Your notes

GCSE Religious Studies: revision notes

Judaism: beliefs and teachings

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The nature of God

- Jews believe God is one, as declared in the **Shema** (Deuteronomy 6:4). God is the creator, the law-giver and the judge, and is loving and merciful. Many Jews write 'G-d' out of respect for God's name.
- The **Shekhinah** is God's divine presence on Earth, as in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

Life after death and the Messiah

- Judaism focuses more on how to live this life than on the afterlife, and beliefs vary. Many Jews believe in judgement and in Gan Eden (paradise); some speak of Sheol as a place of waiting; some believe the dead will be resurrected when the **Messiah** comes.
- The **Messiah** ('anointed one') will be a descendant of King David who will bring peace, rebuild the Temple and gather the Jewish people in Israel. Orthodox Jews generally expect a personal **Messiah**; many Reform Jews think of a Messianic age that people help to bring about. Jews do not believe Jesus was the **Messiah**.

The covenants

- The **covenant** with Abraham: God promised him land, many descendants and a special relationship. Circumcision (**brit milah**) is its sign (Genesis 17).
- The **covenant** at Sinai: God gave Moses the **Torah**, including the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). The Jewish people became God's chosen people, with responsibilities to keep his laws.

Mitzvot and moral principles

- The **Torah** contains 613 **mitzvot** (commandments): 248 positive and 365 negative. Some concern the relationship with God; others concern how to treat people.

- **Pikuach nefesh**: saving a life overrides almost all other laws, including the laws of Shabbat.
- Other key ideas: free will, justice (tzedek), charity (tzedakah) and healing the world (**tikkun olam**).

Your notes

Key terms

Shema	The Jewish declaration that God is one.
Shekhinah	The divine presence of God on Earth.
Messiah	'Anointed one': a future leader who will bring peace.
Covenant	An agreement between God and people.
Torah	The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, containing God's laws.
Mitzvot	The commandments in the Torah.
Pikuach nefesh	The principle that saving a life overrides most other laws.
Tikkun olam	Healing or repairing the world.
Brit milah	The circumcision of baby boys, the sign of the covenant with Abraham.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What does the Shema declare?
2. What is the Shekhinah?
3. How many mitzvot are in the Torah?
4. What is pikuach nefesh?
5. What is a covenant?
6. What sign of the covenant with Abraham is still practised?
7. What did God give Moses at Sinai?
8. What will the Messiah do, according to Jewish belief?

Answers

1. That God is one
2. The divine presence of God on Earth
3. 613
4. The principle that saving a life overrides most other laws
5. An agreement between God and people
6. Circumcision (brit milah)
7. The Torah, including the Ten Commandments
8. Bring peace and rebuild the Temple

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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