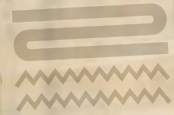
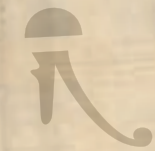


CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL TIMES: BECOMING AN YISRAEL



Dear Diary,

I'm terrified, though my parents tell me not to worry. They say everything will be all right, but how do they know? Nothing like this has happened before; it feels as if nature is out of control. The other day, swarms of insects swooped down on the Egyptians. I could hear children and adults crying as they pleaded to their gods for help. It became so unbearable that I covered my ears, but I couldn't turn off my imagination. My mind pictured insects crawling over the Egyptians.

But nothing so far has been as frightening as the wall of blackness that inched its way across the sky today. Within minutes it had swallowed the sun, and the land of Egypt, except where we live, was completely dark. Moses says that God is angry at Pharaoh, and that the Holy One has sent these plagues to free us. I hope it's true. Life is miserable in slavery. No one is safe from the taskmasters' whips.

My father believes that if Pharaoh won't free us, there will be one more plague, and then Pharaoh will change his mind. Everyone is getting ready to leave. Like our neighbors, we've slaughtered a lamb and smeared its blood on our doorposts to ward off something terrible. My mother is roasting the meat for a feast tonight. I'm not sure what will happen, but I'm excited. They're calling me now...I must go.

Rachel
Goshen, Egypt



KEY EVENTS

About 1300 BCE

Joshua leads the Israelites to conquer the Land of Israel

About 1000 BCE

David becomes the second king of Israel

About 950 BCE

King Solomon begins building the First Temple

About 928 BCE

Israel divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah

Laying a Foundation

From ancient Egypt to the Land of Israel, Babylonia to Poland, Am Yisrael held onto its unique identity throughout the centuries, not forgetting its history or values. Just as you have a unique identity, every nation has one too, and its early history gives us a clue about its values.

Consider the early history of Am Yisrael, starting with the dynamic duo, Abraham and Sarah. They first set foot in Canaan, the future Jewish homeland, around 4,000 years ago, and forged the original Brit with God. Pivotal events like the Exodus from Egypt, receiving the Torah, and entering the Land of Israel are part of the history that is the foundation of Am Yisrael's identity. At every point of Am Yisrael's early life, great personalities helped it develop based on values like courage, compassion, and justice. How do these values still affect the Jewish nation's identity today?

How Do We Know...

About Am Yisrael's Early Days?

What do you think is the main source for our ancient history? If you guessed the Bible, you are correct. Although the *Tanakh*, the Jewish Bible, is not a history book, and does not give precise dates or photos, it is where we go to learn much of our earliest history. Whether you believe that all the events in the Tanakh happened or not, its accounts are part of our Jewish heritage and have shaped our people's identity.

Name some events from the history of Am Yisrael that are mentioned in the Tanakh.

In addition to clues from the Tanakh, we use archaeological finds like clothing, jugs, and remains of ancient buildings to help us imagine what life was like in the early days of ancient Israel. Houses and even cities have been discovered from the time of the First Temple. Our knowledge of ancient Jewish history is helped by the discoveries of ancient art and texts that shed light on Bible stories, such as how some famous cities in Israel were conquered. New items are still being found that fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the earliest periods of Jewish history.



Ancient Iron Age figurine

About 722 BCE

Northern kingdom of Israel destroyed by Assyrians

586 BCE

Destruction of the First Temple and exile to Babylonia

538–516 BCE

Return to Israel and building of the Second Temple

About 445 BCE

Nehemiah leads the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls



Taking a Stand

What did it take to be the founding parents of the Jewish nation? In the Tanakh, Abraham is called *Ha'Ivri*, the Hebrew. Literally, this name means "one who came from the other side." This can refer to Abraham's move from his birthplace to Canaan. But it can also refer to the way Abraham and his wife Sarah stood up for beliefs that set them apart from everyone else. While everyone in their time believed in multiple gods and worshipped idols, they introduced **monotheism**, the idea of one God, to the ancient world.

