

## Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox

Judaism is an ancient monotheistic religion with a rich history and diverse expressions. Jewish identity can also be defined as a people rather than as a religion. In North America, three main branches of Judaism are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism. More info: [My Jewish Learning](#).

**Core Beliefs:** More info: [My Jewish Learning](#).

- **One God:** The central tenet of Judaism is the belief in one, indivisible, and eternal God, the creator of the universe.
- **Covenant:** God established a covenant (agreement) with the Jewish people, promising them a special relationship in exchange for their adherence to God's laws, including bearing witness of God to the world.
- **Torah:** The Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, is considered the word of God and the foundation of Jewish law and tradition.
- **Prophets:** Judaism emphasizes the role of prophets who conveyed God's messages and called for social justice and ethical behavior.
- **Messianic Age:** Some Jews believe in a future Messianic Age of peace and universal redemption.

**Practices and Rituals:**

- **Shabbat:** The observance of Shabbat (Sabbath), a day of rest and spiritual renewal, is central to Jewish life.
- **Dietary Laws:** Jewish dietary laws (kashrut) govern the preparation and consumption of food, prohibiting certain animals and requiring the separation of meat and dairy (particularly for Orthodox Jews).
- **Prayer:** Daily prayers (Shema, Amidah) are recited, often in synagogues.
- **Life Cycle Events:** Significant life events like birth, circumcision (brit milah), Bar/Bat Mitzvah (coming of age), marriage, and death are marked by specific rituals.
- **Holy Days:** Jewish holidays commemorate historical events, such as Passover (celebrating the Exodus from Egypt), Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). More info: [Jewish Holidays](#)

**Places of Worship:**

- **Synagogue:** The primary place of Jewish worship, the synagogue serves as a center for prayer, study, and community gatherings.

**Leadership Structure:**

- **Rabbi:** A rabbi is a Jewish religious leader who provides spiritual guidance, teaches Torah, and performs religious ceremonies.
- **Other Roles:** Other important roles include cantor (chant leader), cantor's assistant, and synagogue president.

**Main Symbols:**

- **Star of David:** A six-pointed star, often used as a symbol of Jewish identity.
- **Menorah:** A seven-branched candelabrum, symbolizing the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days in the ancient Temple.
- **Tallit:** A prayer shawl with fringes, worn during prayer.
- **Tefillin:** Small leather boxes containing scripture verses, worn on the arm and head during morning prayers.