

**WHAT DO JEWISH PEOPLE  
BELIEVE?**

***THE SEVEN QUESTIONS OF  
JUDAISM***

**Power Books**, are produced by Metro Jewish Resources, (Assemblies of God office for Jewish Ministry.) These quick fact booklets provide a quick read approach to important topics.

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# INTRODUCTION

It is highly likely you have encountered Jewish people and know a Jewish person. Your best friend may even be Jewish. Still, some things about their Judaism may seem curious. Your first thought maybe that they are the people of the Old Testament, chosen by God, so they have a profound knowledge of the Scriptures.

You have probably discovered also that the answer to this is no. Yes, God chose them, but their understanding of the Old Testament is seriously deficient. Furthermore, since Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah, and Jews do not, some think this is the only difference between Christianity and Judaism. What we should understand is that an entire theology is associated with believing in Jesus that Jews see as diametrically opposed to what the Bible states.

One reason Judaism is complex. Comprised of vast disparities from one sect to the other. Even something as foundational as Torah is not universally accepted or interpreted the same way from one to the other. Instead, different streams of thought intricately intertwine with traditional views, and they can depart from the main cloth to form their own fiber. Yet, they can remain Jewish.

For this reason, Judaism is very much a religion and culture in motion from generation to generation. It is defined by a broad spectrum of beliefs. From complete secularism and humanism to no faith in the One True God, to intense religious rituals and beliefs. Some know more about the Bible than others. Some are absent from any knowledge of the Scriptures. In Orthodox Judaism, the ideal to garner wisdom comes from the Talmud and Mishnah, which are explained further in this edition of Power Books.

Historically, following 70 A.D., Judaism transformed itself after the Second Temple was destroyed, creating more disparities that have endured to this day. Tackling this topic can be challenging, given the limited work in this booklet. Here we highlight the seven fundamental questions about Judaism and provide in the Appendices, material for further reading and study.

# QUESTION ONE

## DO JEWISH PEOPLE BELIEVE IN REPENTANCE?

The Jewish principle of repentance or in Hebrew, Teshuvah (to return), is different from Christianity. In Judaism, no savior is needed as an intermediary to mitigate one's personal sin and separation from God. Yet, the Jewish laws of repentance and substitution are so prominent in the book of Leviticus.

Modern Judaism sees no necessity for a blood sacrifice to achieve repentance. Whether this is through an individual or the blood of an animal. The concept of one's forgiveness from sin through Yeshua is a foreign concept. Jews believe in an individual and collective involvement with God through tradition, rituals, prayers, and ethical actions. Repentance does take place, but once per year on Yom Kippur. On that day, they believe a unique window is open to them whereby God draws closer, and favor is provided through Yom Kippur prayers, and fasting. From this one day, they will receive the forgiveness that lasts until the next year.

## **QUESTION TWO**

### **DO JEWISH PEOPLE BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY?**

Another significant distinction between Christianity and Judaism is over the Godhead or Trinity. In Judaism, there is no belief in a Triune God. The thought of one-person, although divine, coming in human form, is heretical and a blasphemous principle. Two thousand years ago, the Pharisees viewed and treated Yeshua with disdain and revulsion over this very issue when He claimed to have come from the Father.

Judaism, on the other hand, emphasizes the Oneness of God without three distinct operations. This belief has been rehearsed for thousands of years in the Shema, which is the most ancient declaration of Judaism. It affirms Judaism's ancient Shema, "hear "O Israel the Lord your God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9.)

## **QUESTION THREE**

### **DO JEWISH PEOPLE BELIEVE IN HEAVEN AND HELL?**

Generally speaking, Judaism does not teach a particular concept of hell. It is assumed that evildoers will be punished. But the manner and place of chastisement are left to the justice of God.

Although the Old Testament clearly teaches a place of eternal suffering and torment, (Sheol, or, hell in the Old Testament,) it is described as a place of darkness to which all the dead go, both the righteous and unrighteous, regardless of the moral decisions they make in life. Sheol is also seen as a place of stillness and darkness where a person is cut off from life, and from the Hebrew God.

Though this last point strongly hints to divine punishment for one's sins. Most Jewish people believe when the body dies, the cycle of life ends. The body returns to the dust of the ground and the soul dissipates as a vapor.

Contributing to this is the fact that only the first five books of the Scriptures, called the Torah, are considered inspired. Most references to Sheol, Hades, and eternal separation from God, are found in other books of the

Bible. Though ample references to the grave are throughout the first five books.

