

JUDAISM

THE HEBREW RELIGION AND JUDAISM

Judaism originated in the MOSAIC AGE, which was the period of time between the giving of the law by God to the people of Israel, until the time of the establishment of the Lord's church by the Apostles of Jesus after the ascension of Jesus into the heaven approximately AD 33.

Judaism as a term did not exist until there was a nation called Judah, well after the division of the kingdom into two parts called Israel and Judah. Coming from the world's oldest religion, given to man by God, following the patriarchs through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the time of the giving of the law, and down to the captivity of Israel and Judah, the Hebrews spoke of 'Torah', God's revealed instruction to Israel.

This instruction to Israel provided religious law, civil law, medical instruction, dietary law, and rules of cleansing and discipline. These laws are found in the existing books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. These laws mandated a way of life and a cultural system, along with the rite of circumcision which was instituted by God in covenant with Abraham. This covenant was for land and for the promise of the 'seed of the woman' to come from his descendants. It was necessary that they keep the line of Abraham through Jacob and down through the families of Israel until the Savior would come. Circumcision and records of family lineage were necessary and were followed closely, although sometimes and often the people forgot the only living God and worshipped other gods or none at all.

Judaism originated in the land of Canaan, also now known as Palestine. Judaism has always been a belief in a single God who created the universe and continued to govern it through His prophets, priests, and kings. **Deuteronomy 6: 4-9** provides the principal commandments and includes the words, "*Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*" This same God who created the world revealed Himself to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai and provided a written law commonly known as the 'Ten Commandments.' The other laws were given by God through Moses His prophet as they journeyed in the wilderness between Sinai and Jericho.

A major feature of this religion was the covenant, or contractual agreement between God and the descendants of Abraham through his son Isaac, and continuing down the line in the family of Jacob, who in later years was called Israel. The people of Israel agreed to a relationship with God where they would acknowledge and worship Him as their ruler, and obey His laws: God in turn would acknowledge Israel as His special people and be mindful of them. After many other nations had failed to acknowledge God and turned to gods of their own making, God turned to the family of Abraham and Israel to be His people and the seed to carry the promised Savior. Israel was to be a nation of priests and to live by divine laws, and would be a model, or a witness, to the other nations of God's gracious dealings with mankind.

Worship was to be conducted at the Tabernacle or later at the temple, and was conducted by the priests from the tribe of Levi. The form of worship continued the use of sacrifices for the sins of the people, as the patriarchs had done and would be necessary until the time when the perfect sacrifice, the 'Lamb of God', would come as told by the prophets. Israel's well-being depended on their faithfulness to God and their obedience to His commandments. Historically we see that they often departed from these ways and were brought to judgment because of this. This story demonstrates God's mercy, patience, and justice. Their

experiences when forced into military defeat and finally into exile from their land of Israel; their time of suffering brought prophets who gave them hope with prophecies of the 'Messiah' or Savior who was to come. This Savior was to be of the house of King David and establish His Kingdom. Various prophecies revealed the details of His life, His birthplace, His suffering, and the minor events of His life which would prove who He was. He was to be called among other things 'Emmanuel' which means 'God with us'.

The roots of Judaism are in the Hebrew Bible. This Bible consisted of Torah, Pentateuch, and Neblim, the prophetic writing, and the Ketubin, which were the other writings. Judaism is not only a religion based on these old writings, but also on Rabbinical Tradition.

Since the destruction of the temple in AD 70 the place of worship was gone. The people had been scattered many times to many places. Synagogues had been used as places of instruction by Rabbis or teachers; Jewish sages studied the scriptures and created their own traditions as well. These Rabbis taught the written scriptures and faithfully transmitted oral traditions which they maintained that God had given to Moses at Sinai. This oral Torah is called Misnah and is that which is learned or memorized. The earliest written form of Misnah is from around the 3rd century AD and a Babylonian Talmud, from about the 6th century. The Talmuds are 'that which is studied' also called Gemaras in Aramaic. From the 16th century there are Rabbinical writings which include codification of Talmudic Law.

These early Rabbinical writings contain commentaries on the scriptures, some translations of the Pentateuch and other books of scripture. To study Torah means to study all of these materials, not only the Torah itself.

After AD 70 and their failed revolt in 132-135 led by Simon Bar Kokhba, Judaism suffered the loss of its priesthood, who were now discredited. The Jewish people had no control over their political destiny. The rabbinical movement emerged to strengthen their spiritual and community life. They taught conformity to the Torah and the Rabbinical Traditions in the daily life, through prayer, study, and observance of traditions in family life.

