



**FIGURE 6.3** Yochanan Ben Zakai Synagogue in Jerusalem's Old City. AKG Images/Israelimages.

rules of priestly purity. What we know about the Essenes comes mostly from their writings in the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, documents found by two Palestinian shepherds in caves near the Dead Sea in the 1940s. (Following the initial discovery, archaeologists began systematic excavation of the area and within ten years had identified some 900 scrolls.) The Essenes considered themselves the true faithful children of Israel, and they hoped to reconquer the promised land from gentiles (non-Jews) and Hellenized Jews (those who had adopted Greek ways).

There were other schools of thought, as well, including those messianic Jews who believed Jesus was the messiah. It may sound odd to count them as Jews, but Jesus was indeed Jewish and thought of himself as Jewish, as did his **disciples**, as his followers (or students) are usually called. Even today, there are messianic Jews who believe that Jesus is the messiah. (There are perhaps 250,000 messianic Jews in the United States, and some in Israel, although, as we shall see, not all Messianic Jews believe Jesus was the messiah.) However, the fourth group mentioned by Josephus was the **Zealots**, revolutionaries who conducted guerilla warfare against the Romans. They launched a revolt in 66 CE, which the Romans crushed, destroying the Second Temple in 70. A second Jewish revolt in 132–135 was also put down, killing perhaps half a million Jews and destroying almost a thousand villages. This time the emperor rebuilt Jerusalem as a Roman colony and banned Jews from entering it.

From then on, the Jews were in **diaspora**, a Greek word that originally meant a scattering of seeds, but now means the dispersing of people from their homeland. Within a century, Jews were settled as far west as Spain and as far east as India. By this time, the followers of Jesus no longer considered themselves Jews, and the Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots had



## PART II USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS

disappeared. So there was one kind of Judaism left, that of the Pharisees. Theirs was the foundation of the Judaism led by rabbis that we still have today.

After the destruction of the Second Temple, as after the destruction of the First Temple, worship could not be centered in a temple or in Jerusalem. And sacrificing animals was obsolete. Jewish practices had to be portable, so that they could be conducted anywhere that Jews might find themselves. This portable form of Jewish practice had been developing since the Babylonian Captivity. It consisted of following the Mosaic Law, praying, and studying the Torah. Judaism was now carried out mostly in people's homes and in meeting places called synagogues.

"Torah" is perhaps the most important word in Judaism. It has a range of meanings. In the narrowest sense, it is the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. In a wider sense, Torah is the Scriptures, the Hebrew Bible. The Bible is also called Tanakh, which is an acronym in Hebrew formed from the first letters of the three parts of the Hebrew Bible – the Torah (the first five books), the Nevi'im (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings) – hence *Tanakh*.

In a still wider sense, Torah includes the Written Torah (the Bible) and the Oral Torah (Talmud). According to the Pharisees, the Oral Torah is the part of God's revelation at Sinai that Moses did not write down but passed on to his successors by word of mouth. They in turn passed it on to their successors. When it was eventually written down, the Oral Torah took the form of the **Mishnah** and the **Gemara** (see "Law and Life" in box below). The Gemara consists of commentaries on the Mishnah.

There are two major talmuds. The first is the Talmud of Jerusalem, which was compiled around 400 CE. A second, more sophisticated Talmud was compiled around 600 CE in Babylon (Iraq), where many Jews continued to live after the end of their captivity there. Since 600, rabbis have added more comments to these texts, creating even richer talmuds.

The Talmuds are commentaries on the law, which covers all aspects of life. It contains all Jewish teaching about what is right and wrong, what should and should not be done, including rules about cleanliness, suitable foods, and cooking.

The Talmuds became the heart of Jewish education. Students learned what important rabbis had said about various questions, and learned to debate in favor of and against various positions. Today in **yeshivas**, Jewish schools, students pair up to interpret and debate the traditional questions. On a typical page from a Talmud, there is at the center a passage from the Mishnah outlining the opposing positions of early rabbis Hillel and Shammai on some rule. Above this is a passage from the Gemara offering comments by later rabbis. Then around the edges of the page are still more comments.

