

WORLD RELIGIONS

Judaism Lesson #19

For most Christians Judaism is a bit confusing. A Christian reads the Bible and learns about Judaism as God prescribed it in the law of Moses. They read about the sacrificial system, the temple, festivals, and yet they know that today there is no temple or sacrificial system. Christians often wonder how Judaism can function with no temple and no sacrificial system. Since those who practice Judaism reject Jesus Christ as their Messiah, Christians often wonder how Jews atone for their sins. It is also common among Christians to think that all Jews are religious Jews. Even if they understand that some Jews are non-religious, they may still assume that those who are religious believe the same thing.

Christians read the Bible as their sole source of authority. We believe, read, and study in both the Old and New Testaments. Because of this we often assume that every Jewish person will be very familiar with the Old Testament. Most Christians read the Bible every day and study the Bible weekly. They assume that Jews do the same thing with the Old Testament. Yet this is rarely the case. Most Jews who are studious Jews still may not study the Old Testament Scriptures. They study the Mishnah and Talmud instead. Christians often have the mistaken idea that all religious Jews are united in their beliefs. Further complicating the subject is that the term “Jewish” can refer to those who practice Judaism and those who are ethnically descendants of Abraham.

The fact is, there are a lot of different groups within Judaism just like there are in Christianity. All Jews don't believe the same thing and very few Jews study the Old Testament on a regular basis. In this lesson we will try to unravel some of the common misconceptions about Judaism and consider how Judaism can be a false religion since God is the one who established it.

I. THE JEWISH RELIGION VERSUS NATIONALITY

- A. **Jewish nationality** refers to those who are ethnically Jewish. Their ancestry goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. While the genealogical records of the Jews have been lost, the Jewish people have often formed close-knit communities and maintained their Jewish identity, religion, and ethnic roots. Today, many non-religious or secular Jews have intermarried with Gentiles (those who are not descendants of Abraham). Many Gentiles have also converted to Judaism. If asked, they would tell you they are Jewish also. What this means is when you hear someone say they are Jewish you have to ask more questions to find out exactly what they mean.

B. **The Jewish religion** is also a bit difficult to understand, because many Jews are religious to different degrees and believe different things. Apart from secular or non-religious Jews, there are Jews who deny God's personal work in Judaism, others who want to see the temple rebuilt and sacrificial system reestablished, and still others who only observe certain Jewish holidays. There are Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah. If one travels to Israel and visits the wailing wall they may see certain Jews with black, flat-brimmed hats, and long, black trench coats, with beards and long sideburns. Maybe you have gone on a transatlantic flight and seen someone who looked like he came out of a movie, and twice during the flight the man wrapped a leather strap around his arm and put a box on his forehead and mumbled certain prayers. All these ethnically Jewish groups would define themselves as "religious Jews."

C. Richard Robinson has written:

If you journeyed back in time 3,500 years and saw Jewish life as our forefathers lived it, you would be astounded at how vastly it differed from today's practices. Instead of synagogues and Jewish community centers, you would witness a tent-like tabernacle, or at a later date, Solomon's magnificent temple. And whether it was a temple or a tabernacle, you would find the "services" totally foreign. In place of a chanted liturgy centered in the weekly Torah reading, you would discover a world of worship where animal sacrifice was the focal point. No rabbi would preside. Instead a kohen, a priest, would be responsible for the ritual handling of the animal's b[!]ood.

There were other differences as well. Unlike rabbis of today, the priest was not paid a salary. Rather, he received a percentage of the meat and grain offered by the worshipers. Whereas synagogue congregants today participate in the entire High Holy Day service, in ancient times the High Priest alone ventured into the sacred Holy of Holies. There, in solemn ceremonies, he made atonement for the nation. And what would the sermon topic have been, had there been a sermon? Certainly not "the brotherhood of man!" Instead, the major issue would have been atonement.

