

World Religions Class 5 – Judaism
Christ Community Church – Pastor Steve Ingino

There are about 15 million Jews living in the world. I believe that is .25% of the world population – not even 1 percent. About 5 million Jews live in Israel. 6.5 million Jews live in the United States and almost 2 million of the 6.5 live in New York (primarily NY City). Jews in Israel – many migrated to Israel from the U.S. to help rebuild the nation. They are very gracious, love the nation, and love tourists.

History

The Jewish religion of course originates from God, from the Bible, around 2100 B.C. Of course, it dates further back in terms of the creation of the world, and people like Adam, Seth, and so forth, but the nation did not have its roots until the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12, which God made with Abraham around 2100 B.C.

The nation did not officially exist until about 1440 when God made the Mosaic covenant with the nation of Israel. Up until that time, God dealt with individuals like Noah and Jacob, and Joseph, and formed the tribes, but there was no official nation until after the Exodus, out of slavery from Egypt.

While we could look at the Judaism of the Bible, with people like Abraham and their faith in God, I want us to look at Judaism today. The Judaism of today is much different from the Judaism in the Bible. One reason for this is because the religion has so heavily depended upon tradition rather than the Scriptures, so their theology and practices do not always line up with the Old Testament.

The Jews would call the Old Testament the **Tanakh**.

The **Torah** (“Teaching”, also known as the Five Books of Moses)

Nevi'im (“Prophets”) and

Ketuvim (“Writings”)—hence TaNaKh. The books are arranged in a different order.

For instance, the books goes from 1 and 2 Kings to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel because these are the prophets. Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and then 1 and 2 Chronicles comprise the writings. Different grouping or arrangement of the material.

First Monotheistic Religion

Judaism was the first monotheistic religion. Up until this time

1. World religions (especially those in the Middle East) focused on worshipping many gods whether it was the religions of the Canaanites, the Egyptians, Assyrians, and so forth.

2. The gods were just as immoral as people – they were unpredictable as well. They also had bodies unlike God who is spirit.
3. Other religions taught that the universe was eternal, whereas Judaism taught that God created the universe and is distinct from the universe.
4. The gods did not speak or give guidance for living.
5. People lived in fear not knowing if what they were doing would please or displease the gods. They were very superstitious, and believed that the gods ate the food that was sacrificed.

The Jews did not believe that God needed to eat their sacrifices, but made them out of thanksgiving for His provision (if it was not a blood sacrifice), or if it was a blood sacrifice, made it for atonement or forgiveness of their sins.

6. In the Ancient Near East, humans thought they were created by the gods to help them – in other words, the gods were dependent upon humans. The belief was that the gods had limited power and they created humans to lighten their work in the universe.

The most important difference is the fact that the Jews believed that God entered into relationship with people and revealed His nature, ways, and words. The Near Easterners stated that they could not truly know a god. They said that at times the things which they thought were good could be despicable in the eyes of a god. Who could know? The Mesopotamians had no way to know what was true or just.

There were no absolutes because the gods did not communicate such matters and furthermore, no one believed that the gods wanted their behavior to be copied (p. 261). So, with the giving of the Torah, the Jews knew this was a prized possession, a gift from God, revelation about His character and how to live, that no other religion had.

The key to Judaism is that it introduced the world to the idea that God is transcendent and immanent. He is transcendent, distinct from creation, and infinite, holy, and sovereign above all. But He is knowable, personal, and intimately cares for His creation and creatures. This was a totally new concept until God revealed it in the Law.

We may assume that people believed in a God like us, but this was totally foreign. Until the Bible, there was no belief in a single, all-powerful, infinite yet knowable God. God revealed to the Jews that He was sovereign, all-powerful, in need of nothing, and that He is holy, without sin, and does not act like humans in terms of their sinful behavior.

Judaism Today

But, let's talk about Judaism today so that we can discern what is going on and how to interact with our Jewish friends.

Religious Jews in the United States are divided into 3 movements.

- **Reform (not reformed)**
- **Conservative**
- **Orthodox**

These three branches began in the 19th century and are not unlike the developments in the church. Both Christians and Jews reacted to the Enlightenment and the age of reason by trying to accommodate to the culture, and remove teachings from the Bible that would be offensive or thought to be archaic to the modern man. The Conservative and Reform are so similar today, that many scholars group the strands of Judaism into two categories (traditionalist and modernists).

When you hear the term secular Jew, many are not atheists as some suppose. They may believe in God, but they just don't practice Judaism as strictly. They may observe the Sabbath, but not be so rigid. They may go to synagogue once in awhile, just not every week. So, they are not atheists, they are just not as devoted.

Most Jews do not understand the Jewish background of Christianity; they think it is a separate religion, rather than the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Few know that the writers of the New Testament were Jewish, and the unbreakable connection between Christ and the Old Testament.

