Your notes

GCSE Religious Studies: revision notes

Judaism: practices

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The synagogue

- The **synagogue** is a place of prayer, study and community. The Ark (Aron Hakodesh) holds the Torah scrolls. The ever-burning light (ner tamid) hangs in front of it. The Torah is read from the **bimah**, a raised platform.
- In Orthodox **synagogues**, men and women sit separately; in Reform **synagogues**, they usually sit together.

Worship and prayer

- Services are held three times a day. In Orthodox Judaism, some prayers need a **minyan** of ten adult men. Prayers include the Shema and the Amidah (the standing prayer).
- Many Jewish men wear a kippah (skullcap), a tallit (prayer shawl) and tefillin (small boxes containing scripture, worn on the arm and head).

Shabbat

- **Shabbat** runs from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday. It is a day of rest, remembering that God rested after creation.
- It begins with lighting candles, the Kiddush blessing over wine, and challah bread. Orthodox Jews avoid 39 categories of work, such as lighting a fire. It ends with the Havdalah ceremony.

Rituals

- Brit milah: circumcision of a baby boy at eight days old. **Bar mitzvah** (boys at 13) and bat mitzvah (girls at 12, or 13 in many Reform communities) mark religious adulthood.
- Weddings take place under a chuppah (canopy), and a glass is broken. Mourners sit shiva for seven days and say the Kaddish prayer.

Food laws and festivals

- Kashrut (**kosher** food laws): only animals that chew the cud and have split hooves, and fish with fins and scales, may be eaten; meat and dairy must not be mixed; animals are slaughtered by shechitah. Forbidden food is treif.
- Rosh Hashanah is the new year, when the shofar (ram's horn) is blown. **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement, is a day of fasting and repentance. **Pesach** (Passover) remembers the escape from Egypt with a Seder meal and matzah. Sukkot is a harvest festival, when families eat in a sukkah (a temporary hut).

Key terms

Synagogue	A Jewish place of prayer, study and community.
Ark	The cupboard in a synagogue that holds the Torah scrolls.
Bimah	The raised platform from which the Torah is read.
Minyan	The ten adults needed for some prayers.
Shabbat	The Jewish day of rest, from Friday sunset to Saturday nightfall.
Kosher	Food that is allowed under Jewish law.
Bar mitzvah	The ceremony marking a boy's religious adulthood at 13.
Yom Kippur	The Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and repentance.
Pesach	Passover, remembering the escape from slavery in Egypt.

Quick questions

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

1. What is kept in the Ark in a synagogue?
2. What is the bimah?
3. What is the ner tamid?
4. When does Shabbat begin and end?
5. What is a minyan?
6. At what age is a boy's bar mitzvah?
7. When is a Jewish baby boy circumcised?
8. What is Yom Kippur?

Answers

1. The Torah scrolls
2. A raised platform where the Torah is read
3. The ever-burning light in a synagogue
4. From sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday
5. The group of ten needed for some prayers
6. 13
7. At eight days old

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8. The Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and repentance

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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