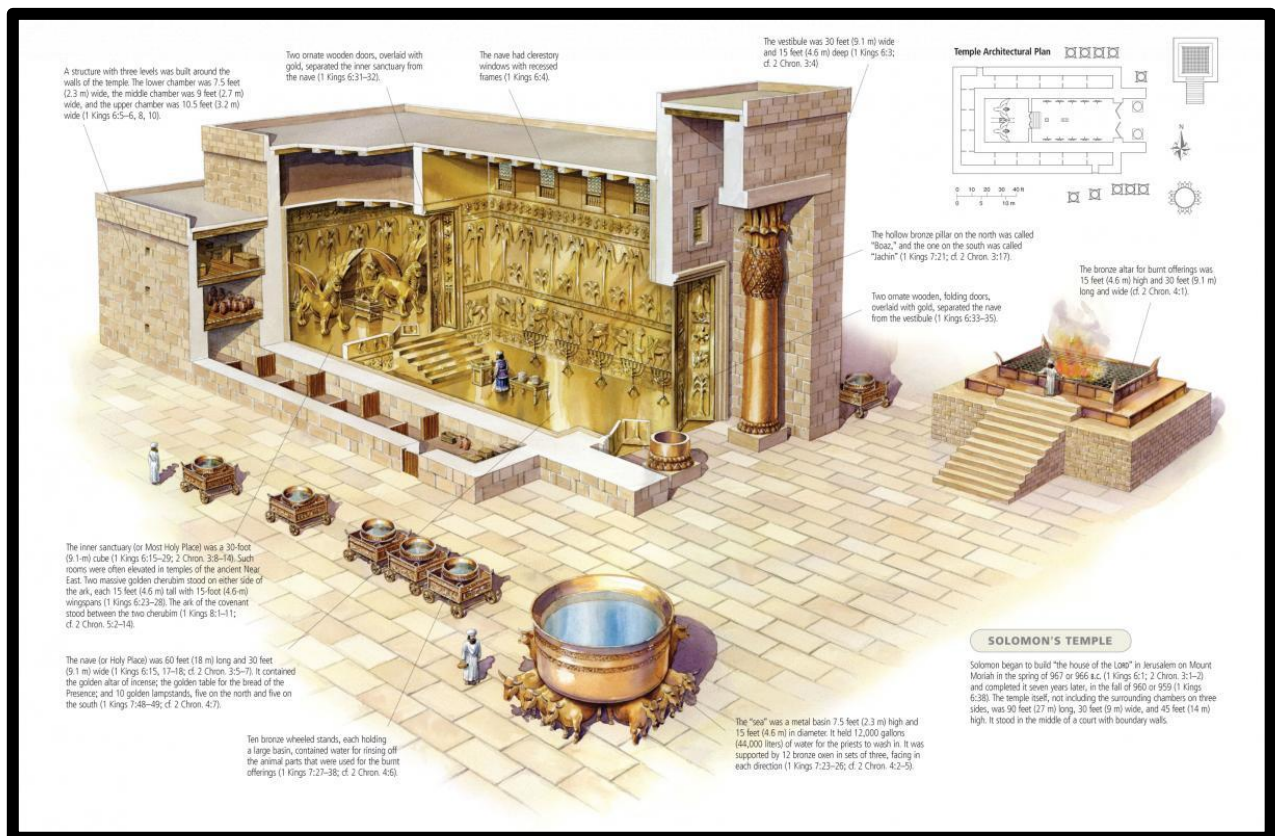


JUDAISM

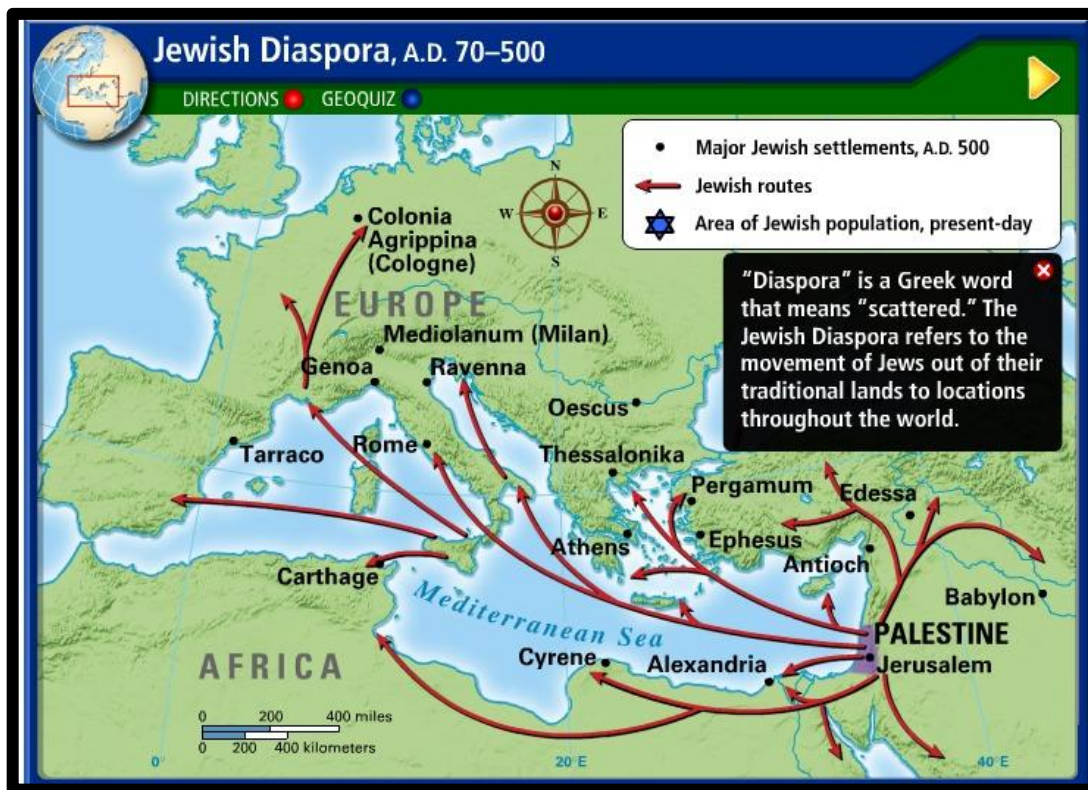
Judaism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religion, starting some 6,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent. With its rejection of polytheism and insistence on social justice and law, Judaism marked a significant change from the religions of other Middle Eastern cultures. The religious literature of Judaism, especially the Ten Commandments and the Torah, influenced the two other major monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam.

The Torah is the Jewish Holy Scripture, sometimes referred to as the Old Testament by Christians. It contains the history of the Hebrews (the ancestors of modern-day Jews), including their enslavement by the Pharaohs of Egypt. A prophet named Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt to Canaan (now Israel) and into the "Promised Land" around 1300 BC.

According to the Torah, Moses gave his people the Ten Commandments and the Hebrews believed that these laws formed part of a covenant, or solemn agreement, with God. The Hebrews lived in the kingdom of Israel under kings such as David. Later Jews would name a symbol of their identity, the Star of David. David's son, Solomon, built a temple to hold the Ten Commandments and its repository, the Ark of the Covenant. The Temple became the center of Jewish worship and its most holy place. Another symbol of Judaism is the menorah a seven-lamp candelabra used to light the inner areas of the Temple. It is also associated with the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah (Chanukah). According to the Talmud, after a desecration of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, there was only enough non-desecrated oil left to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days.



