



# Judaism

## Comparative Theology

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# Introduction

- **Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions and was founded over 3500 years ago in the Middle East. Jews believe that God appointed them to be His chosen people in order to set an example of holiness and ethical behavior to the world.**
- **The most important event in Judaism is the Exodus.**
- **God promised Abraham that a great nation would arise from his seed that this nation would have a homeland (Canaan) and that the entire world would be blessed by this nation.**

- **The book of Exodus opens with the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites, crying out for deliverance from their enslavement by the Egyptians. The key figure in God's plan is Moses. During his time in the desert, Moses had an encounter with God Himself who spoke through a burning bush that was not consumed.**

# Introduction

- **God commanded Moses to lead the Israelites from their slavery. Moses returned to Egypt and after a series of ten miraculous plagues upon the Egyptians was able to gain the release of the Israelites. The final plague was death to the firstborn of every house in Egypt. Israelites that ate a sacred meal of roasted lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread and who smeared lamb's blood on their door posts were passed over by the angel of death.**

# Introduction

- **When the Israelites fled Egypt they were pursued by pharaoh, God parted the waters of the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross through on dry land. This event, along with the Passover, became a main part of Jewish history, an act in which God intervened to deliver His chosen people.**
- **After crossing the Red Sea, God communicated the law to the Israelites through Moses.**
- **The Ten Commandments are the basics to Jewish life. These commandments stress obedience and loyalty to God and decent behavior toward members of the community.**



# Introduction

- **The first five books of the Holy Bible called the Torah (our Pentateuch) became the single most important part of the Bible for Judaism. It is to this material that Jews have turned for centuries, looking for inspiration and guidance.**
- **This material became the basis for the later Mishnah and Talmud, which in turn became central for Judaism. It is at this point that Judaism is defined as a religion of the law and Jews as a people primarily concerned with obedience to the laws of God.**

# Introduction

- **In addition to the written scriptures, there is an "Oral Torah," a tradition explaining what the scriptures mean and how to interpret them and apply the Laws. Orthodox Jews believe God taught the Oral Torah to Moses, and he taught it to others, down to the present day.**
- **This tradition was maintained in oral form only until about the 2nd century A.D., when the oral law was compiled and written down in a document called the Mishnah.**



- **Over the next few centuries, additional commentaries elaborating on the Mishnah were written down in Jerusalem and Babylon. These additional commentaries are known as the Gemara.**
- **The Gemara and the Mishnah together are known as the Talmud. This was completed in the 5th century AD. There are actually two Talmuds: the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud.**

- **The Babylonian one is more comprehensive, and is the one most people mean when they refer to The Talmud.**
- **Modern Judaism is a complex phenomenon that incorporates both a nation and a religion, and often combines strict adherence to ritual laws with a more liberal attitude towards religious belief.**

# Introduction

- **Today, Judaism exists in three main forms: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. Orthodox Jews maintain strict adherence to the letter of the Law. The Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) and the Talmud rules every aspect of the Orthodox Jew's life. As an example, the Law of Moses forbids the eating of Pork or shellfish.**

- **It also forbids the cooking of a young goat in its mother's milk. Orthodox Jews, therefore, will not eat meat and dairy products together going so far as to use separate dishes for meat and dairy foods.**

# Introduction

- **Conservative Jews have a more lenient interpretation of the Torah but believe the Law is of vital importance. Reform or Liberal Jews attempt to apply broadly Judaic notions to contemporary culture in a humanistic manner; they teach that the principles of Judaism are more important than the practices.**

- **Most reformed Jews do not adhere to dietary restrictions or laws governing what should or should not be done on the Sabbath. All however, observe the Sabbath (which goes from sundown Friday night to sundown Saturday night) and the holy days.**



- **The central religious belief of Judaism is that there is only one God. Of note is that monotheism was uncommon at the time Judaism was born. The fact of God's existence is accepted almost without question.**
- **Proof is not needed, and is rarely offered. Judaism views the existence of God as a necessary prerequisite for the existence of the universe.**

# Views On God

- **The existence of the universe is sufficient proof of the existence of God. There is only one God. No other being participated in the work of creation.**
- **God is a unity. He is a single, whole, complete indivisible entity. He cannot be divided into parts or described by attributes. Any attempt to ascribe attributes to God is merely man's imperfect attempt to understand the infinite.**

- **One of the primary expressions of Jewish faith, recited thrice daily in prayer, is the Shema, which begins "Hear, Israel: The Lord is our God, The Lord is one."**
- **This simple statement also indicates that it is to the LORD alone to whom one should offer praise or prayer for He is the Lord alone.**

