

right and on their left. The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen. At the morning watch, the Lord looked down upon the Egyptian army from a pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into a panic. He locked the wheels of their chariots so that they moved forward with difficulty. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians and upon their chariots and upon their horsemen." Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But the Lord hurled the Egyptians into the sea. The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen—Pharaoh's entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Source: Exodus 12:29–41, 14:5–29, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

MOSAIC COVENANT

The third great covenant in the Tanakh text consists of God giving the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai, a means by which the Israelites could become a holy people. Mosaic Law is articulated throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, interspersed with narratives about the Israelites' forty years of wandering. Exodus 19, a JE text, describes the people's preparation for receiving the Law from God. Exodus 20, which is possibly a reworked version of an ancient P text, presents the best-known part of the Mosaic Law, the Ten Commandments.

19. On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai. Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, and Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered as one, saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the people's words to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, in order that

the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after." Then Moses reported the people's words to the Lord, and the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai. You shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Beware of going up the mountain or touching the border of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death: no hand shall touch him, but he shall be either stoned or shot; beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain."

Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman."

On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn; and all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses led the people out of the camp toward God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently. The blare of the horn grew louder and louder. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up. The Lord said to Moses, "Go down, warn the people not to break through to the Lord to gaze, lest many of them perish. The priests also, who come near the Lord, must stay pure, lest the Lord break out against them." But Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and sanctify it.'" So the Lord said to him, "Go down, and come back together with Aaron; but let not the priests or the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them." And Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

20. God spoke all these words, saying:

"I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides Me.

"You shall not make for yourself a sculpted image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

"You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.

"Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

"Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God has assigned to you.

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's."

All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance. "You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." Moses answered the people, "Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray."

Source: Exodus 19, 20:1-17, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

HOLINESS CODE

The Mosaic Law contains a series of codes on social, ethical, and religious topics, such as the Covenant Code (Exodus 21-23), the Purity Code (Leviticus 11-16), the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-27), and the Law Code (Deuteronomy 12-26). The literary and legal style of these codes is frequently compared to other codes of the ancient Near East, such as the Code of Hammurabi, king of Ur. For example, on the issue of kidnapping, the Hammurabi code states, "If a man has stolen the young son of a freeman, he shall be put to death." By comparison, the Covenant Code in Exodus 21:16 states, "He who kidnaps a man—whether he has sold him or is still holding him—shall be put to death." The following is from the Holiness Code, a P text in the Book of Leviticus.

19. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I the Lord am your God.

Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I the Lord am your God.

When you sacrifice an offering of well-being to the Lord, sacrifice it so that it may be accepted on your behalf. It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it, or on the day following; but what is left by the third

day must be consumed in fire. If it should be eaten on the third day, it is an offensive thing, it will not be acceptable. And he who eats of it shall bear his guilt, for he has profaned what is sacred to the Lord; that person shall be cut off from his kin.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God.

You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord.

You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning.

You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

You shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly. Do not deal basely with your countrymen. Do not profit by the blood of your fellow: I am the Lord.

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord.

You shall observe My laws.

You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material.

If a man has carnal relations with a woman who is a slave and has been designated for another man, but has not been redeemed or given her freedom, there shall be an indemnity; they shall not, however, be put to death, since she has not been freed. But he must bring to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as his guilt offering to the Lord, a ram of guilt offering. With the ram of guilt offering the priest shall make expiation for him before the Lord for the sin that he committed; and the sin that he committed will be forgiven.

When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before the Lord; and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit—that its yield to you may be increased: I the Lord am your God.

You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice divination or soothsaying. You shall not round off the side-growth on your head, or destroy the side-growth of your beard. You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Lord.

Do not degrade your daughter and make her a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry and the land be filled with depravity. You shall keep my Sabbaths and venerate My sanctuary: I am the Lord.

Do not turn to ghosts and do not inquire of familiar spirits, to be defiled by them: I the Lord am your God.

You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God.

You shall not falsify measures of length, weight, or capacity. You shall have an honest balance, honest weights, an honest *ephah*, and an honest *hin*. I the Lord am your God who freed you from the land of Egypt. You shall faithfully observe all my laws and all my rules: I am the Lord.

Source: Leviticus 19:1-37, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

CONQUEST AND UNITED KINGDOM

ENTRY INTO CANAAN

After forty years of wandering, the Israelites enter Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' successor. This account is part of a larger text sequence called the Deuteronomistic History, edited just before the Babylonian exile and encompassing the books of Deuteronomy through second Kings. The story emphasizes Deuteronomist themes, such as the importance of the Ark of the Covenant as the focus of God's presence and the command to annihilate the present occupants of Canaan as a means of ensuring religious purity.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant:

"My servant Moses is dead. Prepare to cross the Jordan, together with all this people, into the land that I am giving to the Israelites. Every spot on which your foot treads I give to you, as I promised Moses. Your territory shall extend from the wilderness and the Lebanon to the Great River, the River Euphrates [on the east]—the whole Hittite country—and up to the Mediterranean Sea on the west. No one shall be able to resist you as long as you live. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

"Be strong and resolute, for you shall apportion to this people the land that I swore to their fathers to assign to them. But you must be very strong and resolute to observe faithfully all the Teaching that My servant Moses enjoined upon you. Do not deviate from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Let not this Book of the

Teaching cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful.

"I charge you: Be strong and resolute; do not be terrified or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua thereupon gave orders to the officials of the people: "Go through the camp and charge the people thus: Get provisions ready, for in three days' time you are to cross the Jordan, in order to enter and possess the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession."

Then Joshua said to Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, "Remember what Moses the servant of the Lord enjoined upon you, when he said: 'The Lord your God is granting you a haven; He has assigned this territory to you.' Let your wives, children, and livestock remain in the land that Moses assigned to you on this side of the Jordan; but every one of your fighting men shall go across armed in the van of your kinsmen. And you shall assist them until the Lord has given your kinsmen a haven, such as you have, and they too have gained possession of the land that the Lord your God has assigned to them. Then you may return to the land on the east side of the Jordan, which Moses the servant of the Lord assigned to you as your possession, and you may possess it."

