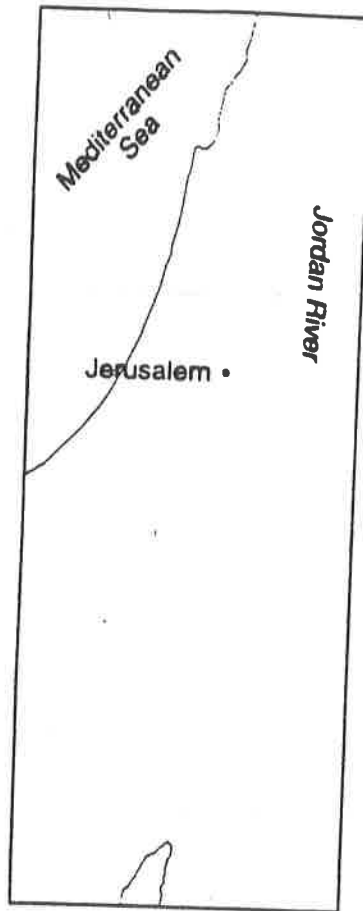




Information About Judaism



Land of the ancient Hebrews in 3000 B.C.

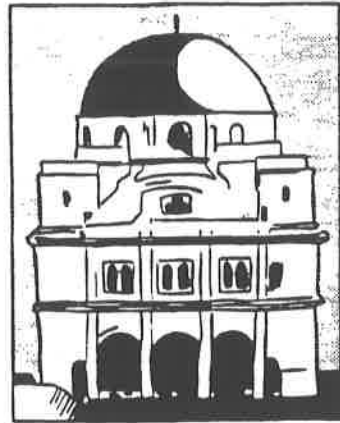
Followers of Judaism, called Jews, believe in one God—the God of Abraham—called *Adonai* in Hebrew. Abraham lived in the Middle East about 4,000 years ago at a time when most people believed in many gods. Abraham believed that only one all-powerful God had created the world. Jews believe God made a covenant (agreement) with Abraham that Abraham’s descendants would be God’s chosen people, called Hebrews, and that they would dwell in a promised land called Canaan.

Jews base their religion on their holy book, called the TeNaKh. It is written in Hebrew, which is considered the sacred language of Judaism. The word *TeNaKh* is taken from the initials of the holy book’s three parts: the *Torah*—stories of the ancient Hebrews and the Hebrew law, the *Nevi'im*—the history of Hebrew prophets (messengers of God’s revelation), and the *Ketuvim*—writings, including psalms (prayers written in song or poem form). The Torah is the most important part of the TeNaKh because it is the law of God. Jews believe that about 3,000 years ago, God gave the Torah to Moses, Judaism’s most important prophet. In addition to the history of the early Hebrews, it includes 613 commandments (laws) about how to worship God and live a moral life.

The goal of Judaism is to live a good life according to the laws of the Torah and to pass on Jewish traditions to one’s family. An example of this combination is the Torah law that requires Jews to

keep the day of *Shabbat*, or Sabbath, holy. This means that from Friday evening until Saturday evening Jews must rest and pray. Shabbat begins with a traditional family meal that includes practices such as breaking *challah*, or Shabbat bread, and sharing wine. On Friday evening and Saturday morning, Jews gather to pray together at a holy building called a synagogue. During the worship service a rabbi, or teacher, leads the congregation in prayers and readings from the TeNaKh. During Saturday’s service the rabbi also gives a sermon. Traditionally, rabbis were Torah scholars who also





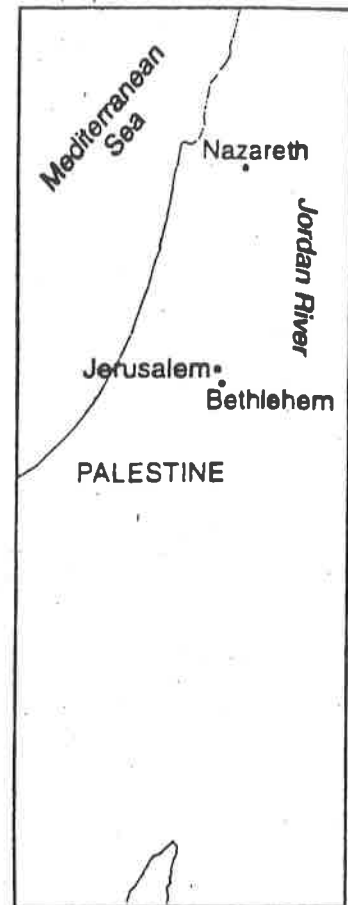
Exterior of a synagogue

kept everyday jobs and only acted as rabbis when working at the synagogue. About 2,000 years ago rabbis began to speak about the *Talmud*, or oral law. Jews believe the *Talmud* continues to unfold in every generation, meaning that God's teachings are a continuing revelation. Rabbis work to understand the ongoing revelation of God's laws and adapt them to the modern world.