- **In Judaism, God is seen as the creator of everything, including evil (Is.45:6-7); Jews totally reject the idea of Satan bringing evil into the world. In addition, God is Holy, incorporeal, genderless, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, and perfect. They also believe God will send the messiah and the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished.**

- **God is not merely some supreme force but is a person, one with emotions of anger, sadness, and joy. He is above all a person with whom one can have a relationship; He desires to share the full gamut of emotions with men.**

- **To this end, God is seen as continually active in a creative way, constantly working in the world to offer men the opportunity to fulfill their obligations toward Him and toward fellow men**



# Man and the Universe

- **The material world is considered on the whole "very good" (Genesis 1:31), and man has a unique responsibility to order it according to God's purposes.**
- **Some Jews go as far as to say that all people, animals, and things contain a "divine spark," which man is assigned to call forth to completeness through loving action.**

# Man and the Universe

- **The personhood of God and His need for relationships form an analogy for man's most pressing need: to live in harmony with other men.**
- **History is the arena of God's purposeful activity, and Jews often look for signs of His approval or judgment in historical events.**

# Man and the Universe

- **The great responsibility of man as well as his frailty and wickedness are emphasized. The distinguishing mark of humans is their ability to make ethical choices; it is to those choices that Judaism most often addresses itself directly.**
- **When Genesis 2:7 says "God formed man," it uses the Hebrew word vayyitzer ("formed"). The Talmud finds special meaning in the unique spelling of the word in this context, with two yods instead of one.**

# Man and the Universe

- **The two yods, the rabbis explain, stand for the two impulses found in humans: the yetzer tov and the yetzer ra.**
- **According to this view, the yetzer tov is the moral conscience that reminds a person of God's law when one considers a specific action or choice.**

# Man and the Universe

- **The yetzer ra is the impulse to satisfy one's own needs and desires. There is nothing intrinsically evil about the yetzer ra, as it was created by God and is natural to humankind.**
- **It is also what drives us to good things such as eating, drinking, having a family, and making a living. However, it can easily lead to sin when not kept in check by the yetzer tov.**

# Man and the Universe

- **The idea of human free will is fundamental to Judaism. The concept of original sin is rejected, and every person has the ability to choose good or evil.**



# Salvation and the Afterlife

- **For the Jew, it seems, salvation and the afterlife are disconnected from one another.**
- **In the Jewish mindset, the concept of salvation is more corporate (national) than personal (as Christians view it).**
- **The salvation of the individual Jew is directly bound up with the salvation of the entire people, and includes the hope of being rescued from national enemies, of the Temple's complete restoration and of the full corporate inheritance of the covenantal blessings of God.**

# Salvation and the Afterlife

- **For the Jew, the messiah (savior) is a this-worldly, temporal leader who will rescue corporate Israel from her enemies and make the nation great in all the earth.**
- **The idea of a “Savior of the Jewish people,” then, is bound up with the idea of national Israel and the restoration of the Kingdom of David on earth. This partly explains why the Jewish people tend to reject Jesus as their Savior: from their point of view, Jesus did not rescue national Israel for set up the kingdom of David. \***

# Salvation and the Afterlife

- **The Messianic Age (the period when the messiah comes), it is taught, will usher in the following:**
  - **Peace among all nations (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3)**
  - **Perfect harmony and abundance in nature (Isaiah 11:6-9) (but some interpret this as an allegory for peace and prosperity)**
  - **All Jews return from exile to Israel (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4-5)**
  - **Universal acceptance of the Jewish God and Jewish religion (Isaiah 2:3; 11:10; 66:23; Micah 4:2-3; Zechariah 14:9)**
  - **No sin or evil; all Israel will obey the commandments (Zephaniah 3:13; Ezekiel 37:24)**
  - **Reinstatement of the Temple (Ezekiel 37:26-27)**
  - **At this time, the righteous dead will be resurrected but the wicked will not**

# Salvation and the Afterlife

- **The Messianic age is only one part of what Jews mean when they say “the world to come”. The other part refers to the afterlife. But there really is not much discussion on what happens after death.**
- **The Torah and Talmud alike focus on the purpose of earthly life, which is to fulfill one's duties to God and one's fellow man. Succeeding at this brings reward, failing at it brings punishment.**