Milton Steinberg wrote a book more than 50 years ago called *Basic Judaism*. In the book he outlined 8 areas where Traditionalists and Modernists disagree. These 8 areas are: Torah, God, Morality, Human Nature, Israel, Religious Ritual, the World to Come, and Messiah.

TOPIC	Traditionalist	Modernist
TORAH	<p>The torah reveals the truth about God and humanity.</p> <p>Every letter is from God. They also believe the Talmud or oral law is inspired, but not as inspired as the Torah. Traditionalists say: Since Torah is God’s Word and God’s Word is forever, Judaism should never change. (Amen) (Baker, p. 38)</p> <p><u><i>See page below on Mishnah, Gemara, Talmud...</i></u></p>	<p>The Torah might have some general, inspired ideas about God, such as God’s goodness and justice, but human reason is more important.</p> <p>Modernists say certain parts are inspired, whatever their reasons tells them is true. They believe Judaism must change and adapt over time and the revelation was given to a certain culture, so we must change these Laws for the present.</p> <p>Homosexuality should be accepted since it was only bad in that culture, but now we are more educated and it should be accepted.</p>
GOD	<p>Both traditionalists and modernists say that God is one, against polytheism. Some Jews think that we believe in 3 gods, so they would stand against that, as well as atheism. Both groups believe the God of the Jewish Bible is distinct from other gods. Both agree that God is involved in history and rules, unlike the ANE gods who were not sovereign.</p> <p>Traditionalists say that God still performs miracles</p>	<p>Modernists, being so influenced by rationalism, say that God does not do miracles. This is basically deism, that God set the world in motion, but He is not involved in history.</p> <p>Some believe that the concept of God is flexible, but also that He is impersonal.</p> <p>Some in Reform Judaism can believe in anything from mystical ideas about God to even be an atheist.</p>
MORALITY	<p>Traditionalists and modernists both talk about a life of decency that is honoring to God. They like how the prophets focused on justice and compassion.</p> <p>They both agree that the Ten Commandments are good.</p> <p>Traditionalists believe that Jews must observe the 613 commandments in the Torah.</p>	<p>Modernists think the general principles of justice and compassion are found through reason and experience. This is much like the liberal Christian denominations today.</p> <p>They follow small parts of the Bible, such as the Golden Rule, but reject most of the Bible.</p>

<p>HUMAN NATURE</p>	<p>Both groups believe that humans are free to do what God commands. People are morally neutral.</p> <p>Jews insist that there is no original sin, or fallen nature, or depraved nature, and so we can either choose good or bad, by ourselves.</p>	<p>Here is a major difference between Jews and Christians. Jews think the human is morally neutral, not fallen, and can master sin by his own will. Christian believe in original sin, that we are stained with sin in our mind, heart, will, soul, emotions, and need God's grace in Christ, the merits of Christ, the Cross, forgiveness and the power of the Spirit in us to overcome sin.</p>
<p>ISRAEL</p>	<p>Traditionalists say that God chose Israel as the chosen nation. They believe that Jews everywhere must communicate God's truth to the nations. This also impacts their view of salvation. Because they are chosen by God, they do not believe they need to be saved.</p> <p>However, today, they feel that they are in covenant with God by God's grace, but they must keep the Law to stay in the covenant with God.</p> <p>It is a works-based salvation. They do emphasize that they are automatically promised heaven due to the fact that they were born Jewish.</p>	<p>Modernists do not view God's election in the same way. They say that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob chose God (not true) and that this is why God chose them.</p> <p><u>Read Deut. 7, Joshua 24:1-2</u></p> <p>They say that if another nation chooses God, they will be His chosen nation as well.</p> <p>Gentiles can convert to Judaism but they do not evangelize that much and focus on their own people. Modernists are opposed to linking Judaism with the state of Israel and believe their identity, not the land mark them as Jews.</p> <p>(McDowell, <i>Handbook</i>, 371)</p>
<p>RELIGIOUS RITUALS</p>	<p>Traditionalists strive to obey the Torah in terms of daily living and the feasts. They are also scrupulous about the smallest details from the oral law (e.g. you can't push an elevator button on the Sabbath).</p> <p><u>Look at handout on festivals available through the class (not online). However, see chart below</u></p>	<p>Modernists think that the rituals are merely human devices for making us feel close to what is good and divine. Again, this stems from their weak view of revelation. Since it's not God's Word, anyone's idea goes. The rituals can be changed or improved.</p>

<p>THE WORLD TO COME</p>	<p>Jews do not view salvation as we do. They think of salvation as victory over ignorance and selfishness in this world and do not focus on eternal life. Orthodox believe that through repentance, prayer, and obedience to the Law, one can earn acceptance by God.</p> <p>Both groups believe in recompense after death. They believe good on earth will be rewarded and evil punished.</p>	<p>Both groups affirm immortality and resurrection, but they disagree on what these terms mean.</p> <p>Traditionalists say these are literal ideas, but modernists say we can't know much about the afterlife.</p> <p>Modernists say that salvation is obtained through the betterment of self and society.</p>
<p>THE MESSIAH</p>	<p>Traditionalists say that the Messiah will be a man, and they hope and pray for His coming. He will not be God, but a person who will abolish evil and establish a kingdom or paradise.</p> <p><u>Read passages below which balance the conquering king messianic passages with the suffering servant passages.</u></p>	<p>Modernists don't look for a Messiah, but a messianic age, a utopia. They do not believe God will bring this about, but we humans will usher in this great age by working together for justice and goodness. Our efforts will accomplish this, not God or a messiah.</p> <p>Modernists translate certain messianic passages differently, such as Isaiah 9 and say Mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace does not refer to the Messiah, but to God.</p> <p>Both groups would reject Jesus as Messiah because he did not establish paradise. They envisioned a Messiah who would destroy Rome and usher in the Kingdom – but Christ's coming was for individual salvation from sin, and not a political movement. He must suffer for sin to cleanse us before He can establish His eternal kingdom!</p>

The Mishnah, Gemara, and Talmud

The Oral Law that the Jews followed in Jesus' day, was codified into a book called the Mishnah.

The Mishnah

The Mishnah is essentially the written-down version of the Oral Law – and remember, the Jews believed that this was given from God, but it obviously wasn't – it was just the musings of men. By 200 A.D. this 800 page long book, the Mishnah, contained the Jewish interpretation of the Law.

So, much of what is in the Mishnah is what Jesus was clashing with in His day – those traditions which often contradicted the Bible. To be a devout Jew in the religious establishment's eyes, you not only had to study the Torah – the 1st five books of the Old Testament, but you had to know and live by the 800 page commentary on the Torah, the **Mishnah**, to understand the Torah.

Well, if that wasn't enough, the Rabbis later created commentaries to explain the Mishnah called the **Gemara** – around 400 A.D. Then, later, the Mishnah and the Gemara were combined in what's called the **Talmud**. And, there were different versions of the Talmud – the Babylonian and Jerusalem ones.

The Babylonian Talmud had 60 volumes while the Jerusalem one had 12. Pretty soon, you can imagine how God's Word was lost and buried under piles of man-made ideas. So, talk about man-made traditions - **you not only needed to read the Mishnah, which supposedly correctly explained and applied the Torah, but you had to read the Gemara which explained the Mishnah.**

Over time, you can see how the power of God's Word was lost in layer upon layer of human traditions and speculations. The Word didn't lose its power of course, but people were more focused on their interpretations and traditions than the Word of God itself.

Isaiah 11

¹ Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; ⁴ But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. ⁵ Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. ⁶ And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. ⁷ Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. ⁹ They will

not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.¹⁰ Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious. (Isa 11:1-10)

Micah 4:1-5

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. 2 Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 3 He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. 4 Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken. 5 All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.

Suffering Servant

Isaiah 53

1 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Jewish hermeneutics:

- Allegory, e.g. Gen. 4:7, *What Jews Believe*, p. 85
- Numbers, codes, meanings within words based on letters
- Very subjective, ignores historical and literal meaning oftentimes.

Important Scriptures to Consider (PLEASE READ ROMANS 8-11 this week very carefully with a good study Bible or use Constable's notes online at www.soniclight.com/constable)

- Romans 8:31f (Jews are not automatically saved)
- Romans 9 (not all Israel are believers)
- Romans 10:1f.
- Rom. 10:19-11:15

How to Witness to Jews

The Illustrated Guide to World Religions - Page 140f.

Jewish Feasts				
Feast of	Month on Jewish Calendar	Day	Corresponding Month	References
Passover	Nisan	14	Mar.-Apr.	Ex. 12:1–14; Matt. 26:17–20
*Unleavened Bread	Nisan	15–21	Mar.-Apr.	Ex. 12:15–20
Firstfruits	Nisan	16	Mar.-Apr.	Lev. 23:9–14
	or Sivan	6	May-June	Num. 28:26
*Pentecost (Harvest or Weeks)	Sivan	6 (50 days after barley harvest)	May-June	Deut. 16:9–12; Acts 2:1
Trumpets, Rosh Hashanah	Tishri	1, 2	Sept.-Oct.	Num. 29:1–6
Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur	Tishri	10	Sept.-Oct.	Lev. 23:26–32; Heb. 9:7
*Tabernacles (Booths or Ingathering)	Tishri	15–22	Sept.-Oct.	Neh. 8:13–18; John 7:2
Dedication (Lights), Hanukkah	Chislev	25 (8 days)	Nov.-Dec.	John 10:22
Purim (Lots)	Adar	14, 15	Feb.-Mar.	Esth. 9:18–32
*The three major feasts for which all males of Israel were required to travel to the temple in Jerusalem (Ex. 23:14–19). ¹				

¹John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997), Le 23:2.