

In Quest of the Real Jesus:

Judaism vs. Christianity

Overview

Judaism: In general, followers of the Law of Moses and varying Jewish practices

Jew: A Jew is someone who was born to a Jewish mother, or who converts to Judaism in accordance with Jewish law and tradition.

Torah: The First Five Books of the Bible. They also acknowledge the prophets and the writings.

Moses: The deliverer of Israel and the man whom the Law was given by God

Talmud: The Talmud has two components: the Mishnah (c. 200 CE), the first written compilation of Judaism's Oral Law; and the Gemara (c. 500 CE), the part of the Talmud that contains rabbinical commentaries and analysis of the Mishnah.

Main schools of thought: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed

a. Orthodox Judaism:

Orthodox Jews believe that God gave Moses the whole Torah (Written and Oral) at Mount Sinai. Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah contains 613 commandments that are binding upon Jews. Modern Orthodox Jews strictly observe Jewish Law, but still integrate into modern society. Ultra-Orthodox Jews, which includes Chasidic Jews, strictly observe Jewish laws and do not integrate into modern society by dressing distinctively and living separately.

b. Conservative Judaism:

Conservative Judaism maintains that the ideas in the Torah come from God, but were transmitted by humans and contain a human component. Conservative Judaism generally accepts the binding nature of Jewish Law, but believes that the Law should adapt, absorbing aspects of the predominant culture while remaining true to Judaism's values.

c. Reform Judaism:

Reform Judaism believes that the Torah was written by different human sources, rather than by God, and then later combined. While Reform Judaism does not accept the binding nature of Jewish Law, the movement does retain much of the values and ethics of Judaism as well as some of the practices and culture.

Rabbis: The Religious Teachers

Ultimate Authority: Judaism differs from many religions in that in modern times, central authority is not vested in any single person or group, but in sacred texts, traditions, and learned Rabbis who interpret those texts and laws

The Tip of the Iceberg: What a Jew would say to a Christian

1. We believe that God is the creator of life and the universe (Genesis 1-2)
2. Like Jesus, we also recognize the Torah, the prophets, and the writings. (Luke 24:44).
3. We believe that God is One (Deuteronomy 6:4)
4. We believe Jesus existed and was crucified (Matthew 27:41-43).
5. We believe Jesus Performed Miracles (John 9:13-16).

The Middle of the Iceberg: What a Jew really Means

1. We believe that Yahweh is the creator of life and the universe, but not Jesus (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2).
2. We also recognize the Torah, the prophets, and the writings—and they do not foretell of Jesus being the Messiah. (Luke 24:44)
3. We believe that Yahweh is One (Deuteronomy 6:4), but we deny that Jesus is one with Yahweh (John 14:8-10).
4. We believe Jesus existed and was crucified (Matthew 27:41-43), but not that he was raised from the dead.
5. We believe Jesus Performed Miracles, but he did so in the name of Beelzebub (Mark 3:22).

The Foundation of the Iceberg: The True Heart of the Matter

1. Mary the mother of Jesus, was an adulteress

It is taught: R. Eliezer told the sages: Did not Ben Stada bring witchcraft with him from Egypt in a cut that was on his skin? They said to him: He was a fool and you cannot bring proof from a fool. Ben Stada is Ben Pandira (Jesus?).

R. Chisda said: The husband was Stada and the lover was Pandira.

[No.] the husband was Pappos Ben Yehudah (Joseph?) and the mother was Stada (Mary).

[No.] the mother was Miriam the women's hairdresser [and was called Stada]. As we say in Pumbedita: She has turned away from her husband (Mary had an affair). (Talmud Shabbat 104b, Sanhedrin 67a)

2. Jesus was a false prophet and taught a heretical form of Judaism

While returning (Many Pharisees and their students were exiled in Egypt during the Hasmonean rule), Yeshu (Jesus?) misunderstood one of his teacher's remarks and said something that demonstrated that he was interested in and looking at married women. As sexual promiscuity was a sign of many of the Hellenist sects, R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah suspected his student of being yet another leader influenced by Hellenism and had him excommunicated. After many attempts by Yeshu to reconcile with his mentor, R. Yehoshua Ben Perachiah was finally ready. However, Yeshu approached him while he was reciting Shema, the most important part of the morning prayer during which he could not stop to speak. He motioned to Yeshu with his hand which was misinterpreted as a signal to go away. Yeshu finally gave up and fulfilled his teacher's suspicion. He adopted a pagan religion and went on to create his own sect of Judaism and lead many Jews astray. (Talmud Sanhedrin 107b, Sotah 47a)

3. Jesus was not the Messiah because.....

A. He did not orchestrate the building of the Third Temple (Ezekiel 37:26-28).

B. He did not Gather all Jews back to the Land of Israel (Isaiah 43:5-6).

C. He did not Usher in an era of world peace, and end all hatred, oppression, suffering and disease. As it says: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation" neither shall man learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4)

