

God in Other Cultures: Judaism

Session 5, March 3
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“Ways” of being Jewish

- Religiously
- Culturally
- Ethnically
- One can be all of the above or only some of the above and being “Jewish”

Abraham

- Move to a foreign land
- Faith in one God
- covenant
 - Binding agreement between God and people
 - Renewed and did not expire
 - Not a contract
 - Breaking it by one part did not make it null and void

Beginnings of two “peoples”

- Jews believe the covenant was through Abraham and Sarah
- Muslims believe the correct line was between Abraham and Hagar
 - Note that Muslims do not use the same images – no language of covenant and “chosen” people

Jews in Egypt

- “Visitors for a time” and “equals” became slaves
 - Under Joseph – “visitors”
 - Under Moses – “slaves”
- The Exodus
 - Culminated with the Passover
 - About 1300-1200 BC
 - Received the 10 Commandments
 - The Shema

Jews in Canaan (Promised Land)

- Clash of beliefs when Jews re-entered Canaan
- History in 3 parts
 - Under the Judges
 - Under the Kings
 - David and Solomon established the kingdom
 - Under the Prophets
 - The time of the kings and the prophets overlapped

Jews in Exile

- Northern Kingdom fell in 721 BC to the Assyrians
 - Peoples carried away to Assyria and replaced by others
- Southern Kingdom fell in about 597 BC to the Babylonians
 - Leadership taken to Babylon; commoners left in Israel

During the Exile

- End of Temple and centralized worship
- The Tanakh and the Torah were increasingly important for teaching and identity and faith
- Rise of the synagogue

Postexilic Judaism

- Under Cyrus of Persia (who defeated the Babylonians), Jews returned to Israel
- Rebuilt Temple and finished in 515 BC under leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah
- The Torah was read anew and people agreed to follow it

Postexilic Judaism

- Though the people returned, their identity was not driven as much by a king as by the Temple
- Under the Greeks and Alexander, Hellenism prevailed
 - Influenced Judaism because of its openness and tolerance to other religions as long as they did not revolt
 - Septuagint translation of the Torah still studied today

Under Hellenistic rule

- Maccabean Revolt
 - Jewish worship and practice were threatened; Antiochus IV desecrated the Jerusalem Temple in 167 BC by dedicating it to Zeus and sacrificing pigs on the altar
 - Simon and Judas Maccabee led the successful revolt that reestablished Jewish control of the temple
 - Hannukah commemorates this event

Jews under Roman rule

- The Greeks were absorbed by the Romans
- Romans came to settle dispute about succession to position of high priest
 - stayed for more than 400 years
- Tolerated Jews as long as they didn't cause trouble and paid taxes
 - The taxes were extreme

Under Roman rule

- Groups developed around how to deal with the Roman problem
 - Sadducees – conservative, rejected all but the Torah, cooperated with Romans
 - Zealots –sought overthrow of Romans; more political than religious
 - Essenes – live a pure life apart from the rest until God’s final judgment
 - Pharisees – apply Torah to all aspects of life

Under Roman rule

- Jews, mostly Zealots, revolted against Roman in 66AD which led to Roman reprisals between 66 and 70 AD in which many were crucified, the Temple destroyed, and the center of Jewish life was again removed
- Masada
- Synagogue life re-emerged
 - Rabbis took the place of priests and leaders

Written teaching emerge as primary

- Talmud – rabbinic teachings
 - Mishnah and Gemarah
- Midrash – explanation or commentaries on the Torah
- Aggadah and Halakhah – legal and not legal stories of rabbinic literature from Babylon

Medieval Judaism

- Existed in cultures dominated by Christians or Muslims
- Centered on synagogue worship and Talmud teaching
- Became skilled businessmen and tradesman because they had no land
- Was both a blessing and a curse
 - Blessing for societies who profited from their profit; curse for them when people became jealous of their success

Islamic Period

- Began with the unifications of many Arabs under the teachings and rule of Mohammed
- Palestine conquered by Muslims in 636 CE

Islamic Period

- Jews and Christians left mostly to themselves
- Action of the Seljuk Turks starting in 1072 that marked the beginnings of long term hostilities
- Crusades began in 1097 and were a response to this and actions of Egyptians Muslims

Beliefs and Practices

- "Judaism is primarily a religion of action; characteristically it has emphasized proper obedience to God... over proper beliefs about God."

