

Introduction

The Birth of Our People and Monotheism

textbook pages 2–5

Overview

The early history of the Israelites and their religious beliefs are presented. Despite similarities to their neighbors, who believed in many gods, our ancestors distinguished themselves by their monotheistic beliefs.

core concepts

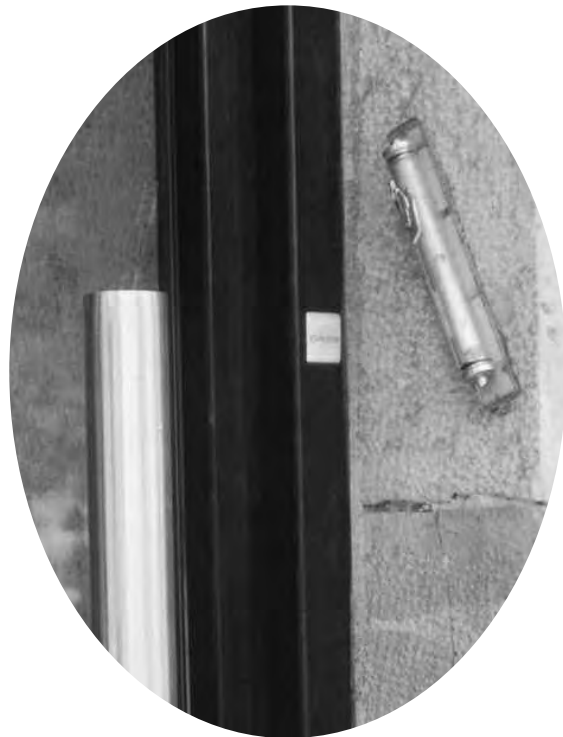
- Monotheism fostered the Israelites' development of a strong ethical code.
- Today we are guided by the same core ethical values as our ancestors.

Learning Objectives



Students will be able to

- Identify primary differences between the early Israelites and their ancient neighbors: the concept of monotheism and the Torah.
- Describe the Torah, as a moral and ethical code, the centerpiece of the Jewish value system.
- Apply what they have learned to explain one way in which our ancestors have influenced our own lives.



Teaching Opportunities

Getting Started

Supplies you will need: world map, tape, and one strip of construction paper for each student. Tape a world map to the wall. Using the map, have students locate where they live. Ask: Where did our earliest ancestors live? (*Ancient Israel*) Ask: How do we know? (*The Bible and archaeological remains tell us.*)

Provide each student with a strip of paper and a piece of tape. Have each one write his or her name on the strip. Ask one student at a time to use one hand to cover his or her eyes, then guide the student to the map and invite him or her to tape the strip on Israel. Students quickly will see how difficult it is to locate the right spot. The student who tapes his or her strip closest to Israel wins.

Ask: If Israel is so tiny, why is it so important? (*Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people; out of Israel and the Jewish people have come important ideas, such as the idea of one God and the teachings of the Torah, that have influenced the world.*)

Tell students that they will learn about the early importance of Israel in the history of our people and the history of the world.

page 2 **As Numerous as the Stars**

Explain that Israelites, children of Israel, and *b'nei Yisrael* are all terms that refer to the same people.

page 2 **Learning Your BCES**

Invite a student to read this feature. Explain that dates before the common era are always labeled BCE but that, generally, dates from the common era are not labeled. For example, today when an e-mail or letter is dated, it is not labeled CE.

page 3 **Map: The Israelite Tribes and Their Neighbors**

Name the neighbors of the ancient Israelites. (*Phoenicians, Hivites, Arameans, Canaanites, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Amalekites*)

Compare the map on page 3 to a modern map of Israel. Have students identify cities and bodies of water that appear on both maps. (*Jaffa [may be spelled Yaffo], Ashkelon, Gaza, Hebron, Jerusalem, Beit-Shean, Mediterranean Sea, Sea of Galilee, Dead Sea, Jordan River*)

page 4 **The Gift of Monotheism**

Have volunteers read aloud one paragraph each of this section. Ask students what prayer comes to mind when they think of the Jewish people's belief in one



God. (*the Sh'ma*) Point out the photo at the bottom of page 5 and have students read the caption. Ask if anyone knows the prayer in Hebrew. (*Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Elobeinu, Adonai ehad.*)

page 5 You Are There: A Conflict of Cultures

What pressure might you feel to worship Ba'al? (*Peer pressure, desire to participate in local holidays and celebrations*) Encourage students to talk or write about an incident in which they felt conflicted between their religious and secular interests or commitments, such as religious school classes that took place during soccer practice, and how they handled it. Keep the conversation nonjudgmental but encourage students to see how they can make choices that enable them to participate in both Jewish and secular life.