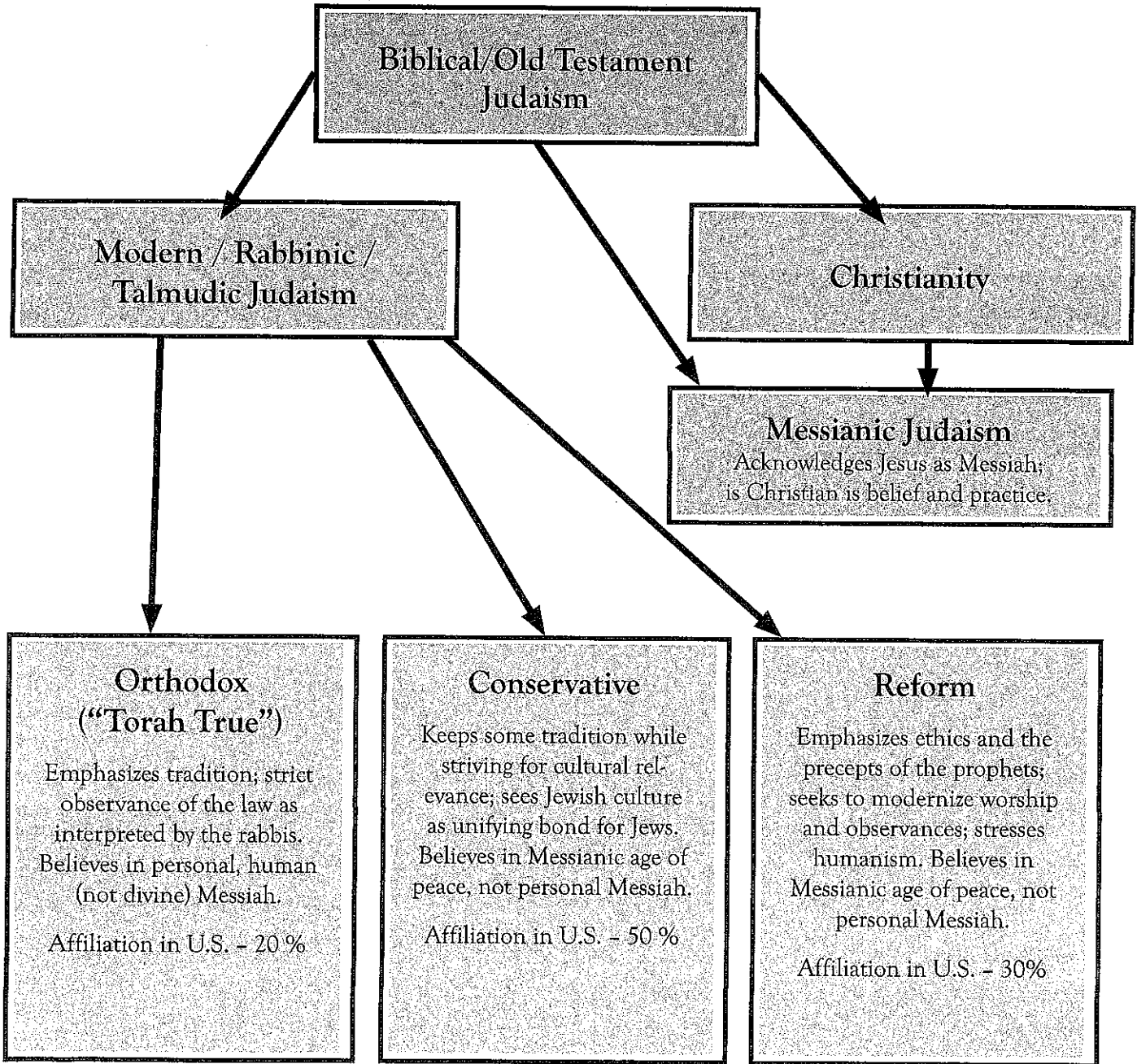


Judaism and Christianity: Sister Religions



# Judaism: An Overview



Judaism is the religion of the Jewish people. It is based on the principles of the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) and the *Talmud* (a record of rabbinic discussions about law, ethics, custom and history). The history of Judaism begins with the covenant between God and Abraham, in which God establishes the Jews as His chosen people and promises them future blessings, including a large population and land. Most significantly, the Jews are the people through whom the entire world would be blessed (in the coming of the Messiah). Judaism is one of the oldest religious traditions still in practice today. Jewish history and beliefs have influenced other religions including Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i faith.

## **Jewish Texts**

The *Tanakh* corresponds to the Old Testament and is composed of three parts:

- *Torah* (law) – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
- *Nevi'im* (prophets) – Joshua, Judges, Samuel (2), Kings (2), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi.
- *Ketuvim* (writings) – Ruth, Chronicles (2), Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations and Daniel.

