

The Roots of Judaism

What role did Abraham play in the culture of the ancient Hebrews?

The Torah is one of the oldest religious texts in existence today. Although it is for the most part a religious text, the Torah was also the book of law for the ancient Hebrew people. It contains stories and legends of their origins, travels, and conquests. Like the information in many ancient texts, only some of the information in the Torah has been supported by archaeological evidence.

One of the most important figures in Hebrew tradition is **Abraham**. The Torah states that Abraham was living in the Mesopotamian city of **Ur** in Sumeria. At the time, the Mesopotamian people practiced **polytheism**, or the belief in many gods. The Hebrew people believe that God spoke to Abraham and told him to establish a new nation. Abraham obeyed God, left Ur, and traveled to **Canaan**, which would become the kingdom of **Israel**. Abraham became the first person to practice **monotheism**, or the belief in a single god, in the religion that would become **Judaism**.

According to the Torah, Abraham was 75 years old when God called him to Canaan, and his wife, Sarah, could no longer have children. However, the Torah states that in Canaan, God made a covenant, or

agreement, with Abraham, promising him that his descendants would inherit the nation of Israel. In turn Abraham agreed to worship and follow God and only God. Abraham's promise to follow only one God would establish a religion that was different from the other ancient religions and would go on to influence the formation of other major monotheistic religions.

According to the **Hebrew Bible**, after Abraham agreed to the covenant, his wife Sarah gave birth to a son, Isaac, when she was 90 years old. Isaac would go on to found the nation of Israel.