

Judaism is the oldest of the world's four biggest monotheistic religions (religions with only one god). It's also the smallest, with only about 12 million followers around the world.

Jewish history begins with the covenant established between God and Abraham around 1812 BC (over **3,800** years ago), during the Bronze Age, in the Middle East.

The Torah (Jewish Law), the primary document of Judaism, was given to the Jews by the Prophet Moses (Moshe) about **3,300** years ago.

The Jewish calendar starts with the day when Adam and Eve were created (the Sixth Day of Creation). This year (2010) is **5770** on the Jewish Calendar. It starts with Rosh HaShanah, the two day Jewish New Year. From September 2010, the Jewish Calendar will be 5771.

There are large Jewish populations in Israel and the U.S.

Where did Judaism originate from?

Judaism originated in Israel around 4000 years ago.

What do Jews believe?

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.

Who is the founder of Judaism?

Jewish history begins with the covenant established between God and **Abraham** around 1812 BC, during the Bronze Age, in the Middle East. Abraham is considered as the father of the family of Jews.

Moses, is also an important figure as he gave the Jews the Torah around 1250 B.C. The Torah contains the laws of God.

Who is Abraham?

Abraham is the father of the Jewish people. Jews see Abraham as a symbol of trusting and obeying God. Abraham is also important to followers of **Christianity** and of **Islam**.

The story of Abraham is told in the Book of Genesis (the first book of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles) in chapters 12-25.

Who is Moses?

Moses is the leader who freed them from slavery in Egypt. Moses protected the Jews from the wrath of God, and negotiated with God on their behalf.

What is the Symbol of Judaism?

The symbol or emblem of the Jewish people is the Magen David (Shield of David), also known as the Star of David.

What is a Menorah?

The Menorah is one of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith. It is a candelabrum with seven candle holders displayed in Jewish synagogues. It symbolises the burning bush as seen by Moses on Mount Sinai. The two most common menorahs have seven and nine candle-holders. The term *hanukiah* or *chanukiah*, refers to the nine-candled holder used during the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.



What is a Mezuzah?

A mezuzah is found on doorposts in Jewish homes. It is a little case, containing a tiny scroll. The writing on the scroll is from the bible. It is in Hebrew and is called the Shema. It says that Jewish people should love God and keep his rules.

Where do Jews worship?

Jews worship in **Synagogues**. Men and women usually sit separately in the Synagogues

Men are required to cover their heads. In most cases worship takes place in Hebrew.

What are the spiritual leaders called?

The Jewish spiritual leaders are called Rabbis. Unlike leaders in many other faiths, a rabbi is not a priest and has no special religious status.

What is the Jewish Holy Book called?

The most holy Jewish book is the *Torah* (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible). Others include Judaism's oral tradition, the written form of which is known as the Talmud.

The Torah (or teachings) contains the five books revealed to Moses by God on Mount Sinai.

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy

The *Torah* is stored inside the Ark.

No one is allowed to touch the Torah, so a special pointer called a *yad* is used to follow words when reading it

What is the most important day of the week for Jews?

The most important day of the week is the Sabbath (Shabbat), which is a day made holy by refraining from weekday work.

When does the Sabbath start and end?

The Jewish holy day, or Sabbath, starts at sunset on Friday and continues until sunset on Saturday. During the Sabbath,

observant Jews will do nothing that might be counted as work. Among the things that they can't do are driving and cooking.

What happens on the Shabbat in a Jewish family?

At the beginning of Shabbat Jewish families share a meal. They eat special bread called hallah. On the Sabbath, Jews attend services at the synagogue, often led by a Rabbi.

What is a bar mitzvah and a bat mitzvah?

They are both special ceremonies where Jewish boys (aged 13) and girls (aged 12) can become adults in the eyes of the Jewish religion.

Bar mitzvah is for boys and means Son of the Commandment.

Bat mitzvah is for girls and means Daughter of the Commandment.

What is Kosher food?

Kosher foods are those that conform to Jewish law. This means no mixing of dairy and meat, no pork or pork products and no shell fish.

Meat

The animal from which the meat is taken must have been slaughtered in accordance with prescribed Jewish ritual. Jews cannot eat meat from any animal which does not both chew its cud (food brought up into the mouth by an animal from its first stomach to be chewed again) and has a split hoof; animals such as rabbit or hare, pig, horse, dog or cat are therefore prohibited.

Fish

Jews may eat fish that have both fins and scales that are detachable from the skin.

What and when are the main Jewish Festivals?

Passover

Passover (Pesach in Hebrew) is celebrated to commemorate the liberation of the Children of Israel who were led out of slavery in Egypt by Moses.

It is a major eight day festival. A highlight is the Seder meal held in each family's home at the beginning of the festival, when the story of their deliverance is recounted as narrated in the Haggadah (the Telling, the Story). Matzah (unleavened bread) is eaten throughout the festival, as are other foods that contain no leaven. There is a great spring cleaning in the home before the festival to ensure that no trace of leaven is left in the home during Pesach.

Rosh Hashanah - Jewish New Year

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year festival and commemorates the creation of the world.

This festival marks the Jewish New Year and begins with ten days of repentance and self examination, during which time God sits in judgement on every person. The festival is also known as the Day of Judgement, the Day of the Sounding of the Shofar, and the Day of Remembrance.

Over the two days of Rosh Hashanah, there are special services at the synagogue. A musical instrument, called a shofar, is blown. It makes a loud piercing sound like a trumpet and reminds Jews of God's great power.

People eat slices of apple dipped in honey. This is a way of wishing each other a sweet and happy New Year.

Happy New Year - 'Leshanah Tovah Tikatevy'

Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement

Yom Kippur, the most sacred and solemn day of the Jewish year, brings the Days of Repentance to a close.

As well as fasting for 25 hours, Jews spend the day in prayer, asking for forgiveness and resolving to behave better in the future.

Sukkot / Sukkoth

Sukkot commemorates the years that the Jews spent in the desert on their way to the Promised Land. Some lived in tents whilst others built huts out of leaves and branches. These huts were called sukkot.

During the festival, some Jews build their own sukkah in the garden or at the synagogue. Jews eat their meals in the sukkah for the eight or nine days of the festival.

There are rules to making the sukkah. Each sukkah must have at least three walls. The roof of the sukkah must be made of material referred to as *sekhakh*, which means "covering." This 'covering' must be something that grew from the ground and was cut off, such as tree branches, corn stalks, bamboo reeds or sticks. Sekhakh (the roof covering) should be sparse and left loose enough so that the stars can be seen.

There is a special Sukkot service in the synagogue. Everyone holds branches from three trees in their hands and a citron fruit in their right. They walk around the synagogue seven times, waving the branches.

(Sukkah is the singular, Sukkot is the plural)

Hanukkah

Hanukkah or Chanukah is the Jewish Festival of Lights. It dates back to two centuries before the beginning of Christianity. It is an eight day holiday starting on the 25th night of the Jewish month of Kislev

Hanukkah celebrates the miraculous victory over religious persecution in the Holy Land and also commemorates the re-dedication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the miracle of the burning oil. This is where the oil of the menorah (the candelabrum in the temple) miraculously burned for eight days, even though there was only enough oil for one day.

Tisha B'av

Tisha B'av is a solemn occasion because it commemorates a series of tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people over the years

Tu B'Shevat

Tu B'Shevat is the Jewish 'New Year for Trees'. It is one of the four Jewish new years (Rosh Hashanahs).

Yom Hashoah

Yom Hashoah is a day set aside for Jews to remember the Holocaust.