They answered Joshua, "We will do everything you have commanded us and we will go wherever you send us. We will obey you just as we obeyed Moses; let but the Lord your God be with you as He was with Moses! Any man who flouts your commands and does not obey every order you give him shall be put to death. Only be strong and resolute!"

Early next morning, Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and marched to the Jordan. They did not cross immediately, but spent the night there. Three days later, the officials went through the camp and charged the people as follows: "When you see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God being borne by the levitical priests, you shall move forward. Follow it—but keep a distance of some two thousand cubits from it, never coming any closer to it—so that you may know by what route to march, since it is a road you have not traveled before."

And Joshua said to the people, "Purify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will perform wonders in your midst."

Then Joshua ordered the priests, "Take up the Ark of the Covenant and advance to the head of the people." And they took up the Ark of the Covenant and advanced to the head of the people.

The Lord said to Joshua, "This day, for the first time, I will exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they shall know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. For your part, command the priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant as follows: When you reach the edge of the waters of the Jordan, make a halt in the Jordan."

And Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come closer and listen to the words of the Lord our God. By this," Joshua continued, "you shall know that a living God is among you, and that He will dispossess for you the Canaanites,

Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: the Ark of the Covenant of the Sovereign of all the earth is advancing before you into the Jordan. Now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from each tribe. When the feet of the priests bearing the Ark of the Lord, the Sovereign of all the earth, come to rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan—the water coming from upstream—will be cut off and will stand in a single heap.”

When the people set out from their encampment to cross the Jordan, the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant were at the head of the people. Now the Jordan keeps flowing over its entire bed throughout the harvest season. But as soon as the bearers of the Ark reached the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the Ark dipped into the water at its edge, the waters coming down from upstream piled up in a single heap a great way off, at Adam, the town next to Zarethan; and those flowing away downstream to the Sea of the Arabah (the Dead Sea) ran out completely. So the people crossed near Jericho. The priests who bore the Ark of the Lord's Covenant stood on dry land exactly in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed over on dry land, until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

Source: Joshua 1, 3, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

SONG OF DEBORAH

After their entry into Canaan, the Israelites fight to dislodge the Canaanites. Israel is then governed by a series of legal and military judges, including Deborah, one of a few female leaders in Jewish history. With the aid of the military leader Barak, Deborah and a small group defeat the army of Jabin, King of Canaan. The Canaanite army, headed by Sisera, has an initial advantage of 900 chariots. Due to a sudden divinely caused cloudburst and flash flood, the Israelites gain the advantage. The Song of Deborah, which commemorates this victory, is one of the oldest passages of the Tanakh. Composed about 1100 B.C.E., it is similar in structure to Canaanite poems of the period. Historically it denotes the Israelites' successful habitation of the hillsides, overshadowing Canaanite occupation of the valley regions.

When locks go untrimmed in Israel,
When people dedicate themselves—
Bless the Lord.

Hear, O kings! Give ear, O potentates!
I will sing, will sing to the Lord,
Will hymn the Lord, the God of Israel.

O Lord, when you came forth from Seir,
Advanced from the country of Edom,
The earth trembled;
The heavens dripped,
Yea, the clouds dripped water,
The mountains quaked—
Before the Lord, Him of Sinai,
Before the Lord, God of Israel.

In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
In the days of Jael, caravans ceased,
And wayfarers went
By roundabout paths.
Deliverance ceased,
Ceased in Israel,
Till you arose, O Deborah,
Arose, O mother, in Israel!
When they chose new gods,
Was there a fighter then in the gates?
No shield or spear was seen
Among forty thousand in Israel!

My heart is with Israel's leaders,
With the dedicated of the people—
Bless the Lord!
You riders on tawny she-asses,
You who sit on saddle rugs,
And you wayfarers, declare it!
Louder than the sounds of archers,
There among the watering places
Let them chant the gracious acts of the Lord,
His gracious deliverance of Israel.
Then did the people of the Lord
March down to the gates!
Awake, awake, O Deborah!
Awake, awake, strike up the chant!
Arise, O Barak;
Take your captives, O son of Abinoam!

Source: Judges 5:2-12, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

DAVIDIC COVENANT

In response to the need for a ruler who could unify the country against Philistine attacks, Saul is appointed the first king. The Deuteronomistic History relates how Saul's disobedience quickly puts him in disfavor with God, after which God selects David as Saul's more obedient successor. This reflects the most consistent theological theme throughout all seven books of the Deuteronomistic History: Obedience to God results in prosperity, while disobedience results in hardship. The fourth and final great covenant in the Tanakh is with King David, wherein a promise is given that David's house and kingship will be secure and his throne established forever.

... Thus said the Lord of Hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the flock, to be ruler of My people Israel, and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut down all your enemies before you. Moreover, I will give you great renown like that of the greatest men on earth. I will establish a home for My people Israel and will plant them firm, so that they shall dwell secure and shall tremble no more. Evil men shall not oppress them any more as in the past, ever since I appointed chieftains over My people Israel. I will give you safety from all your enemies.

The Lord declares to you that He, the Lord, will establish a house for you. When your days are done and you lie with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own issue, and I will establish his kingship. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to Me. When he does wrong, I will chastise him with the rod of men and the affliction of mortals; but I will never withdraw My favor from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed to make room for you. Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure before you; your throne shall be established forever.

Source: 2 Samuel 7:8-16, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

PSALMS ASCRIBED TO DAVID

The Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 songs and prayers written over a 600-year period, many after the Babylonian exile. The book may have taken its final form under the editorship of Ezra and sometimes is referred to as the hymn book of the second temple. Although the authorship of most of the psalms is uncertain, 73 are ascribed in the text to David and are traditionally said to reflect happy or troubled periods of his life. The psalms are classified as they relate to the themes of deliverance, penitence, praise, pilgrimages, historical episodes, and messianic hope. The following is a selection of psalms of David.

