

Judaism, Origin, Evolution, Core Beliefs, Sacred Texts, Commandments

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Judaism is **one of the oldest living religions in the world**, with a history of nearly 4,000 years. It is regarded as the earliest of the **Abrahamic religions**, influencing Christianity and Islam. It is a **monotheistic religion**, based on the belief in one supreme God who revealed himself through prophets such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Solomon.

Origin and Evolution of Judaism

- Judaism began nearly **4,000 years ago** in the Middle East with the Hebrew people, making it one of the oldest monotheistic religions.
- Its origin is linked to **Abraham**, who is regarded as the founder of Judaism because he introduced the idea of **one God (monotheism)** at a time when most societies believed in many gods.
- God made a special agreement with Abraham called the **Covenant**, promising that his descendants would become a great nation and live in the **Promised Land**.
- Abraham's son **Isaac** and grandson **Jacob (Israel)** continued this tradition, and their descendants came to be known as the **Israelites**.

- A major turning point was the **Exodus**, led by **Moses**, who freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.
- At **Mount Sinai**, Moses received the **Ten Commandments**, which became the foundation of Jewish laws, ethics, and religious practices.
- The Israelites later settled in **Canaan** and established a kingdom under **King David**, followed by **King Solomon**, who built the **First Temple in Jerusalem**.
- Over time, invasions by the **Assyrians, Babylonians, and Romans** led to the destruction of temples and forced Jews to disperse across different regions, known as the **Diaspora**.
- During the Diaspora, Judaism evolved from a temple-based religion to a **community-centered faith**, with **synagogues and rabbis** playing a central role.
- Despite persecution and hardships, Jews preserved their religious beliefs, traditions, and cultural identity, making Judaism a **resilient and enduring religion** that continues to exist today.

Core Beliefs of Judaism

Judaism is a monotheistic religion that teaches the existence of one all-powerful God who guides human life and has a special covenant with the Jewish people. It emphasizes moral living, following God's laws, and maintaining a strong sense of community, while looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Key Beliefs of Judaism:

- **Belief in One God:** Jews believe in a single, all-powerful God who created the universe and guides human history.
- **Covenant with God:** God has a special agreement with the Jewish people, giving them responsibilities and promising to protect them.
- **Importance of the Torah:** The Torah, including the Ten Commandments, contains God's laws and teachings that guide daily life.
- **Ethical Living:** Jews are expected to act morally, do good deeds, help others, and follow God's commandments.
- **Prophets and Divine Guidance:** God communicates with humans through prophets, who teach and guide people according to God's will.
- **Belief in the Messiah:** Most Jews believe that a future Messiah will come to bring peace, justice, and restore the world.
- **Community and Worship:** Jews worship in synagogues, observe holy days, and maintain traditions that strengthen their identity and faith.

Sacred Texts of Judaism

Judaism has a rich collection of sacred texts that guide religious beliefs, ethical practices, and daily life. The texts are considered both a spiritual and legal foundation for Jewish communities, helping preserve traditions and teachings across generations. Main Sacred Texts:

- **Torah:** The most important Jewish text, also called the Pentateuch, contains the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. It includes laws, moral guidance, and the history of the Jewish people from creation to the death of Moses. The Torah is read regularly in synagogues from scrolls kept in the holy ark.
- **Tanakh (Hebrew Bible):** This is the complete Hebrew Bible, consisting of three parts:

- **Torah (Law)** – as described above.
- **Nevi'im (Prophets)** – writings of the prophets that guide Jews in moral, spiritual, and social matters.
- **Ketuvim (Writings)** – includes poetry, history, philosophy, and songs, such as Psalms, Proverbs, and Job.
- **Talmud:** A key text of Rabbinic Judaism, the Talmud records discussions and interpretations of Jewish law by rabbis. It has two parts Mishnah (written collection of oral laws) and Gemara (commentary on the Mishnah, explaining and expanding the laws)
- **Other Texts:** Later writings, such as the Mishneh Torah and Shulchan Aruch, provide detailed guidance on daily life and law. Works by philosophers like Maimonides, including the 13 Articles of Faith, further explain Jewish beliefs.

Together, these texts form the foundation of Judaism, shaping religious practice, ethical behavior, and community life for Jewish people worldwide.

The Ten Commandments of Judaism

The Ten Commandments are central ethical laws in Judaism. They include principles such as:

- Worship only one God and avoid idol worship.
- Do not misuse the name of God.
- Observe the Sabbath as a holy day.
- Respect parents and elders.
- Avoid immoral acts such as murder, theft, adultery, and false testimony.
- Do not covet the possessions of others.

These commandments form the moral and legal foundation of Jewish life.

Judaism Religious Practices and Rituals

Judaism emphasizes daily practice along with belief. Important practices include:

- Observance of Shabbat, a weekly day of rest from Friday evening to Saturday evening.
- Worship in synagogues, led by spiritual leaders known as rabbis.
- Observance of dietary laws (Kashrut), regulating permissible food.
- Life-cycle rituals such as circumcision, coming-of-age ceremonies, marriage, and mourning rites.

Judaism Festivals and Holy Days

Jewish festivals commemorate historical events and spiritual themes. Major festivals include:

- Passover, which celebrates the liberation of Israelites from Egypt.
- Rosh Hashanah, marking the beginning of the Jewish year.
- Yom Kippur, the holiest day, focused on repentance and fasting.
- Hanukkah, celebrating the rededication of the Temple.

Sects (Denominations) within Judaism

Judaism has diversified into several sects due to differences in interpretation.

Major sects include:

- **Orthodox Judaism:** Orthodox Jews strictly follow traditional laws (Halakhah) and believe that the Torah is the unchangeable word of God.
- **Reform Judaism:** Reform Judaism emphasizes ethical values over strict rituals and allows adaptation to modern society.
- **Conservative Judaism:** This sect takes a middle path, preserving traditions while allowing gradual change through interpretation.
- **Reconstructionist Judaism:** This views Judaism as an evolving civilization and allows flexibility in beliefs and practices.
- **Humanistic Judaism:** This emphasizes Jewish culture and history without focusing on belief in God.

Judaism in the Modern World

Today, Judaism is practiced by millions of people worldwide, primarily in Israel and the United States. The establishment of Israel in 1948 marked a significant moment in Jewish history, providing a homeland after centuries of diaspora.

Modern Judaism faces challenges such as assimilation, identity preservation, and geopolitical conflicts, but it continues to evolve while maintaining its core traditions.

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