

Three Branches of Judaism

After the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, Judaism could no longer be centered around the Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices. All branches of Judaism today are built on the rituals and practices that replaced Temple-centered religious life. Each branch (sometimes referred to as denomination) includes adherents with varying degrees of observance. The most recent figures show Orthodox Jews as 9% of the US population, Conservative Jews at 17%, and Reform Jews at 37%. Six percent identify with smaller Jewish groups, and 32% of American Jewish people are religiously unaffiliated.* This chart will help you be informed as you pray for the salvation of the Jewish people, and it will help you ask insightful questions and have meaningful discussions with the Jewish people in your life.

*Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021, “Jewish Americans in 2020,” [pewforum.org/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020](https://www.pewforum.org/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020)

Orthodox Judaism

Category	
History	Orthodoxy dates back to the days of the Talmud (second to fifth centuries AD). It was the only form of Jewish practice prior to the eighteenth century, so “Orthodox Judaism” is a recent name used to contrast this branch with the others. Orthodoxy today seeks to preserve traditional Judaism.
Other Terms	Traditional or Torah Judaism Modern Orthodox: Follows traditional Judaism while allowing for involvement with the larger secular culture. Haredi: Also known as “ultra-Orthodox,” though adherents prefer to be known as Haredim (plural), or “tremblers” before God. This is the fastest-growing Jewish group today, mostly due to a high birth rate.
Sub-Groups	Hasidic: Emphasizes joy in worship and mysticism. Various sects based on geographic origin, each led by a <i>rebbe</i> (rabbi) who is revered as a special conduit to God. Litvish: Opposes the mystical teachings of Hasidic Judaism while maintaining a strict adherence to Torah study and observance of the law.
View of Scripture	The Hebrew Bible is also known as the <i>Tanakh</i> or the Old Testament. The Torah was given by God and—as interpreted by the rabbis through the centuries—is the guide to daily life and behavior. The rabbis have ultimate authority as to the meaning of the Torah. The rest of the Hebrew Bible is also from God, but has a lesser degree of inspiration than the Torah. (*An acronym for the Hebrew words T orah, N evi'im, and K etuvim, the three sections of the Hebrew Bible, namely the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings.)
View of God	God is personal and is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and exercises both justice and mercy. The Orthodox Jewish view of God excludes the concept of Trinity (as do the other branches).
View of Sin	Everyone has a good inclination and an evil inclination, but humanity is not sinful by nature. A person commits sin by breaking or failing to fulfill the commandments of the Torah.
View of Salvation	“Salvation” is not a term that Jews generally use except perhaps when referring to God saving Israel from its enemies. However, each branch has its own ideas of what needs correcting in the world and how that happens. A person merits life in the World to Come through repentance and obedience to the Torah.
View of Messiah	The Messiah is a human or superhuman being who is not divine. He will bring all Jewish people back to the Land of Israel, execute judgment, and bring justice and peace to the world.
View of the Afterlife	Jewish people are concerned with life here and now, and view Christians as too concerned with the afterlife and not enough about this life. If pressed, each branch is likely to respond as indicated here. There will be a physical resurrection. The righteous will be forever with God in the World to Come and the unrighteous will not. In reality, not much thought is given to the afterlife; the emphasis is on how to live in the here and now.
Further Reading	Hayim Halevy Donin, <i>To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life</i> (2019). Arnie Singer, <i>The Outsider's Guide To Orthodox Judaism</i> (2008). Joseph Berger, <i>The Pious Ones: The World of Hasidim and Their Battles with America</i> (2014).

Reform And Conservative Judaism

Category	Reform	Conservative
History	Reform Judaism emerged in Germany following emancipation from ghetto life in the late eighteenth century. It sought to modernize Judaism and jettisoned many traditional practices. More recently, Reform practice has swung back to recovering some older traditions.	Conservative Judaism emerged in nineteenth-century Germany as a reaction to the extreme assimilationist tendencies of Reform Judaism. It sought a middle ground, attempting to maintain basic Jewish traditions while adapting to modern life.
Other Terms	Liberal or Progressive Judaism (used especially outside North America).	Masorti Judaism (used especially outside North America).
View of Scripture	It is not divine revelation. It preserves the history, culture, legends, and hopes of the Jewish people. Principles and ethics found in the Prophets are emphasized more than the many laws of the Torah.	Again, it is not divine revelation. It is to be understood through the “collective will” of the Jewish community, which may change. Wide latitude is also allowed for individual interpretation.
View of God	Each person is free to think of God as he or she sees fit, including supernaturalism, humanism, agnosticism, and atheism.	While the concept of God is non-dogmatic and flexible, Conservative Judaism veers closer to traditional ideas than Reform.
View of Sin	Sin—if that term is used at all—refers to the ills of society or to mistreatment of other people.	Individuals' sins are recognized in the form of moral or social actions/failings, or in failing to observe the Torah.
View of Salvation	Salvation is obtained through the betterment of self and society.	Leans toward the Reform view.
View of Messiah	Reform Judaism has jettisoned belief in a personal Messiah. Some envision a utopian era brought about through human effort, which might be called a “messianic age.”	Leans to the Reform view, with room for some variances.
View of the Afterlife	Most have no concept of personal life after death. Common views include: living on through one's accomplishments, descendants, and/or the memories of others. Eastern concepts of souls merging into one great impersonal life force. Noncommittal, as in “Who knows? We'll find out when it happens.”	Leans to Reform views, but less likely to be influenced by Eastern thought.
Further Reading	Mark Washofsky, <i>Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice</i> (2010). Dana Evan Kaplan, <i>American Reform Judaism: An Introduction</i> (2003).	Arnold M. Eisen, <i>Conservative Judaism Today and Tomorrow</i> (2015). Michael R. Cohen, <i>The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement</i> (2012). Neil Gillman, <i>Conservative Judaism: The New Century</i> (1993).

Offshoot Movements

Reconstructionist Judaism, begun by Mordecai Kaplan in the early twentieth century, was born out of Conservative Judaism. It utilizes meaningful rituals and lessons from Israel's history and Scriptures, while separating itself from a traditional belief in God. Though small in numbers, Reconstructionist Judaism is notable for initiating the *bat mitzva* for girls, now widely practiced.

Renewal Judaism began in the 1960s and '70s in order to restore more spirituality to Judaism. It incorporates traditional and nontraditional paths, including mysticism, Hasidic practices, and meditation.