Beliefs

- Shema – "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is One, the Lord alone is God."
 - Monotheism – different than polytheism of the culture out of which Judaism grew
- Jesus is not the Messiah whose coming was foretold in Isaiah
- Ethics must reflect God's own nature

Expressions

- Orthodoxy
- Reform
- Conservative
- Reconstructionist
- Zionism

Orthodoxy

- Submission to God’s Law
- Revealed will of God is absolute and not to be tampered with
 - Book of the Law is divinely revealed and accurate
- Ceremonial law and ethical law are equally binding

Orthodoxy

- Keep community distinct from outsiders
- Men and women are separate during synagogue worship
- Men were kippah and tefillin
 - Always being under the watchful eye of God
 - “bind them around your arm and head as a witness to yourself”

Orthodoxy

- Kosher dietary laws
 - Fruits, vegetables, nuts = K
 - Fish with fins and scales =K
 - Meat from split hoof and chew cud =K
 - Ritual slaughter necessary
 - Dairy permitted but NOT with meat
 - Kosher kitchens
 - Prepared foods marked with “U” or “K”
- Keeps the following of God’s commands before a person; the body is as holy as the spirit

Reform Judaism

- Monotheism (Shema) and moral law are constant; everything else can be changed as circumstances change
- Reliance on individual conscience
- Only moral law is binding; not ritual law

Reform Judaism

- Families sit together in synagogue
- Place of worship is called "temple"
- English often used in services
- Ritual garb not often worn
- Ritual practices not kept as rigorously
- First ordained women and instituted coming-of-age rituals for girls

Conservatism

- Follows middle road between Orthodoxy and Reform
- Formed as a reaction to perceived excesses of Reform movement
- Goal is to be fully Jewish and fully American
- Dedicated to preserving historic Judaism without utter refusal to accommodate

Reconstructionism

- Another attempt to unify Judaism in America
- Judaism should be thought of as an evolving religious civilization
- Focus is "Jewishness" in all its forms
- Only form of Judaism produced solely in America

Zionism

- Based on the importance of the Jewish people as a nation
- Tended to be mainly non-religious movement; however,
 - Emphasis on restoration brought support from Orthodoxy
 - Similarly favored by most Conservatives
 - Only supported by Reform Jews after Holocaust

Holocaust

- Holocaust means burnt sacrifice
- Extermination of 6 million Jews during WW II by Hitler's government
- Reasons to remember
 - Religious
 - Practical
 - moral

Festivals/celebrations/remembrances

- Rosh Hashanah (New Year – Sept)
- Yom Kippur (Atonement – Sept)
- Hanakkah (Festival of Lights –Nov/Dec)
- Passover – (spring)
- Shavuot (Feast of Weeks –giving of the Law – 50 days after Passover)
- Sukkot (Feast of Booths - October)
- Yom Ha Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance – Jan 27)

General beliefs

- One God – Shema (Deut 6:4)
- Ways of relating to people cannot be separated from ways of relating to God
- People fall short of this goal = sin
- People are not to exist in isolation but gather together

Beliefs

- Torah – law
 - God reveals God to people in the Torah
- Tanakh – whole of the Hebrew Bible
- Talmud – commentary on the Tanakh
- Commandments – cornerstone of Torah

Beliefs

- The people of Israel (not the state) are one people
- The people of Israel are "chosen people"
 - Implies responsibilities
 - Does not imply rights or privileges
- "Next year in Jerusalem"

Factors leading to anti-Semitism

- Erroneous belief that Jews were (solely) responsible for Jesus' death
- Historical factor
 - Early church did not permit "usury"
 - Jewish people were associated with \$\$
- Early discrimination became ingrained
 - Protocols of Zion
 - KKK movement exacerbated ideas
