

Notes on Judaism

A Religion which regards itself as having begun with **divine intervention** into human affairs rather than with a human search for gods or ultimate truth.

Main doctrines presented in **Hebrew Bible** in context of a **universal history** involving myths of God's creation of the world, the first human beings, telling of disasters of the **Fall** from God's grace, expulsion from earthly paradise, worldwide flood, captivity in Babylon, slavery in Egypt, dispersion of the people (**diaspora**), conquest by foreign powers. Story of a people central to the meaning of their existence, destiny and relation to God.

Abraham - 1800 BC?. Earliest patriarch. Descendant of **Noah**.

Covenant with God (**Yahweh**). God's promise to Abraham of a **homeland** and many descendants, a **Chosen people**, the earthly instrument of God's will for all mankind.

Moses (1450 BC?) - liberator of the Jews from Egyptian captivity.

Passover (pesach) -- annual observance commemorating God's protection of the Hebrew's children from the killing of the firstborn in Egypt that God had ordered be carried out by an angel in reprisal for the Egyptian's refusal to free the enslaved Jewish people. Moses leads the Hebrew tribes to Mt. Sinai, where he receives the foundation of the **Law** (ten commandments) from God. Basis of a wider body of legal doctrine developed in other books of the Hebrew Bible. Five books of Moses (**Pentateuch** or **Torah**) = Genesis + Books of Law (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

Talmud - record of interpretations of the Law by Hebrew scholars, i.e. learned rabbis.

Entire body of scriptures fixed by council of rabbis about 90 CE.

Hebrews eventually settled in **Palestine**, among other indigenous tribes. Established themselves as a nation in about 1030 BCE. Building of the **first Temple** by King Solomon. Split into two kingdoms, **Israel** and **Judah**. Israel destroyed by Assyrians in 721. Judah conquered by Babylonians in 586 BCE. Destruction of First Temple. **Exile** into Babylon.

Evolution of Judaism as a religion during Babylonian captivity. Begins to conceive of itself in more universal, rather than regional or ethnic, terms. Yahweh conceived to be God of all humanity, controller of world according to a single plan. Jews freed from captivity by Persian king's conquest of Babylon, 538 BCE. **Return** to Palestine. Rebuild Jerusalem. Establish **second Temple**. Subsequently conquered and ruled by Alexander the Great, then the Romans. Second Temple destroyed by Romans in 70 CE. Jews dispersed into many foreign lands.

Develop vision of Judaism as **universal monotheism** with one God who rules and loves all humanity and who chose Jews as his instrument or servant for dealing with mankind. Concept of **messiah** (annointed one, Son of Man) developed. Interpreted by some to be a great military and political leader who will free the Jews from foreign domination. Others interpret the messiah to be the future ruler in an age of peace. Many individuals claim to be the Messiah. No present clear agreement on meaning of the Messiah, on future destiny of Judaism or on idea of immortality

