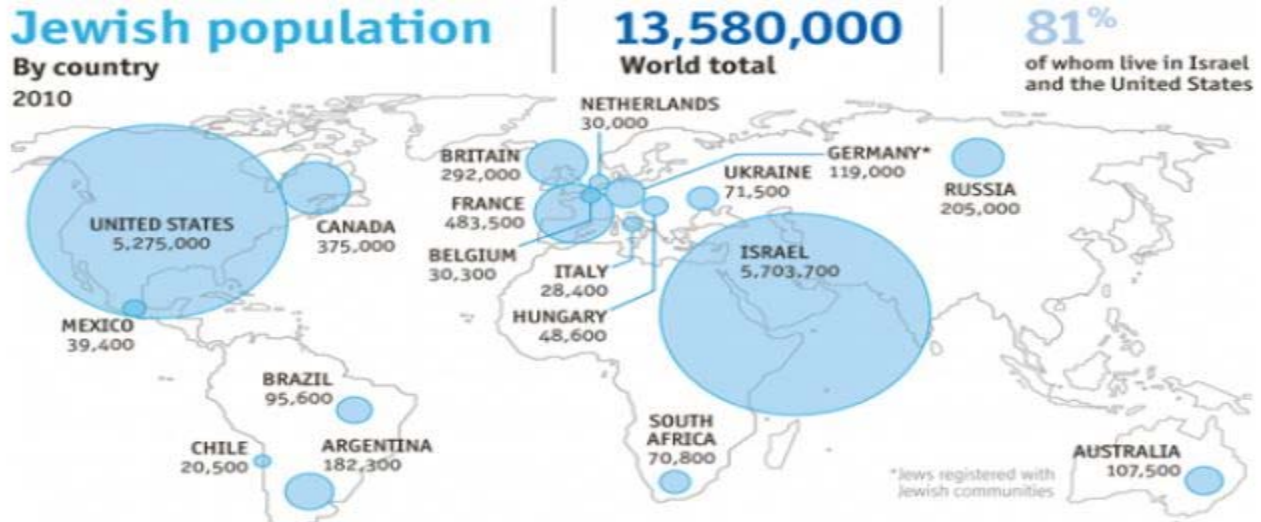


Judaism



Origin/Founder: Abraham, originally from Ur in Mesopotamia, established a covenant with God in exchange for being led to “The Promised Land”, or Canaan, in 2000 BCE.



Canaan is the biblical name for the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, approximately the equivalent of what today comprises the state of Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Israel is considered a holy concept in Judaism, based on the belief that God created the Earth from Jerusalem in the Land of Israel, and He is always closest to this land. Jews believe that this land is where God told the Jewish people to build a society to serve Him, and it is their duty to protect it.

History: Abraham's grandson, Jacob, was the father of the twelve tribes from whom all Jews are considered to be descended from. After many years of drought and famine in Canaan, the Hebrews migrated to Egypt, where they were enslaved. Moses, a Hebrew raised as an Egyptian prince, led the Hebrews out of slavery and back to the Promised Land. Israel had been re-occupied, which led to many ethnic wars, leading the Hebrews to capture Jerusalem, where they established their capitol.



Symbols: The six-pointed Star of David is a common symbol for both Judaism and Israel. Known in Hebrew as a *Magen David* (shield of David), geometrically it is two triangles superimposed on each other, forming the shape of a hexagram. According to the Zohar, a medieval book of Jewish mysticism, the six points of the star represent the six

male *sefirot* (attributes of God), in union with the seventh *sefirah* of the female (the center of the shape).

Tenets: Jews believe that God appointed them to be his “Chosen People” in order to set an example of holiness and ethical behavior for the world. Jews are awaiting the Messianic Era, which means they do not recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah or Savior. Rather, they believe that the promised Messiah has not arrived yet. As a religion, Jews do not actively convert people although they welcome anyone who wishes to become a Jew.

Jews follow a set of dietary laws that dictate what they can or cannot eat and how their food should be prepared; these laws are called kosher. The most common kosher laws are the restrictions on pork and shellfish, since they are seen as unclean foods in the Jewish faith.

Deity: Judaism is the world’s oldest monotheistic religion; they believe in one central, all-powerful God who created and controls the universe. God is also referred to in Jewish texts and scriptures as *Yahweh*, *El-Shaddai*, or *Elohim* in Hebrew.

Afterlife: In Judaism, there is no concentration on the concept of Heaven or Hell for the souls that are awaiting the Messianic era. Jews are encouraged to live a good life following God’s laws in the present, as opposed to worrying what will happen after death.



Scriptures: The *Torah* is the most important of all Jewish writings. The first five books of the Christian Bible’s “Old Testament” make up the Torah. The Torah, also called the Five Books of Moses, contains the basic laws of Judaism and describes the history of the Jews. Jews divide the Hebrew Bible into three parts and call it the *Tanakh*. The three parts are the Torah, which is the first five books; the *Nevi'im*, which are the books of the prophets; and the *Ketuvim*, meaning the Writings, which are other books of history and moral teachings.

Jews believe that Moses brought the Ten Commandments and the Torah down from Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments are special because they were heard by all of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and are believed to teach how to lead a good and moral life.

Jews also believe that there is another part of the Torah called the *Mishnah*, also called the Oral Torah or Oral Law. It explains how to follow the laws written in the 5 books. There is another book, considered to be an explanation of the Mishnah, called the *Gemara*. Together, the Mishna and the Gemara make up the *Talmud*.

Practices: One of the commandments is to keep the Jewish Sabbath, or *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* starts every Friday at sunset and ends on Saturday at nightfall. Many Jews go to their temple or synagogue to pray on *Shabbat* and on the High Holidays. These are the holiest days of the Jewish year, and they include *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) and *Rosh Hoshannah* (the Jewish New Year).



Passover is a Jewish holiday which commemorates the story of Exodus, where Moses liberated the Jews from Egypt and received the Ten Commandments. Hannukah is another Jewish holiday, which celebrates the Maccabees victory over the Greeks who tried to destroy the Second Temple and the miracle of the oil for their menorah lasting eight nights when there was only enough oil for one.

Jewish rites of passage include a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* at the age of 13 to mark a child's passage into adulthood. Jewish marriages are also celebrated with a ceremony at temple, underneath a *chuppah*, which represents the home and life the couple will build together.