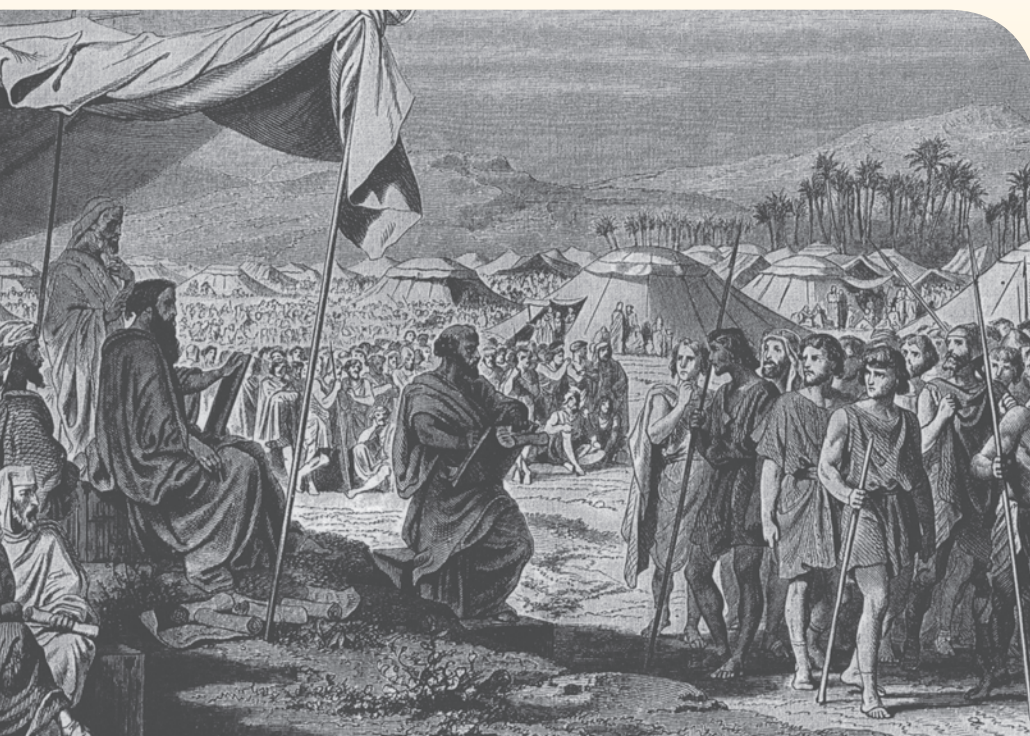
Later, in Egypt, Joseph was called a Hebrew. There, despite the temptations of Egyptian life in the palace, he stayed true to the values of his ancestors. The Jewish community in Egypt continued to be known as Hebrews and held onto its distinct identity instead of adopting the Egyptian religion and culture. Wherever Jews have lived, they learned from their ancestors and continued to pass down their beliefs. Can you describe a time in your life when you took a stand for something you believed in?

From Family to Nation

In the Torah, God promised Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the beach. The Torah provides us with a look at the growth of the Jewish people. Number these quotes in order from 1 to 5:

- "All the people in the house of Jacob who came to Egypt was seventy." (Genesis 46:27)
- "Moses recorded them in the wilderness of Sinai . . . all the Israelite [men] aged twenty years and over . . . totaled 603,550." (Numbers 1:19, 1:45-46)
- "Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son he had, to whom Sarah had just given birth." (Genesis 21:3)
- "[In Egypt] the Israelites were fruitful, and increased greatly, and the land was filled with them." (Exodus 1:7)
- "[Isaac and Rebecca's son] Jacob had twelve sons." (Genesis 35:22)

The Numbering of the Israelites, Henri Philippoteaux (1815-1884)



Do you think God kept his promise to Abraham? Why or why not?

Do you know how many Jewish people there are in the world today? How can you find out?



Leading the Jewish Nation

What are some defining qualities of great Jewish leaders? The Jewish nation has had many leaders who brought them through difficult times in history. Help solve these historical crises by circling the correct answer.

1. Shiphrah and Puah

The powerful Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives in Egypt, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill all the baby boys born to the Israelites. What did they do?

- a. Disguised the baby boys as girls.
- b. Let the boys live and made up an excuse to explain their actions to Pharaoh.
- c. Killed the Jewish baby boys, to save their own lives.

2. Moses

Moses sent spies to check out the land of Canaan. When the spies returned, they reported that the Canaanite people were strong. Many Israelites wanted to return to Egypt rather than enter Canaan. God threatened to destroy the Israelites and start over with Moses. How did Moses respond to God?

