

Rivals of Christianity 1

Judaism and the Jews

This series is an examination of some belief systems that compete for the hearts and minds of humanity. We will be looking at Judaism, Islam, New Age and secularism. Religion is man's attempt to reach God. Religion can take many forms. Humanity always seems to generate a religion for its circumstances. In fact, a religion expresses the deepest desires and values of a culture. Religion is the matrix out of which our culture comes. Even the secular statement that there is no religion, is a form of religion. It is a statement that has profound religious implications.

Christianity and Judaism

Christianity and Judaism are closely related. I claim that Jews and Christians worship the same God. In Acts 24:14, Paul says, 'according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets'. There is no Christianity without the OT. In fact, the gentile paganising tendencies must always be corrected by the Hebrew sense and revelation of God. The roots of the Christian faith are established in the OT. The OT is also a manual on how the spirit world works. Four-fifths (4/5) of the Christian Bible is Hebrew. If you read the Bible through in a year, you do not get to the NT until Oct 14. The OT establishes the concepts of God, salvation, history, tabernacle, worship, miracle, revelation, atonement, law, sin, apocalypse and spirit realm and warfare. The New Covenant is not possible without the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ fulfils the requirements of the Law with respect to atonement. After the Babylonian captivity, the Jews developed the practice and system of Judaism. I claim that the Jews are separate from Judaism. Judaism keeps the Jews locked away in a legalised time-warp that causes them to resist the purposes of God for their lives. God has a special relationship with the Jews. This is the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3). God will work out His purpose for history through the Jews. The Jewish (Biblical) understanding of history will be worked out through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not denying anything in the OT; He is the fulfilment of it. This means that Judaistic observance is not error (as a culture identity practise), but it is not necessary for what God is doing. It is not the life-style of Judaism that has saved the Jews: it is God who has saved the Jews. God has maintained His remnant of His people (Is 11:9; 10:21-23; 11:11, Jer 15:11; 23:3; 31:7-9, Rom 11:5).

History of the Jews

- 1) Abraham (2000BC) Gen 12:1-3, Isaac and Jacob
- 2) Joseph and Bondage in Egypt (400 years)
- 3) Moses and the Exodus from Egypt (1500BC)
- 4) Wilderness experience and the Tabernacle (40 yrs)
- 5) Joshua, Canaan and Conquest of the Promised Land
- 6) Judges (400 years) including Gideon and Samson
- 7) Samuel the prophet (1050BC)
- 8) Kings: Saul (40 yrs), David (40 yrs), Solomon (40 yrs)
- 9) Solomon builds First Temple (954BC)
- 10) Divided Kingdom: Israel (northern 10 tribes) Judah (southern 2 tribes)
- 11) Rebuke by the Prophets: Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Jeremiah
- 12) Northern Kingdom exiled to Assyria (722BC), never return
- 13) Southern Kingdom exiled to Babylon (586BC), the first Temple is destroyed
- 14) A remnant returns after 70 years under Zerubbabel

- 15) The Second Temple (Ezra) and the Wall (Nehemiah) are rebuilt (500BC)
- 16) At this time the terms "Jews" (Ezra 4:12) and "Arabs" (Neh 4:7) are first used in the Bible
- 17) Most Jews remain in the Diaspora (the Dispersion Deut 28:25). Ever since most Jews have lived outside Israel
- 18) The Babylonian Jewish experience starts to develop the synagogue. This is a religious life without a Temple, a priesthood or animal sacrifice. The character of the synagogue included fixed prayer, public fasts and confessions, and assembly for the study of Torah (the Pentateuch - first 5 books of the Bible - understood traditionally to be authored by Moses)
- 19) The later prophets conclude with Malachi (400BC) and the close of the OT canon
- 20) The Greek period (332-63BC) commences with Alexander the Great. On his death the empire is divided by his generals, in particular, the Ptolemaic (Egypt) and the Seleucid (Syria).
- 21) During this time the Septuagint (LXX) is formed (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). It is abbreviated LXX (70 in Roman numerals) because of the tradition that 72 elders translated the OT in 72 days at Alexandria in Egypt (250BC). NT quotes from the OT are from the LXX.
- 22) The Maccabean revolt (164BC) which was a time of Jewish resistance to Hellenising influences in Palestine. The high priesthood becomes a political appointment, Jewish land is occupied requiring the payment of taxes and Herod expands the second Temple.
- 23) The Roman Period (63BC-135AD) sees the completion of Herod's Temple and the Ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.
- 24) Christianity begins and spreads as a sect of the Jews/Judaism.
- 25) Further Jewish revolt brings in the Romans who destroy the Second Temple in 70AD. Masada falls in 73AD.
- 26) The synagogue method for Jewish observance is well established so that when the Jews lose the Temple, priesthood and sacrificial system, the legalised observance of Judaism continues.
- 27) The Rabbinic Period (200-1700AD). The rabbis were politically quiet. 300-600AD saw the making of the Talmuds. The documents that were developed for Judaism were the Torah (first 5 books of the Bible), Mishna (collection of rabbinic law), Talmud (commentary on Mishna) and Midrash (interpretation of problem texts).
- 28) This period recognises two strains in Jewish thought. One strain comes from Roman-Palestinian-North-European-German called Ashkenazi (Gen 10:3) and is more mystically based (Hassidic piety). The other strain is from Persian-Babylonian-Southern-European-(North African)-Spanish called Sephardic (Obadiah 20) and is more open to the culture.
- 29) The Babylonian-Sephardic rabbinic style becomes normative Judaism. The Ashkenazi produces the Jewish mystics and the Hasidim.
- 30) During this period there were anti-rabbinic reactions or messianic revolts. These were by the 'Scripturalists'. This was a reaction against excessive use of rabbinic discourse. Rabbinic law was seen as human invention. The Scripturalists argued for a return to the Bible as text, a return to Israel (waiting for Messiah) and a study of Hebrew. This developed the Masoretic text (900AD) of the Hebrew Bible which is the use of vowel signs, accents and marginal notes on the original Hebrew language which was written in consonants only.
- 31) There was also the development of the Kabala which is a name for Jewish mysticism which attempts to reveal hidden mystical insights in the Hebrew Bible.