The traditions taught that a Jew could achieve salvation while waiting for God to complete His promise to bring about messianic redemption to all of Israel. Some Rabbis taught that if Jews complied with the Torah, the Messiah would be compelled to come. The synagogue which had been used before the destruction of the temple and since about 400 BC for study and instruction now became a place of worship.

The laws of the Mosaic Age of Temple Worship and sacrificing of animals, or the first fruits of the field, such as corn, were no longer followed.

Sabbaths and festivals are remembered. Prayers are to be said three times a day corresponding to the times of the day when sacrifices had been offered in the Jerusalem temple. Jewish worship services consist of standing prayer including petitions for welfare and the messianic restoration. A group of ten men forms a congregation for prayer. The head is covered during prayer as a gesture of respect to God. Pious Jews wear a head covering everywhere recognizing God's presence. The study of the Torah is also an act of worship. Passages from the scripture, Misnah, and Talmud are recited. Readings from the Torah are heard on Sabbath and festival mornings and the entire Torah will be read each year. The public reading of scripture constitutes a significant part of Synagogue Worship.

Mitzvah means commandment, and implies action in which the Jew responds to God. Mitzvot, the plural of Mitzvah in Torah are those religious observances between God and man, and between man and man. Social justice is Mitzvah, and the study of Torah is Mitzvah.

To Orthodox Jews, God is Spirit, a personal, eternal, all powerful, and compassionate God. To other Jews God is impersonal, and unknowable. There is no trinity, as God is one God. Jesus is seen either as an extremist false messiah, or a good but martyred Jewish teacher. Jesus is not considered at all and they do not believe He was the Messiah, Son of God, or that He was resurrected from the dead. Orthodox Jews believe Messiah will restore the Jewish kingdom and rule the earth.

A Jewish male is still circumcised on the eight day into the covenant God made with Abraham. But over the years, through the Medieval periods and to more recent times, gradual changes have occurred in Judaism. During the Medieval years there were influences from various areas of the world, and Judaism encountered the mystical and ethical - pietistic movements, and then the 13th century the Spanish Cabala. The Cabala is an esoteric theosophy (privately taught system of philosophy) which investigates unexplained laws of nature, and knowledge of God. It describes the nature of the Godhead and offers symbolic interpretation of the Torah and its commandments. It began in small, scholarly groups but became a major movement after the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. Its spread was facilitated by the mythical, messianic reinterpretation explained to the exiles as the meaning of their suffering and gave them a role in the story of redemption.

Various reformers of Judaism occurred in Europe particularly in Germany, where it took on a look of Protestantism, changing the sermons in worship, and rejecting much Jewish law and custom. The Rabbi took on many of the roles like a Protestant Minister and emphasized ethics and a belief in human progress in a blend of traditional Judaism and modern learning.

Zionism, a form of cultural and ethical nationalism, was gaining strength in eastern Europe, rooted in traditional Judaism and the hope of the Messiah and ultimately led to the re-creation of a state of Israel in 1948.

In the United States, "refugees" from Europe from 1881 to 1924 and more recent survivors of the Holocaust established communities and congregations. There are various forms of Judaism resulting from the adaptation of these immigrant groups to American life and the accommodation one to another. There are Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox affiliated nationally. Most congregations retain autonomy.

Reform Judaism was mostly German, but in America it was influenced by liberal Protestants and the Social Gospel movement. It was oriented to liberal philosophies with emphasis on its people. It maintained some of its religious culture.

Conservative Judaism respects traditional Rabbinic Jewish law and practice with a flexible approach. They maintain a sense of community and Jewish culture,

Orthodox Jews have variations, a traditional group, a Modern Orthodox who try to integrate tradition with a modern life, and some groups that attempt to shut out the modern world.

Judaism is no longer the religion of Moses, or David, or the covenant made with Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. It has been changed considerably since the times of the captivities and the loss of the temple in

Jerusalem. With the dispersion of the Jews and the influences of the world around them, adaptations were made to carry on the hope of the national religion, and that of a coming Messiah.

The ancient writings of the prophets which warned the people of Israel to return to God before the captivity, and the prophets who wrote during the captivity, pointed the Jewish people to the Messiah. Isaiah wrote in the first paragraph of his book, *"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me...sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers... they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward... for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem and He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nations shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. O House of Jacob come, and let us walk in the light of the Lord."*

Jews know that this has not happened literally. We know that this has not happened literally. Why in this age or in future times would anyone want plowshares or pruning hooks? With the modern machinery for farming and pruning this would be a step backward. This is language to indicate that the people of God would learn and practice peace. A law would go out from Jerusalem.