- a. Thanked God for deciding to spare him at least.
- b. Suggested God send the Israelites back to Egypt.
- c. Asked God to have compassion for the Israelites and not destroy them.

3. King David

King David knew that his end was near and found out that his son Adonijah had declared himself king. But David had chosen his son Solomon to take over after his death. How did King David react?

- a. Immediately crowned Solomon as king.
- b. Split the kingdom in half.
- c. Sent both sons into exile.

4. Queen Esther

Mordechai warned Queen Esther that all the Jews in the Persian Empire would be destroyed unless she asked King Ahashverosh to save them. But it was forbidden to visit the king without an invitation and could cost Esther her life. What did Esther do?

- a. Refused to help her people.
- b. At first held back but then made a plan for approaching the king.
- c. Asked her servant to go to King Ahasuerus and risk her life instead.

Answers 1: b, 2: c, 3: a, 4: b

What values or leadership qualities did these leaders demonstrate by their actions?

Which of these leaders do you think had the greatest impact on Jewish history? Why?

Give an example of how these values or leadership qualities could be used to solve a problem in the world today, or in your own life.





From Exile to Exodus

What comes to mind when you hear the word *freedom*? In Jewish history, the idea of freedom is often linked to the Exodus from Egypt, which we celebrate on Passover each year. Freedom meant the end of slavery in Egypt, the opportunity to receive the Torah, and the return of the Israelites to their homeland. The themes of exile and return have since repeated themselves over and over in Jewish history. What does freedom mean to you?

Mapping the Path of the Jewish Nation

The history of the Jewish nation begins in ancient Mesopotamia and Canaan. Canaan, as the Land of Israel was known then, was the Promised Land of the Israelites, and all paths led back to it. But the course of the Jewish nation has not been straight. Plot the travels below by locating each place on the map and drawing an arrow from one place to another. Label each arrow with the number that matches the statement. One example has been filled in for you.



1. Abraham is born in **Mesopotamia**. He and Sarah move to **Canaan**.
2. Joseph is sold and taken from **Canaan** to **Egypt**. Jacob, his children, and their families eventually join him there.
3. The Israelites leave **Egypt** and spend forty years in the **Sinai desert**.
4. Led by Joshua, the Israelites settle in **Canaan**, which is later called Israel.
5. Israel is divided into two kingdoms, **Israel** in the north and **Judah** in the south. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom of **Israel** are exiled to **Assyria**.
6. Jerusalem falls, and the people are exiled from the kingdom of **Judah** to **Babylonia**.
7. Under Persian rule, the Jews return from **Babylonia** to **Israel**, with leaders Ezra and Nehemiah.

In which places did members of the Jewish nation spend time in exile?

