What is Judaism?

The monotheistic religion of the Jews, having its ethical, ceremonial, and legal foundation in the precepts of the Old Testament and in the teachings and commentaries of the rabbis as found chiefly in the Talmud.

So, what does that mean?

One God + One Group (Jews) + One Testament = Judaism
Three Types of Jews

• Orthodox Jew
  A Jew who adheres faithfully to the principles and practices of traditional Judaism as evidenced chiefly by a devotion to and study of the Torah, daily synagogue attendance if possible, and strict observance of the Sabbath, religious festivals, holy days, and the dietary laws.

• Conservative Jew
  A Jew who adheres for the most part to the principles and practices of traditional Judaism with the reservation that, taking into account contemporary conditions, certain modifications or rejections are permissible.

• Reform Jew
  A Jew who adheres to a system of religious worship adapted from Orthodox Judaism to meet the demands of contemporary life, frequently simplifying or rejecting traditional religious law and custom.
The Torah

Torah, which means "teaching", is God's revealed instructions to the Jewish People. It teaches Jews how to act, think and even feel about life and death.
There are two parts to the Torah:

1. Written Torah

2. Oral Torah

**Written Torah**

The Written Torah is often called the Tanakh, which stands for Torah (T), Nevi'im (N) and Ketuvim (K). The Written Torah contains:
1. Five Books of Moses (Chumashe Torah)
2. Prophets (Nevi'im)
3. Writings (Ketuvim)

**Oral Torah**

The Oral Torah, explanations of the Written Torah.

After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, it was decided the Oral Torah should be written down so it would not be forgotten. In the 2nd century C.E., a group of Sages compiled the Mishnah, a written outline of the Oral Torah.

Over the next few centuries, Jewish scholars studied the Mishnah. Their discussions became known as the Gemara, commentaries elaborating on the Mishnah.

The Talmud is the combination of the Mishnah and Gemara together.
It’s not small!

Just a few more steps!
On the doorposts of traditional Jewish homes (and many not-so-traditional homes!), you will find a small case like the one pictured at left. This case is commonly known as a mezuzah (Heb.: doorpost), because it is placed upon the doorposts of the house. The mezuzah is not, as some suppose, a good-luck charm, nor does it have any connection with the lamb's blood placed on the doorposts in Egypt. Rather, it is a constant reminder of God's presence and God's mitzvot.

The mitzvah to place mezuzot on the doorposts of our houses is derived from Deut. 6:4-9, a passage commonly known as the Shema (Heb: Hear, from the first word of the passage). In that passage, G-d commands us to keep His words constantly in our minds and in our hearts by (among other things) writing them on the doorposts of our house.
They shall make themselves tzitzit on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and they shall place on the tzitzit of each corner a thread of techeilet. And it shall be tzitzit for you, and you will see it, and you will remember all the mitzvot of the L-RD and do them and not follow your heart or your eyes and run after them. -Numbers 15:38-40

In some Orthodox congregations, only married men wear a tallit; in others, both married and unmarried men wear one. In Conservative and Reform synagogues, both men and women may wear a tallit, but men are somewhat more likely than women to do so.
One of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith is the menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum used in the Temple. The kohanim lit the menorah in the Sanctuary every evening and cleaned it out every morning, replacing the wicks and putting fresh olive oil into the cups. The illustration at left is based on instructions for construction of the menorah found in Ex. 25:31-40.

The lamp stand in today's synagogues, called the ner tamid (lit. the continual light, usually translated as the eternal flame), symbolizes the menorah.
It is an ancient practice for Jews to cover their heads during prayer. This probably derives from the fact that in Eastern cultures, it is a sign of respect to cover the head (the custom in Western cultures is the opposite: it is a sign of respect to remove one's hat). Thus, by covering the head during prayer, one showed respect for God.
The Magen David (Shield of David, or as it is more commonly known, the Star of David) is the symbol most commonly associated with Judaism today, but it is actually a relatively new Jewish symbol. It is supposed to represent the shape of King David's shield (or perhaps the emblem on it), but there is really no support for that claim in any early rabbinic literature. The symbol is not mentioned in rabbinic literature until the middle ages, and is so rare in early Jewish literature and artwork that art dealers suspect forgery if they find the symbol in early Jewish works.
Judaism vs. Christianity
Idea of Theism

Judaism
- Monotheism

Christianity
- Trinitarian monotheism
Thought of Jesus

Judaism

- Jesus is neither the Messiah nor the Son of God.
- Jesus is a humble Jewish reformer and teacher/ false prophet.
- Jesus was crucified, but he did not resurrect.
- There is not a second coming of Jesus.

