

Bible Special 06-06-13b

Let's pick up our study now. We're looking at Judaism as a religion. And I want to clarify, we had some good questions and discussions on the break.

As was noted at the beginning of our discussion, the term Judaism is very broad and it's kind of hard to define it when you look at the 4,000 odd year history of Judaism, because obviously when you look at Abraham or Joseph or Moses or King David, the religious practice of those men is different than what would become Judaism. And the point of departure, as I said earlier on the break, is really after the Old Testament record finishes, after the prophets in what we call the Second Temple period. And this is the point at which the law of Moses and the word of the prophets and the work of God's prophets who were actively traveling around in Israel and in national Israel especially, recedes into history and you start to have the development of oral tradition, of something that accompanies the written word of God, something that is a complementary piece to the Torah, beyond the prophetic writings, the Tanakh.

By the way, Tanakh, T-N-K, if you will, is the Hebrew word that characterizes the Hebrew Bible. And it's called that, I've mentioned this before, T stands for Torah, N stands for Nabiim, which is the prophets, and the K is the Ketuvim, the writings, the law of the prophets and the writings. That's the Old Testament, that's the Hebrew Bible, and it's called the Tanakh, which is kind of a made-up word from those three elements.

But once that is finished, you very quickly begin to get an accretion of traditions and understandings because there's much in the law that's not specifically detailed. You read through Leviticus and there are ordinances and procedures and some of the details are not fully described. And so the priestly Jews and later what came to be called rabbis and so on would expand and accrete traditions on this.

And the nearest equivalent I can think of is what happened in Catholicism where you have the words of the Bible and specifically the New Testament for the church, but that didn't seem to be enough. And so very soon in the 5th, 6th, 7th century A.D., you start to have the Catholic Church adding dogmas, adding creeds, adding expansions and traditions to the scriptures and treating these on a par with scripture itself. And of course the teaching of the Catholic Church for centuries has been that the Pope can speak with equal authority to scripture because he is the vicar of Christ.

He is the instead of Christ on earth. He's Christ's personal representative on earth and so he can speak as though he were Christ. And so when he speaks ex cathedra, when he speaks from the cathedral, he's speaking on a par with scripture.

Of course the problem with this is a bunch of popes have spoken ex cathedra and they contradicted one another and countermanded one another and contradicted scripture and everything else. But the Catholic view is that the dogma of the church is of equal authority. It's

scripture and the church.

It's the word of God and the word of the church. And those two together, what do we see as the two parts of what we need to live our life before God? It's scripture and what? Holy Spirit. Well, the church says very little about the Holy Spirit.

It says you need the word of God and us. We'll be your Holy Spirit. We'll be your conscience.

We'll tell you when you're forgiven. We'll tell you when you're in the faith. We'll tell you what you need to do and how you need to live and how many candles to light and how many Hail Marys to say and whether or not you're going to be able to pray somebody out of purgatory and so forth.

Well, the same sort of thing happened centuries earlier in Judaism where once the Babylonian captivity was finished and the days of Esther went by, the days of Ezra and Nehemiah went by, the days of Malachi went by, and you're in that three or four hundred years between the end of that period and the time of Christ, you start to have this tradition build up. And this is oral and it remains communicated verbally for decades and centuries until about 200 A.D. when with the dispersion of the Jews and the loss of the temple and the loss of the nation of Israel, the Jewish scholars in those days realized that they were in danger of losing their faith and of forgetting their traditions and so they began to write them down. And what they wrote down was traditionally much older but it didn't get written down until about circa 200 A.D. and this is the Mishnah.

The Mishnah is the written record of all of this oral tradition that traces back 200 and they think even 300, 400 and all the way back they think to the time of Moses. But in reality, it's the written record of oral tradition that's probably anywhere from recent to that time circa 200 A.D. to stuff that was maybe a couple of centuries old. That's the Mishnah.

Well, of course, once you have the Mishnah, this accompanies the law itself, but then the Mishnah needs explanation because Rabbi Akiva says this and Rabbi Gamaliel says that and so what did they mean? So then you have commentary on the Mishnah and expansions and interpretations of the Mishnah and this is your Talmud and you have two basic Talmuds. You have the Palestinian Talmud and you have the Babylonian Talmud and these were two major schools of Jewish thought in the centuries say 200 to 600 A.D. Once the Mishnah was kind of set down and people started looking at it and they said, well, now what does this mean? We've got it all written down but we can't figure it out. So the Palestinian didn't get as far.

It's not as comprehensive. It doesn't deal with as much as the Babylonian because of course the Jews kind of got driven out of Palestine and so a lot of them ended up, oddly enough, in the Babylonian area and so that Talmud is much more complete and comprehensive than the Palestinian, but the combination of the two together, this is Talmud and there's divisions within the Talmud. We've talked about this before, but say all of that to say this, you're Orthodox Jews.

