



Judaism



A Brief History

Judaism is a religious tradition that began in the ancient region of Canaan (present-day Israel and Palestine) nearly four thousand years ago, when it is believed that God promised to Abraham that he and his lineage will be made sacred people and will be given the holy land. The Temple in Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish worship and the only place for sacrifice. After its destruction by the Romans in AD 70, a new form of the religion emerged, known as rabbinic Judaism, which no longer relied on sacrifices done in the Temple, but rather on the study of the Torah and synagogues were the new houses of prayer and worship.

The Spread of Judaism

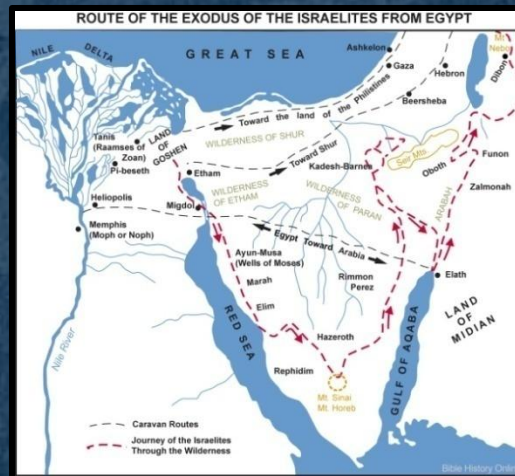
Under the Christian Rome rule, the conditions worsened for Jews, who were forced to leave their homeland. Many of them traveled East and found refuge in Muslims Babylonia and later in Europe. Until 1948, when the state of Israel was born, Jews have been wandering travelers, forced to move from one place to another as they have been continuously persecuted.

Religious customs and beliefs

Jews believe in a unique, transcendent, omnipotent and eternal God. The religious, ethical, and social laws are articulated in the Torah - the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Jews refer to the Bible as the Tanakh, an acronym for the texts of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. Jewish people worship in Synagogues, where men and women usually sit separately. Jewish spiritual leaders are called Rabbis. Jews value rituals more than beliefs. Some of the most important Jewish celebrations include:

Hanukkah, often called Festival of Lights, is an eight-day Jewish celebration that commemorates the rededication of the second Temple in Jerusalem during the second century BC. On each of the eight nights, one candle is lit and added to the nine branched menorah. The ninth candle is used to light each of these eight. This holiday is celebrated on the Hebrew calendar date of 25 Kislev, which coincides with the months on November or December.

Passover: celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery under the Egyptians, led by Moses in the 13th century BC. Before the holiday begins, Jews remove all leavened foods from their homes and are not to consume them throughout the entire week. On the first two nights, families gather for a religious feast known as seder. This celebration takes place on the Hebrew calendar dates of Nissan 15-22 (usually falls in the month of April)



Source: www.bible-history.com/maps/route_exodus.html

Major divisions of Judaism

There are three major subdivisions of Judaism:

Orthodox Judaism is the branch that shows complete loyalty to the beliefs and practices of the first Jewish people.

Conservative Judaism is another form of Judaism that seeks to preserve the original rituals, but has a more flexible approach on the interpretation of the law than the Orthodox Judaism.

Reform Judaism was born about 200 years ago in the German city Seesen and embraces innovation and diversity while preserving tradition. Unlike Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, Reform Judaism believers place more value on the ethical aspect of the religion than on ceremonial one.

Conflict and cooperation with other religions

Jews and Muslims have been in conflict for most part of history. Both religions are monotheistic and both claim to be descendants of Abraham. The roots of this conflict is the acceptance of Muhammad as a prophet and competition over holy land.

Impact of the religion around the world

The mark that Judaism left outside of the land of Israel's borders is very visible in Western civilizations. Much of the values, traditions, and culture are attributed to Judaism. Some of the concepts of Western societies that have been borrowed from the much older Jewish culture are:

- Monotheism as a religious conviction
- The 7-day week and the day of rest for everyone
- The concept of morality
- Women's rights
- Child protection (children should be protected and cared for regardless of the gender preferred in a society)
- The responsibility of the community to support the poor, widows, orphans

Sources:

"Jewish Beliefs" *religionfacts.com*. 17 March 2014 . Web.

"History of Judaism" *BBC*. 1 July 2009. Web

"Synagogues, Shuls and Temples" *Judaism 101*. .Web

"Judaism" *Patheos Library*. Web