

Sharing Life, Sharing Faith

Discussion #7

Judaism

Of all the non-Christian religions, Judaism is unique in that it shares a common history and common scriptures with Christianity. As such, there is much more similarity than differences, especially in orthodox thought, both Christian and Jewish. For example, both orthodox Christians and orthodox Jews believe:

- that there is one and only one God, who is the creator of the universe.
- that prayers should only be offered to God and to none other
- that the scriptures are God's inerrant word, that the writers were inspired of God
- that sin entered the world through the fall of Adam
- that God gave us the law to show us His righteousness
- that God shows His wrath against sin and unrighteousness when the law is not observed
- that redemption and forgiveness of our sins comes from God
- that a Messiah/redeemer will (has) come from the line of David

Judaism teaches that the Jews are the elect, "chosen people" of God, and thus are "saved" by virtue of God's promises based on the "faithfulness of our ancestors". However, emphasis is still placed on the **covenant** of law, and this covenant is still dependent upon our observing the law, the "terms" of the covenant.

However, it also teaches that the Torah is for everybody, Jew and Gentile, and that one does not have to be Jewish to be saved under the law. In fact, the law as given to Moses is only for Jews, and there is a more "relaxed" form of law under which "Righteous Gentiles" may also obtain salvation, called the Noachide Law. This is why Judaism as a religion does not proselytize. This makes it difficult for Jews to understand why people of other faiths, Christianity in particular, tend to proselytize so aggressively. Resentment towards Christianity is directed more at a long history of forced conversion, anti-semitism and hatred toward those who do not convert, and aggressive evangelism efforts, and not because Christians also lay claim to the Hebrew scriptures.

Judaism today is based on intellect and study of the scriptures, and not on an emotional response to or personal "relationship" with God. Intense study and a step-by-step learning progression is encouraged. "Leaps of faith" are not.

I. Primary Denominations within Judaism

A. Orthodox

Orthodox Judaism teaches that the Tanach (the Torah, Nevi'im, and Kethuvim - which is essentially the same as the Christian Old Testament but in a somewhat different order), the Talmud (the oral law, now written and expounded upon), and the Mishnah (commentaries on the law, both written and oral) are all the word of God. Great attention is paid to observance of the law, both of the decalog as well as the ceremonial law. A few examples:

Shabbat: begins at sundown on Friday night and ends at sundown on Saturday night. During this time, absolutely no work may be done. No mechanized means

of transports, such as cars, elevators, trains, and so forth may be used. Electrical settings must remain as they were at the start of the sabbath, and new fires cannot be started.

Kashrut: the Jewish dietary laws forbid the eating of pork, shellfish, or eating dairy products and meat within six hours of each other. Strict observance requires a kosher kitchen, with two sets of cookware and plates, two refrigerators, etc.

Prayer: is said three times a day, from a prayerbook and in Hebrew, using tallit, tefilin, and head coverings. Women and men do not sit together in synagogue services, but are segregated behind curtains or partitions of some kind.

B. Conservative

This movement is strictly American, and is an attempt to blend Orthodoxy with the “enlightenment” of our contemporary culture. Observance is still stressed, but in a more modified form, and the degree with which one wishes to participate is left up to the individual. In addition, the Jewish culture, rather than Jewish observance, is seen as the unifying bond for Jews. Worship services contain prayers in both Hebrew and English. Over half of affiliated American Jews are Conservative.

C. Reform

The Reform (not Reformed) denomination has its roots in Germany, however it is prevalent today primarily in America. Reform Judaism does not teach the inerrancy of the Bible, or even that it is the word of God. It teaches that revelation is continuous and takes into account the changes brought about through history and culture. Like the Unitarians, the belief is that any path to God is as good as any other, and individuals are free to decide for themselves what path they wish to take. Stress is placed on living a good life and making a difference in the world, called “Tikkun Ha’Olam”. The idea of the Messiah has been changed from an actual person who is eagerly awaited, to the idea of a “Messianic Age”, which will finally bring peace to the world.

D. Reconstructionist

Reconstructionism is a radical movement which seeks to “reconstruct” all aspects of Jewish society, and while it is growing, it is still a small minority rejected by most Jews. Its major teaching is that Judaism is not a religious community but a culture or civilization. Mordechai Kaplan, the founder of the movement, has stated that the Jewish people are not the “Chosen People”, which is heresy to most Jews (as well as to many Christians), because the Bible is composed merely of myths and stories and therefore is not the word of God.

E. Renewal

The Renewal movement shares some characteristics with Reconstructionist and also Mystic Judaism. From the Reconstructionist, it asserts that Judaism must adapt and change to fit the times. From mysticism, it borrows heavily from early Hassidic forms of Judaism, as well as from Islamic and Eastern tradition.

