

Title: Conversations

Subtitle: Judaism

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Quote:

The term "G-d" is used in this essay to respect the Jewish prohibition against the title of the deity in full. Dates listed which are prior to the 4th century B

Early History of Judaism

Circa 2000 BCE, the G-d of the ancient Israelites established a divine covenant, making him the patriarch of many nations. The term Abrahamic Religions is used for these. These are the four religions which trace their roots back to Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Baha'i World Faith. The book of Genesis describes the events surrounding the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Joseph, who is recognized as a patriarch by Christians is not considered one by Jews). Moses was the next leader of the Israelites, led his people out of captivity in Egypt, and received the Law from G-d. Joshua led the tribes into the promised land, driving out the Canaanites through a series of military battles.

The original tribal organization was converted into a kingdom by Samuel; the second king, David, established Jerusalem as the religious and political center. Solomon built the first temple there.

Division into the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah occurred after the death of Solomon in 922 BCE. Israel fell to Assyria in 722 BCE; Judah fell to the Babylonians in 587 BCE. The temple was destroyed. Some Jews returned from Babylonians and started to restore the temple in 536 BCE. (Orthodox Jews returned from 422 to 352 BCE). Alexander the Great invaded the area in 332 BCE. Greek became the language of commerce, and Greek culture had a major influence. In 63 BCE, the Roman Empire took control of Judea and Israel.

Four major (and some minor) religious sects had formed by the 1st century: Pharisees, Essenes, Sadducees, and the Jesus sect. Many anticipated the arrival of the Messiah and the Roman invaders out and restore independence. Christianity was established as a sect, centered in Jerusalem. Paul broke with this tradition and spread the faith to non-Jews. Many mini-revolts led to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. Jewish Christians were wiped out or scattered at this time. The movement quickly evolved into the religion of Christianity. Jews were scattered and their religion was no longer centered in Jerusalem; Jews were prohibited from converting. Judaism became decentralized and stopped seeking converts. The local synagogues became the center of Jewish life, and authority shifted from the centralized priesthood.

teachers, giving rise to Rabbinic Judaism.

The period from the destruction of the temple onward give rise to heavy throughout Europe and Russia. Many groundless stories were spread, acc murder, the desecration of the Catholic host and continuing responsibility. Unsubstantiated rumors continue to be circulated today. In the 1930s and the German Nazi party drew on centuries of anti-Semitism, and upon their racial purity. They organized the Holocaust, the attempted extermination 6 million were killed in one of the world's greatest examples of religious

The Zionist movement was a response within all Jewish traditions to cent persecution. Their initial goal was create a Jewish homeland in Palestine formed on 1948-MAY-18.

There are currently about 18 million Jews throughout the world. They are North America (about 7 million) and Israel (about 4.5 million).

Jewish Texts

The Tanakh corresponds to the Jewish Scriptures, (often referred to as t Christians). It is composed of three groups of books:

the Torah (aka Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and D the Nevi'im: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (2), Kings (2), Isaiah, Jeremiah, E Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah the Ketuvim, the "Writings" including Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of So Esther, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles (2).

The Talmud contains stories, laws, medical knowledge, debates about mo composed of material which comes mainly from two sources:

the Mishnah, 6 "orders" containing hundreds of chapters, including serie Scriptures. It was compiled about 200 CE.

the Gemara (one Babylonian and one Palestinian) is encyclopedic in sco from hundreds of Rabbis from 200 - 500 CE, explaining the Mishnah with religious, legal, sociological, etc. material. It often records many differe giving a definitive answer.

Basic Jewish Beliefs:

There is a story in wide circulation about a question asked of Rabbi Hillel 1st century BCE. A non-Jew asked the rabbi to teach him everything about on one foot. Rabbi Hillel responded: "What is hateful to you, don't do un commentary. Now, go and study."

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, (a.k.a. Maimonides) is generally accepted as o Jewish scholars from Medieval times. He wrote a list of thirteen principle generally accepted by Jews for centuries as a brief summary of the Jewish

wings of Judaism dispute some of the 13 today.

G-d exists.

G-d is one and unique.

G-d is incorporeal.

G-d is eternal.

Prayer is to be directed to G-d alone and to no other.

The words of the prophets are true.

Moses was the greatest of the prophets, and his prophecies are true.

The Written Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) and Oral Torah (teachings and other writings) were given to Moses.