8.

O Lord, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name throughout the earth,
You who have covered the heavens with Your splendor!
From the mouths of infants and sucklings
You have founded strength on account of Your foes,
to put an end to enemy and avenger.
When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
the moon and stars that You set in place,
what is man that You have been mindful of him,
mortal man that You have taken note of him,
that You have made him little less than divine,
and adorned him with glory and majesty;
You have made him master over Your handiwork,
laying the world at his feet,
sheep and oxen, all of them,
and wild beasts, too;
the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea,
whatever travels the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!

23.

The Lord is my shepherd;
I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me to water in places of repose;
He renews my life;

He guides me in right paths
as befits His name.
Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness,
I fear no harm, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.
You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my drink is abundant.
Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
For many long years.

27.

The Lord is my light and my help;
whom would I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life,
whom should I dread?
When evil men assail me
to devour my flesh—
it is they, my foes and my enemies,
who stumble and fall.
Should an army besiege me,
my heart would have no fear;
should war beset me,
still would I be confident.
One thing I ask of the Lord,
only that do I seek:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord,
to frequent His temple.
He will shelter me in His pavilion
on an evil day,
grant me the protection of His tent,
raise me high upon a rock.
Now is my head high
over my enemies roundabout;
I sacrifice in His tent with shouts of joy,
singing and chanting a hymn to the Lord.
Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;
have mercy on me, answer me.
In Your behalf my heart says:
seek My face!
O Lord, I seek Your face.
Do not hide Your face from me;
do not thrust aside Your servant in anger;
You have ever been my help.
Do not forsake me, do not abandon me,
O God, my deliverer.
Though my father and mother abandon me,

the Lord will take me in.
 Show me Your way, O Lord,
 and lead me on a level path
 because of my watchful foes.
 Do not subject me to the will of my foes,
 for false witnesses and unjust accusers have appeared against me.
 Had I not the assurance that I would enjoy the goodness of the Lord in the
 land of the living. . . .
 Look to the Lord;
 be strong and of good courage!
 O look to the Lord!

32.

Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven,
 whose sin is covered over.
 Happy the man whom the Lord does not hold guilty,
 and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
 As long as I said nothing,
 my limbs wasted away
 from my anguished roaring all day long.
 For night and day
 Your hand lay heavy on me;
 my vigor waned
 as in the summer drought.
 Then I acknowledged my sin to you;
 I did not cover up my guilt;
 I resolved, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
 and You forgave the guilt of my sin.
 Therefore let every faithful man pray to You
 upon discovering [his sin]
 that the rushing mighty waters not overtake him.
 You are my shelter;
 You preserve me from distress;
 You surround me with the joyous shouts of deliverance.
 Let me enlighten you
 and show you which way to go;
 let me offer counsel; my eye is on you.
 Be not like a senseless horse or mule
 whose movement must be curbed by bit and bridle,
 far be it from you!
 Many are the torments of the wicked,
 but he who trusts in the Lord
 shall be surrounded with favor.
 Rejoice in the Lord and exult, O you righteous;
 shout for joy, all upright men!

51.

Have mercy upon me, O God,
 as befits Your faithfulness;
 in keeping with Your abundant compassion,

blot out my transgressions.
 Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity,
 and purify me of my sin;
 for I recognize my transgressions,
 and am ever conscious of my sin.
 Against You alone have I sinned,
 and done what is evil in Your sight;
 so You are just in Your sentence,
 and right in Your judgment.
 Indeed I was born with iniquity;
 with sin my mother conceived me.
 Indeed You desire truth about that which is hidden;
 teach me wisdom about secret things.
 Purge me with hyssop till I am pure;
 wash me till I am whiter than snow.
 Let me hear tidings of joy and gladness;
 let the bones You have crushed exult.
 Hide Your face from my sins;
 blot out all my iniquities.
 Fashion a pure heart for me, O God;
 create in me a steadfast spirit.
 Do not cast me out of your presence,
 or take Your holy spirit away from me.
 Let me again rejoice in Your help;
 let a vigorous spirit sustain me.
 I will teach transgressors Your ways,
 That sinners may return to you.
 Save me from bloodguilt,
 O God, God, my deliverer,
 that I may sing forth Your beneficence.
 O Lord, open my lips,
 and let my mouth declare Your praise.
 You do not want me to bring sacrifices;
 you do not desire burnt offerings;
 True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit;
 God, You will not despise
 a contrite and crushed heart.
 May it please You to make Zion prosper;
 rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
 Then you will want sacrifices offered in righteousness,
 burnt and whole offerings;
 the bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Source: Psalms 8, 23, 27, 32, 51, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

Israel's glory peaked during the reign of King Solomon, David's son. Its borders extended farther than they ever would again (though not as far as under David), and Israel was a key player in ancient Near Eastern politics. The jewel in the crown of

Solomon's achievements was his temple, said to have taken thirteen years to complete. According to the Deuteronomistic History, all sacrifices were to be performed only at the temple in Jerusalem; thus, the temple became the focus of all religious activity in Israel. The following describes the extent and wealth of Solomon's kingdom, his wisdom, and his construction of the temple.

Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sands of the sea; they ate and drank and were content. . . .

Solomon's rule extended over all the kingdoms of the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and the boundary of Egypt. They brought Solomon tribute and were subject to him all his life. Solomon's daily provisions consisted of 30 *kors* of semolina, and 60 *kors* of [ordinary] flour, 10 fattened oxen, 20 pasture-fed oxen, and 100 sheep and goats, besides deer and gazelles, roebucks and fatted geese. For he controlled the whole region west of the Euphrates—all the kings west of the Euphrates, from Tiphseh to Gaza—and he had peace on all his borders roundabout. All the days of Solomon, Judah and Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba dwelt in safety, everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree. Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariotry and 12,000 horsemen.

