

Unit One

Who Am I? Who Are We?

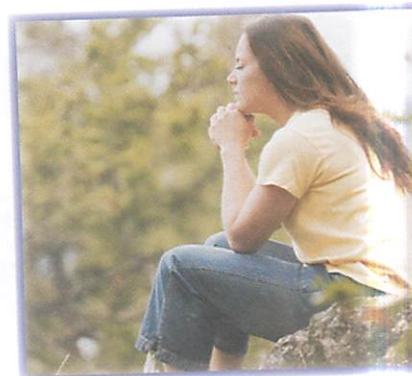
Lesson 5

Roots and Branches: Judaism

heart to Heart

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9



The Jewish Path

Judaism derives its name from Judah, the great-grandson of the patriarch Abraham, Judah was also the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel and the name of the southern Kingdom (the northern was Israel) where Jerusalem was capital. The story of the origins of the Jewish faith is found in the Old Testament. We know it well as the founding patriarch Abraham is an important person in not only our story but for the Muslims as well.



You can read about the story of the founding patriarchs in the Book of Genesis, and Abraham's especially in Genesis 12 – 50.

Abram and Sarai (they were renamed later by God) were inhabitants of Haran, a city in ancient Mesopotamia, in the land of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what is now Iraq.

- Read Genesis 12: 1-5 to see how it all began.

1. *What command and promises does God give Abraham?*
2. *Would you rather be blessed or be a blessing?*

So Abram doesn't fool around. He leaves immediately, taking everything with him. And he's no youngster, is he? At 75, even in the era of legendary long lives (he lives to be 175-Genesis 25:7), Abram faced an arduous journey in a caravan of camels and donkeys, carting all his worldly possessions and taking all the people of his household. When Abram reaches his destination, God made a covenant (sacred agreement) with him, renaming him Abraham, which literally means "father of all nations." God foresees descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and makes circumcision the mark of all who will be considered his "chosen nation or people." Abraham, his son Isaac, grandson Jacob and great grandson Joseph and their families undergo many trials and adventures – they are some of



the most well-known stories in the Bible. Eventually the great patriarch Moses is called to free the Jews from their masters in Egypt, and the Jews are led into the Promised Land by Joshua. Now in Canaan, the settlers were led first by a series of Judges and then by kings: Saul, Solomon and, finally, David. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom split into two, the larger and more powerful Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The northern kingdom was destroyed in 722 BC by the Assyrians. In 586 BC, Judah was attacked by the Babylonians, destroying the Temple in Jerusalem and deporting most of Judah's inhabitants. It was during this exile that the Jewish religion took shape, as the exiles had to define their national religion without a nation.

In 539, the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians, and the exiles returned home. The Temple was rebuilt only to be disrespected by the Romans who installed an altar of Zeus, inspiring the Maccabean rebellion in 167 BC led by Matthias Maccabee and his son Judah. This was crushed by Rome in 63 BC after which Jewish life shifted beyond Jerusalem. Like Armenians, the Jews were frequently victims of persecution. Ultimately, in response to the horrific Holocaust perpetrated by the Germans in WWII, a Jewish homeland was established in the State of Israel in 1948.



Judaism has branched into far fewer subdivisions than Christianity, so it's a lot easier to learn the differences (*easier*, not *easy*!). The three main branches of Judaism in North America are the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform.

The Orthodox follow the ancient Jewish traditions the closest. In worship, men and women are separated. The men wear a yarmulke or skull cap, prayer shawl, and the tefillin – the small leather pouches of Scripture that are worn on the forehead and arms. Kosher dietary laws are strictly adhered to. On the Sabbath, no work is permitted—to such an extent that, for example, light switches cannot be turned on. The Torah is extremely important and its study obligatory. All of the Hebrew Bible, as well as Jewish commentaries such as the Talmud are also held in high esteem. They believe a divine emissary in the person of a messiah will eventually come to redeem the world.



Conservative Jews have modified strict Orthodoxy; men and women sit together during worship and are more flexible in applying modern circumstances to traditional laws and practices. They do follow kosher dietary laws.

