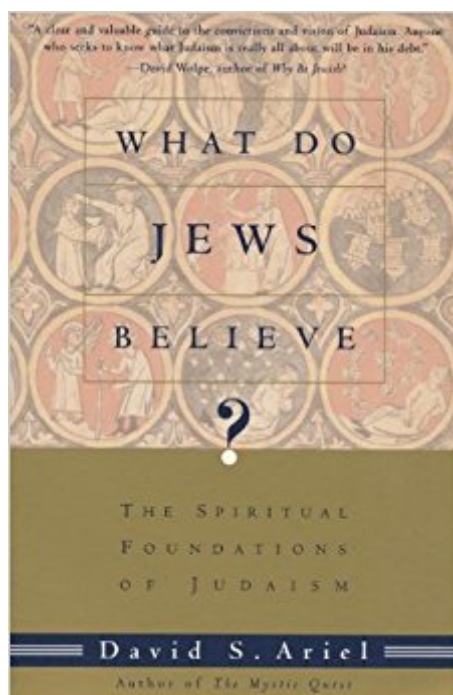


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What Do Jews Believe?: The Spiritual Foundations Of Judaism



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

What Do Jews Believe?: The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism, by David Ariel, is a basic exploration of the broad question posed by its title. Ariel's contention is that "Judaism is not a religion of fixed doctrines or dogmas but a complex system of evolving beliefs." And yet despite its diversity, "no matter how literally or metaphorically we choose to interpret them, ... sacred myths form the framework for the Jew's ongoing search for personal meaning in his or her own life, the life of the Jewish community, and society at large." What Do Jews Believe? describes some essential "sacred myths," such as the existence and nature of God, the meaning of the Torah, the importance of prayer, and the significance of chosenness. Ariel's selection and exploration of these myths is guided by the following questions: Which Jewish beliefs have survived from antiquity to the present day, how have they evolved over time, and what beliefs distinguish Judaism today? As he pursues these questions, Ariel enthusiastically describes Judaism's seminal influence on the rise of humanism, which makes his book especially credible for readers whose sympathies are more secular than his own. Perhaps the best part of this book is its conclusion, a tzavaah, or ethical will,

written as an open letter to his children. In it, he quotes a letter from a mother to her child, written while they were living in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940, before they both were murdered by the Nazis. This letter offers an extraordinarily persuasive and poignant summary of what exactly makes a Jew a Jew: "Judaism, my child, is the struggle to bring down God upon earth, a struggle for the sanctification of the human heart. This struggle your people wages not with physical force but with spirit and by constant striving for truth and justice. So, do you understand, my child, how we are distinct from others and wherein lies the secret of our existence on earth?" To these words, Ariel adds a moving piece of advice to his own children, and to his readers: "Remember, your life is like a book. Write in it what you want to be known about you." --Michael Joseph Gross

Ariel, president of the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies, here offers a lucid and accessible study of the central beliefs of Judaism. With grand and sure strokes, the author paints the history of the "sacred myths" of Judaism?God, Torah, human destiny, chosenness, prayer, theodicy, mitzvot and messiah?using the colorful texts of biblical writers, rabbinic scholars and contemporary Jewish leaders. For example, in his remarks on messiah, Ariel moves from the biblical expectation of two messiahs to the fervor of contemporary messianic movements like the Lubavitch Hasidim. In a concluding letter to his children, Ariel argues that the great value of Judaism is its attempt to discover God's image in ourselves. In sum, this is a powerful introduction to the rich history and lively character of Judaism. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I really enjoyed reading this book. As a Christian, I feel that what I believe began with what the Jews believed and I love learning as much about God, "bless His name", as I can. (I learned from this book to bless God's name whenever used.) It was a little difficult to keep track of the Hebrew and Yiddish names and words used, but there is a brief list of some of the more common terms used in the back of the book. The author used a nice format for describing each section that I caught onto after about the third time he started a new topic. He would start with the oldest concepts and discuss as these evolved over time during different developmental times of Jewish thought. I'm not sure I can remember them all, but it was something like this, age of the Talmud (as it was written by Moses), times of the Priests (while the 1st and 2nd Temple existed), then when the 2nd temple was destroyed and no more sacrifices could be made Jewish thought was regulated by the Rabbis and the most popular of them established large and influential schools to study the Talmud and interpret it to the people, often coming up with new thought and conflicting opinion. The Middle Ages brought

who enjoy light reading.

Timely ! Came just as advertised and saved a lot of money. Used it immediately and the book was very meaningful and informative

very interesting and informative - gives me a very good picture of the background of my faith and the roots of Christianity

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