The *Talmud* comes mainly from two sources:

- *Mishnah* – containing hundreds of chapters, including series of laws from the Hebrew Scriptures.
- *Gemara* – including comments from hundreds of rabbis from 200-500 A.D. explaining the *Mishnah* with additional historical, religious, legal and other material.

## **Basic Jewish Beliefs**

The closest thing to a creed in Judaism is the 13 articles formulated by rabbi and scholar Moses Maimonides, who lived from 1135-1204 A.D.

1. God alone is Creator.
2. God is one and unique.
3. God is incorporeal (without material existence).
4. God is eternal – the first and the last.
5. Prayer is to be directed to God alone and to no other.
6. The words of the prophets are true.

7. Moses was the greatest of the prophets, and his prophecies are true.
8. The *Written Torah* (first five books of the Bible) and the *Oral Torah* (teachings now contained in the *Talmud* and other writings) were given by 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.

Some additional beliefs found commonly among Jews are:

- Jesus was a great moral teacher; or, Jesus was a false prophet or an idol of Christianity.
- The Jews are God's chosen people; that is, God selected Israel to receive and study the *Torah*, to worship God alone, to rest on the weekly Sabbath, and to celebrate the festivals.
- The 613 commandments found in Leviticus and other books of the Torah regulate all aspects of Jewish life.
- The Ten Commandments form a brief synopsis of the Law.
- The Messiah will arrive in the future and gather Jews once more into the land of Israel. There will be a general resurrection of the dead at that time, and the Jerusalem Temple, destroyed in 70 A.D., will be rebuilt.
- Boys reach the status of *Bar Mitzvah* on their 13th birthday. Girls reach *Bat Mitzvah* on their 12th birthday. Following these milestones, males and females can sign contracts, testify in religious courts, and marry (although the *Talmud* recommends 18 to 24 as the proper age for marriage).

### **Jewish Practices**

Jewish practices include:

- Observation of the weekly Sabbath.
- Strict discipline, according to the Law, which governs all areas of life.
- Regular attendance by Jewish males at synagogue.
- Celebration of the annual festivals including: Passover, Rosh Hashanah (New Year), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Sukkoth (Feast of Booths), Hanukkah (Feast of Lights), Purim (Feast of Lots), and Shavout (Feast of Weeks).

### **Main Forms of Judaism**

There are five main forms of Judaism in the world today:

- **Orthodox** – the oldest, most conservative, and most diverse form of Judaism. Modern Orthodox, Chasidim and Ultra Orthodox Jews share a basic belief in the Jewish Law, even though they differ in their outlooks on life. They attempt to follow the original form of Judaism as they see it. Every word of the sacred texts is considered inspired.
- **Reform** – a liberal group including many North American Jews. The movement started in the 1790s in Germany. Reform Jews follow the ethical laws of Judaism but allow the individual to decide whether to follow dietary and other traditional laws. They use modern forms of worship. Many of their rabbis are females.
- **Conservative** – a movement that began in the mid-nineteenth century in response to the Reform movement. It is a mainline movement midway between Orthodox and Reform.
- **Humanistic** – a very small group composed mainly of atheists and agnostics who regard man as the measure of all things.
- **Reconstructionist** – a small, liberal movement started as an attempt to unify and revitalize the religion. It rejects the concept that Jews are a unique people whom God favors.

It's important to note what some call a sixth – and growing – form of Judaism: **Messianic Judaism**. These Jews believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah. Culturally and ethically they are Jews, but they have embraced Christianity. Some prefer to be called Hebrew Christians, Jewish Christians, or simply believers.

#### ***Moshiach*: The Messiah**

Traditional Judaism holds to a foundational belief in the eventual coming of the *moshiach*– the Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek). Jews teach that the Messiah will be a great political leader descended from King David (Jer. 23:5). He will be well-versed in Jewish law and observe its commandments (Isa. 11:2-5). In addition, he will be a charismatic figure who inspires others; a great military leader who wins battles for Israel; and a great judge who makes righteous decisions (Jer. 33:15). But above all, he will be a human being who is in no way divine. It is believed that in every generation a person is born with the potential to be the Messiah.

Though many have claimed to be the Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth (1st century), Shimeon ben Kosiba (2nd century), and Shabbatai Tzvi (17th century) to name a few – Jews claim all of them died without fulfilling the Messiah's mission, which involves:

- Bringing about the political and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people by restoring the Jews' homeland and capital city (Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5).
- Establishing a government in Israel that is the center of all world government (Isa. 2:2-4; 11:10; 42:1).
- Rebuilding the temple and reestablishing its worship (Jer. 33:18).
- Restoring the religious court system of Israel and establishing Jewish law as the law of the land (Jer. 33:15).