There will be no other Torah.

G-d knows the thoughts and deeds of men.

G-d will reward the good and punish the wicked.

The Messiah will come.

The dead will be resurrected. 9

Additional Jewish beliefs:

Some additional beliefs found commonly among Jews are:

Some Jews view Jesus as a great moral teacher. Others see him as a false prophet. Christianity. Some sects of Judaism will not even say his name due to the belief that it is an idol's name.

The Jews are often referred to as G-d's chosen people. This does not mean they are to be considered superior to other groups. Biblical verses such as Exodus 19:5-6 has selected Israel to receive and study the Torah, to worship G-d only, to celebrate the festivals. Jews were not chosen to be better than others, but to receive more difficult responsibilities, and more onerous punishment if they fail.

The 613 commandments found in Leviticus and other books regulate all aspects of Jewish life.

The Ten commandments, as delineated in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-22, form a synopsis of the Law.

The Messiah (the anointed one of G-d) will arrive in the future and gather the people of Israel to the land of Israel. There will be a general resurrection of the dead at that time. The Temple, destroyed in 70 CE, will be rebuilt.

A fetus gains full personhood when it is half-emerged from its mother's womb.

Boys reach the status of Bar Mitzvah on their 13th birthday; girls reach the status of Bat Mitzvah on their 12th birthday. This means that they are recognized as adults and are personally responsible for observing Jewish commandments and laws. Males are allowed to lead a religious service, and a group of ten men, called a "minyan" (a quota of men necessary to perform certain parts of religious services), is required for many prayers. After Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah they can sign contracts; they can testify in court; they can marry, although the Talmud recommends 18 to 24 as the proper age for marriage.

The more liberal movements within Judaism differ from some of the above in their view of the source of the Torah, the concept of direct reward and punishment according to deeds, and the resurrection of the dead.

Judaism and Christianity compared:

Although Christians base much of their faith on the same Hebrew Scriptures, there are major differences in belief:

Jews generally consider actions and behavior to be of primary importance over beliefs. This conflicts with conservative Christians for whom belief is of primary importance. Actions tend to be derivative from beliefs.

Jewish belief does not accept the Christian concept of original sin (the inherited Adam and Eve's sin when they disobeyed G-d's instructions in the Garden of Eden). Judaism affirms the inherent goodness of the world and its people as created by G-d. Believers are able to sanctify their lives and draw closer to G-d by performing good deeds (following the commandments).

No savior is needed or is available as an intermediary with G-d.

Jewish Practices

They include:

Observation of the Sabbath as a day of rest, starting at sundown on Friday and ending at sundown on Saturday.

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, or Pesach is the most important. It commemorates Jews' deliverance out of slavery in Egypt circa 1300 BCE. A ritual Seder is held in every Jewish home at this time. Six different foods are placed on the table, from which they are eaten: Karpas (vegetables dipped in salt water) recalls the bitterness of slavery.

Maror (bitter herbs) to symbolize the bitterness of slavery.

Chazeret (bitter vegetables) also to symbolize the bitterness of slavery.

Choronet (apple, nuts & spices with wine) represents the mortar used by the Israelites to build the Egyptian pyramids.

Also placed on the seder plate, but uneaten during the Seder meal: Zeroah (roasted lamb shank) recall the Passover sacrifice in the ancient temple.

Beitzah (roasted egg) symbolizes mourning, sacrifice, spring, and renewal.

Not placed on the Seder plate, but often eaten, is a boiled egg.

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, and is the anniversary of the creation of the world 5760 years ago. It is held in the fall.

The 10 days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, are a time of reflection and penitence.

Sukkoth or the Feast of Booths is an 8 day harvest festival; a time of thanksgiving. Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights is an 8 day feast of dedication. It recalls the Maccabees in the cause of religious freedom. It is typically observed in December. As a Jewish holy day, it has become more important in recent years.

Purim, the Feast of Lots recalls the defeat by Queen Esther of the plan to exterminate the Jews, circa 400 BCE.

Shavout, the Feast of Weeks recalls G-d's revelation of the Torah to the Israelites in late May or early June.

Rules for calculating Rosh Hashanah and Passover are available online at <http://quasar.as.utexas.edu/BillInfo/ReligiousCalendars.html>

The local synagogue is governed by the congregation and is normally led by a rabbi chosen by the congregation. A rabbi is a teacher who has been well educated in Jewish tradition.

