

# What are the key beliefs, teachings, and practices of Judaism?

## Key facts

- The origins of Judaism go back about 4000 years, when God made a covenant with Abraham to make him leader of God's chosen people. They were known as Israelites, but later called Jews.
- Jews view Abraham as the first patriarch. His son Isaac was the second patriarch and Isaac's son Jacob the third. Moses is also an important figure for Jews.
- The Temple was the most important place for Jews. Built by Solomon, it was destroyed by the Babylonians, but later rebuilt. The Romans destroyed the Second Temple. One wall remains, known as the Western Wall.
- There are different types of Jews, including Orthodox, Reform and Secular Jews, who believe slightly different things and practise Judaism in different ways.
- The two most important scriptures for Jews are the Torah (part of the Tenakh) and the Talmud (a collection of writings by rabbis).
- Jewish law is known as Mitzvot – a collection of 613 rules and instructions on how Jews should live their lives.
- Jews worship in buildings called synagogues. The most important part of the synagogue is the Ark – a special cupboard where the Torah is kept.
- When Jews pray, they may wear particular items of clothing that have a special meaning: a kippah (head covering), a tallit (shawl) and tefillin (two small boxes strapped to the forehead and arm).
- Jews observe a day of rest each week called the Shabbat or the Sabbath. This is a day of rest on which they are not allowed to do any work.
- On Shabbat, many Jews will go to services at the synagogue. They also enjoy a special meal with family in which certain rituals are performed.

## Key Vocabulary

- Ark** – a cupboard in a synagogue where Torah scrolls are stored.
- Bimah** – the platform from where Torah scrolls are read.
- Covenant** – an agreement between God and people.
- Menorah** – a seven-branched candlestick and a symbol of divine light in the world.
- Messiah** – Anointed one.
- Mezuzah** – a small box attached to doorposts in Jewish homes containing the Shema.
- Mitzvot** – Jewish laws (there are 613 in total).
- Monotheist** – someone that believes in one God.
- Ner tamid** – the light in front of, or above, the Ark.
- Orthodox Jews** – Jews who believe in maintaining the traditional beliefs and practices of Judaism and laws given by God.
- Prophet** – Messenger of God.
- Reform Jews** – Jews who believe that Judaism can change or modernise over time.
- Shabbat** – a day of rest
- Shema** – the most important prayer in Judaism.
- Synagogue** – the Jewish place of worship.
- Talmud** – a collection of teachings from rabbis giving more information about the Torah.
- Tanakh** – the main Jewish scripture.
- Tefillin** – two boxes worn during prayer, which contain the verses from the Torah.
- Torah** – the most important holy text for Jews.
- Yad** – a pointer used to read the Torah in the synagogue.

## Key people

- Abraham** – A man who God made a covenant with that he would have many descendants who would be a great nation.
- Herod** – A Roman governor who built an extension to the Second Temple.
- Isaac** – The son of Abraham and the second patriarch.

**Jacob** – The son of Isaac and the third patriarch.

**Moses** – A man who received the laws including the Ten Commandments from God.

**Solomon** – The king of Israel who built the first Temple in Israel.