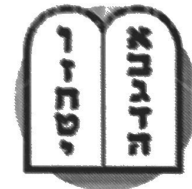
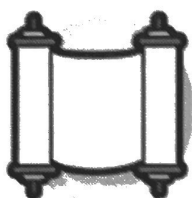


The Ancient Hebrews and Judaism

JEWISH LAWS AND BELIEFS



Among the most famous Jewish teachings are the Ten Commandments. These commandments and other laws are contained within the Torah or the first five books of the Old Testament of the Bible. Religious Jews see the Ten Commandments as a notable summary of how God wants Jews to live. But it is important to note that the Jewish tradition explicitly teaches that other religious instructions are as obligatory and as sacred as the Ten Commandments.

The items identified below are among the most important and influential ideas in Judaism.

1. **There is only one God** and God provides standards of right and wrong that people should follow. This belief differs from other ancient religions, which believed in many gods. Jewish ethics flow in large measure from this idea; Judaism teaches that there is such a thing as "right" and "wrong" and that people have an obligation to do what is right.
2. **Honor the Sabbath.** Judaism teaches that Jews should spend one day a week, the Sabbath, focusing on things other than work and material concerns. This is the origin of the idea of a weekly day of rest that is part of many religions and is widely followed in many parts of the world.
3. **Study.** Judaism teaches that studying the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish texts leads to wisdom and good deeds, so Jewish culture emphasizes the importance of learning. Throughout the centuries, Jews greatly respected scholars and depended on them to determine how to apply Jewish teachings to new situations. Today, most Jews build on this tradition to respect all forms of scholarship and to see knowledge as valuable and worth pursuing.
4. **The Land of Israel** is Judaism's most important spiritual center. Most of the events in sacred Jewish scripture occurred there. Judaism's most sacred sites are there, including Jerusalem, which is its holiest city and the site where the Jewish Temple once stood. Jews face towards Jerusalem, the ancient and modern Jewish capital, during their daily prayers. The daily prayers address the importance of the Land of Israel to the Jewish past and future.

HEBREW LAW AND MORALITY

Hebrew law was recorded in the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. Because Hebrew law was closely linked to the Jewish concept of God, it differed from the legal codes of other, older civilizations in the Near East. The following selection is from Leviticus, which contains laws that govern

actions dealing with neighbors and the community. Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.

9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard, you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.

11 You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. ¹² And you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

13 You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. ¹⁴ You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

15 You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. ¹⁶ You shall not go up and down as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand forth against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.

17 You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

33 When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. ³⁴ The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself...

Directions: Evaluate the following generalizations in terms of whether or not the selection above supports them. Identify specific instances or phrases as evidence for your answer.

1. For Hebrews, God was the source of law.

2. Hebrew law was more concerned with people and their relationships than with property.

3. Hebrew law required that all people be treated equally.

4. Hebrew law was more concerned with love of God than the love of neighbor.
