

Understanding Judaism & Christianity

QUICK HISTORY OF JUDAISM

(2000 BC & earlier)

The Torah (the Five Books of Moses that begin both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles) teaches that the Hebrew people are descended from Abraham, the ancient father with whom God formed the Covenant sometime around 2000 BC. In this Covenant, God told Abraham, *"I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your offspring after you."* (Genesis 17:6-7) The Covenant was established further when God gave Moses laws for the entire Abrahamic community - including the 10 Commandments.

Moses led Abraham's descendants, then called Israelites, out of slavery in Egypt. Eventually they established themselves as a nation by taking over the land of Caanan. In 1020 BC, the Israelite nation transitioned to a monarchy, ruled by King Saul in Jerusalem. By 922 BC, the kingdom was crumbling. Eventually all of the 12 tribes that formed the nation of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians and/or the Babylonians. Oppression for Jews continued even after they were allowed back to Jerusalem in 538 BC. Romans tolerated their religious approach to community living until the middle of the first century when the Jewish temple was destroyed and Abraham's descendants were scattered.

SACRED TEXT

Jews not only consider the Torah to be sacred, but also the Tanakh, or the Christian "Old Testament." In traditional Judaism, every letter and every word in these writings are considered to be directly from God. Yet God's revelations & teachings continue with the Talmud. Orthodox Jews believe that God told Moses orally how to interpret and apply the written law. Moses passed this tradition down to the rabbis, who developed it until the end of the 2nd century AD, when it was written down. This is the Mishnah.

For the next three centuries, rabbis in Jerusalem and Babylon commented in writing on the Mishnah in a series of books known as the Gemara. The combination of Mishnah and Gemara is the Talmud. As rabbinic teachings have been added to Jewish tradition, areas of division has also occurred. Yet the timeless dimension of Jewish spirituality is rooted in the appreciation of the proclamation known as the Sh'ma: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One."

THE BASICS

FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF PRACTICING JEWS

- 1) There is one (and only one) God who created all things
- 2) God is so holy that one must not mention his name
- 3) God is the ultimate authority and possesses final dominion
- 4) Life is holy
- 5) The Torah is a guide to holy living and a source of continued revelation of the word of God
- 6) Group worship and group prayer are essential to right living
- 7) Certain people (Jews) were/are chosen by God to remind the people of the Creator's love for them and the necessity of their obedience to the Law.

SALVATION FROM SIN (& HEAVEN)

- 1) Human will is able to master sin if it makes an effort
- 2) Repentance from sin and adherence to the 613 various laws of the Torah returns people to God

NOTE: To many Jews, questions related to the afterlife are seen as a distraction from the obligation to live life on earth in a manner pleasing to God.

FINAL SALVATION & MESSIAH

- 1) Goodness on earth will be rewarded and evil punished
- 2) Messiah (as a man or as a period of time) will come and establish everlasting peace

10+ LAWS

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW...

The core of the Jewish law is known as the Decalogue. The commands have profoundly influenced not only Judaism, but Christianity and Islam as well. Although traditional Judaism spells out 613 laws to honor God, many people are familiar with the 10 primary laws from Exodus 20:2-17:

- 1) I am the Lord your God who led you out of slavery - have no other gods before Me
- 2) You shall not worship an idol
- 3) You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain
- 4) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy
- 5) Honor your father and mother
- 6) You shall not kill
- 7) You shall not commit adultery
- 8) You shall not steal
- 9) You shall not bear false witness (lie) against your neighbor
- 10) You shall not covet anything that doesn't belong to you

3 FASCINATING FACTS

- 1) The Jewish "religion" started over 4000 years ago.
- 2) The majority of Jews do not strictly follow traditional Judaism.
- 3) Early Christianity was considered an offshoot of Judaism by the Roman Empire.

JEWES & CHRISTIANS AGREE

- THE God is the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob
- Jesus existed and was rejected
- Torah, Wisdom & Prophet books are Scripture (Hebrew Scripture same as Old Testament)

DISAGREEMENTS...

1) Jesus was not the Messiah

A. HE DID NOT FULFILL ALL MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

Ezekiel 37:27-28 - Third Temple will be built

"My dwelling place will be among them; I will be there God and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever."

Isaiah 43:5-6 - All Jews will be brought back to Israel

"I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'give them up' and to the south, 'do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth."

Isaiah 2:4 - He will bring world peace

"He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."

Zechariah 14:9 - Messiah seen as King

"God will be king over all the world - on that day, God will be One."

B. HE DID NOT EMBODY THE QUALIFICATIONS

1. The Messiah will be the greatest prophet since Moses - but prophecy may only happen when the majority of the world's Jews inhabit Israel. This was not the case when Jesus walked in Israel.

2. The Messiah must be descended from his father's side from King David. If Jesus was born of a virgin, he had no father - thus he could not be from the line of David and not the Messiah.

3. The Messiah will lead the Jewish people to full observance of the Torah - not override it, as Jesus claimed to do.

(NOTE: There are other reasons not mentioned here)

2) Victory over sin is humanly possible

Adhere to Torah by free will and you will be atoned for your sin and will restore your broken relationship with God. Sin can be mastered by keeping all of God's commands.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - PAUL ABOUT SALVATION

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."

FROM THE WORDS OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

John 4:25-26 - Jesus says he is the Messiah

"The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he.'"

Matthew 5:17 - Jesus and the Torah

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

John 8:58 - Jesus before Abraham?

"Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."

John 14:6 - Jesus and the path to God

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

JEWES & JESUS

BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW...

The Talmud, in Sanhedrin 43a, claims that Jesus *"practiced magic and enticed Israel to go astray."*

Yet, a Jewish Historian named Josephus, wrote about Jesus around 90AD. His writings seem to reflect a more neutral (or journalistic) position about Jesus. He wrote,

"Around this time lived Jesus, a wise man. For he was a worker of amazing deeds and was a teacher of people who gladly accept the truth. He won over both many Jews and many Greeks. Pilate, when he heard him accused by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, [but] those who had first loved him did not cease [doing so]. To this day the tribe of Christians named after him has not disappeared."

CONVERSATIONS

START THE DIALOGUE...

- 1) Do you follow Judaism because of your choice or because it is your family tradition?
- 2) Have you ever considered the possibility that Jesus really is the Messiah? Why or why not?
- 3) Since you believe that entrance into heaven is dependent on keeping the Law, how well have you obeyed the 10 Commandments?

OTHER TIPS...

- 1) Compliment the truth found in the Hebrew Scriptures (don't refer to it as the Old Testament) and the impact of Judaism on the world.
- 2) Remember that Judaism is intricately tied to family - so if you insult the religion, you insult the family.
- 3) Affirm and re-affirm that you believe that God is one.

SOURCES:

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