

## **Christians Confronting Cultural Issues**

### **Session 6: Judaism**

#### **This Week's Goal**

- state basic Jewish beliefs
- give a biblical response to each belief
- suggest ways to witness to Jews

#### **The Hollow Easter Bunny**

- Worldwide there are more than 2500 Jewish synagogues in 79 countries.
- The largest Jewish population outside Israel lives in the United States.
- Formed in 1936, the World Jewish Congress represents the vast array of Jewish sects in more than 100 countries.

#### **Acts 24:10-21**

For those who passionately want to reach their Jewish friends, this single point may be the largest stumbling block. The vast majority of the more than 14 million Jews on earth have abandoned the faith of their fathers.

In Jesus' day there were four major groups of Jews: doctrine and practice, and each had its own particular view of god and humanity. This pattern has continued throughout Jewish history. We will identify the seven major sects of modern Judaism. Knowing the differences in belief between these groups radically affects your approach to sharing the gospel of Christ with them.

#### **Secular Judaism**

Many people with Jewish lineage have virtually no connection to a Jewish community. They are uninterested in any conception of salvation.

#### **Kabbalah: Hindu-Judaic Mysticism**

The most culturally popular form of Judaism today is based on medieval mysticism. The current popularity is due to the centers founded by Philip Berg. Kabbalists call Rabbi Berg the Rav, and many consider him the "living conduit between the light and the creator." The movement is highly superstitious; adherents wear a red thread as a bracelet, drink Kabbalah-blessed water to cure diseases, and run their hands over a text instead of reading it to understand the deeper meanings.

#### **Reconstructionist Judaism (Evolutionary Judaism)**

Mordecai Kaplan founded this movement as an alternative for nonreligious and secular Jews. Any interpretation of God is supplanted by progressive social involvement. Followers study the *Torah* (written law) alongside modern philosophies. Sin is not defined, and God is seen as the Life, Love, and Intelligence of the universe.

### **Reform Judaism**

The largest sect of Judaism in North America is the Reform movement. It was founded by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise in 1873. Worldwide, followers make up 22 percent of the Jewish population. The movement attempts to take seriously the core beliefs in the Torah and Israel, but it is very liberal in its support of homosexuality, feminism, and agnosticism.

### **Conservative Judaism**

Though the name would suggest otherwise, Conservative Judaism is not an orthodox branch but rather a bridge between the orthodox and liberal sects of Judaism. They attempt to conserve some of the traditional and historical Jewish practices, such as observing the *shabbat*, but they do not necessarily adhere to the biblical meanings behind those rituals.

### **Orthodox Judaism**

Of all the sects of modern Judaism, the two orthodox sects are most in line with the traditional and biblical understandings of Judaism. Followers believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and explicitly follow the teachings of the Torah. They observe the shabbat every week and intensely study the teachings.

### **Ultraorthodox Judaism**

Perhaps the most recognizable form of Judaism is the Hasidic sect. As often portrayed in the media, the Hasidim wear black or grey suits and the skullcap (yarmulke). Interestingly, the Hasidim are more mystical than the Orthodox and often study Kabbalah. However, they are equally committed to the traditional doctrines and teachings of Judaism about God and humanity.

### **Witness Tip-Respond to Suspicion**

Most Jews are suspicious of Christians because throughout history Jews have been persecuted and forced to convert to a variety of religions. “Christian” movements such as the Crusades and the Inquisitions subjected Jews to brutal torture. If a Jew brings up these topics, explain it is unfair to equate medieval Roman Catholics with evangelical Christians today. Baptists played a key role in bringing religious liberty to America, and few groups have benefited more than Jewish people. Be especially humble to offset the perception that Christians are an arrogant majority.

Focusing on common beliefs about God can help Christians reach sincere Jews. We wholeheartedly agree with the orthodox understanding of God as Creator and Sustainer and as being personal and holy. Old Testament references to the Lord’s fatherly provision, such as in Psalm 23, also carry a redemptive message. The Shepherd always provides for His sheep.

Many Jews sometimes resist Christians because they see us a pushy or brash. A gentle heart and a warm disposition certainly open more doors than the expected Bible thumping. We should not be perceived as a threat to Judaism but a friend.

**Definition:****Torah or Tanakh**

Written law

**Talmud and Mishnah**

Oral law

**The Written Authority: Torah**

The word *Torah* means *law* in Hebrew. With only a few variations in translation, the *Torah* corresponds to our Old Testament. The Hebrew written *Torah* is divided into three sections: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and the Writings (*Kethuvim*).

**The Oral Authority: Talmud and Mishnah**

In addition to the written Scriptures, devout Jews also have the oral law, known as the *Talmud*. The *Talmud* is a collection of wise sayings by devout rabbis, who explained how the *Torah* was to be interpreted and applied. Once these sayings and teachings were collected in written form in the second century A.D., they became known as the *Mishnah*.

