

Judaism



Judaism is the religion of the more than 14 million Jews throughout the world. Judaism was the first major religion to teach the existence of only one God. The basic laws and teachings of Judaism come from the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

Judaism teaches that a person serves God by studying the Torah and living by its teachings. Orthodox Jews closely observe the laws of the Torah.

Conservative and Reform Jews interpret the Torah less strictly and literally.

The Star of David (shown above), also called the Shield of David, is the universal symbol of Judaism. The emblem refers to King David, who ruled the kingdom of Israel from about 1000–962 B.C.

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RESEARCH WEB LINKS Go online for more on Judaism.

Ritual ►

Major events in a Jew's life are marked by special rites and ceremonies. When Jewish children reach the age of 12 (girls) or 13 (boys), for example, they enter the adult religious community. The event is marked in the synagogue with a ceremony called a bar mitzvah for a boy and a bat mitzvah for a girl, shown here.



▲ Worship Practices

The synagogue is the Jewish house of worship and the center of Jewish community life. Services in the synagogue are usually conducted by a rabbi, the congregation's teacher and spiritual leader. Many Jews make the pilgrimage to the Western Wall, shown here. The sacred structure, built in the second century B.C., formed the western wall of the courtyard of the Second Temple of Jerusalem. The Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70.



▼ Celebration

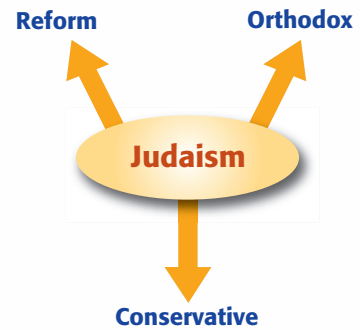
Jews celebrate a number of holidays that honor their history as well as God. Pictured here are Jews celebrating the holiday of Purim. Purim is a festival honoring the survival of the Jews who, in the fifth century B.C., were marked for death by their Persian rulers.

Jews celebrate Purim by sending food and gifts. They also dress in costumes and hold carnivals and dances.



Learn More About Judaism

Major Jewish Sects



Yarmulke



Out of respect for God, Jewish men are not supposed to leave their head uncovered. Therefore, many Orthodox and Conservative Jews wear a skullcap known as a yarmulke, or kippah.

The Torah

PRIMARY SOURCE

During a synagogue service, the Torah scroll is lifted, while the congregation declares: "This is the Law which Moses set before the children of Israel." The following verse from the Torah makes clear Moses's law regarding belief in one God:

Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

Deuteronomy 6:4



Chapter Connection

For a historical examination of Judaism, as well as the development of the Kingdom of Israel, see pages 77–80 of Chapter 3.