In essence, if time travel were possible it would reveal that the **Judaism of today is something other than what was established by the God of Israel.**¹

II. **BIBLICAL OR OLD TESTAMENT JUDAISM**

Biblical or Old Testament Judaism is not practiced today. The law of Moses requires a temple, a sacrificial system, and a priesthood to start with. The Jews no longer have a temple, they no longer observe the sacrificial system, and they have lost their genealogical records so they don't know who belongs to the tribe of Levi. They also don't have the ark of the covenant. Over the centuries man-made rules and traditions have slowly swallowed up, erased, and modified what God originally prescribed. The fact is, even the most conservative Jews don't practice biblical Judaism as revealed in the law of Moses. Some obey the law of Moses more than others, but even they fall far short of what God requires of His people. Since biblical or Old Testament Judaism is not practiced today we will move on to what is practiced.

III. **FORMS OF MODERN DAY JUDAISM**

- A. **Humanistic or Secular Judaism** might be understood as unbelieving Judaism. Secular Jews are non-religious, but are often held together by their ethnic background and historical beginnings. Thus, there is a comradeship among those who are Secular Jews, but they may be atheists, may reject Jewish law and tradition, deny supernaturalism, live in the world like any other person, intermarry with Gentiles, and not observe any Jewish rites, festivals, holidays or traditions. Thus the Secular Jew is an unbelieving Jew.

- B. **Reconstructionist Judaism** is a more modern version of Judaism and might be understood as the most liberal of all religious movements within Judaism. Reconstructionists believe that Judaism is always evolving and changing. Jewish law and tradition are not considered binding, but valuable as a cultural element of Judaism. In some respects Reconstructionist Judaism might be viewed as atheism melded with Jewish tradition. Many deny God's existence or that God is personal.

¹http://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/4_4/yomkippur (Emphasis his).

Contemporary Western morality (which means no morality) is held to rather than traditional Jewish morality. Jewish law, they say, should be considered as folklore and historical folkways rather than binding law. Divine, supernatural revelation is almost universally rejected along with all other forms of supernaturalism. All positions within Reconstructionist Judaism are open to men and women and even homosexuals.

- C. **Progressive or Reformed Judaism** has its origins in early 19th century Germany. It might be understood as liberal Judaism. Unlike Reformed Christianity which sought to *undo changes* in fundamental doctrines of historical Christianity imposed by Roman Catholicism, Reformed Judaism is “reformed” in that it *promotes changes* to Jewish customs. Reformed Jews believe Jewish laws should be divided into *ritual* and *ethical laws*. The ritual laws can be changed for they are “customs” but the ethical laws never change. Progressive Jews believe they should integrate with whatever societies they choose to live in, not isolate themselves into separate Jewish communities. Their laws, therefore, must be adapted to fit in with other cultures to allow for modern lifestyles. The law of Moses should not be read literally, but seen as having figurative or symbolic meaning. The law of Moses can be criticized like any other literature. Reformed Judaism allows men and women to sit together and both men and women to become rabbis. Reformed Judaism believes one is a Jew if their father is Jewish.²
- D. **Conservative Judaism** is a mid 19th century reaction to Reformed or Progressive Judaism. This form of Judaism is “conservative” in that it attempts to “conserve” or maintain Jewish tradition rather than alter or abandon it. The term “conservative” does not relate to their political views. They affirm that there is a God who created and governs the universe. They believe in the traditional body of Jewish law and traditions, and they encourage the study of all Jewish literature in an attempt to get closer to God. They believe Jews must abide by certain Jewish ethics prescribed in their laws and traditions. They believe that Israel is not only a *holy land* but includes *the totality of Jewish people around the world*. As Jews live out their laws and traditions it will slowly move the world towards the Kingdom of God. Conservative Judaism believes that more liberal Reformed and Reconstructive Judaism has erred by rejecting the authority of Jewish law and tradition. They believe that more conservative

²http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_Judaism

kinds of Judaism, like Orthodox Judaism, are too inflexible in that they fail to accommodate Jews living in a modern age and a variety of circumstances. Conservative Judaism allows for homosexual men and women to become rabbis. Conservative Judaism believes one is a Jew if their mother is Jewish or if they convert to Judaism according to Jewish law and tradition.³