32) The Modern Period (1700 to present) saw the effect of the Enlightenment on Jewish belief. The Enlightenment (Endarkenment?) in modern European thought was the reaction against the supernatural. It saw the Age of Reason as the rejection of revelation and the miraculous with the assertion of the goodness of nature, the rise of science, the natural goodness of Man and the belief in the necessary evolution of Mankind and Nature to a better state. This movement affected Christianity as well as Judaism. We are only just emerging from a naturalism that tolerates all beliefs as equally true and all freedoms as equally necessary. If all beliefs are equally true or available then, in effect, they are all equally false. That which is more correct is seen as more oppressive. This is where the marginalised is centralised and the minority rules the majority. It is guilty to the right. Roaring into this values-vacuum comes militant Islam with its rhetoric of infidel and its confrontation with jihad.

32) Modern culture also created a loss of Jewish identity. The hope of real assimilation was dashed by pogroms (organised massacres of Jews in Russia) and the ghetto. The first ghetto was created in 1516 in Venice to isolate Jews. There was also the Warsaw ghetto of WWII.

33) Modern Judaism takes three main forms: Orthodox (traditional), Conservative (middle ground) and Reform (liberal). Christianity also follows similar lines. It has to do with the attitude to the Bible: either one sees the Bible as over against (and a determiner of) culture or as a product of (or determined by) culture. (This represents the current split in the Uniting Church.)

34) The Formation of the modern state of Israel (May 15 1948) Israel, a nation formed in a day (Is 66:8), has fought a number of wars for its existence: 1948 (Independence war), 1956 (Sinai war), 1967 (6 day war, occupying Gaza, Golan Heights and Jerusalem), 1973 (Yom Kippur war), 2006 (Lebanon).

35) It is estimated (2002) that there are 13 million Jews in the world: 6 million in USA, 5 million in Israel, 2 million in Europe. There are 100,000 Jews in Australia, ranked the 10th largest Jewish population in the world.

God, History and the Jews

God intends to bring His creation to His conclusion. This is called Judgement. The creation has no inherent meaning. Life has no purpose in itself, other than itself. God is the only one that can give meaning to life outside of life. Survival itself is a purpose or meaning about life that looks at life and therefore is beyond life. Survival is a purpose for life or about life and therefore speaks to and judges life; it is a direction for life. Why should things survive anyway?

God has not forgotten the Jews. There is a Christian theology, called Replacement theology, that claims that the Jews failed to witness to God and the Church had to take over. This theology says that the Jews are an appendage of history. It seems to me that the Abrahamic promise still applies. The NT and the Church continues to use OT themes: sin, atonement, judgement, forgiveness, love and reconciliation. The Book of Revelation is full of Tabernacle imagery. In Revelation, after chapter 3, the church is not mentioned in God's apocalyptic work. There is something very significant about Jerusalem and the Israel of God (Gal 6:16). Consider Paul's reference to the Olive Tree (Rom 11:17-24). The Biblical purposes of God in history have not changed (Rom 11:29): they will now be fulfilled through Jesus Christ. As human beings we can create dogmas and religious systems that can justify our own opinions and experiences but which may frustrate the purposes

of God. The Judaistic system is a mindset that can justify Man rather than God. God can be made so remote (as G-d or YHWH) that law becomes a plausible substitute. Christianity brings God near in the Man Jesus Christ.

Jewish Criticisms of Christianity

Jewish objections to Christianity (other than the ways Christians have treated Jews in the past which is tragic, scandalous) include Christian teaching about the Trinity, the importance of Moses, the possibility of atonement and the requirements for Messiah.

The Trinity is regarded as a form of polytheism and an offence to the absolute oneness of God. Although Christians would claim that God is One, to claim that Jesus (a man) is also divine compromises the divine majesty. There is a big theological discussion here about the conceivability of God and whether God can be truly described in human terms (anthropomorphism: Col 2:9).

Moses can be taken well beyond scripture as an authority according to Judaism and the rabbis. Christians argue that rabbinic law, based on Moses, creates a burden grievous to be borne (Acts 15:10). Rabbinic law rather than adjusting to a culture creates its own culture. Judaism is a portable, 'survival' culture.

Atonement for Judaism is based solely on repentance. This reflects the observance base of Judaism. For the Christian, faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ cleanses us from all sin (1John 1:7-10). We are forgiven not only repentant. Jesus Christ does not fit certain features of Messiah. If Joseph was not His real father He cannot be descended from David. Is 53 can be interpreted as Israel, the suffering servant. The Jewish argument is that the messianic visions of the prophets can only be validated by the words of Moses which is the only validation of scripture. The Jewish witness validates the text. God will still use the Jews even if they lock themselves away in Judaism. God separates people (including Christians) from their religious clothing.