

Christianity has Judaism at its historical core, since Judaism as God established it was the foundation for Christianity. However, after the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, Jews faced a decision: To trust and recognize that Jesus is God's promised Messiah? Or assume Jesus wasn't the Messiah and keep on waiting? Christians trust in Jesus the Messiah. Jews do not.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Judaism traces its foundation all the way back to Abraham. God chose Abraham to be the father of his chosen nation. This nation would be the kingdom of the promise. God would cultivate faith in the coming Christ through this nation called Israel.

As centuries passed and the coming of the Messiah drew near, God continued to reveal more and more about the Messiah through Israelite prophets. Israelite worship centered on rites and sacrifices instituted by God, each of which illustrated a spiritual reality that was to come in the future through the Messiah (e.g. the Passover meal a foreshadowing of Christ's atonement).

Still, Israel was very unfaithful to God. As a result God allowed the Babylonians to capture Israel and destroy their temple in 586 BC. This was a critical point in Jewish history since it forced the development of the synagogue system. Since there was no temple any more, the system of centralized worship could no longer function. Jewish leaders devised a decentralized and localized system of synagogues (the word means "assembly") to serve the needs of the Jewish people.

The Jews eventually returned from Babylon and rebuilt their temple and re-established their homeland. They thrived for several centuries more until the Roman empire conquered their land.

It was during the Roman rule of Israel that Jesus Christ was born. It was now that Judaism reached its watershed moment. The Messiah had come and fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. Would the Jews recognize it? Many did, and a large number of Christians came out of Judaism. Christianity was even considered a denomination of Judaism for a period of time. The Apostle Paul always started his missionary work among the Jews at the synagogues. When they rejected him, he moved to the non-Jews.

Unfortunately, many Jews did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and continued their centuries-long wait for another messiah. It is from that branch of Judaism that modern Judaism came.

In the centuries after Christ, Judaism grew in size and numbers. Rabbis worked to codify their system of beliefs and laws. Today there are several different denominations of

Judaism. The world population of Jews totals approximately 13 million.

DENOMINATIONS AND SECTS

The three main divisions of Judaism today are orthodox, conservative, and reformed.

Orthodox Jews consider themselves to be the only true adherents to the Jewish faith. For the most part, they are right. Orthodox Judaism is basically what all of Judaism was up until the 19th century. At that time a sweeping philosophy of rationalism (i.e. the trust in human reason over and above God's revelation) led many Jews to reject their historical faith.

Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah is God's revelation given through Moses. They consider the Jewish laws received from God to be unchangeable. As a result, they still hold to many of the old practices such as observing the Sabbath. Orthodox Jews consider other Jews who do not practice these ordinances to be unfaithful and not truly Judaic. Among other practices, Orthodox Jews also avoid intermarriage among non-Jews. Orthodox Jews also follow the Talmud, which is a written compendium of various rabbinic regulations, commentaries on scripture, and traditions. It is from the Talmud that modern Orthodox Judaism gains much of its complexity.

Orthodox Jews are the only group of Jews still waiting for a messiah to come.

Conservative Jews also arose as a denomination during the 19th century. Conservative Jews went along with more of the rationalism of that era. Unlike Orthodox Jews, Conservative Jews believe Jewish law is not static, but rather fluid and changeable. They accepted some of the rationalist views about divine revelation as well. They do not necessarily trust in the authenticity of their sacred texts.

Conservative Jews are interested in conserving the traditions of Judaism while allowing it to adapt to changing times. They basically look at Orthodox Jews as moving too slowly in their adaptation of Judaism and at Reformed Jews as moving too quickly.

Conservative Jews have a non-fundamentalist practice of their faith, view modern culture in a positive light, and accept both traditional rabbinic writings (e.g. Talmud) and

modern critical views of their scripture. They are the largest denomination in Israel and America.

Reformed Jews are the most divergent from historical Judaism. The Reformed branch is not so much a system of codified beliefs, but rather a school of thought that delights in the system of tension between tradition and modernity. They believe in the constant and continual integration of Jewish tradition with modern, non-Jewish insights.

Beliefs in God, eternity, and other religious concepts runs a wide gamut in the reform movement. For example, it is completely normal for one Reformed Jew to believe in God in the traditional sense while the Jew sitting next to him is an agnostic (i.e. not saying for sure whether there even is a God).

Reformed Jews see all world religions as essentially the same. They all seek God. Therefore they simply say that Judaism is the *highest form* of world religion and the most authentic way to seek God, even though all religions technically do that very thing.

Reformed Jews do not believe that a messiah will come, nor do they believe that the Talmud and other rabbinic writings are normative in any sense. Note also that Reformed Jews are strongly Zionist.

BASIC BELIEFS

A prominent 12th century rabbi named Maimonides formulated a series of thirteen statements of belief that summarize what constitutes basic Judaism.

1. *I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is the Creator and Guide of everything that has been created; He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.*
2. *I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is One, and that there is no unity in any manner like His, and that He alone is our God, who was, and is, and will be.*
3. *I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, has no body, and that He is free from all the properties of matter, and that there can be no (physical) comparison to Him whatsoever.*
4. *I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, is the first and the last.*
5. *I believe with perfect faith that to the Creator, Blessed be His Name, and to Him alone, it is right to pray, and that it is not right to pray to any being besides Him.*
6. *I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the prophets are true.*
7. *I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was true, and that he was the chief of the prophets, both those who preceded him and those who followed him.*

8. *I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that is now in our possession is the same that was given to Moses our teacher, peace be upon him.*
9. *I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will not be exchanged, and that there will never be any other Torah from the Creator, Blessed be His Name.*
10. *I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, knows all the deeds of human beings and all their thoughts, as it is written, "Who fashioned the hearts of them all, Who comprehends all their actions" (Psalms 33:15).*
11. *I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, Blessed be His Name, rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those that transgress them.*
12. *I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah; and even though he may tarry, nonetheless, I wait every day for his coming.*
13. *I believe with perfect faith that there will be a revival of the dead at the time when it shall please the Creator, Blessed be His name, and His mention shall be exalted for ever and ever.*

WORSHIP PRACTICES

Jewish worship centers on the recitation of prayers. Jewish services include the reading and recitation of prayers along with commentary on the content of the prayers. Sabbath worship commonly includes readings of the Torah as well. Many Jews rock or sway as they pray. Overall worship practices vary greatly between Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed Jews, but prayer remains central throughout.

KEY DIFFERENCES FROM CHRISTIANITY

Judaism and Christianity share a common history, but now the beliefs of the two differ greatly.

The most obvious difference has to do with the person of Jesus. Jews either view him as a martyred teacher or a false prophet. Jesus was and is the true Messiah, but Judaism in its purest form still awaits another messiah.

Adherents of Judaism also do not believe in the Trinity. They believe that the essence of the Lord is *one* and not *three in one* as the Bible teaches.

Modern Judaism has a weak definition of heaven and hell, although the Hebrew scriptures mention the concepts clearly in several places.

Jews accept the reality of sin, but downplay original sin and believe that humans are inherently good, but sin often. This sin requires atonement.

Overall, Judaism is a religion of works and following the law. The concept of God's salvation as a *gift of grace* is foreign to Judaism.