**Witnessing Tip-Enter Their World**

Attend a synagogue or temple service with your Jewish friend. Ask questions. Find out why the participants face the same way or why men and women sit apart. You may then have an opportunity to explain the components of Christian worship services. Both services attempt to reconcile sinful people to the holy God. Explain the symbols in a church, such as the baptistery (Hebrew *mikvat*) and the altar. While we understand these elements in a different way, they are useful visual aids in promoting dialogue and in witnessing.

**Witnessing Tip-Become All Things**

Learning more about Jewish customs and observances establishes common ground and enriches our Christian faith. The Jewish feasts and festivals recognized God's work in the lives of His people and foreshadowed the work of Christ. Be culturally sensitive when talking with Jews. Stress the Jewishness of faith in Jesus by using His Hebrew name, Yeshua, and by speaking of Messiah rather than Christ. Use believer in the Messiah instead of Christian. Use the Messiah's return instead of Christ's second coming. Avoid church words like conversion and convert. Use congregation of believers instead of church and good news instead of gospel.

To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. 1 Corinthians 9:22

Orthodox Judaism holds to an intermittent state after death that is similar to the Roman Catholic concept of Purgatory. Many Jewish men and women refer to the place of spiritual reward as *Gan Eden*. Somewhat like the garden of Eden, it is a place of spiritual perfection. Conversely, the average person descends to a place of punishment or purification (*Gehinnom* or *She'ol*).

### **Witnessing Tip-Rely on Prayer**

Prayer is particularly appropriate for the salvation of Jewish people. The old Testament admonishes prayer for the spiritual well-being of the people of Israel (see Psalm 122:6-9), and one of the New Testament references to specific prayer for the lost, (Romans 10:1) describes Paul's prayer for the salvation of the Jewish people.

### **Salvation and Security**

Most modern and mainline Jews do not concern themselves with the concept of eternal salvation. Devout Jews, however, find salvation in a moral life, adherence to the law, and the ultimate anticipation of the *Moshiach* (Messiah). The belief in the advent of the (Moshiach) is fundamental to Orthodox Judaism. Three times a day Orthodox Jews repeat the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer, which foresees the events that mark the coming of the Son of David:

- The ingathering of Jewish exiles from around the world
- The restoration of Jewish courts of justice
- The cessation of wickedness and sin
- The reward and honor of the righteous
- The rebuilding of Jerusalem as the eternal city of God
- The restoration of the line of King David
- The reinstatement of temple service

### **Witnessing Tip-Point to the Messiah**

Jews today view Jesus in various ways. Some view Him as a myth, having never really existed. Some view Him as a great, respected teacher who understood Jewish law but no more. Still others view Him as one of many failed messiahs who attempted to reestablish David's throne.

Ask your Jewish friends to join you and other friends for a brief Bible study from the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament. Ask whether your friends would accept the gift of a New Testament. An edition that highlights the fulfillment of messianic prophecy would be ideal. If the opportunity arises, use Scriptures like the ones on the next page to show ways Jesus fulfilled messianic prophecy.

<b>Jesus' Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecy</b>		
<b>Prophecy</b>	<b>Verse(s)</b>	<b>Fulfillment</b>
To be the Son of God	Psalm 2:7	John 3:16-17
To be born of the tribe of Judah	Genesis 49:10	Hebrews 7:14
To be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1-6
To be a descendant of David	Isaiah 9:6-7	Luke 1:32-33
To die for the sins of His people	Isaiah 53:5-8	1 Corinthians 15:3-4
To die by crucifixion	Psalm 22:13-18	Luke 23:33
To sit at God's right hand	Psalm 110:1	Mark 16:19

### **Confronting the Truth**

Whether through obedience to the law or through acts of social benevolence, all Jews rely on works to earn personal salvation.

### **1 Corinthians 15:3-6**

<b>A Comparison of Beliefs</b>		
	<b>Christianity</b>	<b>Judaism</b>
<b>God</b>	One God who reveals Himself in three persons.	Absolutely one. Not triune.
<b>Jesus</b>	Unique Son of God who provided salvation through atoning death and resurrection.	Identity as Messiah rejected.
<b>Source of Authority</b>	Bible is divinely inspired and preserved and contains perfect instruction and truth.	The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), which is inferior to tradition.
<b>Humanity</b>	Sinful by nature.	Basically good.
<b>Sin</b>	Sinful nature and choices are humanity's problem.	Sinful nature and the need for atonement are denied.
<b>Salvation</b>	Accepting God's gift of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.	Earned through prayer and adherence to law or good deeds.

