

Judaism

Judaism is the religion of the more than 13 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.

According to the Bible, God gave laws of human conduct to the Hebrew leader Moses as he was leading the Jews out of slavery in Egypt in about 1300 or 1200 B.C. These laws are known as the Ten Commandments.

Prophets—religious teachers who interpreted the will of God—constantly urged the Jews to worship God and to live moral lives in accordance with God's laws. This emphasis on right conduct and the worship of one God is called ethical monotheism. It is a Hebrew idea that has deeply influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.



Celebration

Jews celebrate a number of holidays that honor their history as well as their 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.

The story—found in the Book of Esther in the Hebrew Bible—describes how Esther, the Jewish queen of Persia, convinced the Persian king to spare her people. Jews celebrate Purim by sending food and gifts to friends, neighbors, and the poor. In addition, they dress in costumes and hold carnivals and dances.

Ritual

Some Jews follow strict dietary laws based on passages from the Hebrew Bible. These laws have established what is kosher, or acceptable, for Jews to eat. Kosher laws forbid the eating of animals considered unclean. These animals include pigs and shellfish.

The preparation of food is a significant part of kosher law. Animals must be killed in a certain way—a single cut across the neck made with a knife absent of nicks. This is intended to kill the animal as quickly and painlessly as possible. Before the meat is cooked, it must be drained of its blood.

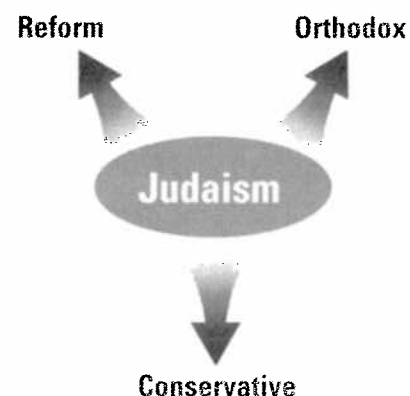
There are additional kosher laws that determine everything from the preparation of food to what foods may not be eaten together. Shown here, a rabbi inspects a kitchen in the United States to ensure that it follows kosher guidelines.



Worship

Several women worship at the Western Wall—a place of prayer and pilgrimage held sacred to the Jewish people. The ancient structure formed the western wall of the courtyard of the Second Temple of Jerusalem. The Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70. The wall, which dates back to the second century B.C., measures about 160 feet long and about 60 feet high. Located in Jerusalem, it is also known as the Wailing Wall. This term was coined by European travelers who witnessed some Jews loudly mourning the destruction of the temple.

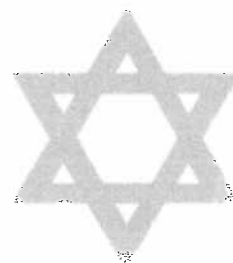
Major Jewish Sects



Chapter Connection

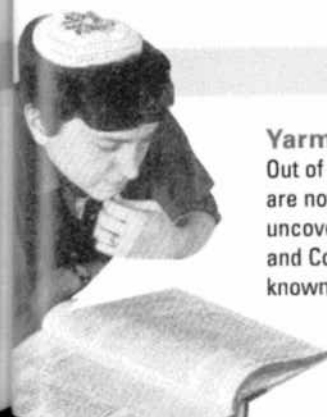
For an examination of the impact that Judaism has had on the development of democratic ideas, see pages 12–13 of the Prologue: “The Rise of Democratic Ideas.”

ICONS, TEXTS & SYMBOLS



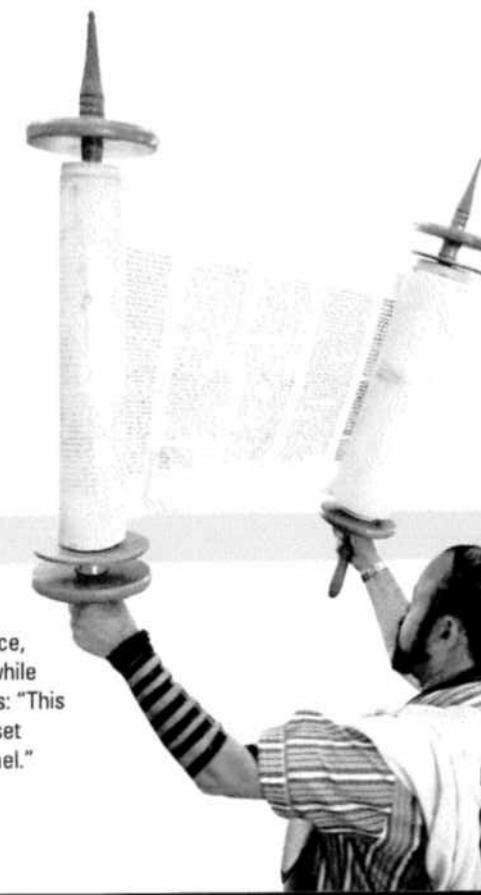
The Star of David

The Star of David, 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.



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 Scroll

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.”