F. Mystic

A movement which started in Safed in the 1570's. It utilizes an additional sacred text, called the *Zohar*, (the *Book of Light*, or the *Kaballah*), which is an exposition of the Torah, and includes the study of the hidden meanings of the Hebrew words, letters and combinations that are found in the Torah. Much of New Age thought is taken from the work of these early Kabbalists, and we will discuss some of these teachings in more detail in our section on New Age Thought.

G. Secular

In addition to these denominations, there are many smaller ones with different beliefs that generally fit into the spectrum somewhere. Jews who are not affiliated with any denomination, and have no particular common beliefs are referred to as Secular. Many secular Jews still participate in Jewish holidays and special events.

II. Beliefs

As seen above, beliefs vary widely within the Jewish community. Some common practices seen in all denominations include a sense of Jewish identity, whether cultural or religious. Most Jewish males are circumcised 8 days after birth in a ceremony called a "Brit", which is the Hebrew word for *covenant*. Boys and girls are said to be adults and responsible for their own sins when they are 13 years old (12 for girls). This is commemorated with a Bar Mitzvah (Bat Mitzvah for girls). Depending on the denomination, the child is required to learn a Torah portion, or part of it, and be able to recite it in Hebrew, using correct cantillation. This is a significant achievement, and not all Jewish children actually go through this.

Many Jewish homes will have small, decorative boxes mounted on each door frame, both on entrances to the house and to each room within the house, called a *mezuzah*. Each *mezuzah* contains a small scroll with the Sh'ma and V'ahavtah prayers written on them in Hebrew, and are touched and the fingers raised to the lips when entering or leaving a room. There may also be a *menorah*, or lampstand, in a prominent place in the home.

Most Jews hold some kind of celebration or commemoration of the major holidays, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Pesach (Passover). Other holidays are observed in varying degrees depending on denomination and affiliation.

Most Jews are suspicious of the "Jews for Jesus" and other Messianic type organizations, because they are aggressively evangelistic, they usually teach some kind of decision theology based on emotional response, and most of the people in those organization are not Jewish. Many of these groups, while they may be very sincere, have an erroneous understanding of eschatology and believe that only when all the Jews return to Israel and become Christians can the second coming of Jesus occur. This "ulterior motive" is readily apparent, and gives them an appearance of insincerity and phoniness.

III. Witnessing to Jewish People

A. First and foremost: Be a friend!

As with all faith groups, let them know that you care about them, and that your friendship is not contingent upon their beliefs. Let your friendship develop as friendships do, building trust, love, and respect through talking about life situations. As your friendship grows, don't be afraid to open up and show your own imperfections and vulnerability. Trust takes time.

Use of Terminology. Be aware of and sensitive to their comfort level when talking about Christianity, which may vary widely. Most Jews are somewhat uncomfortable around crosses and crucifixes. When talking about Jesus, many Jews also prefer to use His Hebrew name, Yeshua (which means "he who saves"). It is fine if you want to use that name as well. In general, use the word Messiah instead of the word Christ. *Messiah* is from the Hebrew *ha-moshiach*, while *Christ* comes from the Greek. Although the words mean the same thing, Jewish people are generally more comfortable with the Hebrew form. It is also preferable to use the term "Hebrew Scriptures" rather than "Old Testament".

Remember too the teaching that "Torah is for everyone". Most Jewish people are not offended or put off by the fact the Christianity uses the Hebrew Scriptures. On the other hand, this "sharing" of scriptures may cause a Jewish person to be more open to the Christian message if it is presented in the context of the scriptures. Most Jewish resistance to Christianity has more to do with aggressive missionary tactics and a misunderstanding about what Christianity actually teaches. On the other hand, you may find some resentment toward the Christian use of Hebrew Scriptures, but this is again, usually related to attitude. If you give the impression that you think that only Christians understand the scriptures and the Jews have it all wrong, you will be met with resistance.

Make sure you have an open dialog with your Jewish friend so that you know how he/she feels about these things, and speak accordingly. Remember also that, as a rule, Jewish people do not understand the concept of proselytizing, and do not want to be the subject of such efforts, so be sensitive to that as well.

B. Study and discuss the scriptures with them

Many Jews know the Hebrew scriptures very well, both in the original Hebrew and in English. This is especially true for those raised in Orthodox or Conservative denominations. Others know very little about them. In either case, both you and your friend will benefit from studying the scriptures together, if they are willing to do so. Learn the Torah lectionary schedule and volunteer to read and / or discuss the weekly parshah with them. You may receive new insights seeing the scriptures through Jewish eyes, and you may be able to share your own insights of the "new covenant" with them. You don't have to be an expert to do this. In fact, if you have the attitude that you already know it all, your witness will not be effective. Don't be afraid to also ask questions and learn.

