

Name of Religion: Judaism

God(s): Yahweh (from the Tetragrammaton, YHVH)

Note: God is conceived of as a being that transcends this world; language, however, is of this world—a human construction that reflects the lives, thoughts, and biases of those who use it. Traditional Jews refrain from using the actual scriptural names of God when not involved in religious activity; during casual conversation God is usually referred to as [Hashem](#) (literally, the Name) or Adonai (Lord).

Number of adherents: There are about 13-14 million Jews in the world. About 80% of them live in Israel and the United States.

Although Judaism is older than Christianity and Islam, it is not considered a “world religion” or one of the four major religions of the world by population.

[Christianity (31.5%), Islam (23.2%), Hindus (15%), and Buddhism (7.1%), make up the four major religions of the world by percentage of population.]

Date of Origin: Judaism is the oldest (first major) **monotheistic** religion in the world and was founded over 3500 years ago in the Middle East. The life of Abraham is generally dated to around 2000-1700 BCE. Dates in this range are therefore the most commonly given for when Judaism was founded.

Founder: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, known as the Patriarchs, are both the physical and spiritual ancestors of Judaism. The history of Judaism begins with Abraham, who came to believe in one Supreme Being, his son Isaac, Isaac's son Jacob, later called Israel, and Jacob's 12 sons who founded the twelve tribes of Israel. They founded the religion now known as Judaism, and their descendants are the Jewish people.

Sacred scripture: **Torah** or *Tanach* (Hebrew bible). The Torah is the center of the Jewish faith (tells the story of the Jews and describes the Jewish Laws.) It is the axis around which the whole of Judaism revolves. If you want to know the Jewish approach to any issue; if you want to define who the Jewish people are; if you want to taste and smell and feel Judaism – look to the Torah. This collection includes the five books of Moses, eight books of the prophets, and eleven books of the “writings.” These 24 books make up the written law.

“Pentateuch” is the name given to the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). In traditional Judaism, these five books are considered a faithful and exact record of the word of G-d to His greatest prophet, Moses. These books describe the creation of the world, the main events of the first 2000 years of history, the origins of the family which was to become the Jewish people, our exile and slavery in Egypt, redemption, the giving of the “Torah” at Mt. Sinai and some very limited details of the 613 mitzvot which the Jews were commanded to observe.

Central works: The **Talmud** is one of the central works of the Jewish people. The rabbinic teachings of the Talmud explain in great detail how the commandments of the Torah are to be carried out.

The Talmud is made up of two separate works: the **Mishnah**, primarily a compilation of Jewish laws, its 62 divisions provide the background for every subject of Jewish law found in the Torah; and the **Gemara**, the rabbinic commentaries and discussions on the Mishnah.

Background: Judaism traces its heritage to the *covenant* God made with Abraham and his lineage — that God would make them a sacred people and give them a holy land. The primary figures of Israelite culture include the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the greatest prophet, Moses, who received God's law at Mt. Sinai. Judaism is a tradition grounded in the religious, ethical, and social laws as they are articulated in the Torah — the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

Moses is arguably the greatest figure in Judaism other than God. He helped the Israelites out of slavery and leads them for the next 4 decades, until his death just before they enter the Land of Israel (Caanan.) In addition to being a major character in the Torah — spanning the beginning of the Book of Exodus to the end of the book of Deuteronomy — Moses is traditionally regarded as its author, or at least transcriber. Hence the Torah's alternate name: the Five Books of Moses.

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, there are more legends about Moses than about any other biblical figure. A cycle of legends as been woven around nearly every trait of his character and every event of his life.

Main belief(s):

Jews believe that there is a single **God** who not only created the universe, but with whom every Jew can have an individual and personal relationship. They believe that **God** continues to work in the world, affecting everything that people do. The Jewish relationship with **God** is a covenant relationship.

