Role Of The Hebrew Bible in Judaism.

Overview:
The Hebrew bible is the founding text of Judaism, it recounts the history of the people, the laws they live by and the covenant relationship between God and his people, providing a framework for ethics, morality and the preservation of identity.
It is also the Old Testament for Christianity, making it a significant text for both religions.

Introduction:
The Hebrew Bible plays a pivotal role for Jews, it is also known as the Old Testament and a significant component of Christian Scripture, serving as the first part of the Christian Bible. The Old Testament is composed of thirty-nine books, for the Christian Old Testament and twenty-four books for the Hebrew bible,which are traditionally divided into the Law (Torah), the Prophets (Nevi'im), and the Writings (Ketuvim).
Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions with a rich and complex history that spans thousands of years.
Judaism traces its roots back to the ancient Middle East, making it one of the oldest religions in the world.
Although it is difficult to pinpoint an exact date for the birth of Judaism, scholars believe it emerged around 2000 BCE with the patriarch Abraham, who is considered the first Jew.
God made a covenant with Abraham and set out the laws that Jews still live by today. The Hebrew bible is therefore significant to the lives of Jews on a daily basis. It tells them how to act and what to eat and how they should live their lives in accordance with this covenant with god.

What the Jews believe:
Jews believe that God dictated the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, fifty days after their Exodus from Egyptian slavery. A Torah shows Jews the laws God wants them to live by.
There are around six hundred and thirteen commandments,although there is some disagreement as to what constitutes a commandment.
The most sacred is known as the ten statements or more commonly in christianity the ten commandments.
A Torah is written in Hebrew and is also known as the Torat Moshe-Law of Moses.
For the Jewish community the Torah means teaching, instruction and law.
The Torah is not a book, in the conventional sense, it comes in the form of a scroll.
Torah scrolls are taken from an Ark called Aron Kodesh,parts of the scroll are read in the synagogue three times a week. They are read on Mondays, Thursdays and on the Shabbat(Sabbath).Over a year the whole scroll is read in sequence, starting at the end of the Sukkot, an Autumn festival. This festival forbids work, writing and even travel.

The portions of readings are called Paishioth and are usually three to five chapters in length.
The scrolls are read by a skilled reader, as there are no vowels in the sacred writings. The Torah is sung in an ancient tune rather than spoken, the scrolls are handwritten by a Sefer (scribe) on Kosher animal parchment(usually from a cow).
It takes around eighteen months for one scroll to be created, they are so sacred that if a scroll is dropped in the synagogue the whole congregation would have to fast for forty days.
The Torah is kept in an Ark, a cabinet within the synagogue. It is the holiest spot and usually kept on the wall that faces Jerusalem.A scroll is the most sacred object in Judaism, the Ark is an adaptation of the holy of holies, from the ancient temple in Jerusalem,a sacred chamber that would have held the Ark of the covenant. The Ark would have contained the ten commandments across two stone tablets, five laws scribed on each tablet. The Ark is the most sacred Jewish relic, its location remains unknown, with no proof of what happened to it,or even if it once existed,although it is detailed in religious texts.

Historical background:
Before there was Israel, twelve tribes and commandments set out in stone tablets, there was a covenant with God.
When Moses stood in front of the burning bush he asked," what is your name? " Exodus 3:14 "I am who I am." The voice of God had answered him.
"Say to the Israelites the god of your fathers, the god of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob has sent me to you," Exodus 3:15.
The name Yahweh means I am or he, that is, God had given his name to Moses,I am (Yahweh).
God was not new to the Israelites, he'd had a covenant with Abraham, Abraham was told to leave Ur and go to a place called Canaan. The land of Canaan would become known as Israel, named after the grandson of Abraham.
God promised Abraham and Sarah many descendents, despite their age, the first a son named Isaac.
In the first covenant God asked that all boys be circumcised , as all Jewish boys are still today, God's covenant with Abraham is still felt in Israel today.
Psalm 105:10 an everlasting covenant.
God said to Abraham's grandson "You shall no longer be named Jacob,but Israel"-Genesis 32:28. Israel means god contends or to fight, as it was Jacob who had wrestled with an angel.

About the Hebrew Bible:
The Hebrew Bible, also known as theTanakh, is the primary scripture of the Jewish faith.
The Hebrew Bible provides the Jews with the law, and religious practices in which they must live by. It is the sole substructure of their practices.

Christians also use the Hebrew Bible- known to them as the Old Testament. For Christians it is part of a larger religious canon.
For the Jewish community the Hebrew Bible focuses on the observation and maintenance of their religious practices, but for Christians it is a prophetic fulfillment of Jesus Christ.
The laws are linked to the figure of Moses, who is depicted as having received them directly from God in order to transmit them to the people of israel. Biblical laws are thus presented as being of divine origin.

> What one does find are frequent general statements referencing the obligation of the people to observe God's laws and linking the laws overall to his divine Covenant with them.[1]

The Torah contains the commandments sent down from God (Yahweh), through Moses to his chosen people. The Jewish rules are known as Mitzvot, and cover the various aspects of Jewish life including daily living, religious practice and ethical conduct.
Some of these commandments include how they should treat their fellow man, Leviticus 19:17, not to embarrass others,and Leviticus 19:18, not to bear a grudge. Some laws prohibit the worship of idols, Exodus 20:15 or to even make an idol Exodus 20:4.
The prophets taught that Yahweh, the God of Israel, ruled all nations and events and that he would punish the people of Israel for failing to fulfill his laws and commandments.

Jewish beliefs:

The jews believe that god is omnipotent, the judge,the creator and the law giver.They believe in the divine presence of god (Shekinah),most Jews believe that the Shekinah is with them when they worship in the synagogue during the shabbat.
The Jewish feasts, still celebrated today, are around the belief that the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt and freed by Moses (the Passover),one of three Jewish pilgrimage festivals.The Passover is where God "passed over" the Israelite houses marked with lamb's blood, sparing their firstborns but not of the egyptians. Some scholars believe its origins predate the biblical account, possibly stemming from earlier rituals. Scholars like Hayyim Shauss and Robert H Pefeiffer link the Passover to a spring festival long before the Exodus with a communal meal on a full moon and a sacrificial lamb.
The lamb would have been killed using Shechita, the Hebrew term for the ritual slaughter of animals under the laws of kashrut.

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[1] ,Greengus,Samuel,2019, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion

The Hebrew Bible for Christians:
While Jesus did not write any scriptures himself, it is believed that he had access to scriptures and the Jewish traditions.There is evidence for him referencing the Hebrew Bible during his ministry.However many believe Jesus was illiterate and would have encountered scriptures through oral traditions. Luke 2:41-42, shows Jesus and his family at the temple for passover.
Around only ten percent of the population in Jesus time could read and far less could write.
Jesus was a Jew, so the Hebrew bible became important to Christians as Jesus was important to them.

Conclusion:
The scriptures provide Jews with the guidance from God on how to live their lives and how to worship him; it provides them with an understanding of their history and their ancestors.
The Jewish community still worships in synagogues today providing them with a place to worship and to be able to gather as a community.
Following the laws sent down by God, provides Jews with an identity and promotes their ethical behaviour. Jews believe that following the Mitzvot(laws), helps them live in a way that pleases god. Many Jews focus on the actions in life being a primary concern as opposed to believing in a heaven, although many jews believe in a spiritual realm.
The role of the Hebrew bible is paramount to the identity of an ancient ethnic people.

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