All those prefects, each during his month, would furnish provisions for King Solomon and for all who were admitted to King Solomon's table; they did not fall short in anything. They would also, each in his turn, deliver barley and straw for the horses and the swift steeds to the places where they were stationed.

The Lord endowed Solomon with wisdom and discernment in great measure, with understanding as vast as the sands on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the Kedemites and than all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was the wisest of all men: [wiser] than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalkol, and Darda the sons of Mahol. His fame spread among all the surrounding nations. He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five. He discoursed about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; and he discoursed about beasts, birds, creeping things, and fishes. Men of all peoples came to hear Solomon's wisdom, [sent] by all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

King Hiram of Tyre sent his officials to Solomon when he heard that he had been anointed king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend of David. Solomon sent this message to Hiram: "You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the enemies that encompassed him, until the Lord had placed them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me respite all around; there is no adversary and not mischance. And so I propose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord promised my father David, saying, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for My name.' Please, then, give orders for cedars to be cut for me in the Lebanon. My servants will work with yours, and I will pay you any wages you may ask for your servants; for as you know, there is none among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians."

When Hiram heard Solomon's message, he was overjoyed. "Praised be the Lord this day," he said, "for granting David a wise son to govern this great people." So Hiram sent word to Solomon: "I have your message; I will supply all the cedar and cypress logs you require."

. . . King Solomon imposed forced labor on all Israel; the levy came to 30,000 men. He sent them to the Lebanon in shifts of 10,000 a month: they would spend one month in the Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor. Solomon also had 70,000 porters and 80,000 quarriers in the hills, apart from Solomon's 3,300 officials who were in charge of the work and supervised the gangs doing the work.

The king ordered huge blocks of choice stone to be quarried, so that the foundations of the house might be laid with hewn stones. Solomon's masons, Hiram's masons, and the men of Gebal shaped them. Thus the timber and the stones for building the House were made ready.

. . . When Solomon had completed the construction of the House, he paneled the walls of the house on the inside with planks of cedar. He also overlaid the walls on the inside with wood, from the floor of the House to the ceiling. And he overlaid the floor of the House with planks of cypress. Twenty cubits from the rear of the House, he built [a partition] of cedar planks from the floor to the walls; he furnished its interior to serve as a Shrine, as the Holy of Holies. The front part of the House, that is, the Great Hall, measured 40 cubits. The cedar of the interior of the House had carvings of gourds and calyxes; it was all cedar, no stone was exposed. In the innermost part of the House, he fixed a Shrine in which to place the Ark of the Lord's Covenant. The interior of the Shrine was 20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 20 cubits high. He overlaid it with solid gold; he similarly overlaid [its] cedar altar. Solomon overlaid the interior of the House with solid gold; and he inserted golden chains into the door of the Shrine. He overlaid [the Shrine] with gold, so that the entire House was overlaid with gold; he even overlaid with gold the entire altar of the Shrine. And so the entire House was completed.

Source: 1 Kings 4:20; 5:1–20, 27–33; 6:14–22, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

PROVERBS ATTRIBUTED TO SOLOMON

In the preceding passage, Solomon is said to have been the wisest of all men and author of 3,000 proverbs. The Book of Proverbs contains seven distinct collections of sayings, the first four of which are traditionally attributed to Solomon. Compiled during the time of Ezra, Proverbs contains sayings from throughout periods of the united and divided kingdom, in the form of two-line sentences about an aspect of human experience, usually secular. Three literary styles are exhibited in the proverbs: synonymous parallelism, in which the second line repeats the content of the first; antithetic parallelism, in which good behavior in the first line is contrasted with bad behavior in the second line; and ascending parallelism, in which the second line completes the train of thought in the first line. The following is from the second collection within Proverbs—thought to be the oldest part of the book—titled "The Proverbs of Solomon."

1. A gentle response allays wrath;
A harsh word provokes anger.
2. The tongue of the wise produces much knowledge,
But the mouth of dullards pours out folly.
3. The eyes of the Lord are everywhere,
Observing the bad and the good.
4. A healing tongue is a tree of life,
But a devious one makes for a broken spirit.
5. A fool spurns the discipline of his father,
But one who heeds reproof becomes clever.
6. In the house of the righteous there is much treasure,
But in the harvest of the wicked there is trouble.
7. The lips of the wise disseminate knowledge;
Not so the minds of dullards.
8. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,
But the prayer of the upright pleases Him.
9. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,
But he loves him who pursues righteousness.
10. Discipline seems bad to him who forsakes the way;
He who spurns reproof will die.
11. Sheol and Abaddon lie exposed to the Lord,
How much more the minds of men!
12. The scoffer dislikes being reproved;
He will not resort to the wise.
13. A joyful heart makes a cheerful face;
A sad heart makes a despondent mood.
14. The mind of a prudent man seeks knowledge;
The mouth of the dullard pursues folly.
15. All the days of a poor man are wretched,
But contentment is a feast without end.
16. Better a little with fear of the Lord
Than great wealth with confusion.
17. Better a meal of vegetables where there is love
Than a fattened ox where there is hate.
18. A hot-tempered man provokes a quarrel;
A patient man calms strife.
19. The way of a lazy man is like a hedge of thorns,
But the path of the upright is paved.
20. A wise son makes his father happy;
A fool of a man humiliates his mother.
21. Folly is joy to one devoid of sense;
A prudent man walks a straight path.
22. Plans are foiled for want of counsel,
But they succeed through many advisers.
23. A ready response is a joy to a man,
And how good is a world rightly timed!

