah’s episodes of Samson and Delilah, and of David and Goliath, are set during this time. Then, in 1000 B.C.E. the Israelite tribes joined together under the rule of King Saul (1020–ca. 1000 B.C.E.), followed by **King David** (r. 1000–970 B.C.E.), followed by **King Solomon** (r. 970–930 B.C.E.).

The Israelites, who became known as Jews during the 900s B.C.E., incorporated some Palestinian and Canaanite customs—which included worshipping many gods such as Baal and Asherah. Because their tribes were strengthened as a unified group under David and Solomon, the Israelites controlled land ranging from the Sinai Peninsula all the way to Syria.

During the eleventh and tenth centuries, when David and Solomon ruled, the Israelites developed patriarchal societies that privileged men. While women had more rights than their peers in other societies (some women, such as Deborah, could rise to positions of authority in the law and the military), they still were forbidden from owning property or leaving their husbands. Each family became concerned with producing male children to inherit their belongings.

David and Solomon became legendary kings. During King David’s reign, the Israelites formalized the central zone of Jerusalem as their capital city. King David continued to bring together the twelve tribes of Israel into a single group of people. He made sure Jerusalem had a religious focus on Yahweh and the Jewish faith by installing the Ark in Jerusalem; however, he also strengthened the city from a political standpoint. Under his rule, the Israelites contributed taxes to the government and built an army for protection. Today, people believe that King David, regarded as an excellent musician, composed the majority of the Psalms (which are in both the Hebrew and the Christian Bibles).

King David’s son Solomon also ruled well and fairly and was known for his wise judgments. During King Solomon’s era, Israel prospered and entered into trade with Arabian nations. Solomon also honored Yahweh by creating a religious house in Israel: the first temple, or **Solomon’s Temple**, where all people could come to worship. In order to build the temple in a manner he thought would be pleasing to Yahweh, Solomon wished to use materials that could not be found in Israel, but only in nearby countries in the Arab region (such as cedar). In order to procure these materials, Solomon developed peaceable trade with the leaders of these Arabian nations. The temple also stands out as one of the first houses of worship dedicated to a monothe-
istic god rather than a group of gods. The men who worked at the temple became rich and powerful, which caused dissent among the Israelites. The rich grew richer, while the poor grew poorer: Israel's prosperity and unification would be short-lived.

**Empires and the Invasion of Israel and Judah**

In 920 B.C.E., following the death of King Solomon, the people of Israel split into two factions: Israel and Judah, which held the city of Jerusalem. Those factions did not remain undisturbed for long. As early as 722 B.C.E., leaders of other countries, including the Assyrians and the New Babylonians, had interceded to rule over the Jews. In fact, in 722 B.C.E. the Assyrians conquered the new Israel even though its people had joined with Judah in an attempt to combat the assault, and most of the people there either became Assyrian or were forcibly removed from the region.

Less than two hundred years later, in 586 B.C.E., the ruler Nebuchadnezzar led the New Babylonians to conquer the Assyrians, and also attacked Judah. People in Judah who clung to their Jewish faith were forcibly removed from the region. Nebuchadnezzar demolished the temple that Solomon had built and forced the important authority figures out of Judah to Babylon. Some Jews would later rebuild the temple in the years between the 530s and 520s B.C.E.

Despite these outside influences and pressures, the Jews maintained their religious and cultural traditions. Even though the Jews were continually persecuted and forced away from their homes, they trusted in religious forecasters, or prophets, who encouraged them to remain faithful and true to Yahweh. According to the prophets, the Jews’ were persecuted by the Assyrians and New Babylonians because Yahweh was unhappy with them. The prophets believed that if the Jews were more faithful and observant, Yahweh would relent and assist them. The Jews began to have faith in the idea that Yahweh would send down a special messenger as their savior who would release them from these non-Jewish governments and leaders. The Jews began to refer to this savior as the Messiah.

Eventually, fifty years after the New Babylonians forced them out of Judah, some Israelite citizens would return. They brought with them renewed commitment to their faith and worked to rebuild smaller nations where they could practice their faith safely. Yet many of the former Israelites stayed away. Meanwhile, in the centuries that followed the New Babylonians’ conquest, other countries would also attack Judah. They included Persia, which attacked in 539 B.C.E., Macedonia under Alexander the Great from 333 to 331 B.C.E., and Rome between 66 and 64 B.C.E. During this time, many Jews were forcibly removed from their homes.