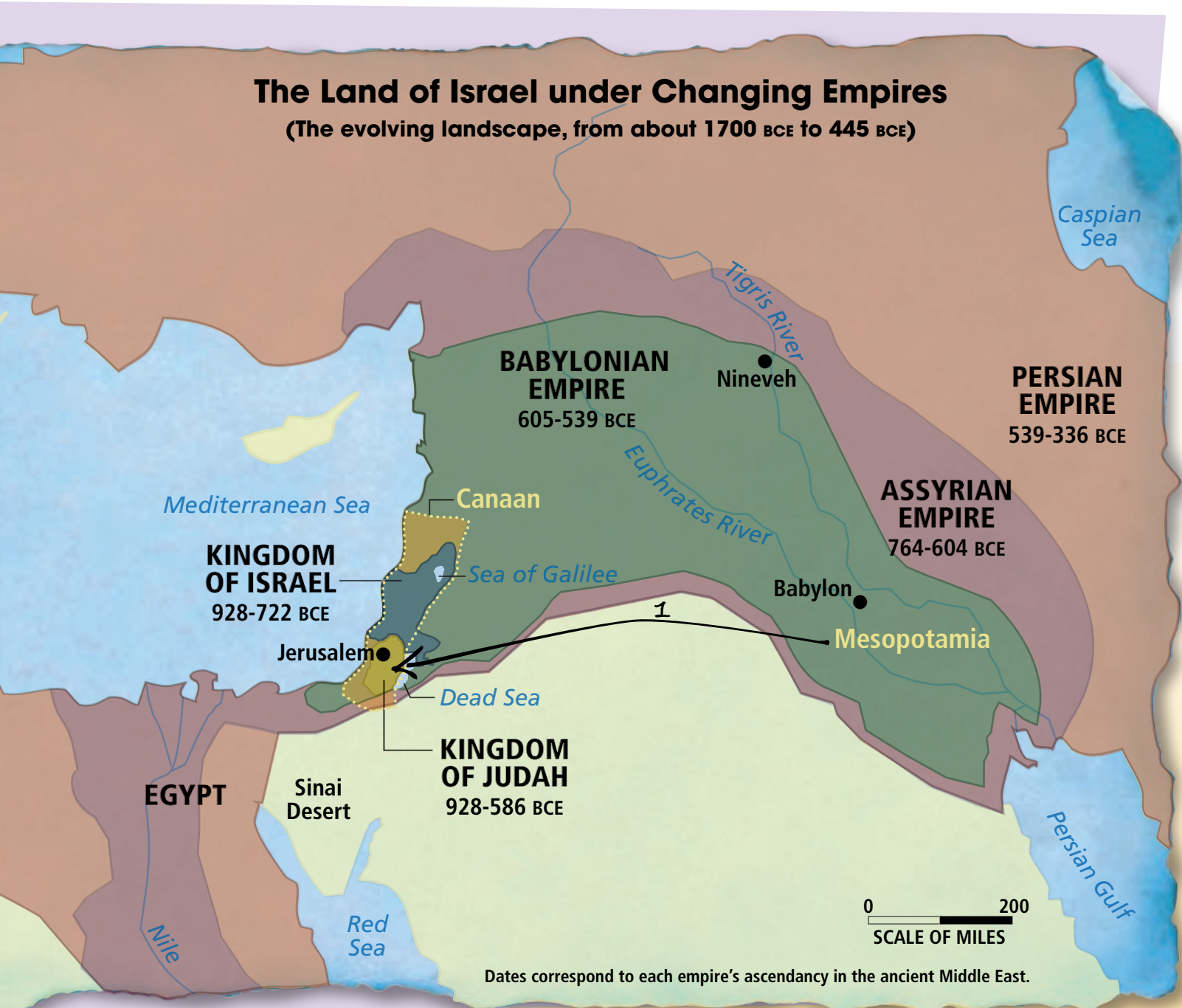
Which part of the Jewish nation did *not* return to Israel? _____

How do you think the patterns of exile and return have affected the identity of Am Yisrael?

Staying True to Your Name

The Tanakh recounts how Jacob, on his way home to Israel after many years, found himself locked in a struggle with a stranger one night. When daybreak came, Jacob discovered that he had wrestled with an angel. In recognition, his name was changed to Israel, or *Yisrael*, meaning "one who wrestled with God." Since then, the Jewish people have been called *Am Yisrael* or *B'nei Yisrael*, the Children of Israel.

Jacob Wrestling with the Angel,
Gustave Doré, 1855



Then and Now: Jerusalem

Jerusalem has been an important site for the Jewish nation since the times of the Bible.



Then: Ancient Jerusalem

King David conquered Jerusalem and made it the capital of Israel. His son, King Solomon, established the city's importance to Israel when he built what structure there?



Now: Modern Jerusalem

Today, Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel, the site of the remains of the Second Temple, and a modern city much larger than the one David and Solomon knew. Can you name a famous building or structure found in Jerusalem today?

Making a Home in Babylonia

The city of Jerusalem was at the heart of Jewish life in ancient Israel. It was the capital city, the place where Israel's royalty lived. Its spiritual and cultural center was the First Temple, built by King Solomon around 950 BCE. But a few centuries later, when the Babylonians conquered the land, things changed. Israel's king and most important officials were taken to Babylonia. Then, in 586 BCE, Jerusalem fell, the Temple was burned to the ground, and the rest of the Jewish nation was sent away from their land. It was a great blow for Am Yisrael. How would they live in exile? How would they keep their Jewish identity and traditions alive without a Temple, a king, or a land of their own?