With the Bible and the Talmuds, the Jews now had a rich body of texts that guided every aspect of life. Being Jewish meant studying these texts, following the law as presented in them, and thus making their lives holy.

## **The Middle Ages (500–1500 CE)**

In the fourth century the Roman emperors made Christianity legal and then made it the official religion of the Empire. With their new power, Christian leaders often treated Jews harshly. John Chrysostom, one of the most revered of the **Church Fathers** (influential thinkers in the early centuries of Christianity, whose views are considered authoritative; also known as



## Law and Life

The Mishnah is a law code written about 200 CE that interprets the **mitzvot** – the plural of **mitzvah**, “commandment.” For example, the Mishnah discusses the kinds of work that are prohibited on the Sabbath (the “seventh” day, commemorating the day on which God rested after creating the world). The Bible does not prohibit “work” in general on the Sabbath. It prohibits *melachah*, which is the word used in Genesis for God’s creating the world. Since God rested from *melachah* on the seventh day, the rabbis reasoned, we should rest from similar kinds of work. The rabbis also found the word *melachah* in Exodus 31, where it is applied to the building of the sanctuary. There God emphasized that no one should engage in *melachah* on the Sabbath – under penalty of death. So the rabbis concluded that what God meant in banning *melachah* on the Sabbath were the kinds of work involved in building the sanctuary. What kinds of work were these? The rabbis came up with this list of thirty-nine kinds:

- |                    |                            |   |
|--------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Sowing          | 16. Spinning               | 31. Cutting hide up   |
| 2. Plowing         | 17. Weaving                | 32. Writing two letters   |
| 3. Reaping         | 18. Making two loops       | 33. Erasing two letters   |
| 4. Binding sheaves | 19. Weaving two threads    | 34. Building  |
| 5. Threshing       | 20. Separating two threads | 35. Tearing a building down   |
| 6. Winnowing       | 21. Tying                  | 36. Extinguishing a fire  |
| 7. Selecting       | 22. Untying                | 37. Kindling a fire   |
| 8. Grinding        | 23. Sewing two stitches    | 38. Hitting with a hammer   |
| 9. Sifting         | 24. Tearing                | 39. Taking an object from the private domain to the public, or transporting an object in the public domain. |
| 10. Kneading       | 25. Trapping               |   |
| 11. Baking         | 26. Slaughtering           |   |
| 12. Shearing wool  | 27. Flaying                |   |
| 13. Washing wool   | 28. Salting meat           |   |
| 14. Beating wool   | 29. Curing hide            |   |
| 15. Dyeing wool    | 30. Scraping hide          |   |

Ultimately, the rabbis counted 613 mitzvot.





**FIGURE 6.4** First page of the Babylonian Talmud. AKG Images/Israelimages.

THE FAMILY OF WESTERN MONOTHEISMS: JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

“Doctors” of the Church), said that because the Jews had killed Jesus and Jesus was God, the Jews had killed God. Because of this offense, Chrysostom said, God rejected the Jews once and for all, so that they were a doomed people who deserved to suffer. This comment ignores the historical fact that Jesus was executed by the Romans and not “the Jews,” of course, but such anti-Jewish arguments became common across Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. Many church synods (meetings of bishops) passed laws surprisingly similar to the laws that Hitler created in Nazi Germany. In 306 the Synod of Elvira prohibited Christians from marrying Jews, or even eating with them. The Synod of Clermont in 535 banned Jews from holding public office. A synod in Toledo, Spain in 681 ordered the public burning of the Talmud and other Jewish books. Other synods forbade Christians from visiting Jewish doctors, and said that Jews could not be plaintiffs against Christians in court, or serve as witnesses against Christians. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, a meeting in Rome to which all bishops were invited, declared that Jews had to mark their clothing with a special badge. The Synod of Breslau in 1267 set up compulsory ghettos – areas where Jews were required to live. The Council of Basel in 1434 said that Jews were not permitted to obtain university degrees.

