

# [Reform judaism in the 19th century](https://assignbuster.com/reform-judaism-in-the-19th-century/)

The most extreme precursor to the Reform movement was a man by   
the name of Samuel Holdheim. He was born in 1806 in Kempo in the   
province of Posen. At a young age he studied at a yeshiva and received   
a Talmudic education. He began to study German and secular subjects   
after his marriage to a woman with a modern education. After their   
divorce several years later, he began studying at the University of   
Prague and Berlin and received a doctorate from the University of   
Leipzig. Following service in Frankfurt -Am-Oder he became a   
Landesrabbiner or chief Rabbi of Mecklenberg-Schewerin. In the year   
1847 he became the rabbinate of a reform congregation in Berlin . At   
this point he already disapproved of most liberal Rabbis and came to   
be known as the most exemplar of reform Rabbis in all of Europe ( 241)   
The question comes to mind as to what exactly triggered this   
different belief in Judaism which differed significantly from previous   
tenents. It started during the time of the French revolution, a time   
when European Jews were (for the first time) recognized as citizens of   
the countries in which they lived in. Ghettos were being abolished,   
special badges were no longer required and Jews could dress the way   
they wanted, settle were they pleased and work the occupations they   
Many Jews settled outside of Jewish districts, and began to   
live like their neighbors and speak the language of the land. They   
went to public schools and began to neglect Jewish Studies and forget   
In 1815, after Napoleon's defeat, Jews lost the rights of   
citizenship in many countries. Many Jews converted to Christianity in   
order to retain those rights. Many thoughtful Jews were concerned   
about this. They realized that many of these changes took place not   
because of a dislike for Judaism, but in order to obtain better   
treatment. Many rabbis believed that the way to address this was to   
force Jews to give up public schools and universities. This didn't   
Rabbis suggested that observance might have to be changed in   
order to appeal to the Jew living the modern world. They realized that   
every now and then old practices and new ones were introduced,   
resulting in a different lifestyle then 4000 or even 2000 years   
previously. They fathomed that these changes often made life easier   
for the Jew. They concluded that in order to make Judaism attractive   
to all Jews this change had to continue. A group of Rabbis assembled   
in Germany, and changes began, thus developed the start of Reform   
Judaism. Holdheim a reform Rabbi himself felt that the Jews living   
during his time period should change the laws given to them at Mt.   
Sinai and the halacha that the Talmud and Mishna state. Holdheim   
believed that the laws of the Torah and the Talmud that were in effect   
when the Jews had their own country and government have lost their   
legitimacy. Judaism now had to be in accord with both the letter and   
the spirit of laws of the nations they were living among. Even the   
laws of the Torah whose source was God had to be regarded as valid for   
certain times and places as he said " with the change of the   
circumstances and conditions of life for which God once gave those   
laws , the laws themselves cease to be operative, that they shall be   
observed no longer because they no longer can be observed". Thus ,   
Holdheim said that the biblical and Talmudic laws concerning marriage,   
divorce and personal status are no longer relevant and the Jews in   
these cases should be ruled by the state government (Sasson 835). He   
concluded that laws between man and man should be left to the rule   
of the state they lived in but questions of prayer and religious   
institutions should be left to the Rabbis because prayer was the   
most important part of religious life.   
Holdheim denied the authority of the Talmudic dicta, the oral   
law. He says that it was written by the hand of man but was divinely   
inspired. His conclusion was that Jewish life should be based on   
spiritual and ethical guidance of the Torah. Even though he didn't   
reject the Talmud and Mishna one-hundred percent for him they were no   
longer used for Jewish law but storehouses of wisdom and ethics (Gay   
155). Illustrations of commandments that he rejected during this time   
period were the celebration of Shabbat on Saturday. The reason for   
this was there was normal school on Saturdays and the Jews felt school   
was more important than observing the word of God (Gay 155). Holdheim   
also went a little far fetched and said that he couldn't find anything   
wrong with intermarriage , even though the Torah clearly states it. He   
also stated in 1844 that circumcision wasn't required even though he   
had absolutely no reason for this( 243). Other important beliefs of   
Holdheim were anti-Zionism, the observance of only one day festivals   
and that men and women should be treated equally in terms of mitzvot   
(Gay 155). Most of these changes in the religion were so that the Jews   
should adapt with the nation they were living in. Since they   
themselves didn't constitute a nation and these laws were prerogatives   
of the state the Jews should abide by the law of the land (Sasson   
Reform Judaism wasn't the only way of belief during this time   
period. Others like Samson Raphael Hirsch went in the totally   
opposite direction of Holdheim. Hirsch felt that Judaism had to be   
observed the way we were told to under almost any and every   
circumstance(Gay 154). If Hirsch wouldn't have taken this different   
stand a true Jewish nation wouldn't exist today. Holdheim didn't   
realize that he was weakening the nation and could have ultimately led   
to the extinction of the Jewish people   
Bibliography: