

World Religions, Cults, and Aberrant Beliefs

Lesson 2 – Judaism

Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

www.valleybible.net

History of Judaism

To begin to understand Judaism, it is important to understand how God has communicated with mankind through the ages. As we read through and understand the chronology of the Bible, we see that God did not provide all information about Himself at a single time, but progressively added more revelation concerning Himself and His plan. This is called progressive revelation. God's revelation has not gone from error to truth, but from incompleteness to completeness. Truth in the OT is truth, however, it is not complete. For example, the truth about the nature of God in the OT is true – and the fullness is alluded to (Gen 1:1, 26), it just is not complete (Matt 28:19). Truth about the Messiah is given in the OT (Gen 3:15; Isa 53), but it is not complete until the NT. Since God has progressively revealed more truth about Himself and His plan through the ages, it is important to understand that the NT takes priority over the OT as the source of doctrine.

Remember one important thing: Just because the OT was progressive does not mean that it is wrong in any way. There is simply development. For example, the standards of morality established in the OT were totally refined in Jesus. God gave man a progressive revelation. The distinction is not in the nature of the truth; it's in the amount and time of it. Children are first taught letters; then they worry about the words and the sentences. God gave His revelation in the same way. His spelling book began with types, ceremonies, and prophecies and progressed to final completion in Christ. *The Superiority of Christ*; Introduction to Hebrews by John MacArthur; Hebrews 1:1-2 Tape GC 1600

The worship of Yahweh is the oldest “universe” religion as angels worshiped God before the creation of the world (Job 38:7). Therefore, it is also the oldest world religion and dates to the creation of mankind on the 6th day of the creation week. The worship of Yahweh does not equate to Judaism since others worshiped Him before the beginning of Judaism – for example: Noah and Enoch. .

¹Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, ²“Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? ³“Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! ⁴“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, ⁵Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? ⁶“On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷**When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?** Job 38:1-7

Judaism's beginning is traced to the covenant relationship that God initiated with Abram in ~2091 BC. God's covenant choice continued along Abraham's line through Isaac to Jacob (Israel)

¹Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ²And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Gen 12:1-3

¹⁹But God said, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. Gen 17:19

²⁴So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Ex 2:24

As God progressively revealed more information about Himself and His relationship to His chosen people, He gave the descendants of Abraham the Mosaic covenant through Moses. This covenant provided for the rules that God expected His chosen people to live by (the law) and is the basis for the religion of Judaism. Ultimately, the purpose of the law was to be a tutor to show all that they are sinful and in need of a Savior (Gal 3:15-29).

²³But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴Therefore **the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.** ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Gal 3:23-27

Who are the Jewish People?

This seems like an easy question to answer, but it is actually complicated. The first easy sub-grouping of the Jewish people are those that are direct descendants of Abraham. In recent years this has been anyone whose mother is Jewish, but most modern Jewish groups will recognize anyone who has one parent as being Jewish as Jewish. These people are referred to as “Jews by birth”

In modern Judaism there are also those who are converts to Judaism. These are “Jews by choice”. The requirements for conversion are different depending on the group within Judaism that one is converting to. In general, the requirements are circumcision for males, immersion (like baptism) for men and women, and to understand and accept the duties of classical Jewish religious law.

So in modern Judaism there can be Jews by birth and Jews by choice.

Modern Judaism

Modern Judaism is somewhat of a hodge-podge of belief and practice.

There's an old saying that goes, "Two Jews, three opinions." Judaism is by no means a monolith; it has changed and will continue to change for years to come. Chances are if you go to a handful of Jewish web sites, you'll find dozens of explanations of what it means to "be Jewish" and "live Jewishly." These days, the Jewish experience varies from extremely religious to atheistic and all points in between and our observances, practices and ways of life often reflect this diversity.
<http://www.jewsforjesus.org/judaica>

In the 12th-century a rabbi named Maimonides developed what he called the “13 Articles of Faith”. These articles detail what he believed every Jewish person ought to believe/practice. These articles are widely accepted as a proper expression of the Jewish faith. While it is not necessary to believe all of these articles they serve as a good general summary of religious Judaism.

1. God exists
2. God is one and unique
3. God is incorporeal
4. God is eternal
5. Prayer is to God only.
6. The prophets spoke truth.
7. Moses was the greatest of the prophets.
8. The Written and Oral Torah were given to Moses.
9. There will be no other Torah.
10. God knows the thoughts and deeds of men.
11. God will reward the good and punish the wicked.
12. The Messiah will come.
13. The dead will be resurrected.

There is a distinction between the Jewish people and the religion of Judaism. Of the 12.8 million Jewish people in the world, not all consider themselves to be religious or practice Judaism. Many profess to be atheists, agnostics, or secular. Still others have embraced New Age and Eastern philosophies. ... it is important to understand that Judaism is a religion of deed, not creed. It is possible to be an atheist and yet an Orthodox Jew because one happens to attend an Orthodox congregation. What an individual believes about God or the afterlife is not nearly as important as how one lives, ... CRI Statement DJ-431, "Understanding Judaism: How to Share the Gospel with Your Jewish Friends", by Richard Robinson, page 1.

Judaism is usually broken down into three broad "denominations" each itself containing a variety of beliefs and practices: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative. None of the three "denominations" emphasize a personal relationship with God. They are much more interested in living according to tradition than in a personal relationship with their Creator.

Orthodox Judaism adheres to a strict application of the laws and ethics in the Talmud or "Oral Law" and as developed by later Rabbinical teachers. An Orthodox Jew will generally adhere to Maimonides' 13 Articles of Faith as stated above and are expected to observe all 613 mitzvot (commandments). However, there are certain core practices considered essential to being Orthodox. These are the minimums to be considered Orthodox:

1. Refraining from murder, idolatry, and certain biblically-prohibited sexual practices.
2. Refraining from activities that violate the Jewish Sabbath and Jewish holidays.
3. Observing the Jewish dietary laws.
4. Observing the laws of family purity.
5. Observing circumcision for males.

Orthodox Judaism, fall into two broad categories: Modern Orthodox and Hasidim. The Modern Orthodox are usually more academic, while the Hasidim are more mystical. Hasidic men usually wear black or dark gray suits and always wear skullcaps

Reform Judaism (not "Reformed" Judaism), has developed in the last centuries as Jewish people have attempted to adapt themselves to modern society. Reform Judaism has embraced modernity, liberalism, and humanism. This form of Judaism has set aside the belief and practices of Orthodox Judaism. In this form synagogues are called "temples" and doctrines such as the coming of Messiah and bodily resurrection have been spiritualized. What remains in Reform Judaism is a liberal ethical system based on a monotheistic philosophy which generally maintains a more inclusive position regarding ideas like feminism and homosexuality.

Conservative Judaism is an intermediate form of Judaism between Orthodox Judaism and Reform Judaism. This form of Judaism retains the feasts and many of the Jewish traditions, but attempts to make allowances for modern culture, while "conserving," as far as possible, traditional Judaism.

A fourth group of religious Jewish people which does emphasize a personal relationship with God is called Messianic Jews. This group contains cultural or ethnic Jewish people who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Throughout the church age, God has maintained a remnant that has the faith of Abraham according to God's progressive (now completed) revelation.

¹I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³"Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE."
⁴But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." ⁵In the same way then, **there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.** Rom 11:1-5

Below is a comparison of the three major “denominations” of Judaism (from CRI Statement DJ-431, “Understanding Judaism: How to Share the Gospel with Your Jewish Friends”, by Richard Robinson, www.equip.org).

| | Orthodox Judaism | Reform Judaism | Conservative Judaism |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| U.S. Membership (as of 1992) | 6 percent of all American Jews | 38 percent of all American Jews | 35 percent of all American Jews |
| View of Scripture | <p>Torah, meaning essentially the teaching of the Five Books of Moses, is truth. They assert that a true Jew believes in revelation and the divine origin of the oral and written Torah. "Oral Torah" refers to various interpretations of the written Torah believed to have been given to Moses along with the written Torah. The Torah is accorded a higher place than the rest of the Hebrew Bible.</p> <p>The Law is the basis of Judaism. It is authoritative and gives structure and meaning to life. The life of total dedication to Halakhah (body of Jewish law) leads to a nearness to God.</p> | <p>The Bible is a human document preserving the history, culture, legends, and hopes of a people. It is valuable for deriving moral and ethical insights. Revelation is an ongoing process.</p> <p>The law is an evolving, ever-dynamic religious code that adapts to every age. It is maintained that if religious observances clash with the just demands of civilized society, they must be dropped.</p> | <p>The Bible, both the Torah and the other books of the Hebrew Bible, is the word of God and man. It is not inspired in the traditional sense but is rather dynamically inspired. Revelation is an ongoing process.</p> <p>Adaptation to contemporary situations is inevitable. The demands of morality are absolute; the specific laws are relative.</p> |
| View of God | God is spirit rather than form. He is a personal God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and compassionate. | Reform Judaism allows a varied interpretation of the "God concept" with wide latitude for naturalists, mystics, supernaturalists, or religious humanists. It holds, "The truth is that we do not know the truth." | The concept of God is non-dogmatic and flexible. There is less atheism in Conservative Judaism than in Reform, but most often God is considered impersonal and ineffable. |
| View of the Messiah | The Messiah is a human being who is not divine. He will restore the Jewish kingdom and extend his righteous rule over the earth. He will execute judgment and right all wrongs. | Instead of belief in the Messiah as a person or divine being, Reform Jews favor the concept of a Utopian age toward which humankind is progressing, sometimes called the "Messianic Age." | Conservative Jews hold much the same view as the Reform. |

