

What Do Jews Believe?: The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism

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In this fresh and lucid study, Ariel presents the fundamentals of Jewish thought on the profound issues of God, human destiny, good and evil, Torah, and messianism, guiding the reader toward a definition of the beliefs that shape Jewish identity. This lively exploration of Jewish ideas and beliefs provides a rationale and stimulus for anyone seeking to understand or reconnect to the rich and diverse spiritual tradition of Judaism.

What Do Jews Believe?: The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism Details

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Mo says

I am about halfway through and enjoying this so far...basic and cogent, which is exactly what I need.

Jonathan says

David Ariel walks us through the spiritual aspects of Judaism, covering God, prayer, the Mitzvot, Good & Evil, Torah, human destiny, Jewish messianism and what being the "Chosen People" really entails. Each chapter shows how these concepts have evolved from Biblical Judaism through rabbinical and medieval schools of thought and how they have changed (or not) under the influence of modern schools of Jewish thought. Not very deep, but broad, this book is a fine introduction to general Jewish life and worship.

Michael says

A decent summary of basic Jewish beliefs and modern practices. A must-read for anyone who ever means to be intentional friends with a person of Hebrew descent.

Hannah Andrews says

This text serves as an easily accessible primer to anyone who is looking to get a broad overview of the diverse beliefs included within Judaism. As someone brought up in the Christian tradition, I thought it was a helpful first introduction.

Simcha Wood says

There are currently a number of brilliant surveys of Judaism available, chief among them perhaps being George Robinson's *Essential Judaism* and Rabbi Telushkin's *Jewish Literacy*. Nevertheless, David Ariel's *What Do Jews Believe?* manages to cover ground not already covered by other fine general works on Judaism. While the best surveys of Judaism are rich in Jewish history, halakhah, and observance, Ariel's book fills in a much needed gap with an in-depth exploration of Jewish belief, diving into the ideas and theologies behind the halakhah and practice.

This book explores various aspects of Jewish belief, including Jewish ideas about God, human destiny, the problem of evil, chosenness, and messianism. In an age in which the phrase "Judeo-Christian" too often assumes a Judaism that is simply Christianity without Christ, Ariel's book offers an elaborate discussion of the distinctions between Jewish and Christian beliefs.

What Do Jews Believe? isn't quite in the same category as *Essential Judaism* or *Jewish Literacy*, but that's

hardly a criticism. It is still a fine book and would be worth reading solely for the final chapter alone, "Why Be Jewish?," written as a letter to his children that offers a thoroughly unapologetic appeal to embrace Judaism and maintain the beliefs and spiritual framework that has sustained the Jewish people for 3,000 years.

Antoinette Maria says

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in Judaism. Honestly, you could read only the last chapter (the author's letter to his children on why they should choose Judaism) and have a far greater understanding on the subject than many other books I've read.

David Rullo says

I thought this was a great book. More than a casual survey it highlighted and explored many different aspects of Jewish belief. The opening chapter is amazing, really every chapter is great. Ariel's chapter on the messiah really illustrates the differences between Christianity and Judaism. Overall, a fabulous book.

Chris says

I still don't know what Jews believe. Actually, I'm kind of confused how a religion can have this much disagreement. Even monotheism seems like a point of debate.

My initial confusion aside, this was interesting to read. I hadn't realized that one religious tradition could have so much diversity of thought and belief in it. Though I'm confused how one can say who's a Jew and who's not, it seems like the Reformed Jew who doesn't keep kosher or the mitzvot and the Orthodox Jew who does so zealously would have a different answer. Then again, maybe one would just say the other is a bad Jew but a Jew nonetheless.

One really interesting comparison I saw through the book was Moses Maimonides's beliefs compared to the Hasidic or more 'spiritual' beliefs. I'd almost call Maimonides's beliefs almost atheistic or maybe very Platonic (i.e. he thought prayer was worthwhile only for those who weren't smart or learned enough to rationally contemplate God or how he saw God as being immeasurably remote and impersonal) whereas the Hasidic, Kabbalah and more spiritually inclined sects tended to see God as more immanent in the world.

And that's just one of the contrasts in here. Every subject in the book has multiple viewpoints from different schools of thought about what Jews should believe about any given topic.

Crown Crown says

it was a great book

Rob Koch says

Im still working on this but its useful information. Being a total ignoramus on the subject I think its a good overview, but I could be wrong.

Neil says

I had to read this book for a class where we are studying the three major Western World Religions [Judaism, Christianity, and Islam]. I found this book a delightful read. It was filled with great insight while discussing the beliefs and the reasons behind those beliefs.

I especially liked the chapter discussing God. It was a great chapter, offering new insights into God that I had not considered before. It offered interesting perspectives on God's character and nature and how God's nature and character relates to humanity. I really enjoyed this chapter.

I also liked the section discussing the historical backdrop of Judaism - its founding, its history, and its relationship with the surrounding nations and religions. It is one thing to read the Old Testament; it is quite another to read a book that helps identify the historical backdrop in which Jewish history has occurred.

These were two of the chapters I enjoyed the most, but I enjoyed the book overall. It was an interesting book I probably would not have read were it not for my class, but now that I have read it I am glad that I did. I can honestly say I do not feel I wasted my time reading this book, and I feel that it has helped broadened my understanding and perspective on God as well as Judaism.

A. Moses Levitt says

penulis sebenarnya menulis sebuah "surat" ttg Judaisme untuk ketiga anaknya Judah, Micah, Aviva. Gw bisa lebih terbuka dan melirik segi positif dari sekte2 judaisme seperti Kabbalah dan Orthodox, juga Modernis...God is JHVH yg hanya bisa disebut dgn Adonai...

Steve says

Better than several years of Hebrew School.

Amanda says

Looking for the basic spiritual foundations of Judaism? This book delivers its promise. Ariel breaks down the historical and philosophical progression of the basic elements of Judaism (inc. God, Torah, Good/Evil, Messiah, Prayer) in a series of chapters that can be read individually or as a cohesive whole. The link between the progression and present-day beliefs wasn't always as clear as it could have been. Despite its modest size (<300 pages), it packs a good deal of information in, and gives a reader good starting points for

further research.
