

JUDAISM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Overview: Jews commonly have a them and us world perspective, which has its origins in God's call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). Gentiles are the rest of the world. When Jewish people are religious they usually turn to Judaism seeing it as "our" religion. Christianity is fine but it considered "their" (gentiles) religion. Today there are three major branches of Judaism, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. There are two other offshoots; Reconstructionism, an offshoot of Conservative, and Hasidic, an offshoot of Orthodox. Judaism is best thought of as developing after the destruction of the temple in the second and third centuries, which is why most religious Jews give equal weight, if not greater, to the Talmud (a 2,700 page record of ancient rabbis between 2nd and 5th centuries) and the Old Testament Scriptures. Judaism is a religion of works not beliefs, an atheist Jew may very well be active in his synagogue and a Jewish lifestyle, though they would most likely be found in a reform branch since it allows a varied interpretation of God or "God concept". Though certain branches have particular doctrines, doctrine is not taught as it is in Christianity; therefore someone may adhere to a particular branch without adopting that branches doctrine. There is no concept of a personal relationship to God in any of the branches of Judaism.

History:

Orthodox ~ Dates to the days of the Talmud. The only form of Jewish religious practice from the 2nd century to the 18th century, when Reform Judaism develops.

Reform ~ Dates to late 18th century. Was an attempt to modernize Judaism to prevent the assimilation of Jews into German lifestyles and culture.

Conservative ~ An American movement with roots in 19th century Germany. It arose as a reaction to Reform Judaism, trying to be a middle ground attempting to keep basic traditions while adapting to modern life.

Views of God:

Orthodox ~ God is Spirit. He is personal – omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, and compassionate.

Reform ~ A varied interpretation of the “God Concept” with wide latitude for naturalist, mystics, supernaturalists or humanists. “The truth is that we do not know the truth.”

Conservative ~ The concept of God is non-dogmatic and flexible, though most often God is thought of as impersonal and unattainable.

Views of Scripture:

Orthodox ~ The Torah (the Law) is the first five books of the Old Testament, the five books of Moses. The Oral Torah believed to have been given to Moses along with the written one to give interpretation to the Torah. A true Jew believes in their divine origin.

Reform ~ The Bible is a human document preserving, history, culture, legends, hope of a people. It is good for moral insight. Revelation is an ongoing process.

Conservative ~ The Bible is the work of God and man. It is not traditionally inspired, but dynamically inspired.

Views of Salvation:

Orthodox ~ Repentance, Prayer, and obedience to the Law are necessary for a proper relationship with God. Salvation is not a Jewish concept since they presume a standing with God.

Reform ~ It is social improvement, it is obtained by betterment of self and society.

Conservative ~ Similar to Reform, but also must maintain Jewish identity.

Views of Messiah:

Orthodox ~ He is a human being, not divine. He will restore the Jewish kingdom and extend his rule over all the earth.

Reform ~ Not a being, but a utopian age, or Messianic Age to which humankind is evolving towards.

Conservative ~ Essentially the same as the Reform.

Views of Life After Death:

Orthodox ~ There will be a physical resurrection; the righteous will exist with God in the world to come. The unrighteous will suffer, but disagreements exist on how.

Reform ~ No concept of personal life after death. Ideas range from live on in accomplishments to your soul merges into the impersonal life force.

Conservative ~ Tend toward the Reform without the Eastern Mysticism.

Approaching Jews With The Gospel:

The unspoken objection: The one underlying objection that almost all Jewish people have concerning placing one's faith in Jesus: is it is not a Jewish thing to do, that they will cease to be Jewish if they believe in Jesus, and that becoming a Christian means turning one's back on one's people, history, and heritage. To overcome this we may have to emphasize that Jesus was a Jew who came to save them, and that following the Christ (the Messiah) is what Abraham would have done (John 8:39ff) and Moses and the prophets told them to do.

Jews presume a standing with God: We must show eventually the same thing that the apostles had to argue, that all sin and fall short, gentile and Jew alike, and we all need the atoning work of the Messiah. (Romans Ch. 1-3)

We can use Jewish references as much as possible. For example many Jews do not realize that "Christ" was greek for "Messiah" many think it was his last name, therefore we would be better understood referring to Messiah Jesus than saying Jesus Christ. Other examples would be their holidays such as Yom Kippur which we know as the Day of Atonement in English Bibles, Sukkos we know as the feast of Tabernacles, Purim which is a feast recounting the story of the Book of Esther. We have many stories in common but often use different names for them.

Understand too that we probably understand the Old Testament Scriptures better than they since they do not study them generally. Don't be afraid to search the "Hebrew Scriptures" as they often refer to what we call the Old Testament.

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