

PRINCIPLES OF JEWISH FAITH

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Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith: Introduction to Mishnah

1. God exists
2. God is one
3. God is incorporeal
4. God is eternal
5. God alone is to be worshipped

6. Prophecy
7. Moses is the greatest prophet
8. God revealed the Torah (including Oral Law) to Moses
9. The Torah is unchanging

10. God knows the deeds of people
11. God rewards and punishes human actions
12. The Messiah is coming
13. There will be a resurrection of the dead

(Rambam's conclusion) When a person affirms all these Principles, and clarifies his faith in them, he becomes part of the Jewish People. It is a mitzvah to love him, have mercy on him, and show him all the love and brotherhood that God has instructed us to show our fellow Jews. Even if he has transgressed out of desire and the overpowering influence of his base nature, he will be punished accordingly but he will have a share in the World to Come. But one who denies any of these Principles has excluded himself from the Jewish People and denied the essence [of Judaism]. He is called a heretic, an *epikoros*, and "one who has cut off the seedlings." It is a mitzvah to hate such a person, as it says (Psalm 139:21), "Those who hate You, God, I shall hate."

Mishnah Sanhedrin 90a

Mishnah: All Israel have a portion in the World to Come, for it is written, “Your people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I be glorified.”

But the following have no portion therein: He who maintains that resurrection is not a biblical doctrine, the Torah was not divinely revealed, and an *epikoros*...

Rambam, Laws of Repentance 3:7

Five categories of heretics are called *minim*: (1) One who says that there is no God nor is there a spiritual ruler of the creation. (2) One who accepts that the creation has spiritual rulers but insists that there are two or more spiritual rulers. (3) One who believes that there is only one God who rules nature, but He has a body and a likeness...

Ra'avad: Why did [Rambam] call such a person a heretic? Several greater and better rabbis than he thought [that God does have a body and likeness] based on what they see in biblical verses and even more so from rabbinic teachings that can confuse the thoughts.

For further study:

J. David Bleich, *With Perfect Faith: The Foundations of Jewish Belief* (New York: Ktav, 1983).

Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1986).

Menachem Kellner, *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999). Review Essay, David Berger, *Tradition* 33:4 (Summer 1999), pp. 81-89.

Marc B. Shapiro, *The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004). Review Essay, Yitzchak Blau, “Flexibility with a Firm Foundation: On Maintaining Jewish Dogma,” *Torah U-Madda Journal* 12 (2004), pp. 179-191.

Marc B. Shapiro, “Is There a ‘Pesak’ for Jewish Thought?” in *Jewish Thought and Jewish Belief (Mahshevet Yisrael ve-Emunat Yisrael)*, ed. Daniel J. Lasker (Be'er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2012), pp. 119*-140*.