- E. **Orthodox Judaism** includes *Neo-Orthodox*, *Modern Orthodox* and *Ultra Orthodox (also Haredi or Hasidic Judaism)*. The views of each are radically different in some respects. In general, Orthodox Judaism more strictly adheres to Jewish laws and traditions. Neo-Orthodox Judaism permits its members to engage in compatible secular studies. They allow for Jews to engage in and influence the modern world. Modern Orthodox Judaism also agrees that interaction with contemporary society is good in that it is the means that Judaism will transform the world and bring in the Kingdom of God. Modern Orthodox Jews tend to have strong Zionist leanings and see great significance in the state of Israel. Ultra-Orthodox Judaism might be understood as clinging to the motto that “recent is forbidden by the Torah.” Ultra-Orthodox or Haredi Judaism is very cautious about making any changes in Jewish law or tradition in order to accommodate modern culture. Segregation from the culture is encouraged except in commercial transactions where Haredi Jews can interact and conduct business in order to make a living. Most Orthodox Jews believe non-orthodox Judaism to be heretical. Women cannot become rabbis. Orthodox Judaism holds to the belief that one is a Jew if they are born of a Jewish mother or convert to Judaism in accordance with Jewish law and tradition.
- F. **Messianic Judaism** is a slightly deceptive term because virtually all religious Jews believe in a Messiah. Some believe the Messiah is still to come and others believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah, but both are “Messianic” in that they both believe in a Messiah. Yet we are using the term here to describe *a modern-day version of the Judaizer heresy which the Apostle Paul addresses head on in the book of Galatians.*

Messianic Jews try to combine Christianity and historic Judaism. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Jewish Messiah, Savior, and Redeemer. They believe, along with orthodox Christianity, that Jesus died on the cross to make atonement for sins, was buried, and rose from the dead

³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conservative_Judaism

three days later and now sits at the right hand of the throne of God. In these respects Messianic Judaism is in line with orthodox Christianity. The difference is that Messianic Judaism attempts to practice their Christianity in the context of the law of Moses. They try to live under both the Old and New Covenants. Thus Messianic Jews believe the law of Moses is still binding in some respects and that Jewish festivals and holidays must be observed. Thus the “Judaizer” side of Messianic Judaism is revealed. By placing themselves under the law of Moses, rather than the law of Christ, they bring the curse of the law upon themselves. They try to be saved by grace and kept by law, and therefore fall from grace.

- G. **Jewish Christians** sometimes refer to themselves as “Messianic Jews” or “Completed Jews” in that they have received Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, as their Lord and Savior. Their faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah is not to be confused with “Messianic Judaism” which promotes a system of works righteousness. It is helpful to think of Christianity as God’s intended plan for Judaism. Christianity abides under the law system of the Jewish Messiah Jesus Christ. The apostles and writers of the New Testament were Jewish. Christianity is Judaism brought to its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

When a Jewish person places their faith in Jesus Christ they are receiving their promised Messiah. Their eyes are opened to the fact that no animal can be a perfect substitute for a sinful human. This is why animal sacrifice in the Old Testament continued. Perfect atonement cannot be made with the blood of bulls and goats. All those sacrifices were a picture, pointing ahead to the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The offering up of Isaac and Isaac being spared by the Ram, a substitute, the Passover lamb, picture the Lamb of God, who could take away the sins of the world. Isaiah 53 clearly says that a man, God’s servant, will become a guilt offering for the sins of many. This could not be Israel, for Israel is blemished. The sufferings of Israel are the just judgments of God, as the prophets clearly reveal, not an unblemished sacrifice for the salvation of souls. When a Jewish person realizes that the Messiah came the first time to die and will come a second time to set up a kingdom, all things become clear. The veil is removed, they are saved by grace, and Jesus Christ, the Messiah, fills their heart.