So the concept of eternal judgment that Christians believe, and one that follows after death (the Great White Throne Judgment,) is not prevalent in Jewish theology or the minds of Jewish people. Instead, Judaism focuses on living, being kind, and performing acts of charity. At its core, it is concerned with the well-being of humanity.

A story is found in the Talmud that is often told when someone is asked to summarize the essence of Judaism: During the first century B.C.E., a great rabbi named Hillel was asked to sum up Judaism while standing on one foot. He replied: "Certainly! What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the Torah. The rest is commentary, now go and study." (Ta Imud Shabbat 31A.) This belief is dominant amongst almost all sects of Judaism. But because there is no eternal destination based on a personal relationship with God, and how one lived, the following sad fact is seen in the Psalms:

Death is tragic because it deprives us of the ability to continue to serve our Master. As the Psalmist wrote it: "praise, not the Lord, neither any that go down in silence" (Psalms 116:17.)

## *Olam Ha Ba*

There seems to be some exception when it comes to the Orthodox. The Hebrew term *Olam Ha Ba* comes into focus, meaning, "the world to come" in Hebrew. Early rabbinic texts describe *Olam Ha Ba* as a physical realm that will exist at the end-of-days after the Messiah has come, and God has judged both the living and the dead. The righteous dead will be resurrected to enjoy a second life in *Olam Ha Ba*.

There is also the term *Gehenna*, which connotes "hell", hidden or unseen, or the underworld. When the ancient rabbis talk about *Gehenna* the question that they are trying to answer is, "How will bad people be dealt with in the afterlife?" After being punished in *Gehenna* a soul was considered pure enough to enter *Gan Eden*, or, Garden of God. Accordingly, they saw *Gehenna* as a place of punishment for those who lead an immoral life.

They also taught that the time a person could remain in *Gehenna* was limited to twelve months, and the rabbis believed that even at the very Gates of *Gehenna*, a person could repent and avoid punishment. Again, this highlights our earliest remarks about the significant disparities of thought that exist within Judaism.

## **QUESTION FOUR**

### **CAN ONE HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?**

Following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. by the Romans, Judaism underwent sweeping changes following the cessation of sacrifices in the Temple. With the Temple destroyed, millions of Jews were killed, sold into slavery, and thousands more exiled from Jerusalem. As a result, a new form of Judaism was needed to rescue it from the brink of extinction.

At the time of Rome's conquest of Jerusalem, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, Judaism's spiritual leader knew certain resistance was futile. Legend has it, he had his followers secretly carry him out of the city in a coffin, so he could reach the Roman commander and appeal to let him, and some of his sages go to Yavneh, a city east of Jerusalem. Given permission, Zakkai established a new institution of learning where matters of law were reorganized.

From Yavneh, legal and spiritual rulings began to be disseminated throughout the Diaspora, and Jews began to turn to Yavneh for guidance and leadership. His new system was built upon good deeds and the study of the Torah. His followers were taught that these elements

were more pleasing to God. This early movement ignited a massive overhaul of Judaism that formed the basis for the rabbinic form of Judaism that exists today. A catastrophic effect of his reforms, however, set the Jewish people on a path away from any concept of a personal relationship with God as the former Prophets had shown them.

## QUESTION FIVE

### DO JEWISH PEOPLE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY BIBLE?

Judaism upholds three crowns; the crown of **Torah**, the **Crown of Priesthood**, and the **Crown of Kingship**. The first connotes our earthly life that is dependent upon the Torah; the second speaks to the purpose of the Jewish people and Israel. The third speaks of the future Messianic Age when King Messiah Returns.

Of course, Christianity places emphasis on both the New and Old. But salvation is mediated through Yeshua Jesus as revealed in the sacred New Testament. This is not the case with Judaism. Right conduct, acts of compassion, caring for the earth, and being good stewards of God is stressed.

Judaism does focus on the Mosaic Covenant, which is found in the first five books of the Old Testament (also considered the sacred Torah and consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.) The rest of the Old Testament, the Nevi'Nevi'ime Prophets,) K'tubK'tubim (writings) and, the Five Megillot (Scrolls) are held valuable and informative, but they are not considered inspired as Torah.

Added to the Torah is the Talmud, which means learning and instruction." It consists of two components. The Mishnah, dated 200 CE, is a written collection of Judaism's Torah, (laws, statutes, and legal interpretations that not found in the Five Books of Moses.)

