

Overview of Judaism

Key Person, Date, Location

Judaism traces its origins to Abraham of the Bible, around 2000 BC, and to Moses in the Middle East. There are three main branches of Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform—each with its own beliefs and practices.

Key Writings

The central texts include the Tanakh (Old Testament), especially the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), the Talmud (a detailed explanation of the Tanakh), the teachings of each branch, and the writings of sages such as Maimonides.

Who Is God?

God is understood to be spirit. Orthodox Jews view God as personal, all-powerful, eternal, and compassionate. Other Jewish perspectives describe God as impersonal, unknowable, or defined in abstract terms. Judaism does not affirm the concept of the Trinity.

Who Is Jesus?

Jesus is generally seen either as a false messiah or as a good but martyred Jewish rabbi. Many Jews do not consider Jesus at all. With the exception of Messianic Jews and Hebrew Christians, Judaism does not accept Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, or believe that he rose from the dead. Orthodox Jews believe the true Messiah will restore the Jewish kingdom and eventually rule the earth.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

Some Jewish traditions interpret the Holy Spirit as another name for God's activity on earth. Others describe it as God's love or power, rather than a distinct person.

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How to Be Saved

Views on salvation vary. Some Jews believe that prayer, repentance, and obedience to the law are necessary. Others see salvation as the moral and social improvement of society.

What Happens After Death?

Judaism teaches that there will be a physical resurrection. The obedient will live forever with God, while the unrighteous will suffer. However, some Jews do not believe in a conscious life after death.

Other Facts, Beliefs, or Practices

Jews meet in synagogues on the Sabbath, which begins Friday evening and ends Saturday evening. Male circumcision is a common practice. Judaism observes many holy days and festivals, including Passover, Sukkoth, Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Purim. Jerusalem is considered the holy city.