D. He did not spread universal knowledge of the God of Israel, which will unite humanity as one (Zechariah 14:9)

4. Jesus was not God

The Shema, the basis of Jewish belief, states: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE" (Deut. 6:4). Jews declare the Shema every day, while writing it on doorposts (Mezuzah), and binding it to the hand and head (Tefillin). This statement of God's Oneness is the first words a Jewish child is taught to say, and the last words uttered before a Jew dies. (Hanefesh: Jewish Perspectives on Jesus, www.hanefesh.com/Jewish-Christian_Talk.htm)

5. Jesus was killed and was not resurrected from the dead

It is taught: On the eve of Passover they hung Yeshu and the crier went forth for forty days beforehand declaring that "[Yeshu] is going to be stoned for practicing witchcraft, for enticing and leading Israel astray. Anyone who knows something to clear him should come forth and exonerate him." But no one had anything exonerating for him and they hung him on the eve of Passover. Ulla said: Would one think that we should look for exonerating evidence for him? He was an enticer and G-d said (Deuteronomy 13:9) "Show him no pity or compassion, and do not shield him." Yeshu was different because he was close to the government. (Talmud Sanhedrin 43a)

The Christian Response

The Christian will have to prove Jesus is the Messiah based on the evidence of the Old Testament. Here are the strongest arguments based on the OT.

1. The Messiah was to descend from the tribe of Judah

Genesis 49:10

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

2. The Messiah (Branch) was to then come from the stump of Jesse (David's dad)

Isaiah 11:1

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

3. The Messiah will be a righteous king from the line of David

Jeremiah 23:5

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

4. The Messiah will be born of a virgin

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Some Jewish scholars will argue that the Hebrew word (*almah*) used for virgin in Isaiah is mistranslated and should mean young maiden. They argue the word *betulah* is the primary word used to refer to a virgin. However, it is significant that when the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek (Known as the Septuagint), the Jewish translators used the Greek word, *parthenos*, which *is* the primary word used for virgin. Indecently, the Septuagint was written approximately 200 years before Christ—which means it was not the result of Christian bias. This was a Jewish translation *for* the Jews and their practice of Judaism.

5. When the Messiah will come

Daniel 9:24-26

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

25 Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. **26** And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

The prophecy of Daniel is one of the most remarkable prophecies connected with the coming time of the Messiah. Daniel received this prophecy 500-600 year B.C, and it refers especially to the city of Jerusalem and its temple, but also to the Anointed one, the Messiah. According to this prophecy, the Messiah should have appeared and also died at the latest when Jerusalem and its temple had been destroyed.

Now that we know from history that the Roman emperor Titus, with his troops, destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 70 A.D. the Messiah should have appeared and died before that.

Scholars have done the math and have concluded that from the time of the rebuilding of the temple to the coming of the Messiah constitutes 490 years. In other words, the prophecy of Daniel clearly indicates that the Messiah should have appeared and be destroyed before the year 70 A.D., when the city of Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed.

6. The Messiah will be Crucified

Psalm 22:16

For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—

7. The Messiah would raise from the dead

Psalm 16:10

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

Isaiah 53:10-11

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Additional Scriptures of Messianic Fulfillment

- He would descend from Abraham (Genesis 12:3, 17:9 cf. Matthew 1:1-2).
- He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; cf. Luke 2:1-7).
- He would be sinless (Isaiah 53:9; cf. 1 Peter 2:21-22).
- He would enter the Temple (Malachi 3:1; cf. Luke 2:25-27).
- He would have a forerunner (Isaiah 40:3; cf. Matthew 3:1-3).
- He would perform miracles (Isaiah 35:5-6; cf. Matthew 11:2-5).
- He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; cf. Luke 19:28, 35-38).
- He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13; cf. Matthew 27:5-7).
- He would be killed with sinners (Isaiah 53:12; cf. Matthew 27:38)
- He would sit at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110:1; cf. Hebrews 1:3).

The Bottom Line

The Old Testament Scriptures are filled with Messianic prophecies that could have only been fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. The prophecies surrounding his birth and death are not something Christians made up; they are revealed in the Hebrew Bible. Lastly, the timing of the Messiah had a window, which closed after the destruction of the temple. If Jesus did not fulfill these Messianic predictions then no one can.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, since the destruction of the temple there has been no sacrificial system for the Jews. Many Rabbis will claim that forgiveness of sin is accomplished through the study of the sacrifices. Unfortunately, this downplays an important tenant found in the Old Testament Scriptures. In the end, there must be blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. The Scripture teaches, *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.* (Leviticus 17:11; cf. 16:15-17, 27,30).

In the end, without a blood sacrifice there is still sin unaccounted for the Jews and those who don't believe in Christ. Somehow, we must find a way to share with God's people that there is no longer any need to sacrifice because Christ is the one time sacrifice who shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. As the author of Hebrews teaches—referring to the Old Testament period, *“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12** But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:11-12).*

Tips for Witnessing to Jews

- Remember they are God's chosen people
- Do not strip Christ of his Jewishness
- To accept Jesus would mean turning back on their heritage and family
- Study the Old Testament Scriptures, especially prophetic references
- Remember they have been persecuted throughout their history, including anti-Semitic aggressions by Christians.
- Don't get frustrated because the Scripture teaches they have been hardened to the truth of the Messiah (Isaiah 8b-10; cf. Romans 11:8), but once the fullness of the Gentiles are redeemed; their hearts will be opened.