

## The First Israelites

The Israelites believed in one God who set down moral laws for his people. They recorded their history in the Hebrew Bible.

### The Early Israelites

About 1200 B.C., great changes took place around the Mediterranean Sea. Empires fell and new people entered the region. Many set up small kingdoms. Around 1000 B.C., a people called **Israelites** (IHZ • ruh • LYTS) built a kingdom in \_\_\_\_\_ (KAY•nuhn). Canaan was a region along the Mediterranean Sea in southwest Asia.

### Who Were the Israelites?

Although the Israelite population was small, the religion they practiced would one day affect much of the world. Most people at this time worshiped many gods and goddesses. The Israelite religion focused on only one God. The belief in one God is called \_\_\_\_\_ (MAH•nuh• thee • IH • zuhm).

The Israelite faith became the religion known today as Judaism (JOO • dee • IH • zuhm). The followers of Judaism were eventually known as \_\_\_\_\_. Judaism influenced Christianity and Islam, and also helped shape the beliefs and practices of societies in Europe and America.

The Israelites spoke a language called \_\_\_\_\_. They wrote down their history and many of their religious beliefs in what later became the Hebrew Bible.

In general, the Hebrew Bible is what Christians call the Old Testament. Through this book, Jewish values and religion later influenced religious beliefs in Europe.

The earliest Israelites were herders and traders. According to the Hebrew Bible, they came from Mesopotamia and settled in Canaan. Today, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan occupy the land that was once Canaan.

The Israelites believed they were descended from a man named \_\_\_\_\_. In the Hebrew Bible, it says that God told Abraham and his followers to leave Mesopotamia and go to Canaan. There, they were to worship the one true God. In return, God promised that Canaan would belong to Abraham and his descendants. According to the Hebrew Bible, this is the reason that the Israelites settled in Canaan.

Abraham had a grandson named \_\_\_\_\_. Jacob was also called Israel, which means “one who struggles with God.” Later this name was given to Jacob’s descendants.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Jacob raised 12 sons in Canaan. His family was divided into \_\_\_\_\_, or separate family groups. These groups later became known as the 12 tribes of Israel. The Israelites resided in Canaan for about 100 years. Then a long drought began. Crops withered and livestock died. To survive, the Israelites went to Egypt.

## From Slavery to Freedom

Life was not good in Egypt. The Egyptian pharaoh enslaved the Israelites. To prevent a rebellion he ordered all baby boys born to Israelites thrown into the Nile River.

The Hebrew Bible says that one desperate mother put her baby in a basket and hid it on the riverbank. The pharaoh's daughter found the baby and named him \_\_\_\_\_.

Around 1290 B.C., while tending sheep in the wilderness outside Egypt, Moses saw a burning bush and heard a voice. He believed that God was telling him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to freedom.

To get the pharaoh to let the Israelites go, the Hebrew Bible says that God sent 10 plagues to trouble Egypt. The last plague God sent killed all first-born children, except for those of Israelites who marked their doorway with lamb's blood. This plague convinced the pharaoh to let the Israelites leave.

As Israelites headed east out of Egypt, the pharaoh changed his mind and sent his army after the Israelites. According to the Hebrew Bible, God parted the Red Sea to let his people pass. When the Egyptians followed, the water flowed back and drowned the soldiers. The Israelite escape from Egyptian slavery is known as the **Exodus**. Jews today celebrate a holy day called \_\_\_\_\_ to remember this event.

## What Are the Ten Commandments?

On their way back to Canaan, the Israelites had to travel through the Sinai desert. The Hebrew Bible says that during this journey, Moses went to the top of **Mount** \_\_\_\_\_ (SY • NY). There, he received laws from God. These laws were known as the **Torah** (TOHR • uh). They later became the first part of the Hebrew Bible. The Torah described a \_\_\_\_\_ (KUHV • nuhnt), or agreement, with God in which God promised to return the Israelites to Canaan if they followed his laws.

The Torah explained what God considered to be right and wrong. One important part of the Torah is the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments told the Israelites to be loyal only to God, whose name was never to be misused. They must never worship any other gods or images. The belief that there should be only one God became the foundation for both Christianity and Islam.

The \_\_\_\_\_ **Commandments** helped shape the basic moral laws of many nations. The Ten Commandments told people not to steal, murder, or tell lies about others. They told people to avoid jealousy and to honor their parents. The Ten Commandments also helped develop a belief that laws should apply to everyone equally.

## The Promised Land

It probably took the Israelites about 40 years to reach Canaan. Moses never lived to see the Promised Land. After Moses died, a leader named Joshua took over and brought the Israelites into Canaan. When they arrived, however, they found other people living there. Most were \_\_\_\_\_ (KAY • nuh • NYTS). The Israelites believed it was God's will that they conquer the Canaanites, so Joshua led them into battle.

The story of the war is told in the Hebrew Bible. Joshua led the Israelites to the city of Jericho and told them to march around the city's walls. For six days, they marched while seven priests blew their trumpets. On the seventh day, the trumpets sounded one last time, and Joshua told the Israelites to raise a great shout. According to the story, the walls of Jericho crumbled, and the Israelites overran the city. Joshua led the Israelites in three more wars. The land they seized was divided among the \_\_\_\_\_ tribes.

### **Who Were the Judges?**

After Joshua died, the Israelites looked to judges for leadership. A judge was usually a military leader.

Generally, he or she commanded 1 or 2 tribes, but seldom all 12. The Hebrew Bible tells about Barak, Gideon, Samuel, Eli, Samson, and others, including a woman judge. Her name was \_\_\_\_\_.

Deborah told Barak to attack the army of the Canaanite king Jabin. She went along to the battlefield as an adviser. With Deborah's help, Barak and 10,000 Israelites destroyed King Jabin and his army in about 1125 B.C.

Over time, the Israelites won control of the hilly region in central Canaan. The Canaanites kept the flat, coastal areas. To protect themselves, the Israelites built \_\_\_\_\_ towns. They also created an alphabet and a calendar based on Canaanite ideas.

### **The Phoenician Alphabet**

One group of Canaanites, the \_\_\_\_\_ (fih•NEE•shuhns), lived in cities along the Mediterranean Sea. The Phoenicians were skilled sailors and traders. Their ships carried goods across the Mediterranean to Greece, Spain, and even western Africa.

Through trade, the Phoenicians spread ideas and goods. One of their most important ideas was an \_\_\_\_\_, or a group of letters that stood for sounds. The letters could be used to spell out the words in their language.

The alphabet made writing simpler and helped people keep records. The Phoenicians brought the idea of an alphabet to the Greeks, who passed it on to the Romans. Most Western alphabets are based on the Roman \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Summary**

Led by Abraham, the Israelites settled in Canaan. They later moved to Egypt and were enslaved, but then escaped. The Israelites used the Ten Commandments as rules to live by.

Joshua and the judges, including Deborah, \_\_\_\_\_ back territory in central Canaan for the Israelites.