IV. **ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS OFTEN ASK**

- A. **Why don’t Jews offer sacrifices anymore since they are commanded in the Old Testament?** Different answers are often given, but the basic

answer is that since the temple is destroyed, the sacrificial system has to be halted and until God sends His Messiah to reestablish Judaism and rebuild the temple (Ezek. 40-48), there will be no sacrificial system. Sacrifices of the Jews now are prayers and, in some instances, symbols, like the roasted egg at the Passover Seder meal.

- B. Why don't Jews practice all that God commanded in the law of Moses, like the year of Jubilee?** As was indicated above, most forms of Judaism have adapted the law of Moses to fit with modern day culture and society. Thus the Jews rationalize that God must desire that they be a positive influence in the world, therefore, change in the law is necessary. It is also argued that there is no monolithic Jewish state as in Old Testament times. The law was established in a time of theocracy (God ruling Israel through prophets like Moses) or theocratic monarchy (God ruling Israel through a godly king). The religious system centralized around the temple and functioned as the government. That system no longer exists, thus it is argued that the law must change.
- C. How do Jews get their sins atoned for today since there is no sacrificial system? How do the Jewish people today get right with God after sinning?** Some argue that blood sacrifice is not necessary for forgiveness of sins. They point to **Lev. 5:11-13** or **Jonah 3:10** as examples of people who were forgiven without a blood sacrifice. This, of course, ignores the primary teaching on blood sacrifice and its necessity from **Lev. 17**. It ignores the fact that on the Day of Atonement, blood sacrifice was offered for the entire nation. And it ignores the obvious fact that the entire Jewish religious system is focused around blood sacrifice. It ignores that as far back as Eden, God killed innocent animals to clothe Adam and Eve and all through the Scripture, even before the law of Moses, God required blood sacrifices.

Yes, it is true that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and even Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. But the only way anyone can ever be forgiven before God is to have perfect atonement for their sins. The only way a sinful human can have perfect atonement is to have a perfect human die for them in substitution as a sacrifice. Of course, no human can do this for all are sinners in Adam and are born sinners (**Gen. 8:21; Psa. 51:5; 58:3**). Thus God forbade human sacrifice in the law of Moses, for all humans are blemished and sinful and cannot atone for each other's sins.

This is why God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (**Gen. 3:15**), that David's Son, who is also called God's

Son, would rule and reign forever (**I Chron. 17:11-14**), that David's Son would be David's Lord (**Psa. 110:1**), that a Son would be born of a virgin named Immanuel (**Isa. 7:14**), that, that same Child would be called Mighty God and eternal Father (**Isa. 9:6**), that the one betrayed for thirty pieces of silver would be none other than the Lord Himself (**Zech. 11:13**), and that there would be one who was to be born in Bethlehem having already existed from the days of eternity (**Mic. 5:2**).

The Jewish people need to have their sins atoned for and there is only one person who can do it – Jesus Christ. One day, they will look on Him whom they have pierced and they will mourn over the rejection of their Messiah, Jesus Christ, and will repent and believe (**Zech. 12:10**).

- D. **Why do most religious Jews not read from and study the Old Testament Scriptures?** The Jews, over the course of time, added more and more man-made rules and traditions to biblical Judaism as prescribed in the law of Moses. Different rabbis promoted different schools of thought. These rabbinical writings were collected into what is called the Mishnah, the Babylonian, Palestinian Talmud, Gemara, and other writings. These writings take up many volumes and contain commentary and debate about various Old Testament texts. Thus Jews who are studious often study the secondary sources but rarely make it a habit of studying the text of the Old Testament itself. They prefer the secondary sources because they incorporate the Jewish traditions that are not prescribed in the Old Testament. So much of the law of Moses is not practiced that even those who do study the law, the prophets and the writings, often spiritualize their meaning so that the author's original intent is lost. Jesus, in **Mt. 15:1-9**, sums up the plight of the Jews in His day, which is even worse in ours:

1Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2“Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” 3And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4“For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’ 5“But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7“You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR

AWAY FROM ME. 9' BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' ”

In light of all the exhortations in the Old Testament to Jews telling them to study, meditate, and memorize the Hebrew Scriptures, one might wonder why so few Jews actually do what the Hebrew Scriptures command them. It is the same reason so few professing Christians read and study the Word of God – in their heart they don't love God. They do not hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they don't desire righteousness. They have never been born again by the Holy Spirit and transformed by God's saving grace.

