

JUDAISM: History, Beliefs, and Practices

(This article was read in class on Tuesday, November 27th--the original document had pictures of Moses parting the Red Sea and the Ten Commandments on the front. This is the same text, just formatted in a different way.)

Judaism began with Abraham, a man who lived more than 4000 years ago. When Abraham and his wife were very old and childless, God established a covenant or contract with Abraham to make him the "Father of the Jewish Faith". This covenant promised to make the descendants of Abraham as plentiful as the stars in the sky. Abraham believed God and had a son named Isaac.

The Exodus

In 1250 BCE, the Israelites found themselves in Egypt serving as slaves. Moses, an Israelite, is adopted by the Pharaoh's, or king's, sister. Raised in the royal household, Moses is given much authority. God tells Moses to ask the Pharaoh to release the Israelites. When Pharaoh refuses, God sent a series of ten plagues, or times of difficulty. These included floods, frog infestations, and hail. The last plague happened one night when all the first-born Egyptian sons died while all of the Israeli first-born sons were spared. With the death of his own son, Pharaoh agreed to let Moses and the Israelites leave Egypt. However, Pharaoh changed his mind once the people had left. When the Israelites reached the Red Sea, the Egyptians were close at hand. God allowed all of the Israelites to cross safely, but closed the Red Sea upon the Egyptians. This miracle of the escape of the Israelites and the parting of the Red Sea is known as the Exodus.

The Ten Commandments

For forty years after crossing the Red Sea, Moses and his people roamed the desert. During this time, God provided for their needs. One day, God called Moses into the mountains. Here Moses received the first ten of God's laws or commandments, the Ten Commandments. These laws are seen as the foundation of Judaism and have long been regarded as moral codes for western culture. The first commandment states that the followers of God will only worship him. This makes Judaism a monotheistic religion, worship of one god. Later, Christians and Muslims would also follow the ten commandments, as they are written in the Old Testament of the Bible. Muslims accept the Old Testament as revelations of God. For this reason, Muslims, Christians and Jews are referred to as "people of the book" that believe in one god.

The Promised Land

After receiving the Ten Commandments, God allowed his people to move into Canaan, the Promised Land. It is here that the Israelites successfully fought for control and establish their nation. King David, ~~the son of the first king, Saul,~~ makes the city of Jerusalem the capital of Israel. King Solomon, the son of King David, builds the first temple of worship in Jerusalem.

Diaspora

God sent prophets, inspired teachers or proclaimers to remind the people of his laws. The prophets were often faced with criticism, but held fast to their teaching; becoming the conscience, or moral guide, of Israel. However, after many years of continuing to be disobedient, God allowed Judah, the region in which Jerusalem was located, to be overtaken by the Babylonians. Thus, in 586 BCE, Solomon's temple was destroyed and thousands of Israelites were taken to Babylonia as slaves. Once again, God allowed the Jews to roam or scatter outside of their homeland. This dispersion throughout the Mediterranean, Spain, Portugal, and beyond is known as the Diaspora.

Sacred Writing

The Tanakh is the collection of holy words held sacred by Jews. As mentioned before, these works are also held sacred by Christians who call them the Old Testament. The first five books are known to Jews as the Torah and contain the writings and teachings of Moses. The Talmud is also held sacred by Jews and contains the writings, thoughts, and discussions of first century Jews.

Jewish Practices

Jews worship in synagogues where the Torah is read. In the synagogue, worship is led by a rabbi, or teacher. The Jewish faith has many types of followers. Some, known as Orthodox, do not allow musical instruments during worship. Progressive Jews allow women rabbis. Hebrew, the language of Judaism, died as a living language. However, in the 20th century, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, restored the language, known today as Modern Hebrew. Yiddish is another language spoken by Jews. This language is the mixture of German and Hebrew.

Besides the synagogue, the home is very important to Jews. It is here that the faith is shared, traditions learned, and family is celebrated. Food is very important to Jewish life. Meals are required to be prepared in a kosher, or fit manner, in accordance with

Jewish law. This often refers to the cleanliness of where the food is prepared or the way meat is rendered.

Throughout the year Jews observe many holy days and festivals. The Sabbath, or last day of the week, is celebrated because it commemorates God's day of rest after six days of creation. Starting a sundown on Friday and lasting until sunset on Saturday, this time is one of family and celebration with readings, prayer and a special meal.

Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, and occurs during September or October. Passover, a celebration of God's sparing the children of Egypt by "passing over" them, takes place in March or April. Hanukkah, or festival of lights, takes place in November or December and is a time of thanksgiving.

Persecution & The Holocaust

For centuries, the people of the Jewish faith were persecuted for their faith. This persecution came from not only their religious practices, but also for economic reasons. Because Jews do not recognize Jesus as the son of God, throughout history Christians have shunned or oppressed them. Faced with limited resources and occupations Jews often took jobs seen as distasteful or offensive to others; such as moneylenders. Christians, according to their faith, were not allowed to lend money and charge usury or interest. Therefore, many Jews made their living this way. However, this work often allowed them to become more wealthy than their Christian neighbors which only added to the hard feelings and persecution Israelites faced. Perhaps the worst persecution faced by Jews took place during World War II when Adolf Hitler, the leader in Germany, killed six million Jews, many in concentration camps. Known as the Holocaust, this horrific event saw more than one third of the world's Jews eliminated.

Modern Israel

In 1948, following World War II, the Jewish people were given a homeland inside the borders of Palestine. Modern Israel faces many hostilities from its neighbors, many Arab Muslims, who not only reject the Jews ownership of the land but, also the faith they worship. Hostilities throughout the region continue in the 21st century.

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