As we shall see, Christianity underwent a revolution in the 16th century called the Protestant Reformation. It was designed to correct what its leaders saw as deviations from Christian principles in the actions of the Roman Christian rulers. However, unfortunately, anti-Judaism remained a feature even of “reformed” Christianity. Here are some of Martin Luther’s proposals:

What then shall we do with this damned, rejected race of Jews? ... First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it.... Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed.... Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer-books and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught. Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more.... If however we are afraid that they might harm us personally... let us drive them out of the country for all time. (Luther 1543, Part XI)

While Jews suffered great discrimination in the Middle Ages and later in Christian Europe, they did much better in areas ruled by Muslims. As we shall see, in the 7th century, Islam arose on the Arabian Peninsula and spread west across North Africa to Spain, and east to India and beyond. The Muslims rejected the claim that the Jews had killed Jesus or God. Their theology, like Jewish theology, was a simple monotheism with no division of God into three persons. They accepted the Torah as God’s revelation. And many of their laws were similar to Jewish laws, such as their prohibition on eating pork and other dietary rules. Jews did especially well in Spain while it was governed by Muslims from 711 to 1492. There they made up more than 5% of the population (in the United States today Jews are around 2% of the population).

One of the most important Jewish thinkers, Moses Maimonides (d. 1204), lived in Muslim Spain. In this relatively open multicultural environment, there was a great deal of interaction between Jews, Christians, and Muslims – interaction that included discussions of religious matters. In this context, Maimonides felt compelled to extract basic Jewish beliefs from the Mishnah. He identified 13 basic Jewish beliefs:



## PART II USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS

1. God is the perfect Creator of all things.
2. God is one in a unique way.
3. God is not physical.
4. God existed before everything else, and exists after everything else.
5. God and only God is to be worshipped.
6. Prophets are special creatures who speak for God.
7. Moses is the greatest of the prophets; he spoke to God face to face.
8. God revealed the Torah to Moses.
9. The Torah is complete.
10. God knows all human actions.
11. God rewards and punishes people in this life and in the world to come.
12. The Messiah will come.
13. The dead will be resurrected.

Many rabbis initially rejected Maimonides' novel, philosophical approach, so different from the traditional style of commentary on the law. However, these thirteen basic principles eventually were accepted by the majority and remain central in Judaism to this day.

Another approach to Judaism that arose in the Middle Ages was the mystical tradition known as **Kabbala**. Its most famous document is the Zohar, "The Book of Splendor," written in Spain around 1275 by Moses de Léon, who claimed that it came from a rabbi of the 2nd century. The Zohar is a mystical commentary on the first five books of the Bible, and discusses the nature of God, the universe, human souls, and good and evil. In the Zohar, God is described as complex rather than simple, and dynamic rather than unchanging. God has emotions. What is more, God has male and female aspects, and they must be joined to maintain harmony in the universe.

A later movement spawned by mystical Judaism was **Hasidism**, which arose in Eastern Europe in the 18th century. It emphasized the emotional side of religion, so that music, dancing, and states of ecstasy could be part of worship. This tradition centered around a leader who had a simple, pious love of God. Hasidic Jews believe that this holy man has a special relationship to God, and following his teachings will bring blessings. The most famous contemporary Hasidic group is the Lubavitcher movement of Rebbe Menachem Schneerson (d. 1994) of Brooklyn, New York. Since his death in 1994, many of his followers have thought of him as the Messiah.

## ***The Modern Period (1750 to the present)***

### **The Enlightenment**

Until the 18th century, all Jews were what we would today call Orthodox. They believed that the entire Torah was revealed by God in just the words we have now, so that whatever it says is literally true. They followed the rules in the Mosaic law and lived apart from Christians in Europe. However, in the 18th century new developments in European philosophy, science,



**FIGURE 6.5** Rebbe Menachem Schneerson. Z. Radovan/  
BibleLandPictures.

and culture changed the lives of many Jews, much as they changed the rest of European culture. The general name for these changes is the Enlightenment, and the Enlightenment within Jewish culture is called **Haskelah**.