Any adult male with sufficient knowledge can lead religious services. In conservative congregations, a woman can also preside. This is often done in rural communities who lack a rabbi.

The Chief Rabbis in France and Great Britain have authority only by the consent of the people who accept it. Two Chief Rabbis in Israel have civil authority in areas of family law.

Jewish Movements:

There are five main forms of Judaism in the world today. However, the most liberal do not necessarily recognize the most liberal as being part of Judaism. This is true among many of the world's great religions:

Conservative* Judaism: This began in the mid-nineteenth century as a reform movement. It is a main-line movement midway between Reform and Orthodox Judaism.

Humanistic Judaism: This is a very small group, mainly composed of atheists. They regard mankind as the measure of all things.

Orthodox* Judaism: This is the oldest, most conservative, and most diverse form of Judaism. Orthodox, Chasidim and Ultra Orthodox share a basic belief in the divinity of God, but they hold very different outlooks on life. They attempt to follow the original Jewish view of it to be. They look upon every word in their sacred texts as being divinely inspired.

Reconstructionist Judaism: This is a new, small, liberal movement started in the 1930's. They attempt to unify and revitalize the religion. They reject the concept that Jews are a chosen people. They have no connection at all with Christian Reconstructionism, an ultra-conservative form of Christianity.

Reform* Judaism: They are a liberal group, followed by many North American Jews. It started in the 1790's in Germany. They follow the ethical laws of Judaism but allow the individual the decision whether to follow or ignore the dietary and other laws. They have modern forms of worship. There are many female rabbis in reform congregations.

* These are the largest forms of Judaism.

A survey conducted in 2001 for the 2002 edition of the American Jewish Archives shows that fewer than 10% of American Jews are estimated to be Orthodox. However, Orthodox Jews represent 40% of all U.S. synagogues. Reform Judaism has 26 percent of all synagogues. Conservatives have 23 percent. "Every other denomination or group represents 11 percent: Reconstructionist, Sephardi, Traditional, Humanistic, Gay/Lesbian -- according to synagogue affiliations..." 8 The total number of U.S. synagogues has increased to 3,727 in 2001.

Jewish-Christian Relations:

The faith of Israel, as described in the Hebrew Scriptures, had divided into sects (the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Sadducees, Zealots and others) by the 1st century CE. Subsequently, a number of events of momentous importance occurred:

30 CE: Some Jews, following the teachings of Jeshua (known by Christians as Jesus), formed a Jewish Christian reform movement within Judaism under the leadership of Jeshua.

circa 55 CE: Paul, a Jewish persecutor of Christians, became converted to Christianity and organized Pauline Christian churches throughout much of the Roman Empire, separating them from Jewish Christians.

70 CE: The Roman army destroyed the Temple and the rest of Jerusalem.

132 CE: Many Jews accepted Bar Kochba as the Messiah. This led to a revolt against the Roman Empire. About a half-million Jews were killed; thousands taken into captivity. The rest were exiled from Palestine and scattered throughout the world, what is called the "Diaspora."

Out of these events came two major world religions:

Judaism in its Rabbinical form, centered in local synagogues, scattered throughout the world, and

Pauline Christianity which later became centered in Rome.

Relations between the two religions became strained. The Christian Scriptures included examples of anti-Judaism. One of the gospels, written during the last third of the 1st century CE, included the accusation that all Jews, (past, present, and future), are responsible for the killing of G-d. This form of religious propaganda was serious enough in its day that Christianity remained a small reform movement within Judaism. There are many examples of inter-religious friction throughout literature of that era; indeed, it is precisely because of this that Christianity remained a small reform movement within Judaism. Christianity became the official religion of Rome in the late 4th century CE, and was sufficiently powerful to actively oppress and persecute Jews. This led to the persecution of Jews during the Dark Ages, Middle Ages, Renaissance and into the modern era. Christian teachings and practices paved the way for the Nazi holocaust during the 20th century.

Today, only a few fringe Christian groups still teach that Jews are responsible for the death of G-d. Many Christian denominations teach that the promises that G-d made to the Jews have been withdrawn and transferred to the Christian Church. This teaching has led to attempts to evangelize Jews. Although anti-Semitism has been abandoned in America, the relationships between Christians and Jews have much room for improvement.