

CHAPTER

1

SECTION 3

Section Summary

PRINCIPLES OF JUDAISM

Most of what we know about the ancient Israelites, or the Jews, comes from the Torah, their most sacred text. The story begins with **Abraham**, who, in Canaan, founded what became the Israelite nation. Later, a famine forced many Israelites to migrate to Egypt, where they spent more than 400 years as enslaved workers. An Israelite named **Moses** finally led his people in their exodus from Egypt.

To the Israelites, each event in their history reflected God's plan for them. They were **monotheistic**, believing in one God. Their belief in this one God dominated their lives. In this way their beliefs differed from those of nearby peoples. Other ancient peoples invoked particular gods as special protectors, believing that such gods were tied to certain places.

The Israelites believed that God had made a **covenant** with Abraham and his descendants. God promised not only to protect the Israelites but also to provide them with a homeland. To fulfill their part of the covenant, the Israelites believed that they had to remain faithful and obedient to God's laws. The Torah set out many laws, including the Ten Commandments. The first four Commandments stress religious duties of the individual toward God, such as keeping the **Sabbath**, a holy day for rest and worship. The other Commandments set out rules for individual conduct toward others.

Often in Israel's history, spiritual leaders emerged to interpret God's will. These **prophets** warned that failure to obey God's law would lead their people to disaster. Other prophets preached a strong code of **ethics**. The Israelites saw their leaders as fully human and bound to obey God's law. In this way, the culture and religion of Judaism contributed to the rise of another important democratic concept, the rule of law.

The Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C. marked the start of the **diaspora**, or scattering of the Jews. When that captivity ended, not all Jews returned to Canaan, later called Palestine. The scattering of the Jews went on for centuries. In 63 B.C., Rome conquered **Jerusalem**, the capital of the independent Jewish state of Judea in Palestine. Now the Roman general Pompey turned Judea into a Roman province.

Review Questions

1. How did the religious beliefs of the Israelites differ from those of other ancient peoples?

2. How is the Torah related to the Israelites' covenant with God?

READING CHECK

To what democratic concept did Judaism contribute?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *invoked* mean in the underlined sentence? The word comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means "to call." Use the meaning of the Latin root and context clues to help you figure out what *invoked* means.

READING SKILL

Understand Effects What did the Israelites believe would happen if they failed to obey God's law?
