

Judaism

Introduction

This lecture will be about modern, non-Christian Judaism.

There are about 14 million people worldwide (0.2% of the global population) who identify as being Jewish. There are more Jews in North America than any other continent, and there are more Jews in New York City than in Jerusalem.

Many of the greatest minds and cultural influencers in history were Jewish: Moses Maimonides, Benedict Spinoza, Albert Einstein, Karl Marx, George Gershwin, Edmund Husserl, Leo Strauss, Sigmund Freud, Robert Oppenheimer, Jacques Derrida, Ludwig Wittgenstein, et. al.

Definition: Judaism - The religion and culture of the Jewish people centered around ethical monotheism.

The term, “Judaism,” comes from the Greek word “*Ioudaismos*” used by Greek speaking Jews to distinguish their religion from that of the Hellenistic world.

The twin pillars of Judaism in the first century were temple and Torah. The temple was run by the Sadducees, and the Torah was explicated by the Pharisees. After the temple was destroyed in 70AD (by the Romans), it was the Pharisaical form of Judaism (which focused on interpretation of Scripture) that became dominant in what is called “Rabbinic Judaism.” Jews met in synagogues to focus on the study of the Torah, and they formed a new type of Judaism without sacrifices or rituals related to the temple.

Sacred Writings

The Hebrew Bible – The sacred religious text of what Christians call the “Old Testament.” It is the same list of books that Christians have but in a different order. It is often just called the “Hebrew Bible.” It is also called the “Tanakh.”

(Ta-Na-Kh)

Torah – Law
Nevi'im – Prophets
Kethuvim – Writings

Talmud - The body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law (and legend) comprising the Mishnah and the Gemara. It references over 2,000 Jewish teachers/scholars – the English edition of the Babylonian Talmud is 18 volumes!

Mishnah – Oral tradition that had been written down. An authoritative collection of exegetical material, written in Hebrew and Aramaic, embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law and forming the first part of the Talmud.

Gemara – Rabbinical commentary and analysis of the Mishnah forming the second part of the Talmud.

Central Beliefs

Monotheism – There is one (and only one God) who exists and who alone deserves worship.

Deuteronomy 6:4 - “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

1 Kings 8:60 - that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other.

Deuteronomy 4:25 - To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.

Isaiah 44:6 - “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

Isaiah 43:10 - “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.

Isaiah 45:5 - I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God;...

Ethnocentrism – Since it is Abraham and his descendants to whom the promises are made, it is important to try to remain ethnically Jewish. Yes, a Gentile may convert to Judaism, but endogamy (marriage within one’s own people group) is encouraged.

Rabbis have decided that, to be ethnically Jewish, your mom has to be Jewish.

Mosaic Law – Following the commands and practices described in the Torah

Sheye Cohen

Judaism is more about practice than doctrine. More about *praxis* than *doxa*. More about deed than creed.

Think back to the New Testament: The Sadducees deny the resurrection, the existence of angels, and they only think that Genesis – Deuteronomy are scripture, but they are still considered Jews. Why? Because they are ethnically Jewish, and they follow the Mosaic Law.

This is very different than Christianity or Islam where the doctrine is central. Christianity and Islam are “creedal religions.”

Halakhah – The totality of laws and ordinances that have evolved since biblical times to regulate religious observances and the daily life and conduct of the Jewish people - “Oral Torah.”

Loving-kindness – Jews should pursue love, kindness, and justice toward their fellow man.

Present-life focus – The focus is not as much on what happens after you die but on living a righteous and God-honoring life now.

Branches of Modern Judaism

The names of these three branches are confusing:

Key:

“Orthodox” = Conservative

“Conservative” = Moderate

“Reformed” = Liberal

Orthodox – The most conservative branch of Judaism. They believe the Hebrew Bible is inspired by God and must be followed meticulously, and they believe one should practice correct halakhah. We may not change what the Bible says to fit modern times. Orthodox Judaism is awaiting a personal Messiah to come in the future and deliver them. *This was really the only common form of Judaism until the 18th century.* There is a focus on tradition and scripture. Worship services are most often in Hebrew.

Ultra-Orthodox – Wear black clothes, don’t trim the edges of their beards, often speak Yiddish, etc.

Hassidic – European in flavor, expects an immanent Messianic age, and focuses on Jewish mysticism (“kabbalah”).

Conservative – The moderate branch of Judaism. They believe the Bible and halakhah are still binding but may be changed to fit with modern times. They believe that there will not be a personal Messiah, but that an age of peace can eventually be ushered in through human progress. In this branch there is both tradition and change. They are liberal in belief, but conservative in practice. There is also a focus on maintaining unity with the Jewish people worldwide.

Reformed – The most liberal branch of Judaism. They believe the Bible is helpful ethically but not inspired. They dispense with much of the halakhah. The Mosaic

Law may be discarded to fit within modern times. They believe that there will not be a personal Messiah but that an age of peace can eventually be ushered in through human progress. There is no resurrection, rather, one metaphorically “lives on” through their accomplishments or descendants. There is a focus on reason and modernity over revelation and miracle.

This is the most common type of Judaism and what you get in Hollywood.

The Holocaust

Jews have been persecuted throughout history. In the Old Testament by nations like Egypt and Babylon, but even since then by Muslims, Christians, Socialists, Communist, and others.

The most famous persecution of Jews is the Holocaust, where Nazi Germany had over 6,000,000 Jews systematically murdered.

Jews today remain one of the most persecuted groups in the U.S.

The Holocaust has shaped the theology of many Jews today and has caused many to become agnostic or atheistic.

Are Jews who do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah saved?

There are many benefits of being Jewish

Romans 9:4–5 - They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

However, the Bible is clear that there is no salvation, for Jew or Gentile, apart from Jesus.

Acts 4:11–12 – [speaking to Jews] This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Romans 1:16 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

John 3:18 - Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 3:36 - Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

2 John 9 - Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

Why do Jews not accept Jesus as the Messiah?

Notes:

How Christians should engage with those who are Jewish

1. We should be kind, loving, and compassionate toward Jews, especially in light of the persecution they have received throughout history.
2. We should rejoice that they are already familiar with the Old Testament.
3. We should show them how we have all fallen short of God's commands and, therefore, need someone to make atonement for us (God demands perfection, not just general conformity, to his Law).
4. We should seek to show them that Jesus is the Messiah and God himself.

That's the central issue. All the other issues are peripheral.