



Judaism key facts

You are expected to know all of the information in this booklet.
You will be assessed on this knowledge.

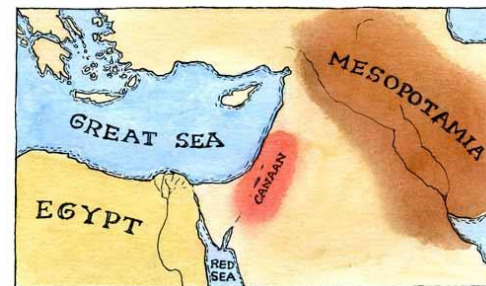
Who are the Jews?

- Judaism is a religion followed by **Jews**.
- Unlike many other religions, people are born into Judaism. Even if someone does not follow the religion, he or she may still be Jewish.
- Jews can be any nationality or colour, and they live in many countries.
- Jews who do not believe in God are called **secular Jews**.
- Most Jews believe that you are Jewish if your mother is Jewish, or if you become Jewish through a long course of study and practice.
- There are several different branches of Judaism. In Britain there are large **Orthodox**, **Reform** and **Liberal** groups.
- Many Jews believe that it is essential to keep the traditional beliefs and the Jewish way of life alive. They try to honour as many of God's 613 laws (**mitzvot**) as possible.
- Reform Jews and Liberal Jews think that Jewish belief and worship can change or modernise over time.

How did Judaism begin?

- Jews believe that Judaism began about 4000 years ago when **Abraham** began to worship **one God** instead of many idols as his father had done.
- God tested Abraham in ten different ways to see how strong his faith was.
- God told Abraham that he had chosen him and his descendants to be a great nation of people who would have a special relationship with Him.
- Abraham entered into a **covenant** (agreement) with God, promising to be faithful and to teach His laws. God said he would bless Abraham and make his family a great nation.
- As part of this contract, God told Abraham that all of the males in his family must be **circumcised**.
- Originally, the descendants of Abraham were known as **Hebrews** or **Israelites**. People began to call them Jews about 2700 years ago because many of them were living in a southern part of Israel called Judah.

The Promised Land



- The Torah (the Jewish holy book) refers to God's offer of a Promised Land for Abraham and his descendants. This is part of the covenant relationship.

Core beliefs

- Judaism is a **monotheistic** religion which means that Jews believe in one God. Judaism is the oldest of the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).
- Jews believe that the name of God is so holy that it should not be spoken or written. They often write **G-d** or use names like **HaShem** (which means 'The Name') or **Adonai** (which means My Lord), or **Melech HaOlam** (which means King of the Universe).
- Jews describe G-d as **eternal**, which means He has no beginning or end.
- Jews believe that G-d is the **creator** of everything.
- Jews believe that G-d is **almighty**, which means that He is all-powerful.
- Jews believe that G-d is **good and loving**.
- Orthodox Jews think that God's laws (in the Holy Book, the Torah) should be followed very closely.
- Reform Jews and Liberal Jews may interpret and apply some of the laws in the Torah differently because they reflect the times in which they were written rather than how G-d wants people to live now.
- Jews try to follow the 613 **mitzvot** – these are the laws given in the Torah.
- There are many food laws (**kashrut**) in Judaism. Food that is acceptable to eat is called **kosher**, which means fit or correct. Any food that is not kosher is described as **trefah**.

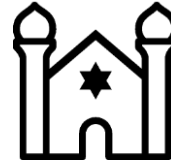
Holy Books / Prayer

- The holiest Jewish book is the **Torah**, a parchment scroll on which the Five Books of Moses are handwritten in Hebrew.
- The Torah teaches Jews about how their religion began and the laws that G-d wants them to follow as part of their special covenant relationship.
- The Torah contains the 613 laws (**mitzvot**) that Jews must follow. This includes the **Ten Commandments**.
- The person reading from the Torah uses a pointing stick with a hand on it. This is called a **Yad**. It is used so that no fingers can damage the holy scroll and because it would be inappropriate to touch the holy scroll with a finger.
- **Prayer books** are also important Jewish holy books. There are different prayer books for **Shabbat** and the **High Holy Days**.
- One of the most important prayers in Judaism is called the **Shema** (Hebrew for 'Hear'). In the Shema, Jews says that they believe in one G-d. It is a statement of faith rather than a prayer to G-d.
- The first line of the Shema is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One.'



The synagogue

- A synagogue (also known as **Shul** or **Temple**) is where the traditional practices and forms of worship take place.
- Each synagogue has at least one handwritten copy of the **Torah** on a scroll.
- When the Torah is not being used it is stored in the **Ark** (a special cupboard).
- The service is often led by a **rabbi**,
- In Orthodox synagogues, all the rabbi are men. Some Reform and Liberal synagogues allow women to be rabbis.
- Men and women can only sit together in Reform synagogues.
- Women take part in the services in Reform and Liberal synagogues.



Important stories in Judaism

- **Abraham** thought that his wife (Sarah) was too old to have a baby. Sarah then fell pregnant. She gave birth to a son, **Isaac**. Isaac had twin sons, **Jacob** and **Esau**.
- Jacob had 12 sons of his own. They settled in Egypt. G-d changed Jacob's name to **Israel** and the families of his sons became known as the **Twelve Tribes of Israel**. They were forced to work for the Egyptians as slaves.
- **Moses** was a descendant of Abraham. G-d told Moses to free the Israelites and lead them to the land that G-d had promised them. At first, the Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, so G-d sent **10 plagues** to Egypt. The final plague was an angel of death that killed all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, including Pharaoh's oldest son. After this, he agreed to free the slaves. This is remembered at Passover.
- Moses led them through the desert to the Red Sea, where G-d parted the water to let them cross. The **Israelites** then lived in the desert for 40 years before they finally settled in the **Promised Land**. During this time, G-d gave Moses the **Ten Commandments** – 10 laws that the Israelites had to follow.

Practices in Judaism



- Jewish children become adults at **Bar/Bat Mitzvah**. This means son/daughter of the commandments. After this, they are expected to observe all the Jewish rules (mitzvot) and become adult members of their community.

- Once a week, Jews stop work for the day of **Shabbat**. Shabbat begins at sunset on Friday evening and ends after sundown on Saturday night when there are three stars visible. Many Jews attend services at Shul on Friday and Saturday and Orthodox Jews also study Torah.
- The Torah describes 39 types of action as **work**, and these are all forbidden on Shabbat.