24. For an intelligent man the path of life leads upward,
In order to avoid Sheol below.
25. The Lord will tear down the house of the proud,
But he will establish the homestead of the widow.
26. Evil thoughts are an abomination to the Lord,
But pleasant words are pure.
27. He who pursues ill-gotten gain makes trouble for his household;
He who spurns gifts will live long.
28. The heart of the righteous man rehearses his answer,
But the mouth of the wicked blurts out evil things.
29. The Lord is far from the wicked,
But He hears the prayer of the righteous.
30. What brightens the eye gladdens the heart;
Good news puts fat on the bones.
31. He whose ear heeds the discipline of life
Lodges among the wise.
32. He who spurns discipline hates himself;
He who heeds reproof gains understanding.
33. The fear of the Lord is the discipline of wisdom;
Humility precedes honor.

Source: Proverbs 15, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

DIVIDED KINGDOM AND EXILE

ELIJAH VERSUS THE PRIESTS OF ASHERAH AND BAAL

After Solomon's reign, Israel divided into northern and southern kingdoms. The explanation given for this in the Deuteronomistic History is Solomon's continual worship of regional deities. Writers of the Tanakh condemn these worship practices and praise the Yahwist prophets and kings who challenge them. Israelite worship of the goddess Asherah is of particular interest. Asherah is the wife of the Canaanite high god, El, and in some popular Israelite religion may have been a consort of Yahweh. Worship rituals of Asherah center on sacred pillars, which in the Deuteronomistic History are strictly forbidden (Deuteronomy 16:21–22). The following story from the Deuteronomistic History dramatically presents a showdown between the prophets of Asherah and Baal on one side, and the prophet Elijah on the other. Elijah is the lone defender of Yahweh in the northern kingdom at this time.

16. . . . Ahab son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah, and Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria for twenty-two years. Ahab son of Omri did what was displeasing to the Lord, more than all who preceded him. Not content to follow the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took a wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethball of the Phoenicians, and he went and served Baal and worshipped him. He erected an altar to Baal in the temple of

Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made a sacred post. Ahab did more to vex the Lord, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel who preceded him.

17. Elijah the Tisbite, an inhabitant of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding." . . .
18. Much later, in the third year, a word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go, appear before Ahab; then I will send rain upon the earth." Thereupon Elijah set out to appear before Ahab. . . .

When Ahab caught sight of Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" He retorted, "It is not I who have brought trouble on Israel, but you and your father's House, by forsaking the commandments of the Lord and going after the Baalim. Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, together with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.

Ahab sent orders to all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel. Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long will you keep hopping between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; and if Baal, follow him!" But the people answered him not a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I am the only prophet of the Lord left, while the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty men. Let two young bulls be given to us. Let them choose one bull, cut it up, and lay it on the wood, but let them not apply fire; I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, and will not apply fire. You will then invoke your god by name, and I will invoke the Lord by name; and let us agree: the god who responds with fire, that one is God." And all the people answered, "Very good!"

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull and prepare it first, for you are the majority; invoke your god by name, but apply no fire." They took the bull that was given them; they prepared it, and invoked Baal by name from morning until noon, shouting, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no sound, and none who responded; so they performed a hopping dance about the altar that had been set up. When noon came, Elijah mocked them, saying, "Shout louder! After all, he is a god. But he may be in conversation, he may be detained, or he may be on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and will wake up." So they shouted louder, and gashed themselves with knives and spears, according to their practice, until the blood streamed over them. When noon passed, they kept raving until the hour of presenting the meal offering. Still there was no sound, and none who responded or heeded.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come closer to me"; and all the people came closer to him. He repaired the damaged altar of the Lord. Then Elijah took twelve stones, corresponding to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob—to whom the word of the Lord had come: "Israel shall be your name"—and with the stones he built an altar in

the name of the Lord. Around the altar he made a trench large enough for two *seahs* of seed. He laid out the wood, and he cut up the bull and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it over the burnt offering and the wood." Then he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. "Do it a third time," he said; and they did it a third time. The water ran down around the altar, and even the trench was filled with water.

When it was time to present the meal offering, the prophet Elijah came forward and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel! Let it be known today that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your bidding. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God; for You have turned their hearts backward."

Then fire from the Lord descended and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth; and it licked up the water that was in the trench. When they saw this, all the people flung themselves on their faces and cried out: "The Lord alone is God, The Lord alone is God!"

Source: 1 Kings 16:29–33; 17:1; 18:1–2, 17–40, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

ISAIAH'S WARNING TO JUDAH

In 722 the northern kingdom fell to the Mesopotamian superpower of the time, Assyria. Although the southern kingdom of Judah survived Assyrian encroachment, it was embroiled in foreign political conflicts. The prophet Isaiah was an advisor to two kings of the southern kingdom at the time: Ahaz and his successor Hezekiah. Under the leadership of King Hezekiah, the Kingdom of Judah survived the Assyrian attack and continued for another 150 years. His advice to both kings was the same: Do not participate in anti-Assyrian conspiracies, but trust in God for deliverance. The Book of Isaiah is an anthology of prophetic writings from Isaiah's time through the Babylonian exile. Of the book's 66 chapters, Isaiah's own words are confined to Chapters 1–11 and 28–32. Chapter 1 below expresses Isaiah's indictment against the people of Judah: They have forsaken God and risk being purged. Chapter 6 is Isaiah's call to prophethood.

1. The prophecies of Isaiah son of Amoz, who prophesied concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,
For the Lord has spoken:
I reared children and brought them up—
And they have rebelled against Me!
An ox knows its owner,
An ass its master's crib:
Israel does not know,
My people takes no thought.

Ah, sinful nation!
 People laden with iniquity!
 Brood of evildoers!
 Depraved children!
 They have forsaken the Lord,
 Spurned the Holy One of Israel,
 Turned their backs [on Him].

Why do you seek further beatings,
 That you continue to offend?
 Every head is ailing,
 And every heart is sick.
 From head to foot
 No spot is sound:
 All bruises, and welts,
 And festering sores—
 Not pressed out, not bound up,
 Not softened with oil.
 Your land is a waste,
 Your cities burnt down;
 Before your eyes, the yield of your soil
 Is consumed by strangers—
 A wasteland as overthrown by strangers!
 Fair Zion is left
 Like a booth in a vineyard,
 Like a hut in a cucumber field,
 Like a city beleaguered. Had not the Lord of Hosts
 Left us some survivors,
 We should be like Sodom,
 Another Gomorrah. . . .