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| View of Humankind | <p>Humanity is morally neutral with a good and an evil inclination. A person can overcome his or her evil bent and be perfected by his or her own efforts in observance of the Law.</p> <p>Orthodox Jews do not believe in "original sin." Instead, one commits sin by breaking the commandments of the Law.</p> | <p>Humanity's nature is basically good. Through education, encouragement, and evolution a person can actualize the potential already existing within him or her.</p> <p>Reform Jews do not believe in "original sin." Sin is interpreted as the ills of society. Humanity is sometimes held to have a "divine spark" within.</p> | <p>This group tends toward the Reform view, though it is not as likely to espouse humanism. Perfectibility can come through enlightenment. Humanity is "in partnership" with God.</p> <p>Conservative Jews do not believe in "original sin." The individual can sin by committing immoral or antisocial acts.</p> |
| View of Salvation | <p>Repentance (belief in God's mercy), prayer, and obedience to the Law are necessary for a proper relationship with God. "Salvation" is not considered a Jewish concept, since Jewish people presume a favored standing with God; that is, they do not need salvation.</p> | <p>"Salvation" is obtained through the betterment of self and society. It is social improvement.</p> | <p>Conservative Jews tend toward the Reform view, but include the necessity of maintaining Jewish identity.</p> |

Witnessing Strategies to Jewish People

Let's remember some of our general strategies from last week.

1. Sanctify your heart. (1 Pet 3:15)
2. Pray – this is a spiritual battle for the truth. (2 Cor 10:3-5)
3. Be ready with a good understanding of the Scriptures.
4. Do not argue. Do not attack the person. (2 Tim 2:24-26)
5. Make sure you define words.
6. Do not get off on tangents. The important points are the source of authority, the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus, the nature of man, and the means of salvation.

In addition, we should be aware that Jewish people presume a standing with God. Since they are a member of God's chosen people, they believe they already have a "relationship" with Him and there is no need of salvation. When a Jewish person places his trust in Jesus for salvation, the Jewish community considers that he has turned his back on his people and has become a Gentile. Our goal is not that they become a Gentile, but that they become a completed Jew. Our desire is for them to find personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Jesus Christ.

Some things to avoid:

1. Avoid Christian jargon – it has no meaning for the unchurched.
2. Avoid offensive language – the gospel can be taken as offensive by the unredeemed, there is no need to place an additional stumbling block before a Jewish person by using offensive language. Avoid "the Jews" or "you Jews", better to say "the Jewish people". Jewish is used as an adjective only for people, land, religion, or language.
3. Do not tell jokes about Jewish people or culture.
4. We must understand that the Jewish people are not the "Christ killers". Jesus said, ¹⁷"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." (John 10:17-18)
5. Avoid the idea of "converting" to Christianity. This implies leaving behind ones Jewishness. In fact they are becoming a complete Jew.
6. As with all witnessing situations you cannot "love someone into the kingdom". Eventually, if they are to be set free from their bondage to sin and its eternal penalty, you must share the gospel with them (Rom 10:17).

Some things to do:

1. Use a Jewish frame of reference. Remember that Jesus, the disciples, and most of the first Christians were all Jewish people. Jesus and the disciples observed a Passover Seder during the last supper (Luke 22:7-20). The Jewish feasts are a good bridges to the gospel as they point to the Messiah or to pertinent points in the gospel (for example – the Passover, Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement).
2. "Christ" and "Jesus" are OK to use, but better is "Messiah". "Hebrew Scriptures" are better than the "OT".
3. Salvation should be spoken of in terms of "redemption" and "atonement" for sin since the idea of salvation is foreign to most Jewish people.

4. Use the Hebrew Scriptures to show how Jesus fulfills prophecy since Jesus Himself spoke of His life being a fulfillment of prophecies (Luke 24:27; John 5:39-40). Most Jewish people will not accept that the Scriptures are inspired and inerrant, but they will accord it respect.