But Israel's site has given it a negative situation. Israel is located on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean and therefore it is situated at the crossroads between the mighty empires in Egypt and those of the Fertile Crescent. It therefore became subject to many invasions. In 586 BC, the Babylonians conquered the Hebrews, destroyed the temple and took them into exile. Later after the Jews had returned and rebuilt the temple, the Romans conquered them in 135 AD, destroyed the Second Temple and forced them out of Jerusalem and across the Roman Empire. This is known as the diaspora or "scattering". The formation of the Jewish identity was influenced by the religious beliefs of the Hebrews and the way they were treated after they were exiled. Jews have frequently faced discrimination in the societies in which they lived, especially in Europe, where they were sometimes exiled again from countries where they had located or subject to persecution within those countries.



The theme of exile and return and the dream of reclaiming the Jewish homeland have also shaped Jewish identity. Many Jews consider Jerusalem to be holy because it was the site of the first two Jewish temples and contains the last remnant of the Second Temple, the Western or "Wailing" Wall. The Zionist dream of an independent Jewish country was fulfilled with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The establishment of the State of Israel and its relationship with its Arab and Muslim neighbors is a contentious issue. We will be spending more time on this subject later in the unit. Modern Judaism includes the Orthodox, the Conservative and the Reform, listed in order of intensity of traditional beliefs. All Jews have the right of Israeli citizenship