"Come, let us reach an understanding,—says the Lord.
 Be your sins like crimson,
 They can turn snow-white;
 Be they red as died wool,
 They can become like fleece."
 If, then, you agree and give heed,
 You will eat the good things of the earth;
 But if you refuse and disobey,
 You will be devoured [by] the sword.
 For it was the Lord who spoke.

6. In the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld my Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple. Seraphs stood in attendance on Him. Each of them had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his legs, and with two he would fly.

And one would call to the other,
 "Holy, holy, holy!
 The Lord of Hosts!
 His presence fills all the earth!"

The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the House kept filling with smoke. I cried,

"Woe is me; I am lost!
 For I am a man of unclean lips
 And I live among a people of unclean lips;
 Yet my own eyes have beheld
 The King Lord of Hosts."

Then one of the seraphs flew over to me with a live coal, which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched it to my lips and declared,

Now that this has touched your lips,
 Your guilt shall depart
 And your sin be purged away.

Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me." And He said, "Go say to that people:

'Hear, indeed, but do not understand;
 See, indeed, but do not grasp'
 Dull that people's mind,
 Stop its ears,
 And seal its eyes—
 Lest, seeing with its eyes
 And hearing with its ears,
 It also grasp with its mind,
 And repent and save itself."

I asked, "How long, my Lord?" And He replied:

"Till towns lie waste without inhabitants
 And houses without people,
 And the ground lies waste and desolate—
 For the Lord will banish the population—
 And deserted sites are many
 In the midst of the land.
 But while a tenth part yet remains in it,
 it shall repent.
 It shall be ravaged like the terebinth and the oak,
 of which stumps are left
 even when they are felled:
 its stump shall be a holy seed."

Source: Isaiah 1:1-9, 18-21; 6, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

BABYLONIAN CONQUEST AND EXILE

Around 610 B.C.E., a group of Semites in Babylon, the Chaldeans, overthrew the Assyrians and formed a new Babylonian Empire. At first Judah's king paid tribute to the

Empire, but he later rebelled, thinking that Egypt would come to his defense if necessary. In retaliation, the Babylonian army marched into Judah, looted the temple and royal treasury, and exiled the royal family and upper-class Israelites to Babylon. The Babylonians appointed Zedekiah as a puppet king, but, when pressured by the Egyptians, he too rebelled. In 586 B.C.E., the Babylonian army again marched into Judah, this time destroying Jerusalem and the temple. The following recounts the tragedy of the exile.

24. . . . Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Nehushta daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. He did what was displeasing to the Lord, just as his father had done. At that time, the troops of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon marched against Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon advanced against the city while his troops were besieging it. Thereupon King Jehoiachin of Judah, along with his mother, and his courtiers, commanders, and officers, surrendered to the king of Babylon. The king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign. He carried off from Jerusalem all the treasures of the House of the Lord and the treasures of the royal palace; he stripped off all the golden decorations in the Temple of the Lord—which King Solomon of Israel had made—as the Lord had warned. He exiled all of Jerusalem: all the commanders and all the warriors—ten thousand exiles—as well as all the craftsmen and smiths; only the poorest people in the land were left. He deported Jehoiachin to Babylon; and the king's mother and wives and officers and the notables of the land were brought as exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon. All the able men, to the number of seven thousand—all of them warriors, trained for battle—and a thousand craftsmen and smiths were brought to Babylon as exiles by the king of Babylon. And the king of Babylon appointed Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, changing his name to Zedekiah.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. He did what was displeasing to the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done. Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah were a cause of anger for the Lord, so that He cast them out of His presence.

25. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. And in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar moved against Jerusalem with his whole army. He besieged it; and they built towers against it all around. The city continued in a state of siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. By the ninth day [of the fourth month] the famine had become acute in the city; there was no food left for the common people.

Then [the wall of] the city was breached. All the soldiers [left the city] by night through the gate between the double walls, which is near the king's garden—the Chaldeans were all around the city; and [the king] set out for the Arabah. But the Chaldean troops pursued the king, and they overtook him in the steppes of Jericho as his entire force left him and scattered. They captured the king and brought him before the

king of Babylon at Riblah; and they put him on trial. They slaughtered Zedekiah's sons before his eyes; then Zedekiah's eyes were put out. He was chained in bronze fetters and he was brought to Babylon.

On the seventh day of the fifth month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, an officer of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the House of the Lord, the king's palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem; he burned down the house of every notable person. The entire Chaldean force that was with the chief of the guard tore down the walls of Jerusalem on every side. The remnant of the people that was left in the city, the defectors who had gone over to the king of Babylon—and the remnant of the population—were taken into exile by Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards. But some of the poorest in the land were left by the chief of the guards, to be vinedressers and field hands.

The Chaldeans broke up the bronze columns of the House of the Lord, the stands, and the bronze tank that was in the House of the Lord; and they carried the bronze away to Babylon. They also took all the pails, scrapers, snuffers, ladles, and all the other bronze vessels used in the service. The chief of the guards took whatever was of gold and whatever was of silver: firepans and sprinkling bowls. The two columns, the one tank, and the stands that Solomon provided for the House of the Lord—all these objects contained bronze beyond weighing. The one column was eighteen cubits high. It had a bronze capital above it; the height of the capital was three cubits; and there was a meshwork [decorated] with pomegranates about the capital, all made of bronze. And the like was true of the other column with its meshwork.

Source: 2 Kings 24:8–20, 25:1–17, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

REMEMBERING ZION

Captive in Babylon, the psalmist in the following passage reflects nostalgically on the beauty of Zion, referring to the city of Jerusalem, possibly the Temple Mount.