The second part, the Gemara, dated around 500 CE, is a rabbinical analysis of, and a commentary on the Mishna. But the term "Talmud" may refer to either the Gemara alone, or the Mishnah, and Gemara together. According to "Maimonides", the Mishnah was to become the ultimate resource for Jews, Judaism, and Jewish Education. It was intended to provide a complete statement of the Oral Law, so that a person who mastered first the Written Torah, and then the Mishnah Torah, there would be no need for any other book.

## **YAVNEH**

Judaism's changes following Yavneh taught Jews to relate to God through prayers, Mitzvot (commandments) good deeds, (performing Mitzvah,) and Charity (Tzedakah.) These Mitzvot are a central part of Judaism still today. So wide-ranging are they that 613 commandments cover all aspects of life. All of them comply with the ethical and ritual teachings of the Torah. These can be found in the Mishna Torah, (meaning, repetition of the Torah.) The Mishna is the Oral Law, while the Torah is the Written

Law. To the question then, the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, the Talmud, Mishna, and Gemara, are the holy books of Judaism.

## QUESTION SIX

### DO JEWISH PEOPLE BELIEVE IN A FUTURE REIGN OF THEIR MESSIAH?

Throughout Jewish history, the Messianic kingdom has been longed for and prayed for. Always, Israel envisioned a time when she will be restored to her former glory, and her people would once again be living in their fullness under the leadership of their Messiah.

The Christian church has longed for the same. But the Christian focus is upon such images and realities as the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, and heaven. The Jew, on the other hand, sees Jerusalem and Mt. Zion restored, and the Christian sees the "New Jerusalem" coming down out of heaven, as seen in Revelation 21:2.

While the kingdom of God has permeated Christian teaching, the kingdom of heaven has permeated Judaism. One distinction from Christianity is over its preconditions. Judaism asserts we must prepare for the building of the Third Temple to hasten our Messiah's return.

For this reason, the training of priests in the sacrificial system, and the manufacturing of Temple furnishings have been underway in Israel for years. These actions,

according to Judaism, will accelerate the return of their Messiah. For Talmudic references of Messiah, see appendix in the back of the book.

## **QUESTION SEVEN**

### **DO JEWISH PEOPLE BELIEVE IN ORIGINAL SIN?**

I Corinthians 15:21-22 states; "For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Sin remains one of the foundation pillars of Christianity. Judaism, however, believes this is unbiblical because Jews believe that one is born into the world with Original Purity and not Original Sin.

Yes, Judaism recognizes that man is capable of great evil, but it does not associate that with man's inclination toward sin. Instead, Judaism focuses on man's power to choose good and not evil. It embraces their belief that God rejoices when a man decides to be good. So, the concept of sin entering the world through Adam and Eve, which brought death into the world, is vehemently opposed.

Judaism also believes that as one man cannot bring death into the world, one man cannot bring salvation, or life into the world. Death is seen merely as a natural cycle of life. Rabbis assert, that death has existed since the first human beings were created. Hence, man does not die because of their sin. Instead, God made the death part of life from the moment of Creation. In some Jewish circles,

they go as far as to say death was The Original Mistake,  
not Original Sin.

# APPENDICES I

## JEWISH ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE MESSIAH

**Christian belief:** The Messiah brings an eternal peace between all nations, and all people<sup>[1]</sup>*Judaism argues, because there is no peace, Jesus cannot be the prophesied Messiah.* Furthermore, Yeshua said that his purpose in coming was to bring a sword and not peace (see Matthew 10:34, as referenced above.)

**Christian belief:** The Messiah will bring about a worldwide conversion of all peoples to ethical Monotheism. *Judaism states since the world still remain steeped in idolatry, Yeshua was not the Messiah.*

**Christian belief:** The Messiah brings about an end to all forms of idolatry (Zechariah 13:2.) *Judaism argues the world remains steeped in idolatry, so Yeshua could not have been the Messiah.*

**Christian belief:** The Messiah brings about universal recognition of The One True God;(Isaiah 11:9.) *Judaism argues the since the world remains steeped in idolatry, and Christians still believe in a Triune God, Yeshua did not fulfill the prophecies spoken of Him.*

**Christian belief:** The Messiah gathers to Israel all of the twelve tribes (Ezekiel 36:24.) *Judaism argues because the Jewish people, and, the ten tribes, remain scattered, Yeshua Jesus cannot be the Messiah.*