²⁷Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. Luke 24:27

³⁹"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; ⁴⁰and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. John 5:39-40

Some Hebrew Scripture gospel passages:

1. sin (see Psa 14:2-3; 51:5; Eccl 7:20; and Isa 59:1-2)
2. atonement (see Lev 17:11 and Isa 53:5-6)
3. Messiah (see Isa 53; Dan 9:16; and Mic 5:1 [v. 2 in our Bible])
4. faith (see Gen 15:6; Num 21:7-9; and Joel 2:32 [3:5 in our Bible])

Prophecies concerning the Messiah:

1. Born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:20-25)
2. Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt 2:1)
3. Sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zech 11:12; Matt 26:15)
4. Betrayed by a friend (Psa 41:9; John 13:18)
5. Silent before His accusers (Isa 53:7; Mark 15:3-5)
6. Hands and feet pierced (Psa 22:16; the crucifixion)
7. Garments divided by gambling (Psa 22: 18; John 19: 24)
8. Mocked (Psa 22:7; Matt. 27 :41)
9. Gall and vinegar to drink (Psa 69:21; Matt 27:34)
10. Prayed for His murderers (Isa 53:12; Luke 23:34)
11. Not a bone broken (Psa 34:20; John 19:36)
12. Crucified with thieves (Isa 53:12; Mark 15:27, 28)
13. His forsaken cry (Psa 22: 1; Mark 15:34 12)
14. His side pierced (Zech 12:10; John 19:34-37)
15. Buried with rich man (Isa 53:9; Matt 27:57-60)
16. Looked on Him whom they pierced (Zech 12: 10; John19:37)
17. People esteemed and received Him not (Isa 53:3; John 1:11)

Jewish people say they will expect a "sign" from God when the Messiah comes – that "sign" has already been given with Jesus' virgin birth.

Point out that the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the NT speak of two comings of the Messiah.

¹⁰As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, ¹¹seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and **the glories to follow**. 1 Pet 1:10-11

²⁴"For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day. ²⁵"But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Luke 17:24-25

Responding to Objections

From CRI Statement DJ-431, "Understanding Judaism: How to Share the Gospel with Your Jewish Friends", by Richard Robinson.

Undoubtedly the time will come when a Jewish friend will put up objections to the gospel. Raising objections such as the following might be a reflex action or represent an "official line" rather than a personally held viewpoint.

"Christians believe in three gods but Jews believe in one God." What is meant may be no more than, "Our religion teaches one God. So even though I do not believe in God, if I did, that is the kind of God I would believe in." Jewish people think the Trinity somehow implies multiple gods. You can simply affirm that you believe that God is One and point out that Jesus Himself quoted the *Sh'ma* (the statement of Gods oneness in Deut. 6:4, quoted in Mark 12:29). You may also wish to point out that even the Old Testament teaches a plurality within the being of the one God, as when God says, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26).

"There's no proof that Jesus was the Messiah." This is typically a stereotyped response; the person may never have investigated any of the reasons for faith. You might start by asking, "What kind of proof would convince you?"

"If Jesus is the Messiah, why isn't there peace on earth?" One answer is that we first need to have peace with God before there can be peace on earth. Jesus' first coming accomplished the former and, in proper order, His second coming will establish the latter.

"How can you expect me to believe in God after all the persecution we've been through, not to mention the Holocaust? And it was Christians who did it!" People can misuse any good thing. For example, tyrants misuse freedom and justice. Yet that doesn't make freedom and justice any less important to seek after. Likewise, people like Hitler have misused the gospel to oppress the Jewish people. They were certainly not Christians.

"The New Testament is anti-Semitic." Ask which parts and which passages. Often a person will not be able to point to anything specific. Sometimes a Jewish person will have in mind certain harsh-sounding passages in the Gospel of John and other places, such as John 8:44 or 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. You can point out that this was the manner of speaking of the prophets of Israel. Isaiah 1 furnishes a good example. Isaiah was a Jew grieved by the sins of his people, and so was Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus is saddened at the sins of all people, not just Jewish people. Point out that you feel similarly about Gentiles who do not turn to God. All have sinned, and Gods response to sin is the same for all people.

"Jews don't proselytize." This objection usually means, "I don't think people should push their beliefs on others." You can point out that Isaiah said Israel was to be a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). Moreover, you can say that you don't believe in forcing religion on anyone either, but you have always found that discussion and persuasion are part of any friendship. You might point out that the gospel is your greatest treasure and you naturally want to share it, especially with people you care deeply about.

"I'm happy with my own religion." You can appropriately respond, "Its OK if you don't want to talk about spiritual things, but just remember that the goal of life is not to be happy but to know God. Ultimately, knowing the truth about God is what brings complete and lasting happiness and joy."

"If Jesus was the Messiah, why don't the rabbis believe in him?" The answer is, because they wouldn't be allowed to be rabbis much longer! With the kind of community responsibility and weight that a rabbi has, not many rabbis will allow themselves the freedom to ask if Jesus might be the Messiah.