

MODERN DAY JUDAISM & CHRISTIANITY BY DEREK LEMAN

THE DIFFERENCES, THE SIMILARITIES, AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR US

Modern Judaism is different from the religion of the Old Testament in many ways. In the Old Testament, Israelites worshiped first at the tabernacle and then at the temple. Modern Jews worship in a synagogue and at home. Israelites offered animal sacrifices to pay for their sins and held great feasts. Modern Jews chant ancient Hebrew prayers, read Scriptures, and have holidays in their homes.

Being Jewish can mean many different things. It can simply mean that a person was born to a Jewish parent or it can mean that person actually participates in the religion called Judaism. Many Jewish people today aren't religious.

JUDAISM'S ORIGINS

At first, the Israelites didn't have places of worship in their towns. Their major worship happened three times a year—during Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles—at the temple in Jerusalem.

Synagogues were started when the Israelites were taken to Babylon and forced into captivity. (Check out the Daniel devos in this issue.) With no temple, the people made new places to worship God.

The Israelites moved back to Israel and worshiped in the synagogue and a much smaller, less elaborate temple for almost 600 years. Jesus, who was Jewish, went to synagogue every Sabbath (Luke 4:16), and to the temple on feast days.

When the temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, another big change happened in Judaism—it became a religion devoted to prayer, repentance, and good deeds. The rabbis said this replaced the animal sacrifices.

MODERN JUDAISM 101

Here are the five basics for Judaism:

1. Peoplehood—God told Israel: *"You shall be my own possession among all the peoples"* (Exodus 19:5 NASB). Jewish people don't think much about salvation, because there's a sense that God has already chosen them.

2. Times and seasons—God told Israel to observe His *"appointed times"* (Leviticus 23:2 NASB). The weekly Sabbath (Friday night until Saturday night) and annual festivals and feast days are very important.

3. Sanctification—This means being holy, separate, different. Religious Jews eat differently (no pork, shellfish, etc.) and dress differently (hats called yarmulkes for men and wigs or scarves for women).

4. Community prayer—In Judaism, prayers are usually said together as a family and as a synagogue. For the most part, religious Jews pray in Hebrew and use prayers written long ago. This is a little like praying from the Psalms.

5. Torah study—The Torah is the first five books of the Bible. Religious Jews also study the commentaries and teachings of rabbis.

JUDAISM

CHRISTIANITY

SUPREME BEING	God as revealed in the Old Testament—no Trinity. God is both loving and the judge of the earth.	God as revealed in both testaments—existing as a Trinity. God is both loving and the judge of all the earth.
BASIC BELIEFS	Jews belong to a people chosen by God. To live as a Jew is to pray, to do good deeds, and to be humble before God.	Good works can never make a person meet God's standard of perfect holiness. Only accepting Jesus—the Messiah's or Savior's—death for one's sins makes one acceptable to God.
SACRED BOOK(S)	The Tanak, the same books we know as the Old Testament, especially the first five books called the Torah. Also, the writings of the rabbis, especially the Talmud, are considered inspired in a lesser sense than the Bible.	The Old and New Testaments of the Bible—a total of 66 books.
SACRAMENTS	Home celebrations for the Sabbath and holidays. Religious Jews pray three times a day and attend synagogue on a regular basis.	Lord's Supper and baptism.
SALVATION	Not really an issue for most Jews. See the "afterlife" section below.	Personal faith in Jesus and His saving death and resurrection brings forgiveness and relationship with God.
AFTERLIFE	Some believe there is none. Others believe all Jews go to heaven. Some believe the very wicked go to hell. Non-Jews can be granted afterlife if they are righteous. There is a greater focus on the Age to Come, when Jews will live on earth in resurrected bodies.	For believers, heaven and life in the presence of Jesus, hell for those who do not accept Jesus' death on the cross as payment for their sins.
THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST	Most see Him as a rabbi who was misunderstood, not the Messiah that Scripture foretold.	God who became a man, the Messiah sent to reveal God and save the world.
CRUCIFIXION	Jesus' death was not unique. Many Jews were crucified by the Romans.	Jesus' death was unique, a sacrifice that brings forgiveness.
SECOND COMING	Some Jews don't believe in a Messiah anymore. Others think when the Messiah comes, it won't be Jesus.	Jesus will come boldly at the end of this age and all will see Him.