The Torah's laws direct many aspects of Jewish religious and social life. For instance, the Torah commands all Jews to fast (refrain from eating and drinking) during the holiday of *Yom Kippur*, the day of atonement (being sorry for bad acts). The Torah also calls Jews to give alms to the needy to create justice in the world. The Torah includes the rules of *kashrut*, which outlines what a Jew can eat. Foods a Jew can eat are called *kosher* because they meet the Torah's requirements concerning the clean preparation of food. Food that is not kosher is called *tref*, and includes pork, shellfish, and meat prepared with dairy products. Today, Jews from different sects keep *kashrut* to varying degrees. The three main sects of Judaism are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed. All three have a special reverence for Jerusalem because it is the sacred city of the prophets.



Information About Christianity



Palestine in A.D. 0

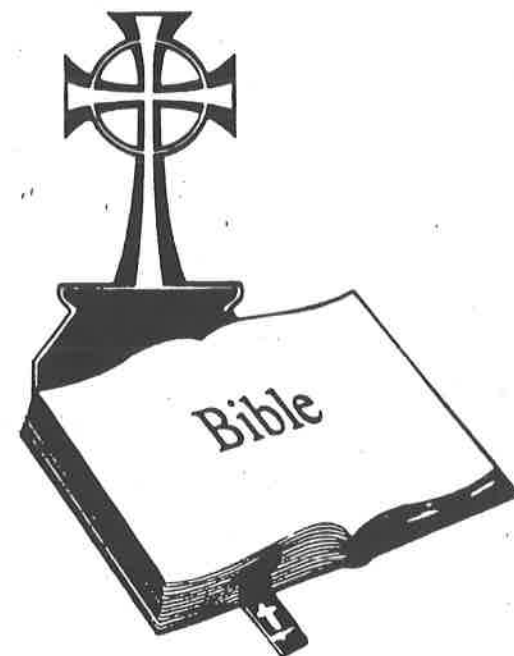
Followers of Christianity, called Christians, believe in one God—the God of Abraham, often called *Yahweh* in English. Abraham lived in the Middle East about 4,000 years ago at a time when most people believed in many gods. Abraham believed that only one all-powerful God had created the world. Christians believe God made a covenant (agreement) with Abraham that Abraham’s descendants would have a special relationship with God. Abraham’s descendants became the Hebrews, who today are called Jews.

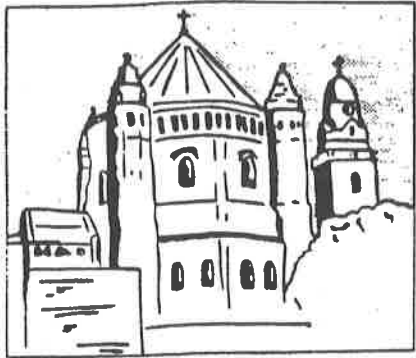
Christians base their religion on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, known as Jesus Christ, who was a Jew. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, near the city of Jerusalem, around the year A.D. 0. During his life he traveled around northern Palestine teaching about a new covenant between God and the Jews. Those who followed Jesus’s teachings broke away from other Jews and became Christians, worshipping God in a new way that focused on Jesus’s teachings.

The Christian concept of God is called the *Trinity* because Christians believe God has three parts: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit (God’s presence on earth). Therefore, all Christians believe Jesus was a part of God, and most Christians believe Jesus was both human and divine. Christians

believe Jesus died on a cross, was buried, and rose from the dead three days later. Christians also believe Jesus then ascended (went up) to heaven to be with God the Father. The story of His life is recorded in the Christian holy book.

Christians call their holy book the Bible. It is made up of two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the history of the law and prophets (messengers of God’s revelation) of the ancient Hebrews. It also contains psalms—prayers written in song or poem form. The New Testament includes the four Gospels—stories of Jesus’s life—and letters and stories about early Christians. The Bible has no sacred language and has been translated into thousands of languages.





Exterior of a church

The goal of Christianity is to achieve salvation, which is the eternal life of one's soul with God in heaven. The opposite of salvation is damnation, or eternal suffering in hell. Christianity condemns to damnation those who sin (turn away from Jesus's teachings) without repentance (being sorry). Christians believe one attains salvation by following Jesus's teachings about living a moral life and by participating in the sacraments—sacred rituals in which Christians experience the Holy Spirit. Though some Christian sects practice as many as seven sacraments, all sects recognize baptism and communion to be sacraments.