Before the time of the Messiah, there will be war and suffering (Ezek. 38:16). After he comes, the world will enter a period known as *Olam Ha-Ba*, or the world to come, or the Messianic Age, characterized by peaceful coexistence among people, and even animals (Isa. 2:4). Jews will return from their exile among the nations to Israel (Isa. 11:11-12; Jer. 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5). The whole world will acknowledge God and worship Him according to the Jewish religion (Isa. 2:3; 11:10; Micah 4:2-3; Zech. 14:9). Sin will cease (Zeph. 3:13). Sacrifices will continue to be brought to the temple, but these will be limited to thanksgiving offerings because there will be no necessity for sin offerings.

Jews do not believe that Jesus was the *moshiach*. They argue that he did not fulfill the mission of the Messiah as described above.

# Comparing Christianity to Judaism

## **What the Bible says about God:**

There is one true and living God, who exists as three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Deut. 6:4; John 10:30; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 Peter 1:2). God is personal and is to be worshipped (Ex. 20:2-3; Isa. 43:10, 44:6; Matt. 4:10).

## **What Judaism says about God:**

There is one God who is Creator, Deliverer, and Lord of history. He exists in absolute singularity and therefore is not triune, nor does He exist as more than one distinct person. He is somewhat less personal and more abstract than the God of Christianity.

## **What the Bible says about Jesus:**

He is the virgin-born Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-23; Luke 1:35). He is the eternal God, the Creator, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit (John 1:1-14, 10:30; Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-13). Jesus died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), rose physically from the dead (Matt. 12:38-40; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:4-8; 1 Peter 1:18-21) and is coming back physically and visibly one day (Matt. 24:29-31; John 14:3; Titus 2:13; Rev. 19:11-16).

## **What Judaism says about Jesus:**

Judaism rejects Jesus as the Messiah because he did not fulfill the required prophecies, which include worldwide peace, the return of all Jewish exiles to Israel, the cessation of sin, and the acknowledgement of God and the worship of God according to the Jewish religion. Some Jews see Jesus as a humble but insignificant prophet; others, as a fraud; still others as a pagan idol.

## **What the Bible says about man:**

God created man in His image – with a human spirit, personality and will. A person's life begins at conception and is everlasting, but not eternal; that is, our lives have no end, but they did have a distinct beginning (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 139:13-16).

## **What Judaism says about man:**

God created man in His image (Gen. 1:26-28). Man does not inherit original sin. Therefore, mankind basically is good, free, and self-determining.

## **What the Bible says about sin:**

Sin is a violation of God's perfect and holy standards. All humans are sinners (Rom. 3:10) and are under the curse of sin – spiritual and physical death (Gen. 2:17, 3:17-19; Rom. 3:23, 6:23). Only faith in Christ and His work on our behalf frees us from sin and its consequences (John 3:16, 5:24; Eph. 2:8-9).

## **What Judaism says about sin:**

Sin is seen virtually as criminal behavior. Therefore, most Jews do not see themselves as sinners. Ignorance of God's law, or refusal to keep the law according to rabbinic tradition, not sin, is man's biggest problem.

**What the Bible says about salvation:**

Christ's death at Calvary completely paid our sin debt so that salvation comes by grace alone through faith in the person and work of Jesus (John 3:16, 5:24; Rom. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7).

**What the Bible says about the Bible:**

The Bible is the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God, and is His sole written authority for all people (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

**What the Bible says about death and the afterlife:**

Physical and spiritual deaths come upon all people as a consequence of sin (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:1). A person becomes spiritually alive when he or she is "born again" by the Spirit of God (John 3:3-6; Eph. 2:4-5). At physical death, our souls and spirits separate from our bodies [which go into the grave to await resurrection and final judgment] and enter an everlasting state of blessedness [for those born again] or torment [for those who die in their sins] (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Cor. 5:8). Hell is a place of everlasting conscious existence, where the unbeliever is forever separated from God (Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:19-31; Rev. 14:9-11, 20:10). As for Heaven, all believers have God's promise of a home in Heaven, will go there instantly upon physical death, and will return with Christ from Heaven to earth one day (John 14:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 19:14).

**What Judaism says about salvation:**

The solutions to man's problem – which is either ignorance of God's law, or refusal to keep the law according to rabbinic tradition – are education and greater effort applied to living moral and disciplined lives. Repentance, good deeds, and prayer take the place of sacrifice.

**What Judaism says about the Bible:**

The Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*, or the "Old Testament"), as interpreted by rabbinic tradition, is man's guide. In practice, rabbinic tradition is more authoritative than Scripture.

**What Judaism says about death and the afterlife:**

Jews hold a range of views:

- Orthodox Jews believe in reward in heaven (Garden of Eden) or punishment in hell.
- Conservative Jews hold to a vague view of the afterlife.
- Reform Jews deny the existence of life beyond the grave.

Scripture that give a clear perspective of Jewish lack of response to God's word.

Matthew 8:10-12 Jesus' response to the Centurion's statement of faith.

"Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, 'Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel, I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Matthew 23:23-28 Jesus exposes the Scribes and Pharisees.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Romans 11:19-24 Paul's description of the grafting process.

"You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do Not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches; be grafted into their own olive tree?"