By the rivers of Babylon,
there we sat,
sat and wept,
as we thought of Zion.
There on the poplars
we hung up our lyres,
for our captors asked us there for songs,
our tormentors, for amusement,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."
How can we sing a song of the Lord
on alien soil?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither;
let my tongue stick to my palate
if I cease to think of you,

if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory
even at my happiest hour.
Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall;
how they cried, "Strip her, strip her
to her very foundations!"
Fair Babylon, you predator,
a blessing on him who repays you in kind
what you have inflicted on us;
a blessing on him who seizes your babies
and dashes them against the rocks!

Source: Psalms 137, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

RETURN FROM EXILE AND RESTORATION

When Persian King Cyrus overthrew the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C.E., he reversed the policy of exiling foreign captives as practiced by the Babylonians and, earlier, by the Assyrians. With his encouragement, 40,000 exiled Jews returned to their homeland. Cyrus encouraged the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple and returned to the Jews the temple treasures that had been taken by the Babylonians.

1. In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows:

"Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any one of you of all His people—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the House of the Lord God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem; and all who stay behind, wherever he may be living, let the people of his place assist him with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, besides the freewill offering to the House of God that is in Jerusalem."

So the chiefs of the clans of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, all whose spirit had been roused by God, got ready to go up to build the House of the Lord that is in Jerusalem. All their neighbors supported them with silver vessels, with gold, with goods, with livestock, and with precious objects, besides what had been given as a freewill offering. King Cyrus of Persia released the vessels of the Lord's house which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Jerusalem and had put in the house of his God. These King Cyrus of Persia released through the office of Mithredath the treasurer, who gave an inventory of them to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. This is the inventory: 30 gold basins, 1,000 silver basins, 29 knives, 30 gold bowls, 410 silver doubled bowls, 1,000 other vessels, in all, 5,400 gold and silver vessels. Sheshbazzar brought all these back when the exiles came back from Babylon to Jerusalem. . . .

3. When the seventh month arrived—the Israelites being settled in their towns—the entire people assembled as one man in Jerusalem. Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brother priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brothers set to and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings upon it as is written in the Teaching of Moses, the man of God. They set up the Altar on its site because they were in fear of the peoples of the land, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings each morning and evening. Then they celebrated the festival of Tabernacles as is written, with its daily burnt offerings in the proper quantities, on each day as is prescribed for it, followed by the regular burnt offering and the offerings for the new moons and for all the sacred fixed times of the Lord, and whatever freewill offerings were made to the Lord. From the first day of the seventh month they began to make burnt offerings to the Lord, though the foundation of the Temple of the Lord had not been laid. They paid the hewers and craftsmen with money, and the Sidonians and Tyrians with food, drink, and oil to bring cedarwood from Lebanon by sea to Joppa, in accord with the authorization granted them by King Cyrus of Persia.

In the second year after their arrival at the House of God, at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brother priests and Levites, and all who had come from the captivity to Jerusalem, as their first step appointed Levites from the age of twenty and upward to supervise the work of the House of the Lord. Jeshua, his sons and brothers, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together were appointed in charge of those who did the work in the House of God; also the sons of Henadad, their sons and brother Levites.

When the builders had laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, priests in their vestments with trumpets, and Levites sons of Asaph with cymbals were stationed to give praise to the Lord, as King David of Israel had ordained. They sang songs extolling and praising the Lord, "For He is good, His steadfast love for Israel is eternal." All the people raised a great shout extolling the Lord because the foundation of the House of the Lord had been laid. Many of the priests and Levites and the chiefs of the clans, the old men who had seen the first house, wept loudly at the sight of the founding of this house. Many others shouted joyously at the top of their voices. The people could not distinguish the shouts of joy from the people's weeping, for the people raised a great shout, the sound of which could be heard from afar.

Source: Ezra 1, 3, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

ESTHER

The Book of Esther is one of two books of the Tanakh focusing on the life of a Jewish heroine (the book of Ruth is the other). Esther is queen to Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I),

one of Cyrus's successors, reigning from 486 to 465 B.C.E. Unknown to the king, Esther is a Jew. When her cousin Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman, a member of the court, for religious reasons, Haman is incensed and plots to have Mordecai, along with the rest of the Jews in the region, executed. The king sanctions Haman's plan. When Mordecai pleads with Esther to speak to the king on behalf of the Jews, she plans a banquet for the king during which she reveals Haman's plot. Haman is hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. The Jews are granted the right to defend themselves against their anti-Jewish enemies. The story of Esther is the basis for the Jewish feast Purim.

3. Some time afterward, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials. All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low. Then the king's courtiers who were in the palace gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's order?" When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's resolve would prevail; for he had explained to them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel or bow low to him, Haman was filled with rage. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone; having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

In the first month, that is, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, *pur*—which means "the lot"—was cast before Haman concerning every day and every month, [until it fell on] the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar. Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in Your Majesty's interest to tolerate them. If it pleases Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury." Thereupon the king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the foe of the Jews. And the king said, "The money and the people are yours to do with as you see fit." . . .

7. So the king and Haman came to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, the king again asked Esther at the wine feast, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Queen Esther replied: "If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, massacred, and exterminated. Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen, I would have kept silent; for the adversary is not worthy of the king's trouble."

Thereupon King Ahasuerus demanded of Queen Esther, "Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?" "The adversary and enemy," replied Esther, "is this evil Haman!" And Haman cringed in terror before the king and the queen. The king, in his fury, left the wine feast for the palace garden, while Haman remained to plead with Queen Esther for his life; for he saw that the king was resolved to destroy him. When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet room, Haman was lying prostrate on the couch on which Esther reclined. "Does he mean," cried the king, "to ravish the queen in my own palace?" No sooner did these words leave the king's lips than Haman's face was covered. Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "What is more, a stake is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai—the man whose words saved the king." "Impale him on it!" the king ordered. So they impaled Haman on the stake which he had put up for Mordecai, and the king's fury abated.