**Christian belief:** The Messiah rebuilds the Temple (Isaiah 2:2; Ezekiel 37:26-28.) *Judaism argues that the Temple has never been built since the Second Temple was destroyed, therefore, Yeshua cannot be the Messiah.*

**Christian belief:** After the Messiah comes, there will be no more famine (Ezekiel 36:29-30.) *Judaism argues because famine and poverty still remain, and is even on the rise, Yeshua Jesus cannot be the Messiah.*

**Christian belief:** After the Messiah comes, death will eventually cease (Isaiah 25:8). *Judaism argues, that while Christianity claims the Messiah has come, death is still a reality of our times.*

**Christian belief:** There will be a resurrection following the coming of the Messiah. *Judaism<sup>[2]</sup> argues that the resurrection never occurred. \* Although from the New Testament there was a resurrection, Judaism does not recognize the New Testament (Matthew 27:52-53.)*

**Christian belief:** The nations of the earth will help the Jews materially (Isaiah 60:5-6; 60:10.) *Judaism argues, though more and more nations are understanding anti-Semitism, Israel is still alone, and rarely do nations come to her aid.*

## APPENDICES II

### REFERENCES OF MESSIAH IN THE TALMUD

In the Talmud, Sanhedrin 99a-b states, "The Mashiach, Messiah of Israel will come after 7000 years." Maschiach son of David, will come until there are no conceited men in Israel, Sanhedrin 98a. There is no difference between this world and the world of Maschiach except bondage of foreign powers, Berachot 34b; Shabbat 63a; 151b; Pesachim 68a.

*Berkhot 13a In the days of the Messiah, the Exodus from Egypt shall not be mentioned, but rather Jeremiah 23:7-8, "Ther" fore, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say: As the Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, as the Lord liveth that brought up and led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country and from all of the countries whither I had driven them." "*

*Pesachim 54a "Seven" things were created before the world was created, and these are they: The Torah, repentance, the garden of Eden, Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah.... The name of the Messiah, as it is written, 'His 'The*

**MessiMessiah' se shall endure forever, and has existed  
before the sun.'" (P''' lm 72:17)**

## APPENDICES III

### THE NINE MAIN SECTS OF JUDAISM

**Ultra-Orthodox / Haredi Judaism** – This stream of Judaism, maintains a steadfast adherence to Jewish religious law by segregating itself from modern society. According to Haredi Jews, authentic Jews believe God wrote the Torah, strictly observe Jewish Law (*halacha*), and refuses to modify Judaism to meet contemporary needs. The word Haredi is derived from the Hebrew word for fear (*harada*) and, can be interpreted as "one who trembles in awe of God" (Isaiah 66:2,5.)

**Orthodox Judaism** maintains the historical understanding of **Jewish** identity; a Jew is someone who was born to a Jewish mother or who converts to Judaism by Jewish law and tradition.

**Modern Orthodox Judaism** attempts to synthesize Jewish values and the observance of Jewish law, with the secular, modern world.

**Conservative Judaism**, is highly prevalent in North America, and seeks to preserve Jewish tradition and ritual, but has a more flexible approach to the interpretation of the law than Orthodox Judaism.

**Reformed Judaism** asserts that Jewish traditions should be modernized, integrated into Western culture. This means that many branches of Reform Judaism hold that Jewish law should undergo a process of critical evaluation and renewal.

**Cultural Judaism** garners individual thought and understanding. Its relation to Judaism is through history, civilization, and ethical values and those shared experiences of the Jewish people, like languages, literature, art, science, dance, music, food, and celebrations of the Jewish people.

**New Age Judaism** is explicitly atheistic with the freedom to incorporate certain elements foreign to Rabbinic Judaism.

**Humanistic Judaism** is one that embraces a human-centered philosophy, which combines rational thinking, with a deep connection to the Jewish people and its culture.

**Reconstructionist Judaism** is the foundation for a growing number of Jewish Communities and is a modern American-based Jewish movement originally born from the reforms and ideas of Mordecai Kaplan (1881–1983.) This movement views *Judaism* as a progressively evolving civilization.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, many opportunities exist in our witness with Jewish people regarding these questions. The answers, of course, are found in the wisdom of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. As we consider these seven areas seek to become more acquainted with Jewish thought, thereby, become better equipped to confront the many objections that we face in our witness of the Messiah to Jewish people.

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[1] Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4; Ezekiel 39:9.

[2] Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; Ezekiel 37:12-13; Isaiah 43:5-6