

Elephant – Judaism

4/16/23

2 Timothy 4:3-4

Sunday AM

Last week, we began the series – *The Elephant in the Room* seeking to learn about and compare the tenets of Christianity w/ those of other religions/cults. The intent of this series isn't to condemn or speak condescendingly of other faiths **but to clarify our similarities/differences** to understand each other.

Remind – we began the series by talking about the infamous/misleading *Elephant Analogy* that speaks of (6) blind men all touching a different part of the same elephant but describing what they're experiencing in vastly different ways. The proposed point is that each religion is touching and describing the same God just in radically different ways – thus, so long as you believe in one of them – you'll be good w/ God.

Problem is – while this sounds nice, when you dig a little deeper into the ideology, you quickly discover that this rationale is full of holes and can't hold water.

(1) The vast majority of the 4200 different religions in existence today believe their way is the only way.

(2) The **Law of Non-Contradiction** concludes that we cannot all be right, but we can all be wrong.

The **Law of Non-Contradiction** says *something can't be true/untrue at the same time in the same context.*

Meaning – that b/c every religion/cult has so many unique/contradictory beliefs – w/in the same context – they CANNOT all be true. Hence – *while we can all be wrong, we cannot all be right.*

So – no matter how many “*co-exist*” bumper stickers we stick on our cars or PC speeches are shared espousing some form of tolerant universalism – *they'll never change the reality that every religion, at its core, is uniquely different from the next* and therefore in contradiction to one another.

If **Mormonism** is the way to God, then **Charles Russell** and all other ways are wrong. If **Gandhi** is God's true messenger, then **Scientology** misses the mark. But if **Jesus** is the only way, truth, and life as He declared, then there are no other avenues to God.

Last week we shared the basic tenets of Christianity – Today, we're going to begin comparing them w/ other religious systems and will begin w/ **Judaism**.

To frame our studies – let me remind you of Paul's words to Timothy – *For the time will come when people will not put up w/ sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.* 2 Timothy 4:3-4

Paul's point – know what you/others believe and why!

I An **OVERVIEW** of Judaism

While the term **Judaism** is often used to identify the faith of people w/ a Hebrew heritage, not all Jewish people are religious w/ many choosing atheism, agnosticism, and secularism as their worldview – meaning Judaism is both a religion and a way of life.

Like w/in Christianity, w/ the different denominations, Judaism has (4) branches: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. Then w/in each branch, you are likely to have a number of subgroups.

Orthodox Judaism is the most traditional form of Judaism holding to ways/beliefs tracing back to the Mosaic covenant at Mt. Sinai. They hold that the written/oral teachings are Divinely inspired giving authority to the Torah/Talmud for interpreting Jewish law. This branch strictly observes the traditional Jewish laws/festivals as practiced for centuries. The (2) primary groups w/in this branch are the *Hasidic* and *Haredi* – w/ the Haredi being ultra-orthodox – and can be identified by their dress – men in black suits...

Reform Judaism – influenced by *Rabbi Abraham Geiger*, is the most liberal wing of Judaism that respects traditional sources, yet believes they're the product of human hands – thus the observance/practice of festivals/dietary restrictions are optional. Yet they would say study the Law, but learning, duty, and obligation are more essential than being religious.

Conservative Judaism is a more middle position. Introduced in the 19th century by *Zacharias Frankel*, the branch is probably the most widely accepted form of Judaism in the U.S. Conservatives Judaism seeks to practice the Law/traditions, but cautiously reinterprets them so their practices are relevant in a modern world.

Reconstructionist Judaism is the newest branch of Judaism introduced by *Mordecai Kaplan* that sees its faith as an evolving religious civilization. They do not believe God chose the Jewish people or that a personified deity is active in history. Thus, they reject the Torah and the Mt. Sinai covenant. Still, they believe their inherited religious beliefs/traditions are an evolving process essential for navigating culture.

Of the appx. 15 mil. Jewish people in the world – w/ 6.9 mil. living in Israel and 5.7 mil. in the U.S. In the U.S. 10% Orthodox | 35% Reform | 18% Conservative | 6% Reconstructionist | and 31% Other/unaffiliated

II The **PRACTICES** of Judaism

No matter what sect of Judaism, most Jews participate in their national holidays to memorialize key events in Jewish history and to honor their heritage.

Passover (*Exodus 12*) is the most significant festival where the Jews commemorate God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt in the 14th century B.C.

In this event, God required the Israelites to make a sacrifice and paint the blood of the animal over the doorpost so the death angel might Passover and provide grace/salvation to God's people.

Tabernacles – celebrates the 40 yrs of wandering in the desert when the Israelites lived in Tabernacles.

Rosh ha-Shanah celebrates the Jewish New Year. This festival marks the beginning of a 10-day period known as the High Holy Days. **Rosh ha-Shanah** climaxes on the 10th day on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. On this solemn day, the people fast, attend synagogue and recite prayers for forgiveness.

Pentecost – (7) weeks after Passover the Jews observe Pentecost to remember the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.

Hanukah is celebrated in Nov/Dec and honors the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrians and the rededication of the 2nd Jerusalem Temple in 165 B.C. The lighting of the 8-branched menorah (the national symbol) is the main feature of this celebration.

I find it intriguing that these Jewish practices not only play a key role in the life of the Jewish people but are significant to the church. Major events in the life of Jesus and the church in Acts occurred on these days. **For example** – Christ died on the Passover and the H.S. was given at Pentecost.

III The HISTORY of Judaism

The origin of Judaism is imbedded in the O.T. writings and began some 4000 yrs ago in the Middle East when God called and made a covenant w/ Abram to leave his homeland for the land of Canaan to father a new nation thru which God would bring salvation to the world.

The Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you – and all peoples on earth will be blessed thru you." Genesis 12:1-3

The Abrahamic Covenant included (4) promises:

- Abraham would become the father of a great nation
- This nation would be a blessing to the world
- God would bless any nation that blessed Abraham's seed and would curse those who came against them
- Thru this nation God would redeem the world

God chose an impotent man (Abe) and a barren woman (Sarah) at nearly 100 yrs old and gave them a promised son, **Isaac** – who passed this promise to his son **Jacob** – who became the father of the (12) Tribes of Israel. Then, thru God's sovereignty, He took them to Egypt where they grew to become a great nation. However, their growth concerned Pharaoh who perceived them as a threat – so he enslaved them.

Exodus/Leviticus/Numbers/Deuteronomy document God's deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian slavery thru Moses and their 40 yrs of wandering in the wilderness b/c of unbelief before entering Canaan.

After Moses, Joshua led the people to settle in Canaan. But b/c the people rebelled, God sent **judges** to help the Israelites navigate 400 yrs of apostasy, judgment, and repentance. This led to the people crying out for a human king. God granted their wish and the Kingdom became united for 120 yrs. under the kingships of Saul, David, and Solomon. But after Solomon's death, the nation split into a **northern/southern kingdom**. The O.T. teaches the northern tribes became increasingly godless causing God to send prophets like *Hosea* and *Amos* to call the people to repentance. Yet b/c of their defiance, in 722 BC, God allowed the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom. The southern kingdom faced a similar challenge as they ignored the prophetic warnings of *Isaiah*, *Habakkuk*, and *Jeremiah*, so God allowed the Babylonians to take Judah into captivity.

From here, the Jews never regained the prominence they enjoyed under David ceasing to be a sovereign state, but instead a minor territory in a series of world empires including the Persians/Greeks/Romans.

During these centuries, the religious freedom of the Jewish people varied. Some foreign governments were oppressive restricting the practice of Judaism while others were more lenient.

Somewhere b/w 200 BC to 150 BC two major events occurred. (1) **Rabbinic Judaism** emerged; and (2) the **Maccabean Revolt** took place. These events changed the trajectory of Judaism and led to the emergence of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots.

Then, some 150 yrs later, the son of a Jewish carpenter came onto the scene causing a tremendous stir among the people and claiming to be the Messiah. His life and teachings upset the religious establishment and worked to have him executed.

Seemingly, a perfect storm hit Judaism as (2) things ensued simultaneously. Out of Jesus' death came a belief that He had returned from the dead leading to a new and growing sect w/in Judaism known as Christianity. And second, Herod's Temple was destroyed in AD 70 bringing an end to the sacrificial system, the priesthood, and

the Sadducees. As a result, the rabbis became the authorities on spiritual/legal matters as the synagogue became the only remaining institution for worship and the teaching of the law.

Today, O.T. Judaism no longer exists. It's been replaced w/ rabbinic Judaism. So, when we refer to Judaism today, we're primarily referring to *rabbinic Judaism* developed in the 2nd century B.C. that became legitimized at the destruction of the Temple and the scattering of the Jews in the Diaspora.

IV The **BELIEFS** of Judaism

SCRIPTURE (Tanakh) – the Tanakh contains the *Torah* (Moses), *Nev'im* (Prophets), and the *Ketuvim* (writings) containing the oral/written traditions. The keeping of the Torah is paramount to salvation.

While different in order/interpretation, the O.T. is basically identical to the Tanakh. An example of interpretation differences, Christianity agrees the Law is a moral code of ethics, but the Law was not given to provide salvation but to reveal man's sin/need for God.

GOD – Judaism is monotheistic believing God is one (not Triune – yet believes the H.S. is a Divine force and supernatural influence of God).

Christianity believes God is one but triune – revealed in (3) ways/persons – Father, Son, and H.S.

JESUS (Messiah) – Judaism believes Jesus was a true person but not the Messiah and that the Messiah is yet to come. This Messiah will gather the Jewish exile, fight the wars of the Lord, rebuild the Temple, and bring about universal peace and knowledge of God;

Christianity believes Jesus is the Messiah who came 2,000 yrs ago to die for our sins and rise from the dead. As Messiah, Jesus will return at the end of the age to establish His Kingdom on the earth, destroy God's enemies, and bring about universal peace of God.

SIN – Judaism believes every person has a battle b/w a good inclination (*yetzer hatov*) and an evil inclination (*yetzer hara*'), but they don't believe in the idea of original sin, emphasizing that thru repentance a person's evil inclination can be overcome.

Christianity believes the fall infected the human race w/ sin separating man from intimacy w/ God. Since all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, we now need a Savior b/c we're incapable of saving ourselves.

SALVATION – While salvation is available, Judaism tends to think more corporately than individually. And while at one time, an atoning sacrifice was required to cover sin, rabbinic Judaism doesn't believe a blood sacrifice is essential for personal atonement but that salvation comes thru obeying the Law and morals.

Christianity believes a person is saved by grace thru faith alone thru the substitutionary atoning death of Jesus on the cross – God's grace | Man's repentance.

Point – While there are many similarities/differences b/w Judaism/Christianity, it really boils down to Jesus. While the Law was intended to help everyone to discover their sinfulness/need for God, Christianity says Jesus came not to abolish the Law but to complete where the Law fell short. So, as God's provision and solution to the problem of sin – Jesus fulfilled the Law to become God's only cure for the infection of sin by becoming our sacrificial Passover lamb.