Jewish eschatology holds that the coming of the Messiah will be associated with a specific series of events that have not yet occurred, including the return of Jews to their homeland and the rebuilding of The Temple, a Messianic Age of peace and understanding during which "the knowledge of God" fills the earth." [And since Jews believe that none of these events occurred during the lifetime of Jesus (nor have they occurred afterwards), he was not the Messiah.]

Judaism has no dogma, no formal set of beliefs that one must hold to be a Jew. In Judaism, actions are far more important than beliefs, although there is certainly a place for belief within Judaism.

13 Principles of Faith: The closest that anyone has ever come to creating a widely-accepted list of Jewish beliefs is [Rambam](#)'s thirteen principles of faith. These principles, which Rambam thought were the minimum requirements of Jewish belief, are:

1. [G-d](#) exists
2. G-d is one and unique
3. G-d is incorporeal
4. G-d is eternal
5. [Prayer](#) is to be directed to G-d alone and to no other
6. The words of the [prophets](#) are true
7. [Moses](#)' prophecies are true, and Moses was the greatest of the prophets
8. The [Written Torah](#) (first 5 books of the Bible) and [Oral Torah](#) (teachings now contained in the [Talmud](#) and other writings) were given to Moses

9. There will be no other Torah
10. G-d knows the thoughts and deeds of men
11. G-d will reward the good and punish the wicked
12. The [Messiah](#) will come
13. The [dead](#) will be [resurrected](#)

Main principles:

Jews believe that there is a single God who not only created the universe, but with whom every Jew can have an individual and personal relationship. They believe that God continues to work in the world, affecting everything that people do.

The Jewish relationship with God is a covenant relationship. In exchange for the many good deeds that God has done and continues to do for the Jewish People...

- The Jews keep God's laws
- The Jews seek to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives.

Almost everything a Jewish person does can become an act of worship. Because Jews have made a bargain with God to keep his laws, keeping that bargain and doing things in the way that pleases God is an act of worship. A religious Jew tries to bring holiness into everything they do, by doing it as an act that praises God, and honors everything God has done.

You should know:

- Judaism is the original of the three Abrahamic faiths, which also include Christianity and Islam.
- Jewish worship is centered in **synagogues**, which completely replaced the Second Temple after its destruction in 70 C.E.
- Jewish religious leaders are called **rabbis**, who oversee the many rituals and ceremonies essential to Jewish religious practice.
- The **Sabbath** (the Jewish Holy Day) begins at nightfall on Friday and lasts until nightfall on Saturday.
- Jews believe that a Jew is someone who is the child of a Jewish mother; although some groups also accept children of Jewish fathers as Jewish. A Jew traditionally can't lose the technical 'status' of being a Jew by adopting another faith, but they do lose the religious element of their Jewish identity. Someone who isn't born a Jew can convert to Judaism, but it is not easy to do so.

Holidays/Traditions/Festivals:

Shabbat begins at sundown each Friday and lasts until dark on Saturday. There is a special Sabbath meal which includes special foods, songs and readings and prayers. Families hold this ceremony together, beginning with the blessing of Shabbat candles, wine and bread (challah).

Bris - Judaism is very much a family faith and the ceremonies start early, when a Jewish boy baby is circumcised at eight days old, following the instructions that God gave to Abraham around 4,000 years ago.

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year festival which usually takes place in September or October.

Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement during which Jewish people fast, pray, and atone for their sins, asking God for forgiveness. This happens ten days after Rosh Hashanah.

Passover or Pesach is in the Spring and marks the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, the giving of the ten commandments and the journey to Israel.

Hanukkah is the festival of lights. It is held in late November or December. When the temple was rededicated after a period of persecution, the eternal light was rekindled but there was only enough oil for a few days. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days, until more oil could be found. The Menorah, a candelabra with eight candles representing the eight days, plus an additional candle to light the others, is a central focus for prayers said during the nights of Hanukkah.

Bar mitzvah and Bat mitzvah ceremonies mark a child's thirteenth birthday. The first act of adulthood is reading from the Torah scroll during services.