



# JUDAISM



Judaism is one of the world's major religions. It is the world's 10th largest religion with about 14.5 million followers. It is around 4000 years old and originated in the Middle East.

## Main Beliefs & Key Vocabulary

Jews believe that there is one God who not only created the world, but with whom every Jew can have a personal and individual relationship.

Jewish history begins with the **covenant** which is an agreement or promise between God and Abraham around 1812 BC. **Abraham** is considered the founder of Judaism when he started worshipping one God instead of many. God made a special promise that he would look after Abraham and all his descendants and confirmed this by giving him and his wife a son (Isaac), even though he was 99! As told in the bible story of Genesis 17: 1-7.



**Moses**, a prophet, was given the **Ten Commandments** (10 most important out of the 613 laws (mitzvah)) that God asked the Jewish people to live by as their promise to him. These are found in the first five books from the main holy book, the **Torah**, written in Hebrew. This book is so special that people are not allowed to touch it! It is kept in a safe place called an ark in the Jewish **synagogue**, a place designed for worship.



Above the ark there is the **Ner Tamid**, an ever-burning light which helps remind Jews that God is eternal and always present.



Many Jews will visit the synagogue on **Shabbat**, this is a day of spiritual renewal and rest. It begins at sunset on a Friday and finishing at nightfall on Saturday.



When they pray, Jews wear a prayer shawl, called a **tallit**, around their shoulders or on their head. The shawl has fringes to remind them to keep all of the 613 laws which is in the Torah.

A **mezuzah**, a small container placed on the doorposts of Jewish homes containing the **Shema**, it is a daily reminder of the covenant between Jewish people and God. The Shema is a Jewish prayer affirming belief in one God.



## Rites of Passage

Jews believe in four important stages of life and mark each with a religious ceremony. The four stages are: birth, becoming an adult, marriage and death. We will focus on two of them but there are also other ways to show commitment to God.

One is Mitzvot, **celebrate Mitzvah Day** – 3rd Sunday in November which means doing good and helping others by volunteering in their community. Jewish people believe that doing good in the world is a way of showing commitment to God.



### **Becoming an adult**

When Jewish boys (aged 13) and girls (aged 12) they have a **Bar Mitzvah** (boys) / **Bat Mitzvah** (girls) ceremony. This marks the time when Jews become responsible for their own beliefs, religion and behaviour. This ceremony is usually held at the synagogue and with a family celebration on the first Shabbat after their birthday.



## Festivals

**Passover** – It takes place in March or April and lasts for 8 days/nights. It is a time when Jewish people remember how God brought them out of slavery in Egypt known as the Exodus story. The story tells of how God sent the ten plagues when Pharaoh refused to set his people free. Then how **Moses** then led the Jewish people to safety across the Red Sea. On the night they escaped God asked them to remember this night forever.

Within Judaism there are rules around what should be eaten – **Kashrut**. Keeping these rules is their choice and if they choose to do this it is because they respect God and want to do as He asks.

Food that is allowed by these laws is called **kosher**. A special meal (**Seder Meal**) is created to remind the Jews of the good and bad times in the past. It includes; lamb (shank bone), roasted /hard boiled egg, horseradish, chopped apples and walnuts, green vegetables, bitter herbs / lettuce, each with its own meaning from the Exodus story.