**Roman Rule and the Jewish Diaspora**

The process of outside intercession continued through the beginning of Roman-dominated rule in 63 B.C.E. under the leadership of Pompey. Roman rule lasted for centuries. During its early years, a man named Jesus who lived in the region of Nazareth and had practiced Judaism began preaching new religious ideas, which eventually turned into another religion, Christianity.

Judah itself became yet another small part of the great Roman Empire. While the region had its own leader (sponsored by the Romans), Judah still functioned as a cog in the Roman Empire’s wheel; its people owed taxes to Rome and had
People of many religions want to honor their gods by creating exquisite temples dedicated to their deities that are full of luxurious items and beautiful craftsmanship. The beauty and richness of each temple is a means of worshipping the deity it honors. In creating a great temple for Yahweh, Solomon hoped to please his god by constructing the finest place of worship possible.

To build his great temple Solomon needed to exchange goods with other countries so he could acquire materials that would be sufficient to honor such divinity. One figure Solomon approached was Hiram, King of Tyre, in Phoenicia. Fortunately, Hiram was willing to trade with Solomon. While the Phoenicians could have responded aggressively to the Israelites, they negotiated peacefully, and both sides benefited from the exchange. The Phoenicians received the food and oil they needed to survive, while the Israelites received the wood they needed to craft Solomon’s Temple.

Many years later, this remarkably peaceful exchange of goods became memorialized in the Israelites’ holy text, the Old Testament. The historic fact of a trade between two nations and the construction of a holy place in Israel thus took on religious connotations. A passage from the Old Testament, 1 Kings 5, describes this trading process, reconstructing a dialogue between the two negotiating rulers, and showing the intercession of the Israelites’ god in the historic construction of the temple:

_And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which thou sentest to me for: and I will do all thy desire concerning timber of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire in giving food for my household. So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year. And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together._ (1 Kings 5:8-12)

Hiram provides Solomon with “timber of cedar” and “timber of fir,” the trees Solomon needed for his temple. In turn, Solomon provided Hiram with “twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil.” The two leaders traded honorably, and Solomon was able to honor his god without opposition from his enemy. Instead, by honoring Yahweh, Solomon was able to strengthen his nation’s relationship with the country of Tyre. Rather than fighting, as so many other leaders did over Israel and Judah, Hiram worked with Solomon to exchange goods. Both nations benefited as a result, and a historic act of trade became memorialized as evidence of the Israelites’ god rewarding his people for their faithfulness to him.
to support the Roman military. One of the earliest of these leaders was known as Herod the Great (40–4 B.C.E.). The Jews did not like Herod very much; he appears to have been a cruel and unforgiving man. Yet he had many achievements as the ruler of Judah, including the creation of many fabulous buildings throughout the region. However, the financial burden of such creation fell on the Jewish citizens of Judah. Herod also made Jerusalem his capital and worked to repair Solomon’s Temple there. Jews came to Jerusalem from around the world to worship at the temple.

When Herod died, his son Archelaos (4 B.C.E.–6 C.E.) took over leadership of the region, albeit briefly. Archelaos was much crueler than his father, and the Jews protested his rule to the current Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. Caesar Augustus removed Archelaos, but then made Judah into a province governed by a Roman prefect, rather than a semi-independent nation ruled by a king. Prefects would govern Judah for the next several decades. With the exception of the years 41–44 C.E., when King Agrippa I was briefly appointed to govern Judah, rulership by Romans continued until 66 C.E.

All told, life under Roman rule became increasingly difficult for the Jews. A little over a century after Rome’s initial conquest, the Romans and Jews fought in another sustained conflict, the Jewish Wars (66–74 C.E.). By 73 C.E., the Romans had burnt down the rebuilt version of Solomon’s Temple. Today, only a portion of that rebuilt temple still stands. Known as the Western Wall, the remnants of the temple are still visited by pilgrims from across the globe, who consider it one of the holiest of places.