Source: Esther 3:7–11; 7, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

EZRA AND THE LAW

The concluding events of the Tanakh focus on the activities of Ezra and Nehemiah, found in the books that bear their names. Ezra was a Babylonian-born Jewish priest devoted to the Law of Moses. In 458 B.C.E., he petitioned Artaxerxes, the reigning king of the Persian Empire, to lead another migration of Jews back to their homeland. Artaxerxes agreed and empowered him to make political and religious reforms as Ezra saw fit. On arrival, Ezra was distressed to see that the returning Jews before him had intermarried, and he proclaimed that 114 priests and laymen should have their marriages annulled. Thirteen years after Ezra's return, Nehemiah, a Jewish cupbearer to the Persian king, was granted permission by the king to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, still in ruins from the Babylonian invasion. A gifted administrator, Nehemiah completed the project in fifty-two days, even in the face of opposition from neighboring provinces. Shortly after completion of the walls, the Jews celebrated a series of feasts, during which Ezra publicly read and interpreted the scrolls of Moses. The following recounts Ezra's reading of the scrolls.

When the seventh month arrived—the Israelites being [settled] in their towns—the entire people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the scroll of the Teaching of Moses with which the Lord had charged Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Teaching before the congregation, men and women and all who could listen with understanding. He read from it, facing the square before the Water Gate, from the first light until midday, to the men and the women and those who could understand; the ears of all the people were given to the scroll of the Teaching.

Ezra the scribe stood upon a wooden tower made for the purpose, and beside him stood Mattithaih, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah at his right, and at his left Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. Ezra opened the

scroll in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; as he opened it, all the people stood up. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," with hands upraised. Then they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the Lord with their faces to the ground. Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites explained the Teaching to the People, while the people stood in their places. They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading.

Nehemiah the Tirshatha, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were explaining to the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God: you must not mourn or weep," for all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Teaching. He further said to them, "Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the Lord is the source of your strength." The Levites were quieting the people, saying, "Hush, for the day is holy; do not be sad." Then all the people went to eat and drink and send portions and make great merriment, for they understood the things they were told.

On the second day, the heads of the clans of all the people and the priests and Levites gathered to Ezra the scribe to study the words of the Teaching. They found written in the Teaching that the Lord had commanded Moses that the Israelites must dwell in booths during the festival of the seventh month, and that they must announce and proclaim throughout all their towns and Jerusalem as follows: "Go out to the mountains and bring leafy branches of olive trees, pine trees, myrtles, palms and [other] leafy trees to make booths, as it is written." So the people went out and brought them, and made themselves booths on their roofs, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the House of God, in the square of the Water Gate and in the square of the Ephraim Gate. The whole community that returned from the captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths—the Israelites had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun to that day—and there was very great rejoicing. He read from the scroll of the Teaching of God each day, from the first to the last day. They celebrated the festival seven days, and there was a solemn gathering on the eighth, as prescribed.

Source: Nehemiah 8, from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures*.

POST-EXILIC WRITINGS

GREEK RULE AND THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

Although the final events reported in the Tanakh take place around 430 B.C.E., the religious drama of the Jewish people continues in post-exilic writings, considered scriptural in many Jewish circles at the time. The extreme Hellenizing policies of the Selucid king Antiochus Epiphanes created a crisis for traditional Jews, further

intensified by the advocacy of these policies by Jewish High Priests themselves. Loyal Jewish writers sought a divine explanation for this crisis, which threatened the Jews' very existence. They wrote apocalyptic texts reporting visionlike revelations about a messianic deliverer and a cataclysmic end to the empires of their oppressors, topped by final divine judgment. The Book of Daniel in the Tanakh is thought to be an apocalyptic work from this period. The following is from the First Book of Enoch, one of the best-known apocalyptic texts of the Pseudepigrapha. The work, written by several authors between 200 B.C.E. and 100 C.E., reflects traditional apocalyptic themes.

46. *The Son of Man.* There I saw one who was the Ancient of Days, and His head was white like wool. With Him was another being who had the appearance of a man; and his face was full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels. I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning that Son of Man, who he was, from where he was, and why he went with the Ancient of Days. He answered and said to me: "This is the Son of Man who has righteousness, with whom dwells righteousness, and who reveals all the treasures of that which is hidden because the Lord of Spirits has chosen him, and whose lot has the preeminence before the Lord of Spirits in uprightness forever. This Son of Man whom you have seen will raise up the kings and the mighty from their seats, and the strong from their thrones. He will loosen the reins of the strong, and break the teeth of the sinners. He will put down the kings from their thrones and kingdoms because they do not extol and praise Him, nor humbly acknowledge from what source the kingdom was bestowed upon them. He will put down the countenance of the strong, and will fill them with shame. Darkness will be their dwelling, and worms will be their bed. They will have no hope of rising from their beds, because they do not extol the name of the Lord of Spirits, raise their hands against the Most High, and tread upon the earth and dwell upon it. All their deeds manifest unrighteousness and their power rests upon their riches. Their faith is in the gods that they have made with their hands. They deny the name of the Lord of Spirits, and they persecute the houses of His congregations and the faithful who hang upon the name of the Lord of Spirits."...
48. In that place I saw the fountain of righteousness which was inexhaustible. Around it were many fountains of wisdom: all the thirsty drank of them and were filled with wisdom. Their dwellings were with the righteous and holy and elect. At that hour that Son of Man was named in the presence of the Lord of Spirits, and his name before the Ancient of Days. Even before the sun and the signs were created, before the stars of the heavens were made, his name was named before the Lord of Spirits. He will be a staff to the righteous whereon to stay themselves and not fall. He will be the light of the Gentiles, and the hope of those who are troubled of heart. All who dwell on earth will fall down and worship before him, and will praise and bless and celebrate with song the Lord of Spirits. For this reason he has been chosen and hidden before Him, before the creation of the world and for evermore. And the