



Modern Judaism

Through Christian Eyes



The Religion of the Jews

▶ Who are the Jews?





What do Jews believe?

- ▶ Wrong question!
- ▶ Scriptures of Judaism (Tanakh)
 - ▶ Torah
 - ▶ Written – first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) – originating about 1200 BC
 - ▶ Oral (Mishnah) – tradition collated and written about 200 AD
 - ▶ Nevi'im (the prophets – including some histories)
 - ▶ Ketuvim (writings – the psalms and everything else)



Other Sacred Texts

- ▶ The *Talmud*
 - ▶ The *Mishnah* (oral tradition committed to writing)
 - ▶ The *Gemara* (commentary by rabbis, mainly added between 200 and 500 AD)



Mishnah

Commentary by one rabbi (e.g. Rashi)

Cross-references



Gemara

Commentary by second rabbi (e.g. Tosafot)

References to other texts, etc.



Main Division in Judaism

Secular Jews

- ▶ Rarely attend synagogue
- ▶ Don't usually follow *mitzvot* (commandments) but might follow some by choice
- ▶ Don't really accept scriptures
- ▶ May have no religious beliefs
- ▶ Follow some traditions as a marker of cultural identity, rather than religious obedience.

Religious (Observant) Jews

- ▶ Attend synagogue regularly
- ▶ Celebrate *shabbat* (sabbath) every week
- ▶ Try to follow *mitzvot*, with varying degrees of selectivity
- ▶ Believe in scriptures and *Talmud*
- ▶ Believe in God, and see Jews as the chosen people obliged to obey commandments



Jews and the Afterlife

- ▶ Not much emphasis
- ▶ Ambiguity in scriptures
 - ▶ Not mentioned clearly in *Torah*
- ▶ Focus on 'here and now'
- ▶ Some believe in 'world to come' (*Olam Ha-Ba*)
 - ▶ Abode of the righteous dead
- ▶ Some believe the souls wait passively for the Messianic age, when all will be made right



Distinctive Practices

- ▶ Living the *Mitzvot* (Commandments)
 - ▶ Keeping *Shabbat*
 - ▶ Observing Holy Days (e.g. *Pesach* and *Yom Kippur*)
 - ▶ Male circumcision
 - ▶ Study Torah (and Talmud)
 - ▶ Keep *kosher* (dietary laws)
 - ▶ Distinctive clothing



Clothing



Kippah



Tallit & Tefillin



Hasidic people





What has changed?

Scriptural Judaism

- ▶ Geographic – focused on Temple in Jerusalem
- ▶ Sacrificial
- ▶ Messiah will come as a king

Rabbinic Judaism

- ▶ Temporal – focused on rhythms of days, weeks year
- ▶ Study of Torah and Talmud
- ▶ Messiah will come as a rabbi – as well as a king



The Jewish Diaspora

- ▶ Began with Babylonian Exile (about 600 BC)
- ▶ Magnified by Romans
- ▶ Jewish settlements in India, East Africa
- ▶ Most in Europe & Middle East
 - ▶ Sephardim (Spain, Portugal, Ottoman Empire, Middle East)
 - ▶ Ashkenazim (Northern Europe – mainly Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania and Russian Empire)



Denominations

- ▶ Orthodox – late 18th Century
 - ▶ Sees itself as only authentic expression of Judaism
- ▶ Reform & Liberal – mid-19th Century
 - ▶ Take commandments in light of modern science and social change
 - ▶ Contemporary worship
 - ▶ Looser dietary laws
 - ▶ Prayers in vernacular (not Hebrew)
 - ▶ Men and women worship together in synagogue



Denominations (2)

- ▶ Conservative – late 19th Century
 - ▶ Reaction against perceived extremes of Liberal/Reform movements
 - ▶ Retains many – but not all – traditions
 - ▶ Focuses on preserving a distinct Jewish identity



Judaism in the Modern Age

- ▶ Centuries of religious discrimination and hatred
 - ▶ Christians sometimes saw Jews as ‘Christ-killers’ and in league with the Devil
- ▶ 19th Century quasi-science brought racial discrimination and hatred
 - ▶ Jews (and others) were considered sub-human
- ▶ Jews could change behaviour and even religion, but they could not change their ancestry



Judaism in the Modern Age

- ▶ Persecution and Pogroms in 19th Century
- ▶ Nazi 'Final Solution' to the 'Jewish problem' in 20th Century
 - ▶ About 6 Million died, more than 2 million from Poland and 2 million from USSR – estimated third of all Jews
- ▶ Zionism – a quest for a Jewish homeland
 - ▶ Originally secular, backed cynically by Britain (1917)
 - ▶ Post-1945, backed by UN (especially USA), creating homeland in Palestine (1947)
- ▶ Tendency among Jews to see criticism of Israel as continuing anti-Semitism



Sharing with Christianity

- ▶ Belief in one God, creator of heaven and earth
- ▶ God expresses himself through the scriptures
- ▶ A sense of holiness, morality and excellence
- ▶ God-given guidance for life
 - ▶ As a minimum, the Ten Commandments
- ▶ People are accountable to God



Differences from Christianity

- ▶ Most Jews do not accept Jesus as Messiah
 - ▶ Some do, and remain both Jewish and Christian
 - ▶ Unpopular among other Jews, who say that by believing in Jesus they cease to be Jews
- ▶ Focus on community, rather than belief
- ▶ Retention of *shabbat*, rather than the Lord's day
- ▶ Sin is taken seriously, but is resolved by repentance, rather than redemption



What does the Bible say?

- ▶ The descendants of Abraham were chosen to be a blessing to all humanity (Genesis 12: 3)
- ▶ The Lord says he will gather back the scattered people and return them to the land of Israel (Ezekiel 11: 17)
- ▶ Paul says, 'Did God reject his people? By no means!' (Romans 11: 1); '...all Israel will be saved...' (v. 26); and 'they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable' (vv. 28-29)