C. Show the Gospel in the Old Testament as well as in the New

Examples of this follow, but as you study your own scriptures you will find more that you can share with others as well.

1. **All have sinned and need atonement with God**
 - a. Ecclesiastes 7:20
 - b. Isaiah 64:6
 - c. Psalm 14:2-3
 - d. Romans 3:23
2. **The result of sin is death**
 - a. Isaiah 59:1-2
 - b. Ezekiel 18:4
 - c. Romans 6:23a
3. **God removes sin by sacrifice**
 - a. Leviticus 17:11
 - b. Isaiah 53:3-8
 - c. John 1:29
 - d. Romans 6:23b
4. **God takes away sin and changes hearts**
 - a. Psalm 51:7-13
 - b. Galatians 2:15-16
 - c. Galatians 5:22-23
5. **Salvation comes through faith**
 - a. Genesis 15:6
 - b. I Kings 18:21
 - c. Galatians 3:6-7

D. Know some of the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus

A few passages that might start some dialog include:

1. Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:1-13
2. Isaiah 53 and the crucifixion story
3. Deuteronomy 18:15-19 and Acts 3:19-23

Don't be surprised if your friend does not immediately see the connections. Be aware that the many prophecies in the Old Testament that point to Jesus, while obvious to you, are not so to many Jews. It is hard to explain, but when you read the Old Testament through Jewish eyes, those prophecies are not apparent. Paul refers to this as the "veil of Moses" and he describes it in **I Corinthians 3:13-15**

We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (verse 16)

E. Appreciation and affirmation

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. (Romans 9:4-5)

Do not be afraid to talk about all that the Jewish faith has brought into Christianity, and to express the appreciation for the blessings that have come through the Jews, including:

1. The scriptures
2. Church design
3. Liturgy and Worship forms
4. Passover and its significance
5. Jesus the Messiah came through the line of Judah through David

However, **be careful not to be patronizing or insulting**. Most Jews do not really know that Christianity so closely follows Jewish worship and practice.

F. Remember your Law and Gospel guidelines

Be sensitive to the state of mind of your friend. As long as he/she is comfortable with the law and its observance, the gospel message will fall on deaf ears. The question would be raised, "Why do I need Jesus to redeem me from my sins when God offers His forgiveness freely to all who turn to Him, repent, and try to do better?" Rabbi Tovia Singer once described it this way. "Christianity answers a question that Judaism doesn't ask." This does not mean that you should never proclaim the Gospel, but be aware that this person first needs to hear the Law. They need to recognize that their attempts to observe the law do not remove their sinful nature, nor their sins.

However, at some point, your friend may see that attempts to observe the law aren't enough. When this happens, there will probably be some anguish involved for them. Learn to recognize signs that he or she is struggling with this idea, and be prepared to show a clear witness of the truth. Let them know that they are not alone in their struggle. Some passages that might be helpful include:

1. John 3 (the entire chapter, with emphasis on verse 16)
2. John 14:6
3. John 6:44
4. Acts 2:21
5. Joel 2:28-32
6. Ephesians 2:8-9
7. Romans 4:16
8. Hebrews (all of it, but in particular 1:1-2, 9:11-12 and others as you find them)

IV. Scenarios

- A. You are talking with your Jewish friend. You know that he is very involved in the local synagogue, and believes in God. He says that he tries to keep kosher, goes to the High Holy Day services and as many Shabbat services as he can. In the course of your talk, he says, “I understand completely how you feel about God. I can see that you believe that we sin and are constantly in need of repentance and turning back to God and His ways. What I don’t understand is, since God tells us in the scriptures that He will forgive a repentant heart, why you think that the sacrifice of Jesus is necessary in order to do this?”

What do you say? Does this person need to hear Law or Gospel?

- B. You are talking about your faith with your Jewish friend. She states that she really doesn’t believe in the Bible except as a story of the history of her people. She says, “I don’t really think there is a God, but if there is, I still don’t think I have to worry. I think he will judge us on the good and bad we’ve done. If the Bible is really a record of his covenant with us, then he will remember his promises. If not, then none of it really matters, does it?”

How do you respond?

IV. Journal Sharing

V. Next Month

- A. Office of the Holy Ministry (The Pastoral Office)**
- B. Islam**
- C. Scenarios**
- D. Journal Sharing**
- E. Handouts for Outside Reading
Pastor Bolland’s Study on Islam**

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