# Salvation and the Afterlife

- **In Judaism the belief in afterlife is less a leap of faith than a logical outgrowth of other Jewish beliefs. If one believes in a God who is all-powerful and all-just, one cannot believe that this world, in which evil far too often triumphs, is the only arena in which human life exists.**

# Salvation and the Afterlife

- **For if this existence is the final word, and God permits evil to win, then it cannot be that God is good. Thus, when someone says he or she believes in God but not in afterlife, it would seem that either they have not thought the issue through, or they don't believe in God, or the divine being in whom they believe is amoral or immoral.**



- **The source and ideal of all morality is God, in whose ways man is to walk (Deut. xi. 22).**
- **As He is merciful and gracious so man should be. When the Israelites accepted the Ten Commandments from God at Mount Sinai, they committed themselves to following a code of law which regulates both how they relate with God and how they treat other people.**

- **Torah ("to point the way, give direction"), often translated "law," refers in Judaism to a total pattern of behavior, applicable to all aspects of communal and individual life.**
- **It is to be found not only in the Old Testament Scriptures but also in a wide variety of oral traditions, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and commentaries on Scripture.**

- **Jews have often tried to develop rules of behavior to cover each situation encountered in their various cultures. Thus a gigantic literature covering codes of conduct has arisen.**
- **From time to time movements have emerged that have tried to cut through those rules and get back to the original meaning of torah, but legalism has been a perennial problem of Judaism.**

- **Marriage and children are held in high regard by Judaism. Singleness is looked down on even for religious leaders, and much time is spent teaching children the precepts of the faith.**

- **God was worshipped by burning animal sacrifices on altars built in the open. The Israelites did not worship their God in a building or temple until the time of Solomon (961-922 BC).**
- **Offering of animal sacrifice continued with the flesh burned in the courtyard of the Temple while prayers were offered to God inside the Temple. During the years the southern kingdom was in exile (606 B.C. to 536 B.C.), changes took place with regard to Jewish worship.**

- **Since the temple could not be used as a central place of worship, houses of prayer, called synagogues, were established. By the time the Jews returned to their land, the synagogue had become firmly established as the place of worship (but not sacrifice).**
- **The practice of sacrifice officially stopped in the year 70 A.D., when the Roman army destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, the place where sacrifices were offered.**



- **The Torah specifically commands the Jews not to offer sacrifices wherever they feel like it; they are only permitted to offer sacrifices in the place that God has chosen for that purpose. (Deut. 12:13-14) It would be a sin to offer sacrifices in any other place.**
- **Along with the synagogue (which can exist wherever there is a copy of the Torah and ten adult Jewish males), arose the figure of the rabbi.**



- **The rabbi is not a priest or a minister in the traditional sense. The word 'rabbi' literally means 'my master'. With the establishment of the Torah as the voice of God, there also arose the need for someone to spend time studying the Scripture and teaching the community.**
- **Those persons who had the time, interest and intelligence to study gradually began to be singled out and eventually became known as rabbis.**

- **Recitation of prayers is the central characteristic of Jewish worship. These prayers, often with instructions and commentary, are found in the siddur, the traditional Jewish prayer book. Observant Jews are expected to recite three prayers daily and more on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays.**
- **While solitary prayer is valid, attending synagogue to pray with a minyan (quorum of 10 adult males) is considered ideal.**

- **As with most religious services, the length and content of the synagogue service depends on the sect and the customs of the particular community.**

- **In general, one can expect to hear the most Hebrew used in an Orthodox service and the least in Reform services, and services in Reform temples also tend to be shorter than those held in Orthodox shuls and Conservative synagogues.**
- **Many synagogues have a hazzan (cantor) who is a professional or lay-professional singer employed for the purpose of leading the congregation in prayer.**

# Conclusion

- **Since Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism, one would expect there to be a greater agreement about who God is and how we understand His relation with us.**
- **Jews completely reject a Trinitarian God. It is blasphemy as far as they are concerned. God is one-only one period. Jews really have no opinion about what happened to the death sentence Adam and Eve received at the fall.**

# Conclusion

- **For Jews, man retained the state in which he was born—there is no corrupt nature from which we need to be freed – we all have ability to choose good or evil. Man can relate with God but to commune (be united to) with Him is not even on the radar screen.**

# Conclusion

- **Salvation is more a matter of reward than anything else; reward for believing in God and being good. Because of this, it is not necessary for the messiah to be divine and in fact they do not expect the Messiah to be divine.**
- **It is inconceivable for them that God would ever come down in the flesh. Jesus, for them, was just a blasphemer and false prophet.**



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