### The Development of Reform Judaism

The intellectual and political changes brought by the Enlightenment influenced Jewish thinkers in the 18th century. With the flowering of democracy, North American and some European governments granted civil and political rights to Jews. This led many Jews to reject their traditional segregation from the rest of society. In the 19th century, more and more Jews stopped thinking of themselves as outsiders; they wanted to live as full citizens of their countries. They stopped dressing in special ways and speaking in Yiddish, a dialect of German traditionally used by European Jews. They pursued careers in law, medicine, and university teaching. They began to integrate into the cultures where they lived and immerse themselves in the intellectual and cultural life of their nations. Many came to prominence, including some of the scholars mentioned in this study – such as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Emile Durkheim.

As Jews began to integrate into their national cultures, some aspects of the traditional laws receded in importance. Indeed, the changes in European society brought by the Enlightenment led to a rethinking of Judaic practice that resulted in Reform Judaism.

Reform Judaism is a movement that started in Germany and France in the 19th century, but flourished in the United States. Whereas traditional Judaism had emphasized the Talmud, Reform Jews emphasized the study of scripture. And instead of reading the Bible as word-for-word dictation from God, they read it in a new way. (As we shall see,





## The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was a broad set of intellectual developments that accompanied socioeconomic and political changes in Europe, beginning in the 17th century. Four significant areas experiencing change were (1) cosmology, our understanding of the universe, (2) epistemology, our understanding of how we know, (3) ethics (or morality), and (4) political thought. All these developments had important consequences for religion.

First were changes in cosmology. From ancient times through the Middle Ages, people thought of the earth as the center of the universe, with the sun, the moon, and the stars circling around it. This, of course, made humans feel important. A few passages in the Bible seem to back up this geocentrism (earth-centered view), and the 2nd-century thinker Ptolemy made it into a complete system of astronomy. However, starting around 1500, astronomers such as Copernicus and then Galileo proposed that the earth moves around the sun. With the invention of better telescopes, scientists came to see that the universe is immense, and that the Earth is far from the center of everything. This realization challenged the geocentrism of the Bible.

Second were changes in epistemology, the study of knowledge and belief. In the ancient and medieval world, the authority of revelation was taken for granted. People believed something was true based on who said it was true – a characteristic of oral cultures. Revelation, considered to be the word of God, was the ultimate source of truth. Those who were accepted as legitimate interpreters of revelation, such as rabbis and priests, were also respected authorities. On issues on which scripture was silent, the word of non-religious authorities was often taken as definitive. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, said that heavy objects fall faster than light objects, for example, and people accepted this as the truth. However, when the traditional belief that the sun goes around the earth was questioned, people started asking what other traditional beliefs might be incorrect. Instead of taking Aristotle's word for it that heavy objects fall faster, Galileo dropped balls of different weights from the top of a ship's mast, and found that they hit the deck at the same time. Such experiments were the start of the modern scientific method, in which the basis of certainty is not an individual's or an institution's word. Instead, reason, based on empirical observation and experimentation, became the source of certainty.

If experts such as Aristotle and Ptolemy could be wrong about physics and astronomy, what about experts in matters of religion? Should people accept the interpretations of scripture offered by the religious authorities, or were individuals – using their own reason – able to understand scripture's teachings? For that matter, how do we know that the version of scripture we are reading was copied correctly? Are we sure that we know the exact meanings of the words in scripture, especially if we are reading a translation from an ancient text?

A third major development in the Enlightenment was in people's understanding of right and wrong – ethics or morality. In the Hebrew Bible, doing what is right is doing what God commands, and doing what is wrong is doing what God forbids. Ethics is a matter of obedience and disobedience. (As we saw in Chapter 3, this is known as "Divine Command" Ethics.) This understanding was questioned by Enlightenment thinkers. They reasoned that when God commands something, either he has a reason for giving that command or he has no reason. If God gives commands for no reason, then he is a despot or an autocrat, terms with a rather negative connotation in Enlightenment Europe. Since people think of God as good, it must be that God gives commands for a reason. Furthermore, most divine commands – such as those calling for honesty and concern for the needy, and those forbidding murder and theft – obviously serve to benefit human beings. So, as Enlightenment thinkers examined issues of right and wrong, they looked for the effects of actions on people, for the ways an action would harm or benefit someone. If there were rules that benefited ancient people but would not benefit people today, Enlightenment thinkers tended to consider these rules as no longer applicable. They must have been beneficial at some point in human history, but they were no longer pertinent. They had become obsolete.

