

Judaism and Christianity

Important Words and Facts

Judaism – the name of the religion. The name comes from Judah, who was a son of Jacob (great-grandson of Abraham).

Jew – a person descended from Abraham, or a person who converts to Judaism.

Hebrew – the language of ancient Jews. Also a name for the ancient Jewish people.

Israel – another name for Jacob. The Hebrews were also named the people of Israel (people descended from Jacob). Israel is also the name of the land where the Jews live.

Torah – Hebrew word that means “Law.” Can mean Law, or the first 5 books of the Old Testament, or all the Old Testament.

Rabbi – Jewish teacher, similar to a pastor.

Jerusalem – Judaism’s most holy city.

Number of Jews in the U.S. – about 5.9 million.

Number of Jews in Israel – about 4.6 million.

Number of Jews in the world – about 14 million.

Reform – a liberal group of Jews who emphasize Jewish culture and living right. Very little religious emphasis.

Conservative – Jews who respect Jewish law and traditions, but make it more modern.

Orthodox – Jews who understand Jewish law and traditions in a strict way.



History

The Bible explains most of Jewish history. From Adam to Abraham, the Bible explains general human history. Around 2100 B.C., God chose Abraham special and he became the father of the Jews (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob are the 3 great fathers of the Jews. Jacob’s family moved to Egypt, where they became slaves.

Around 1500 B.C., God sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. They went to Mt. Sinai, where God gave them His law (Torah), then they went to the Promised Land.

Around 1000 B.C., Kings David and Solomon ruled mighty Israel and built the first temple. But the Israelite people sinned and left God. In 722 B.C., Assyria destroyed the northern part of Israel. In 586 B.C., Babylon destroyed the southern part of Israel, named Judah. Many people went captive into Babylon. They came back to Israel about 70 years later and built a second temple.

In 70 A.D., Roman soldiers destroyed Jerusalem and that second temple. From that time until 1948, the Jews were scattered in different countries. In 1948, the new country of Israel was created. Since that time, many Jews have moved back to Israel.

Beliefs

1. One God.

Jews believe very strongly in one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 is a famous verse for the Jews:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

Jews have accused Christians of worshiping 3 Gods. How do you explain to a Jew what Christians believe about God? What do you say about Jesus? What Bible verses can you use? Anything from the Old Testament?

2. Jewish faith focuses on the Torah, the law.

Jews say the Torah shows how God wants them to live. Jewish rabbis have used the law and Jewish tradition to say how you should live, down to every detail. But the law is not enough. Read Romans 3:19-20. What does that say the law does?

Now read Romans 3:21-24, 28. Does the law make people righteous (holy, innocent)? How do people become righteous?

3. Covenant.

Covenant means the people of Israel belong to God. He will protect and save them, and He expects them to obey His laws. The Torah (law) is a sign of that covenant. There are very serious warnings – if the people break God’s laws, then they will no longer be His people. Read Leviticus 26:9-17.

The Jews couldn’t obey the first covenant. So what did God promise to do? Read Jeremiah 31:31-34

What was this new covenant? Who made the new covenant? Read Luke 22:17-20. (You can also read Hebrews 8-9 on your own to read more about covenant.)

4. Festivals and Sacrifices.

The Jewish year includes 5 major festivals: Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Rosh Hoshanna, and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). There are also 5 kinds of sacrifices. Jews do not sacrifice now, because the temple is gone. Christians have another reason for not sacrificing. Why? Read Hebrews 10:11-18

Christians also celebrate festivals, but we know there is something more important than festivals. What (or who)? Read Colossians 2:16-17.