

## **FROM MANY TO ONE! *Polytheism to Monotheism***

Judaism is one of the world's oldest religions, starting nearly 4000 years ago in the ancient Sumerian city of Ur. Judaism is the oldest monotheistic religion in the world.

### 2 STORIES

#### The Story of Abraham



The history of the Jewish people begins in Bronze Age times in the Middle East when God promised a nomad leader called Abram that he would be the father of a great people if he did as God told him.

Jews regard Abraham (as he was later called) as the first Patriarch of the Jewish people.

Abraham was the first person to teach the idea that there was only one God; before then, people believed in many gods.

The story of Abraham and his descendents is found in the Old Testament. In his story he starts out with the name Abram. There is very little detail about him apart from the fact that he was a shepherd and came from Ur in Mesopotamia - modern day Iraq - after which he and his family moved, with his father Terah, to Haran.

This is a polytheistic time, an time when people believed in and worshipped many gods.

However, Abram answers the call of God. Abram was the first person to recognise and worship one God. And so, monotheism was born.

God asked Abram to leave his home and country and he makes Abram three promises: the promise of a relationship with God, numerous descendents and land.

The only problem is that both Abram and his wife, Sarai (later called Sarah) are old people and childless. They will have to leave their homeland and they don't even know who this God is! They seem to be an almost impossible set of promises for God to keep. But the amazing fact about Abram is that he does what he is asked. There are no signs or miracles; he has no

scriptures or traditions on which to draw, so Abram has to place his trust in God. As a result of his obedience, God changes his name to Abraham, meaning 'father of the people'.

The ultimate test of Abraham's obedience, however, comes when he is asked to sacrifice his son by Sarah - Isaac. God had promised that Abraham's descendants would come through Isaac, so the level of faith he displays is quite astonishing. Abraham trusts God and takes his son, as directed, up a mountain. At the very last minute, God intervenes and spares Isaac's life by providing another animal (a ram) for sacrifice. The test is complete and God once more reiterates his promises to Abraham of land, descendants and a personal relationship.

The land that God chose for his people is the area of modern day Israel and Palestine. In 1700 BCE, this area was known as Canaan. Descendants became known as Israelites after Abraham's grandson, Israel. Overtime, poor harvests and bad crops force Israelites to look elsewhere to live. They were welcomed in Egypt but, only for a short time. A new king enslaved the Israelites and forced them to work for Pharaohs of Egypt. -BBC

### The Story of Moses

Moses was born in Egypt as an Israelite. During the time of Moses the Israelite population in Egypt outgrew the Egyptian population. This worried the Pharaoh. In order for the Israelites to never become too strong or powerful the Pharaoh ordered all male babies of the Israelites to be murdered. Moses's mother hid him in a basket and put him in the Nile River praying he would be safe. Moses was found by the Pharaoh's daughter and raised in the palace as a prince. One day, while watching the slaves build bricks for a pyramid Moses saw an Egyptian beating a slave. Moses stepped in right away and ended up killing the Egyptian. He fled to a place called Midian so, he would not be arrested and killed by the Pharaoh. While in Midian, Moses received a message from God, who told him to go back to Egypt and free the Hebrews from slavery. The Pharaoh refused to free the slaves and Moses threatened him with ten plagues that would torture Egypt.

<https://www.bibleinfo.com/en/questions/what-are-10-plagues-egypt>

The tenth plague is why Hebrews celebrate Passover. The blood above the doors of Jewish families meant the tenth plague would passover their home and no one would be injured. The Pharaoh finally lets the Hebrews leave Egypt with Moses leading them.

<https://youtu.be/OqCTq3EeDcY>

On Mt Sinai, God gives Moses the ten commandments and five books of law, known as the Torah. The Hebrews wander the desert for forty years before settling in the "Promise land" in Israel. -*Human Heritage*