There were also changes in political thought. Before the 18th century, the standard understanding of how leaders got their authority was that God gave it to them. This idea came to be called the Divine Right of Kings, but it goes back at least to the Bible, where God chooses Saul, then David, and so on. In the Christian New Testament, Paul says that all authority is from God (Romans 13:1). However, 18th-century thinkers, many of them devout Jews and Christians, developed a new view of political authority – democracy or "rule by the people." Enlightenment thinkers argued that the authority to govern people comes from those people themselves. A government that ruled without this authority would not be legitimate. This idea led to a number of revolutions, including the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789. It is in this context that we begin to see a clear distinction drawn between religious and political authority – and with it, a distinction between religion and politics.

Christian scholars were doing the same thing.) In this perspective, the Bible was indeed divine revelation, but it was not taken as literal history or science. It was read as a guide for people living in specific cultures and historical eras, as a source of wisdom about purposeful human existence. Reform Jews also changed their synagogue rituals to be more accessible to the congregation. Instead of Hebrew, they used the vernacular, the local language.

In the new Reform movement, as in traditional Judaism, the most important feature of religion was ethics. However, the emphasis was now on the ethical principles of the



## PART II USING THE TOOLS: SURVEYING WORLD RELIGIONS



## Kashrut

Judaic dietary laws are known as *kashrut*. This is the system of rules about what foods are acceptable and unacceptable, and how certain foods must be prepared. Of the animals that live in the water, only those that have both fins and scales are acceptable. So fish are **kosher** (proper), but clams, oysters, and lobsters are *trefa* (or *tref*, literally meaning meat that was killed by wild animals rather than being properly slaughtered, but generally applied to all food that is forbidden). Of the four-legged animals that live on land, only those that have split hooves and chew the cud may be eaten. So sheep and cattle are kosher, but not pigs or foxes.

Acceptable animals must be slaughtered according to a specific ritual called *shehitah*. The slaughterer says a prayer and then draws a razor-sharp knife across the animal's neck to sever the main arteries. Blood may not be eaten, so after most of the blood is drained from the carcass, it is soaked and salted to eliminate any residual blood.

A prohibition in Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26, and Deuteronomy 14:21 says, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk." From this passage, the rabbis derived the rule that meat and dairy products may not be eaten at the same time, or even be prepared together. Further, a household should keep separate dishes, cutlery, and table linens for serving meat and dairy products.

Many Jews follow modified kosher laws, such as avoiding pork and shellfish, but not keeping separate dishes and utensils for meat and dairy.

Muslim dietary laws concerning meat are virtually identical to those of Jews. Acceptable meat is called **halal** (as opposed to forbidden or **haram** meat). In areas without halal butcher shops, Muslims often shop for kosher meat.

These rules were derived from the Bible, mostly the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. As we saw in Chapter 4, anthropologist Mary Douglas thinks that these prohibitions were based on the Bible's categories for things God created. The "unclean" animals are those that do not fit neatly into the Bible's categories.

Enlightenment, which were moral rules that any reasonable person could discover. Many of the 613 mitzvot were seen as obsolete in Reform Judaism. God wants us to tell the truth, be honest in our business dealings, help the poor, and be concerned about social justice. However, whatever purpose had been served by, for example, the rule against *shatnes* – wearing clothing made of two materials – that rule is now obsolete. So the ethics of Reform Judaism looked much like the ethics of other religious groups influenced by the Enlightenment. Central was an emphasis on social justice. Instead of worrying about observing 613 rules, Reform Jews had a simpler ethics captured in the ancient