The prophet Jeremiah sent the Jewish community in Babylonia advice on how to live in exile:

Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and have sons and daughters.... Multiply there, do not decrease. And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to Adonai on its behalf; for in its prosperity, you will prosper. (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

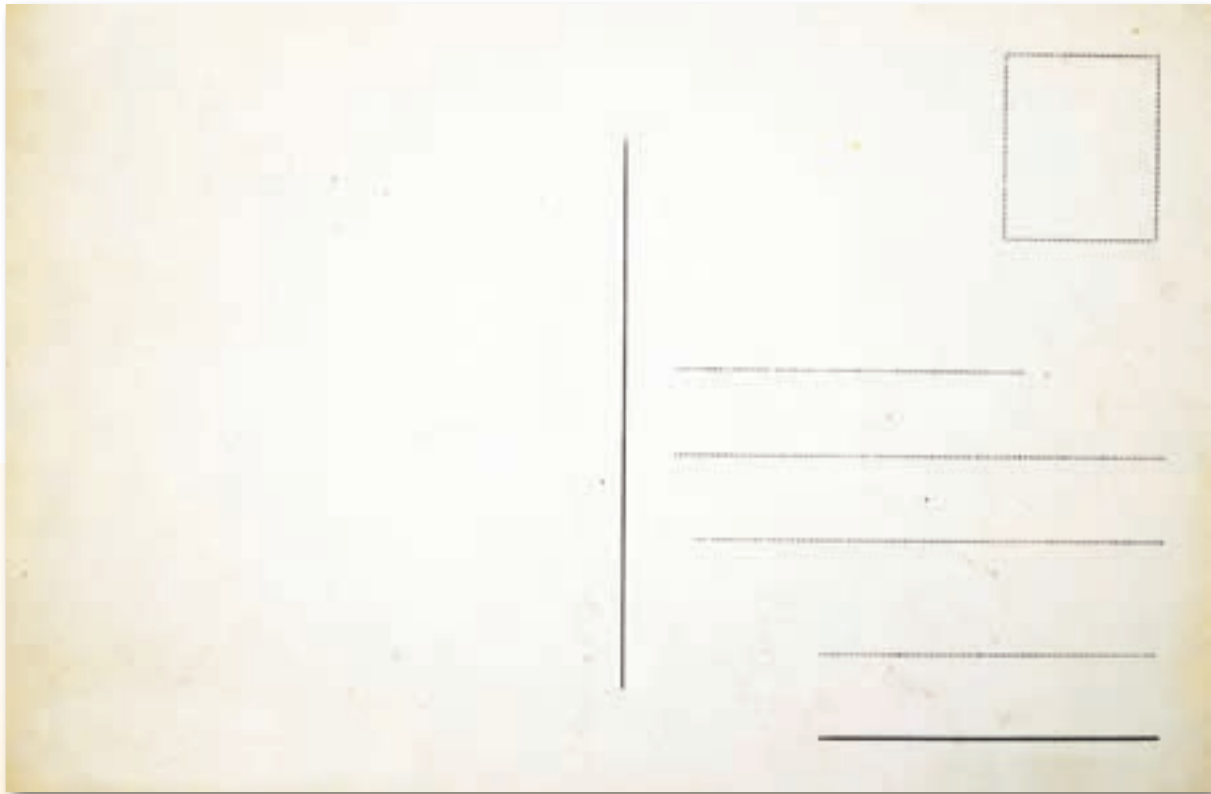
What advice would you give to the Jewish community in ancient Babylonia, or any Jewish community today, for keeping their Jewish identity strong? _____



Should I Stay or Should I Go?

After seventy years of exile, the Jews in Babylonia, now part of the Persian Empire, were finally allowed to return to the Land of Israel and rebuild their Temple. It wasn't easy, however. The walls of Jerusalem were crumbling, there was drought in the land, and their neighbors made life hard for them. But leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah helped bring Jewish life back to their beloved homeland. Still, many Jews, especially the wealthier ones, remained behind in Babylonia. Why do you think they stayed?

Imagine you are a Babylonian Jew who returns to Jerusalem. Write a postcard to your friends in Babylonia about your new life. Talk about why you returned to the Land of Israel.



What's in a Name?

Did you know that the first person to be called a *Jew* in our sacred texts was Mordechai, in *Megillat Esther*, the Purim story? Mordechai was part of a wave of exiles from Jerusalem to Babylonia. Since they came from the Kingdom of Judah (or Yehuda), these exiles were called *yehudim*, or Jews, in Babylonia. The kingdom had been named for the tribe of Judah, which was descended from Jacob's son Judah.



Talk about It

In the Torah, Abraham is described as a "stranger and a citizen." How can you be both a stranger and a citizen of the place in which you live?

