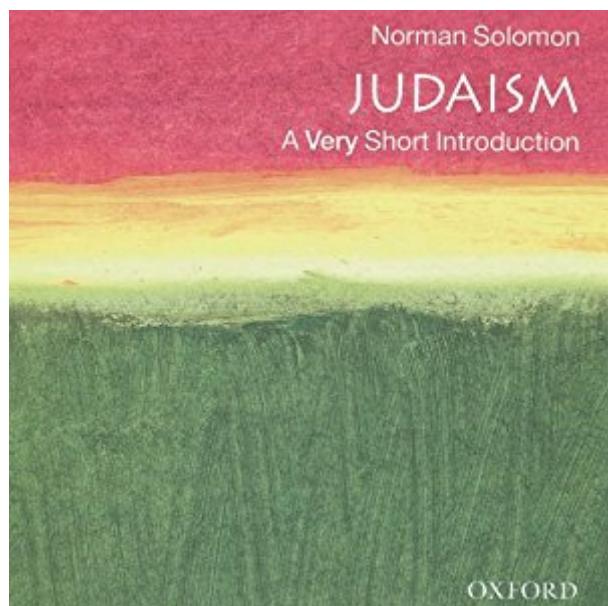


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# Judaism: A Very Short Introduction



## **Synopsis**

Norman Solomon's succinct audiobook is an ideal introduction to Judaism as a religion and way of life. In addition to surveying the nature and development of Judaism, this Very Short Introduction outlines the basics of practical Judaism - its festivals, prayers, customs, and various sects. Modern concerns and debates of the Jewish people are also addressed, such as the impact of the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, the status of women, and medical and commercial ethics.

## **Book Information**

Audible Audio Edition

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## **Customer Reviews**

Christians tend to believe they know all they need to know about Judaism because their Old Testament consists of the Hebrew Scriptures. This book does an excellent job of showing Christians (and others) that Judaism today is more than Abraham, Moses and David. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, Judaism was forced to adapt and in many ways redefine itself. This easily read book explains the development of Rabbinic Judaism as opposed to Biblical Judaism. Anyone who claims to be a student of world religions should read it. Any Christian who wants to develop a better understanding of what was happening to Judaism in the early days of Christianity should also read it.

Complete with fine remarks and introductory tutorials, Norman Solomon exerted accurate perceptions in this pamphlet."Judaism: A Very Short Introduction" gave a run-through of every aspect of (ancient and modern) judaism. Its time-saving structure is neat: without omitting any of the

vital issues which concerned the religion and its followers. This book is well-blended. It maintained proportionate dispositions towards religious practices, cultural heritage, and evolutionary anthropology. There is hardly any weakness in its presentations. Anybody who needs an insight into the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of judaism would find it useful. Its summarized contents included all the transformations, which the ancient religion has undergone.

The PBS series The Jewish Americans happened to be showing, while I was reading this book, and the two complemented each other very well. I wholeheartedly recommend both. World Jewry numbers around 13 million, maybe as many as 18 million, depending on whom and how you count. More than 6 million live in the US, more even than in Israel itself. Being British, Solomon presents a somewhat Eurocentric view, but not to the extent that it is a problem, and I don't think American readers are for the most part troubled by the occasional British spelling or usage. It must be a daunting prospect for a scholar, having to condense a vast store of knowledge into one of these little books, deciding what to include and what must go, but Solomon judges this well. He emphasizes the diversity and continuing evolution of Judaism, correcting common misconceptions about how ancient or orthodox certain aspects of Judaism are. He also lays special stress on the importance of the Holocaust and of modern Israel in shaping contemporary Jewish thought. There are plenty of basic facts - descriptions of festivals, etc - included here, as you would expect. It also raises a great many issues and cites a number of authors, making this an excellent place to begin a more detailed study, if you wished. Solomon writes well, with a light, sometimes even humorous touch, where appropriate. He was a lecturer at Oxford when this book was first published in 1996, but is now retired, I believe. A revised edition wouldn't go amiss. Perhaps he is too busy working on his Penguin Classics Talmud, which is due out soon and should be worth reading. He is not to be confused with the American activist of the same name, although does exactly that, so that if you click on either author, you get a list of books by both of them. Take it from me, they are very different!

Within 150 pages, Solomon tries to give a very basic but nonetheless wide-ranging introduction to Judaism. Solomon was a fellow in Modern Jewish Thought at Oxford, and one of the major themes of his book is that Judaism is very difficult to define exactly. He emphasizes that Judaism is not a direct continuation of the religion of ancient Israel, but has its real beginnings in the dogma of rabbinic Judaism. This dogma has then been engaged by new religious movements, or left behind by those or see Judaism as just an ethnic identity or a general outlook on life. What Solomon gives

us in his book is less one coherent faith, and more a variety of sometimes mutually contradictory beliefs and traditions that have all been referred to as Jewish. One major defect of this VSI is its failure to discuss antisemitism. At a time when lame antisemitism is making a comeback due to the political situation in the Middle East, I wish Solomon could have offered some response to the argument that Judaism is a "racist religion", with membership in the faith and ethnic origin almost always tightly intertwined. In fact, the entire phenomenon of conversion to Judaism is not discussed at all.

Excellent work. Some of the authors' insights were interesting, especially when he discusses Judaism's split from Christianity. His description of Rabbinic Judaism, especially the Talmud and Oral Law, was superior to many other authors. He explained to the average reader that Rabbinic Judaism is where contemporary Judaism developed from. Few Jews and non-Jews understand this, and think Judaism ended with the Hebrew Scriptures. A great book.

Not bad for an introduction. But a bit long-winded at points (which is somewhat ironic for a "Very Short Introduction"). At times, I feel like the author could move to the next point, but instead he provides multiple quotes from multiple Old Testament portions that I could look up on my own if I wanted to read the passages

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