Baptism is the ritual initiation into Christianity and reenacts Jesus's blessing in the River Jordan. Communion, commonly called the Lord's Supper, reenacts Jesus's breaking of bread and sharing of wine at the last dinner before His death.

Christianity requires an ordained ministry—people specially trained to carry out the teachings and rituals of the faith—to preside over the sacraments. Ordained ministers—called priests, pastors, or ministers—lead Christians in worship in holy buildings called churches. The most important service occurs on Sunday. During the worship service, Christians experience the sacraments, recite their creed (basic belief), pray, and read from the Bible. The minister delivers a sermon related to the Bible readings. Christianity has three main sects—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—all of which believe that God continues to reveal his teachings to the world. All Christian sects consider Jerusalem the holiest city because that is where they believe Christ died and rose from the dead.



Information About Islam



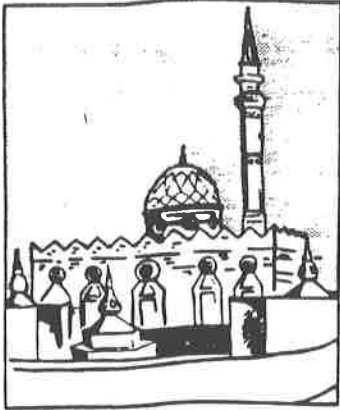
Arabian peninsula in A.D. 530

Followers of Islam, called Muslims, believe in one God—the God of Abraham—called *Allah* in the Arabic language. Abraham lived in the Middle East about 4,000 years ago at a time when most people believed in many gods. Abraham believed that only one all-powerful God had created the world. Muslims believe God made a covenant (agreement) with Abraham that Abraham and his descendants would be a favored people for their faith and submission to God. Abraham had a son, Isaac, by his wife Sarah, and a son, Ishmael, by his wife Hajar. Muslims believe that the Hebrews, or Jews, descended from Isaac and that the Arabs descended from Ishmael.

Islam is based on God's teachings and on the example of the life of Muhammad. Muhammad was born in Makkah (Mecca), located on the Arabian peninsula, around A.D. 570. Muslims believe that when Muhammad was 40 years old, he had a vision in which the Angel Gabriel appeared and told him to repeat a message from God. As God's message was revealed over the next 23 years, Muslims learned to accept all the Hebrew prophets (messengers of God's revelation), including Moses and Jesus—though they do not believe that Jesus was divine—and that God's chosen people had not properly followed the prophets. Muslims consider Muhammad to be God's final prophet. They believe that through Muhammad, God made Makkah the center of Islam and the religion's holiest city. After Muhammad's death, God's teachings, as revealed to Muhammad, were written down in the holy book of Islam.

The holy book of Islam is the Qur'an (Koran). Arabic is the sacred language of Islam. Though the Qur'an has been translated into many languages, it is used for religious purposes only in its Arabic form. The Qur'an, though distinct from Jewish and Christian texts, contains the revelations God made to Muhammad, which include many of the ideas from the history and law of the ancient Hebrews and their prophets, and the story of Jesus's life. The Qur'an outlines the goal of Islam:





Exterior of a mosque

living according to God's guidance, which will be rewarded with salvation, or eternal life in paradise with God. The opposite is damnation, or eternal suffering in hell.

To attain salvation, Muslims must practice five basic tenets known as the "five pillars," which are found in the Qur'an. The first is *shahada*, a public declaration of faith, which is the recitation of the Islamic creed (basic belief). The second is *salat*, or prayer. Muslims pray five times a day at appointed times, always facing Makkah. Third is *zakat*, or almsgiving. Islam requires a Muslim to give approximately 2.5 percent of his or her wealth to charity. *Siyam*, or fasting, the fourth pillar, occurs during the month of Ramadan. For 30 days Muslims cannot eat, drink, or have sexual relations from dawn to sunset. The final pillar requires each Muslim who is able to make a *hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Makkah once in his or her life. The Qur'an also describes *halla*, allowed acts, and *haram*, forbidden acts, which make up a way of life. These include dietary laws, which do not allow the eating of pork or the drinking of alcohol.

Muslims worship in a holy building called a *masjid*, or mosque. Friday noon prayers are the most important. During the Friday worship service, an *imam*, or prayer leader, leads prayers, reads from the Qu'ran, and gives a sermon. Muslims select as imam a person of good character and religious knowledge, but the imam has the same relationship with God as any other Muslim. Muslims also hold Jerusalem sacred as the city of prophets and as the place where Muhammad is believed to have met the other prophets and ascended to heaven.

The two major sects of Muslims, Sunni and Shi'i, share most beliefs, but differ mainly over the issue of leadership in the Muslim community.