The Reform branch is the most liberal, looking to the Torah as authoritative but flexible in applying modern life to traditional understandings. Rather than a personal Messiah, they believe in a messianic age to come when God's total rule will be realized. They do not generally follow kosher dietary laws.



Highlights

Holy Day: Saturday, Shabbat – related to the Armenian word “Shapat” for Saturday. A day of rest commemorating the day God rested after the creation of the world, (Genesis 2:2). Its observance is one of the Ten Commandments. A brief candle-lighting and prayer ceremony ushers in the Sabbath on Friday night.



Holy Days: **Passover.** Perhaps the best known Jewish feast for Christians, this is a week-long spring festival that occurs around Eastertime, recalling how Hebrew homes were “passed over” by the angel of death during the last plague sent upon the Egyptians by God that took the life of first-born boys. The commemorative meal or “seder” (meaning “order” of what will be eaten) recalls their hasty escape from Egypt during the Exodus. The meal therefore includes unleavened bread (matzoh), bitter herbs, eggs, lamb, and wine. Jesus was said to be celebrating the Passover when he held his Last Supper with the disciples. The yearly date to celebrate Easter is connected with Passover. **Rosh Hoshanah.** The Jewish new year which ushers in a period of repentance ending ten days later in Yom Kippur.



On this day, a ram’s horn or shofar is sounded (a symbol of the one Abraham sacrificed in place of his son Isaac). **Yom Kippur.** The most important holy day, the “Day of Atonement” spent in reflection and repentance for sins committed. The shofar is again blown at the close of the day. **Channukah.** Also called “the Festival of Lights” in December. This commemorates the defeat of the Syrian Greeks by the Maccabees in 165 BC and the rededication of the Temple in which a tiny container of oil burned miraculously for 8 days. An 8-branched candleholder menorah is used and lit by a 9th for each day of Channukah. Children receive gifts and play a traditional game of top-spinning with the dreidel.

Holy Book: Tanakh (the Bible), in reference to its three major sections, the Torah (or law, the first five books we call the Pentateuch), the Nevi’im (the prophets) and the Ketuvim (the writings). Christians have arranged what they call the “Old Testament” differently, with prophets coming last. The **Mishnah** were rabbinic decisions and Scripture interpretations circulating orally which were eventually compiled, along with extensive commentary, in a collection called the **Talmud**. Among the

Orthodox, these commentaries are almost as important as the Bible.

Remember

Judaism was the first monotheistic faith. Jesus, his earthly family and all of his initial followers were Jews. The Christian faith has its roots in the faith and traditions of Judaism.



Membership Rites: Naming ceremony/circumcision: generally eight days after birth a boy is circumcised in a religious ceremony and given a name; the circumcision is a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham; girls are named at the synagogue on the Saturday or Sabbath after her birth; **Coming of Age: Bar and Bat Mitzvah:** At age 13, boys and girls are officially part of the adult community in an elaborate ceremony in the synagogue during which they read in Hebrew from the Torah (having thoroughly practiced for weeks; the cantor – a sort of combined deacon and choir master in Jewish worship – is nearby to assist), direct the congregation in prayers, and provide a lengthy personal statement as well. This is fol-



lowed by a celebration to rival any sweet sixteen or graduation party.

Community Governance: Gather to meet and worship at a synagogue, around which each congregation is organized.

Most Basic Belief. One God, creator of all, who has established a covenant relationship with the Jewish people and in turn all the world. In accepting his just and merciful sovereignty, believers respond through a range of pious practices.

Symbols Star of David. The six-point star, used on his shield by David.

Menorah. An eight-branched candelabra with a larger 9th candle to light the others, used during Channukah.

Mezuzah. Metal container holding Scripture quotations that are put in doorjambes as directed by Deuteronomy 6:9.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, today I learned that *(fill in something you learned)*

Thank you, Lord, because *(fill in why you're grateful for this)*

Be prepared to read the above two lines (without what's in the parentheses).

Verse Master

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 6: 5