Christianity

- Jesus is the Christ, Son of God; he is God in flesh.
- Jesus is the Savior of the world.
- Jesus was crucified, and resurrected after three days.
- There is a second coming of Jesus.
View of other Abrahamic Religions

**Judaism**
- God’s chosen people.
- Christianity is a false interpretation and extension of Judaism.

**Christianity**
- Adopted into the family through Jesus
- Judaism is a true religion, but is an incomplete revelation.
RITUALS & HOLIDAYS
Bar and Bat Mitzvah

Upon turning 13, a boy is considered an adult under the law and is expected to obey all the commandments from then on. He has become a Bar Mitzvah, or "Son of the Commandments."

Similarly, a girl becomes a Bat Mitzvah, "daughter of the commandment," upon turning 12.

This does not mean, however, that Jewish law considers boys of 13 or girls of 12 ready to marry and strike out on their own, but time at which a young person becomes responsible under religious law and has met the minimum qualification for marriage. The Talmud states that 18 is the proper age for marriage and 20 is the proper age to begin earning a living.

In its earliest observance, the rite of passage was marked by a boy's first reciting of the aliya (benediction over the Torah reading), at the first Sabbath service after the 13th birthday. These duties have gradually increased over the years, and may now include reciting the haftarah (selection from the Prophets), reading the entire weekly Torah portion, leading part of the service, or leading prayers.

It is also customary for the youth to make a short speech, which usually begins with the words. The father then says a blessing, thanking God for removing from him the burden of responsibility for his child's sins. This ceremony is usually followed by a reception, which can be as elaborate as a wedding reception.

In Orthodox communities, there is no Bat Mitzvah ceremony, as women do not participate in the religious service, but parties are sometimes held marking the occasion. In Reform and some Conservative synagogues, girls participate in just the same way as boys.
Jewish Marriage and Weddings

Before a wedding ceremony, a marriage contract (*ketubah*) is drawn up and consented to by both parties, listing the husband's obligations to the wife during marriage, conditions of inheritance upon his death, obligations regarding the support of children of the marriage, and the wife's support in the event of divorce.

Participation of a rabbi is not necessary for a marriage to be binding under Jewish law. Traditionally, a legal marriage occurs when payment of money, a contract, or sexual intercourse has taken place. {1} However, rabbis almost invariably conduct weddings today, both because secular law requires an ordained official, and it is helpful to have the guidance of an expert in the many Jewish laws pertaining to marriage.

Jewish wedding ceremonies take about 30 minutes, and consist of two ceremonies. The two were traditionally held separately, up to a year apart, but are performed together in modern weddings.
Two Ceremonies involved in Jewish Wedding:

1.) The Betrothal Ceremony: *Kiddushin*
   - ("sanctification"). The bride approaches and circles the groom, then two blessings over wine are recited: a standard blessing and one related specifically to marriage.
   - Rings are exchanged with the declaration, "Behold, you are consecrated to me by this ring according to the Law of Moses and Israel"
   - the *ketubah* is read.

2.) The Wedding Ceremony: *Nisuin*
   - ("elevation"). The couple stand under a canopy (*chuppah*), which symbolizes the couple's new home together.
   - Bride and groom recite the seven marriage benedictions and share a glass of wine.
   - The groom then breaks a glass under his foot, which symbolizes the destruction of the Temple/ frightens away evil spirits/ taking of the bride's virginity
   - the noise of the breaking glass prompts music and shouts of *Mazel tov!*
   - followed by a festive meal and celebration
Jewish Holidays

- **Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year)**
  No work is permitted on Rosh Hashanah, and most of the day is spent in synagogue. The most popular food-related custom is eating **apples and bread dipped in honey** to symbolize a sweet new year.

- **Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)**
  The name of Yom Kippur means "Day of Atonement." It is believed to be the last chance to change God's judgment of one's deeds in the previous year and his decisions one's fate in the coming year.

- **Hanukkah (Chanukah): Festival of Lights**
  The only essential ritual of Hanukkah is the lighting of candles. The Hanukkah candles are held in a *chanukkiah*, a candelabra that holds nine candles. (The *chanukkiah* is different from a *menorah*, which is a candelabra that holds seven candles and is pictured on the official emblem of the State of Israel.) The candle (*shammash*) in the middle of the *chanukkiah* is used to light the others.
Pesach: Passover

Pesach or Passover is a spring holiday commemorating the Exodus, the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt in the time of Moses (circa 13th century BCE). Many of its observances are instituted in chapters 12 to 15 of the book of Exodus. Passover's name comes from the last of the Ten Plagues visited on the Egyptians by Yahweh before the Exodus. All firstborn male children were killed, but those Hebrew households that had slaughtered a lamb and marked their doorposts with its blood were "passed over." It is also an agricultural holiday commemorating the beginning of the harvest season, but this aspect of Passover is not emphasized.
thank you!