E. Why do the bulk of the Jewish people reject Jesus Christ as their Messiah? Here are twelve reasons from Jewish sources.⁴

1. Jews believe that one person cannot die for the sins of another person (**Ex. 32:30-35; Deut. 24:16, Ezek. 18:19-23**).
2. Jews do not believe that blood sacrifice is necessary for the forgiveness of sins (**Lev. 5:11-13; Jonah 3:10**).
3. Jews do not believe God can die and the law teaches that human sacrifice is an abomination (**Deut. 12:30-31**), therefore, Jesus can't be the Messiah.
4. Jews believe people are born into the world pure and sinless and reject the idea of original sin, that the sins of Adam are passed down from generation to generation.
5. Jews do not believe in the Trinity because God is one and indivisible.
6. Jews do not believe God can become a man or become incarnated and take on the form of man.
7. Jews do not believe that Jesus fulfilled Messianic prophecies:

⁴There are many websites explaining why Jews don't accept Jesus as their Messiah. The above statements are paraphrases of statements made from these websites: <http://www.whatjewsbelieve.org/>; <http://www.aish.com/jw/s/48892792.html>.

- a. Build the Third Temple (**Ezekiel 37:26-28**).
 - b. Gather all Jews back to the Land of Israel (**Isaiah 43:5-6**).
 - c. Usher in an era of world peace, and end all hatred, oppression, suffering and disease. As it says: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall man learn war anymore" (**Isaiah 2:4**).
 - d. Spread universal knowledge of the God of Israel, which will unite humanity as one. As it says: "God will be King over all the world—on that day, God will be One and His Name will be One" (**Zechariah 14:9**).
8. Jews don't believe Jesus was a prophet. Prophets can only exist when the majority of Jews live in Israel. Since that hasn't happened since 300 BC, Jesus cannot be the Messiah.
 9. Jews don't believe Jesus was the Messiah because the Messiah has to be fully human, not a demi-god. The Messiah also has to be a descendant of David and since Christians teach Jesus was born of a virgin, he had no father and therefore cannot be from David.
 10. Jews don't believe Jesus is the Messiah because He violated the law of Moses by doing things like breaking the Sabbath (Jn. 9:14). Thus according to Deut. 13:1-4 Jesus was a false prophet.
 11. Jews do not believe Jesus is the Messiah because the virgin birth is not predicted in Isa. 7:14. The word used in the Hebrew text means "maiden" or "young woman" not virgin, but later, Christians, influenced by Greek mythology and the idea that gods impregnated mortals, redefined the word as "virgin" saying Mary was impregnated by God.
 12. Jews don't believe Jesus is the Messiah because Isa. 53 does not refer to Jesus but to Israel. The suffering and death of Israel's people will bring about their future redemption.
 13. Some biblical reasons why the majority of Jews have rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah:
 - a. **Mt. 21:42-45** (following the parable of the wicked vine growers), Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the

Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes'? 43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. 44 "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.

- b. **Rom. 11:25-32** For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." 27 "This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

- c. **II Cor. 3:14-16** But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. 15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

F. What You Can Do for the Jewish People

- 1. Pray for the Jewish people for as God said to Abraham in **Gen. 12:3**, "*And 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.*"

2. Tell Jewish people about Jesus, their Messiah.
3. And let Jewish people know that you anticipate the fulfilment of **Zech. 8:20-23**, *“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities. ‘The inhabitants of one will go to another, saying, “Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I will also go.” ‘So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord.’ “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” ’ ”*