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RELEVANT LINKS

FACT SHEET

JUDAISM (YEHUDIM)

Derived from the name, Judah an ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel. Judaism refers to the religion of Yehudim. Also translated and implied by some as meaning 'People of God'.

Judaism originated in Israel/Palestine and is a mono-theistic religion where one god is responsible for creating and governing the universe.

God subsequently revealed himself to the Israelites on Mt Sinai and handed to Moses, via the Torah and the 10 Commandments, a code of how to live their lives. Jews have agreement between themselves and God known as the Covenant, whereby they acknowledge God as the ultimate authority and God acknowledges the Jews as his chosen people. Therefore, Jews must remain faithful to sustain this 'special' relationship.

Jews believe that at the end of time God will send a Messiah (King of the Jews) to restore Jews to sovereignty. Jews also believe that in-depth study and observance of God's commandments could hasten the Messiah's arrival.

In Judaism, the rabbi (teacher) is responsible for instruction in both the written (Torah) and oral (Talmud) teachings. The Torah generally refers to the first five books of Moses but can also mean the entire Old Testament (referred to by Jews as Written Torah, as their scriptures do not include the New Testament).

The Torah used in services are written on parchment scrolls with elaborate calligraphy. These scrolls are kept in the ark (holy cabinet) within the synagogue. The Talmud refers to interpretation and application of the Torah.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN JUDAISM

- 8 days after birth a male child will be publicly circumcised to initiate him into the covenant.
- At age 13 (girls age 12) Jews are considered to be legally mature and take responsibility for observing the Torah.
- These celebrations are known as bar-mitzvah (boys), and bat-mitzvah (girls).
- During the marriage ceremony (kiddushin) there is a call for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and a return of Jews to the holy land

IMPORTANT FESTIVALS & CELEBRATIONS

Shabbat

Is the 7th day according to the Jewish calendar (Fri sunset to Sat sunset) whereby no work is performed and the day is spent in prayer, rest and taking a meal.

Passover (Passach)

Marks the beginning of the harvest and also commemorates the exodus of Israelis from Egypt in the time of the Pharaohs

Pentecost (Shabuoth)

celebrated 50 days after Passover and commemorates Moses receiving the Torah on Mt Sinai.

Rosh Hashanah (New Year)

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)

The holiest day in the Jewish calendar, occurs 10 days after Rosh Hashanah. God forgives those who have truly repented and some Jews fast for up to 25 hours.

Hannukah

Festival of Lights commemorates the re-dedication of the second temple. Hannukah lasts for eight days



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HOLY SITES
Temple Mount (Known by Muslims as Haram Al-Sharif)

An area of 35 acres located in East Jerusalem believed to be the site where God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son. It is also the site of the two Jewish temples destroyed in 587 BCE and 70 CE by the Babylonians and Romans respectively. This site is sacred to Jews who believe that this will be the location for the return of the Messiah, and is where redemption will occur.

Western (Wailing) Wall

Located below the Temple Mount and seen as the holiest site in Judaism. It is part of the original retaining wall for the earlier second Jewish temple. Prayer takes place at the wall and written prayers are also left here between the stones because of the belief that the 'divine' is continually present. The wall measures approximately 50m (160') in length and 20m (60') in height.

Synagogue (bet kneset)

Translates as Place of Assembly, a place for communal prayer, study and meeting. Construction varies widely but there are some features common to all synagogues:

- The ark which houses the Torah is always located on the wall facing Jerusalem and in the presence of an eternal light (to remind people of God's presence).
- Tablets above the ark to represent the 10 commandments.
- The bimah an elevated platform from which the Torah is read.

In Orthodox synagogues men and women worship separately. Since the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) synagogues have become the primary places to express devotion.

BRANCHES OF JUDAISM

There are three main branches of Judaism and within these divisions are many smaller sects:

Orthodox

This is strictest and most observant of the branches with adherence to the dietary and ceremonial laws of Judaism. Orthodox Jews believe that Jewish laws of the Torah are eternal, come from God, and cannot be challenged or changed to suit modern society. Orthodox Jews follow a literal interpretation of the Torah and this was the only form of Judaism prior to the 18th Century. Many Orthodox Jews speak Yiddish as their everyday language and reserve Hebrew for religious services.

Conservative

This group emerged in reaction to the reformist movement of the 19th Century to ensure maintenance of basic traditions while still adopting a modern lifestyle. Services are conducted in Hebrew.

Reform

This is the largest group among Jews and believe that the individual can choose the level of commitment to belief. They are therefore flexible about observing Jewish ceremonies. The synagogue is generally referred to as the 'Temple'. Services are often held in English and highest attendance occurs when commemorating holidays.



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DRESS AND APPEARANCE

The most distinctive form of dress is that worn by the Orthodox Jews. Men wear black suits with top coats and broad brimmed hats. Also prominent is their hair, in particular their side locks which they do not cut but are usually grown long & curled. Orthodox Jewish men also have a beard which may or may not be trimmed, depending on the religious branch he belongs to. Modesty is important among women and long skirts and stockings are worn along with long sleeved tops to cover the arms. Married women wear scarves and in some ultra-orthodox communities married women are also required to cut their hair.

DIETARY LAWS

Jewish people follow the dietary laws of kosher meaning fit or properly prepared according to Jewish law. Most of the kosher laws are set down in the Torah (Leviticus), and Jews may only eat animals who have cloven hooves or ruminant (chew their cud). Animals products from such animals as pigs and rabbits are not eaten nor are shellfish and fish without fins or scales. Dairy products may not be served with meat and must be prepared using separate utensils.

RELEVANT LINKS

www.jewfaq.org/

<http://www.jewfaq.org/judaism.htm>