The Western Wall in Jerusalem is the only surviving portion of Solomon’s second temple.
The Romans destroyed all their Jewish opponents: they murdered a quarter of the Jews living in Judah and made slaves out of a tenth of them. The Romans also pushed more Jews into exile, forcing them out of the country that so many of them had finally been able to call home. This treatment led to a movement called the Diaspora, a term meaning “dispersal,” in which the Israelites recognized their people as a faith rather than nationality. From this point on, they became known as Jews. Wherever the Jews set up their households, they built religious centers and followed the commandments set forth by Yahweh. Thus, while the Jews lived among many types of people throughout Asia, they did not become fully integrated with them. Instead, they preserved their status as what they believed themselves to be: the chosen people.

From 73 to 300 C.E., Jews extended this Diaspora throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe. They traveled to the regions now recognized as North Africa, Iraq, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Belgium, Turkey, and Greece. As they traveled, their numbers increased to over four million.

Main Ideas of The Talmud
The most important holy text in Judaism is known as the Tanak. The Tanak includes three sections and is named after the initials for each section. As a whole, the Tanak compromises the same information found in the Protestant version of the Old Testament. The first section of the Tanak is the Torah, which itself has five smaller sections ranging from Genesis to Deuteronomy. The second section of the Tanak is the Prophets, which includes smaller sections such as Samuel, Kings, and Isaiah. The third section of the Tanak is the Writings, and it includes the Proverbs and the Psalms.

The Talmud is another text altogether; it is not holy but is an essential part of understanding and applying the Tanak to daily life. The Talmud was created during the 500s C.E. to explain how previous Judaic traditions could be translated to what was seen at the time as the modern world. In a way, the Talmud is analogous to the Christian New Testament, since both interpret the Tanak, which is used in Christianity as the Old Testament.

The Talmud is broken up into 40 books in English and is best understood as a series of teachings, conversations, and ideas about elements of Judaic faith and tradition, accompanied by parables and tales. The Talmud has several sections, including excerpts from the legal discussions of a text called the Mishnah and discussion and analysis of the Mishnah, which is known as the Gemara. The Gemara helps readers understand how to interpret and follow the ideas set forth in the Mishnah. Jews studied the Talmud faithfully and thoroughly for centuries; it is still studied today.

One final important element of the Talmud is the idea that the Torah itself actually exists in two ways, in writing and through memory. The Tanak serves as the version of the Torah in writing; the Talmud is a tool that can be used to access the Torah through memory. Sometimes the Talmud can be difficult to understand or interpret, since it does not have a table of contents or more traditional structure. For that reason, other texts such as the Mishnah Torah, written by Moses...
Maimonides (1135–1204 C.E.), and Joseph Caro’s Shulhan Ark (ca. 1550 C.E.) are used to help scholars gain a better understanding of the Talmud and Jewish law.

**Summary**

Monotheistic religions developed in the ancient world. In Persia, Zoroastrianism developed based on the teachings of Zarathustra. Zarathustra proposed the idea of salvation and that a supreme god, Ahura Mazda, was battling evil forces. People in Egypt and Africa also became interested in monotheism. However, monotheism developed most extensively in the Middle East in a region called Israel. Over time, the people of Israel began to worship a supreme god named Yahweh. Important figures such as Abraham and Moses encouraged followers to make a covenant with Yahweh, stating they would worship no other gods. Their new religion, Judaism, encouraged people to behave morally, follow the Ten Commandments, and abide by the teachings of the Torah and the Talmud. Soon, the people of Israel, or the Jews, would encounter persecution from all sides, including from the Assyrians, New Babylonians, and Romans. Yet despite their suffering, most Jews’ faith would only grow stronger.

**Looking Ahead**

Judaism would become an incredibly important religion. Its influence was soon felt in the development of other monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam. Christianity would arise first, stemming from the teachings of a Jewish man named Jesus, while the Jews themselves were still struggling to emerge from the Roman Empire’s control. While the Jews continued to refine their understanding of religious law and the means by which they would worship, a faction of devoted followers would follow Jesus’s teachings and formulate them into a religion that would become even more widespread than Judaism itself.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. Zoroastrianism placed emphasis for the first time on an all-powerful god, the idea of being saved at the end of life, and the connection between goodness (on the side of that god) and an evil opponent.

2. Jews honor the Sabbath by resting on the seventh day of the week, just as Yahweh rested on the seventh day after creating the world.

3. King David is King Solomon’s father.

4. When the people of Judah complained about the leadership of Archelaos, Caesar Augustus removed Archelaos from power. However, he then placed a Roman prefect in charge of Judah: as a result, Judah lost some of its independence.
Unit 2, Lesson 4