

## Explore More—The Sources of Ethical Teachings and Central Beliefs of Judaism

**Directions:** Listen to your teacher talk about the sources of ethical teachings and central beliefs of Judaism. Refer to the maps in your Explore Geography Picture Dictionary to locate the places your teacher mentions. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

### The Hebrew Bible and the Commentaries

About 1290 B.C., Moses, an important figure in the Jewish faith, led the Hebrew slaves out of captivity in Egypt. According to religious accounts, he and his followers were seeking a land promised to them by God in a place called Canaan. While on the journey to the Promised Land, Moses received commandments from God. These commandments described how the Hebrews should conduct their lives. They discussed the ways they should act toward God and toward one another. These laws are called the Ten Commandments.

*Turn to the Ten Commandments listed in the historical anthology. Which of these commandments are most familiar to you?*

Moses went by himself to a place on Mt. Sinai, where God made a covenant, or promise, with the Hebrew people. According to religious sources, the Hebrews were to have a special relationship with God.

The Ten Commandments tell people how to act toward God and how to treat each other. These standards of right and wrong are the foundation for the moral and ethical beliefs and standards of Western civilization. Many of the commandments, such as the ones that forbid murder and stealing, form the basis of laws in the Western world. Other commandments, such as those that talk about honoring one's parents and not speaking falsely against another person, reflect moral values that people today still hold in high regard.

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Besides the Ten Commandments, the Jewish faith is based on the Hebrew Bible and other sources such as commentaries. The Torah, which often refers to either the first five books of the Old Testament or the entire Old Testament (or Written Torah), is one source. Another source is the Oral Torah, or revelations from God passed by word of mouth to the rabbis, who are Jewish religious leaders. From the Oral Torah come written commentaries like the Talmud, which is still studied today. Study of the Talmud also provides information about Jewish law and justice.

## **Central Beliefs of Judaism**

One of the central ideas of Judaism is the belief in one God. This belief system is called monotheism. Judaism teaches that it is possible for people to have a relationship with God and that God makes promises covenants that he keeps with the people he cares for. Judaism teaches that God gave laws—the Ten Commandments—to his people that he expects them to follow. The Jews also believe that each person is “made in the image of God” and is therefore unique and valuable. Jews believe in the idea of the Messiah, an expected deliverer and king of the Jews. There is also purpose and meaning to life, since God created it, and the world can be understood both through creation and the revelations that God gave to the Jewish people. ❖

## YOUR TURN!

Write your answers to the following questions.

1. What are the main sources of the ethical teachings and central beliefs of Judaism?

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2. How are Hebrew values reflected in the moral and ethical traditions of Western civilization?

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3. Name the central beliefs of Judaism.

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**Questions for further discussion:**

- What would you like to know more about in terms of Judaism? Frame questions that you can answer by historical study and research. Conduct this research and discuss your findings.
- Read the part of the book of Exodus that talks about Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. Then reread the section in the textbook that talks about the same event. Assess the credibility of these primary and secondary sources and draw sound conclusions from them.
- What was happening in other parts of the world during the same period that the Hebrews journeyed toward the Promised Land? Explain how these world events are related to one another in time. Do further research if necessary.