



Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

DCU Chaplaincy:
An Introduction to World Religions

Judaism



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STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT



Judaism

Jewish people consider themselves the descendants of Abraham and the heirs of the **Torah**, which was the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Both Christianity and Islam have roots in Judaism.


According to Jewish tradition, around 1900 BCE, God revealed Himself to Abraham, the ancestor of Jewish people, who was called to leave his home in Ur and travel to Canaan (later known as Israel, Judea and then Palestine), a land which God promised to give his descendants.

Approximately 450 years later, God rescued the Jews from slavery in Egypt (an event known as **The Exodus**) and led them back to the land of Israel with Moses as their leader. God then made a further covenant with the nation at Mount Sinai. He revealed the Torah, including the Ten Commandments and other rules to live by, thus marking the beginning of Judaism as a structured religion.

Strands of Judaism

There are two main groups within Judaism:

- **Orthodox:** a conservative and originalist group, for whom the Torah remains authoritative on modern life. The practices and beliefs of Orthodox Judaism include daily worship, dietary laws, traditional prayers, regular study of the Torah, the separation of men and women in the synagogue and strict observance of the Sabbath and religious festivals.
- **Progressive or Reform Judaism:** Reform Judaism is the most



liberal Jewish denomination. The central tenets of Judaism, namely God, the Torah and Israel are affirmed, while acknowledging a great diversity in Jewish beliefs and practices. For example, women may become rabbis, illustrating that tradition is tempered by modern understandings.

Place and Style of Worship

The Jewish place of worship is called the **synagogue** where daily prayers can take place. Spiritual leaders are known as Rabbis. The synagogue is also used as a place to study as well as a community centre.

Religious observance also takes place in the home. The Jewish holy day is called the **Sabbath** which begins at sunset every Friday and lasts until sunset the following Saturday. Sabbath is observed by rest, worship and spending the day at home and in the synagogue with the family.

Sacred Text

The Torah comprised of two components: The Written Torah and the Oral Torah. According to Jewish learning and tradition, they were both delivered to Moses at Mount Sinai. The Written Torah is comprised of the Five Books of Moses. The Oral Torah, which appears today in Judaism as the **Mishna** and **Talmud**, is an explanatory commentary on the Written Torah.

The Five Books of Moses (also known as the **Pentateuch**) are also the first five books of the Christian Bible.



Jewish Practices

More traditional Jewish men have beards and wear a skull cap known as a kippah, and some married Orthodox Jewish women cover their hair. Observant traditionalist Jews only eat **Kosher** foods and observe strict dietary requirements and restrictions. For example, they are not allowed to mix milk and meat. There are different levels to which different denominations and different individuals adhere to these restrictions.


Many Jewish homes have a **Mezzuzan** on their door post which they touch on entering or leaving their homes. It is usually a wooden or metal box which contains a parchment on which is written the **Shema**, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." (Deuteronomy 6: 4-9).

Significant Religious Dates and Events

The Jewish Sabbath begins on Friday evening and ends on Saturday evening.

The two major holidays are:

- **Rosh Hashanah**: the Jewish New Year, usually falling in late September or early October. The festival celebrates God's sovereignty over the world. Work is generally not permitted on Rosh Hashanah and much of the day is spent in synagogue, where a ram's horn is sounded to announce the new year.
- **Yom Kippur**: the Day of Atonement. This is the most important Jewish holiday. It is believed that on this day God judges all people and decides their fate for the next year. It is also a time



for reflecting and repairing one's relationship with God. On Yom Kippur, Jews must abstain from all work, food, drink and other pleasures from sundown to darkness (a 25-hour period) and most of the day is spent in the synagogue where special services are conducted from morning to evening.

Visiting a Synagogue

People who are not Jewish usually need to book in advance and bring photo ID with you. You must dress modestly, and men and boys must keep their heads covered. Women and men sit separately. Do not bring any food in to the synagogue. Services are in Hebrew and are conducted by a Rabbi, cantor or elder member of the community. Worship in Ireland broadly follows the Ashkenazi (German) tradition.



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