Speaking to Ahaz in Isaiah seven the Lord offered a sign and said, *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel."* (God with us).

Again in **Isaiah 9:2**, *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined."* **And verse 6 and 7**, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, and upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with judgment and justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."*

Isaiah 53, actually starting in chapter **52:13** tells us more of what we can expect. **Jeremiah** tells us in chapter **31: 31**, *"Behold, the days come saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah."* **Verse 32**, *"Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which covenant they brake; although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord."*

Ezekiel confirms this new covenant in chapter **16:60-62** and Daniel speaks of the kingdom, which shall never be destroyed. Many of the prophets from David to Malachi add something to the promise which started with Abraham of the Savior, the seed of the woman.

Judaism does not ascribe any divinity to any human being, and has the concept of 'one' God. We know there is only one God. **Deuteronomy 6:4** established this, *"Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord;"* Jesus, whose life and subsequent death fulfilled the prophecies necessarily of the Messiah, also claimed to be Messiah. In **John 4** while talking with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, *"The woman said to him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ, when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto you, am he."* Jesus claimed to be Messiah, and also to be God. In **John 10:30** He said, *"I and my Father are one,"* yet He declared to be the 'Son 'of God, and Son of David. (Man) **Matthew 16:16** Simon Peter said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

How can He be a son and still be one with the Father as God? **Colossians 1:15** gives us a clue but does not fully explain the mystery of the Godhead. Verse 15 speaking of the Son of God. *"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:"* **Verse 16**, *"For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were made by Him"* **Verse 17**, *"and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist."*

If Messiah comes and He is the seed of the woman, but not divine, how can He be worthy and sinless to be able to be a Savior? (like the innocent animal sacrifice God provided for Adam and Eve) No man can meet those criteria. If He comes and is God, no man can see Him since He is invisible to us. How would we know if He has come, if we can't see Him? As the image of the invisible God, we can see Him.

The Mystery of God and the details of His plans for us and all of His ways are not known to us. Only what He has chosen to reveal to man over the ages is known. The Apostle Paul in his writing to the **Ephesians chapter three and beginning in verse eight** said, *"... that I should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."* And going back to **Ephesians 1:10**, *"That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him;"*

Is Judaism what we are looking for? Have the Jews missed the coming Messiah? Have they failed to recognize him, while looking for him? Messiah needs to fit the promise of the 'seed of the woman' and the writings of the prophets. He must also be "God with us." The letter from the Apostle Paul to the Galatians speaks of the seed of the woman. **Chapter 3: 16-18**, *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. (Messiah) And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise."* In **verse 29** of the same chapter, *"And if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs to the promise."* **Chapter 4:4**, *"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law."*

It is necessary to want Him, in order to find Him. When the disciples of Jesus asked Him why He spoke to them in parables, as recorded in **Matthew 13: 10-13**, He said to them, *"Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given... Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing, see not: and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand."* **Mark 4:12** adds to this, *"lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them."* **Romans 11:25** speaks of the blindness of Israel... *"For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in."*

Romans 10: 1-4, *"Brethren, my hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God,. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."*

The writing to the Hebrews whose author is not stated began his letter with these words, *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners (Various times and ways) spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, by whom He a/so made the worlds;"*

John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

John 14:6, *"Jesus said to him, (Thomas) I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me."*

John 5: 39-40, *"Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me, that you might have life."*

John 5: 43-47, *"I am come in my Father's name, and you receive me not: another shall come in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, which honor one another, and seek not the honor that comes from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accused you; even Moses, in whom you trust. For had you believed Moses you would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if you believe not his writings, how shall you believe my words?"*

We have asked the question about Evolution. Where did that come from? We have asked questions about the ancient religions of men. Where did they come from? We have asked is one religion as good as another? We ask now, Is Judaism still that religion of God, as God gave it to man? As God gave the covenant to Abraham and to Israel it was to lead to the Savior. (Messiah) The prophets pointed to Messiah and provided details of what to look for. Jesus filled those requirements and claimed to be that Messiah. If you do not believe that Jesus is that Messiah (Christ), the Son of the living God, then you need not look into the church of Christ as He established it, nor will you need to look at the various divisions in 'Christianity' to learn if one of them is better than another.