## JUDAISM

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#### **ISRAELITES**

Abraham was the earliest patriarch, or father-like leader, of the Hebrews. His son, Isaac, and Isaac's son named Jacob, or Israel, followed Abraham. As time passed, Hebrews started referring to themselves as Israelites. Famine caused the Israelites to move to Egypt. Their situation improved at first, but then the Egyptians forced them into slavery. They waited for God to send someone to free them.

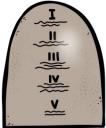
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#### SPREAD

Judaism was no longer limited to the Middle East by the Middle Ages. Jews lived in Europe and Africa too, but often encountered persecution, or poor treatment. They struggled for the right to practice their faith in areas where Christianity was the official religion. Christianity developed from Judaism between the first and second century. It was based on the belief that Jesus of Nazareth, who was Jewish, was the Messiah. Messiah is Hebrew for "anointed one." Both Jews and Christians believed in the idea of God sending them his own chosen leader. They saw the Messiah as a powerful and important person who could bring peace and justice to the world by overcoming suffering and evil. Jews did not think Jesus was the Messiah though. They believe the Messiah is yet to arrive.

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In World War II (1939-1945), the Nazi Party killed millions of European Jews. This mass slaughter was known as the Holocaust. In order to avoid persecution and death, many Jews fled the countries under Nazi control. They settled in Western Europe, North America, South America, and Asia. Thousands of other Jews escaped to their ancestors' homeland. Many Jews moved to the Middle East, but became involved in conflicts over who actually owned Palestine. Arabs who lived there considered the land their home. When the war ended, many world leaders suggested the solution of dividing Palestine into two nations.



In 1948, the State of Israel was formed. It surrounds most of the Palestinian territories, except for the Gaza Strip, a narrow piece of land located on the Mediterranean Sea between Israel and Egypt. Israel's population today is primarily Jewish, while Palestine is mostly made up of gentiles, or non-Jews. Tension between the nations remains, as they fight over the borders that separate them.

#### JUDAISM TODAY

Around I4 million people practice Judaism in the world today, a very small percentage of the world's population. Around 44 percent live in North America, while another 41 percent live in the Middle East and North Africa. About 10 percent of the world's Jews live in Europe. The remaining Jews live in Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

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There is not a central religious leader who unites the people who practice Judaism. Rabbis, or teachers of Jewish law, typically head individual congregations. They lead religious services at Jewish houses of worship, including synagogues and temples. Cantors, religious officials who assist rabbis, are responsible for singing or chanting prayers during services.

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Many Jewish families follow a kosher diet, meaning milk and all other dairy products cannot be cooked or eaten with meat. All meat must be kosher, meaning it is from an animal with a cloven hoof and chew the cud, such as cows and sheep. They should not eat pork, shellfish, or birds of prey.

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There are three major subgroups of Judaism: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative. These different branches are sometimes called movements.

**ORTHODOX:** Members of the Orthodox movement believe in strict obedience to the laws God gave Moses. Most Orthodox services are in Hebrew and men and women are separated in the synagogue. Men typically play a larger role in religious ceremonies. Some Orthodox Jews dress like their ancestors did during 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Men wear dark hats and long, black coats. Married women wear hats, scarves, wigs, or some type of head covering.

**REFORM:** Reform Jews concentrate on the values that religious laws teach. This is more important for them than obeying every rule in the Torah word for word. They believe people should decide for themselves how important certain traditions are. Most reform Jews are open adapting, or changing, parts of their faith to keep up with changing times. They use both English and Hebrew to worship.

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The six-pointed star, or "Star of David," has been used as a Jewish symbol since the Middle Ages. A *mezuzah*, a little case with a tiny scroll with writing from the Bible, is found on the doorposts of many Jewish homes. It is called the *Shema* and is written in Hebrew to remind people to love God and live by his rules. Jewish people kiss the *mezuzah* when they come through the door. The Menorah, a candelabrum, is one of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith.



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The city of Jerusalem is a very holy place for Jewish people because it is where the Temple once stood before it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. One wall remains, called Western Wall, where Jews go to pray. People of other faiths also pray there.

Judaism has survived for thousands of years due to the support of its members. Jews have experienced countless challenges and centuries of persecution, but have remained strong in their faith. This strength is rooted in the belief that one true God decided to make the Jews his chosen people.

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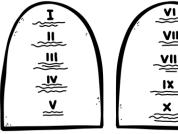
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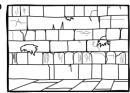
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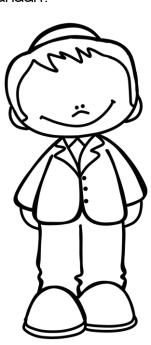
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