Orthodox Judaism goes back to the Torah and they say the Torah was written by God, dictated to Moses and it is distilled down everything we need to know about all of this Mishnah, Talmud, Babylonian, Palestinian, Rabbi this, Rabbi that. It's too much. It's too much.

We're just going to go with the Shulchan Aruch. Thank heaven for Joseph K. Rowe. He got it all figured out for us.

That's the short form. That's our creed, Shulchan Aruch. It's a definitive codification of Jewish law and it incorporates both elements, the Torah itself and all of this commentary and in terms of theology that comes out of all of this, one of the things that K. Rowe drew on in the 1540s and 1550s when he wrote the Shulchan Aruch was 300-400 years earlier, Maimonides, the Rambam, was one of the definitive scholars.

This would be like the Catholics going back to Augustine and saying here's the main church father we're going to lean on for a lot of our theology. Well, the Shulchan Aruch goes back and relies heavily on Maimonides in terms of it doesn't always agree with him but cites him as one of the major authorities and Joseph K. Rowe basically got three major Hebrew or Jewish scholars and he said the way I'm going to figure out what is really true is anytime two of these guys agree, that's going to be the answer in nearly all cases. Two of these guys constitute a majority and a lot of times Maimonides is in that majority.

But Maimonides had 13 principles of the Jewish faith and so these are incorporated in the Shulchan and these are the definition of Orthodox Judaism. Now, what are they? You need to know these because really most Judaism that you want to talk about today is some variation of Orthodox Judaism. Number one, the existence of God.

Number two, the unity of God. Remember the Shema? Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. God's unity.

Monotheism. This is one of the Jews' arguments against Christ and the Holy Spirit. They say, well, hey, wait a minute.

There's only one God, not three. The third principle, again, this is the Rambam, Maimonides. God is spirit and He is incorporeal.

Now, this is not incorporation. To be corporate, corpus means body in Latin. So if you're incorporate, you are out of the body.

You're beyond the body. God is incorporeal. Not incorporated, but incorporeal.

And it means He's beyond the body. He's outside matter. He's outside the physical.

He's spiritual and incorporeal. Number four, God is eternal. Number five, God alone is the object of worship.

Worship only God. Now, out of these first five, what do we agree with? Do we believe in the

existence of God? Yes. Do we believe that God is one? Yes.

It's part of the doctrine of the Trinity, three in one. Do we believe that God is spirit and that God is incorporeal? Yes, we do. Do we believe that God is eternal? Number four, yes, we do.

Do we believe that God alone should be the object of worship? Yes, we do. So we're tracking right along with Orthodox Judaism so far. Number six, revelation, Scripture, comes through God's prophets.

Moses is the first great prophet to bring Scripture. And the other prophets following his wake, we go along with that in terms certainly of the Old Testament anyway. Number seven, Moses is the preeminent prophet, hence the emphasis on the Torah.

That's the foundation. That's what helps you figure out what else is prophecy is looking at the Torah. So, number seven, Moses is preeminent.

He's the preeminent prophet. Number eight, God's law was given at Sinai. This again goes to the Torah as the foundation.

God's law was given at Sinai. Number nine, nothing changes God's law. God's law is immutable.

It's unchangeable. Just like God Himself. That's number nine.

The law doesn't change. Number ten, God has foreknowledge of human action. God knows ahead of time what people are going to do.

So now let's look at this next set of five. Do we believe that God's prophets are legitimate sources of God's Word? Yes, we do. Do we believe that Moses is preeminent among the prophets? Well, I don't know if you could say preeminent.

It's kind of like when you say of all the people I know, you're one of them. Of all the prophets, Moses is one of them. All scripture is profitable.

So we would probably quibble over Moses being greater than the other prophets. But you certainly can't deny that the first five books of the law, the first five books of the Bible are foundational to everything else. Was God's law given at Mount Sinai? Yeah.

Is the Torah immutable and unchangeable? Jesus Himself said one jot and one tittle won't change from the law until all is fulfilled. Does God have foreknowledge of human actions? Absolutely. So we still really have no serious disagreement with Orthodox Judaism.

Number 11, God rewards good and punishes evil. Okay? I think we understand that in terms of judgment. Number 12, expectation of a Messiah.

The Messiah is a promise of God. The Messiah is going to come. And number 13, the dead will be revived.

The dead are coming back. A lot of people try to say there's no expectation of resurrection in the Old Testament. Well, guess what? The Jews only believe the Old Testament.

And principle 13 from Maimonides is resurrection. So where did they get it if they didn't get it from the Old Testament? To me, this utterly refutes, repudiates, and stuffs the argument that the Jews in the Old Testament or the Hebrews in the Old Testament didn't believe in a resurrection. Where did Judaism get the 13th principle of Maimonides if there's not resuscitation of the dead? Resurrection of the dead.

So let's take a look at these last three. Do we believe that God rewards good and punishes evil? I think we do. Do we believe in the coming of a Messiah? It's all a matter of the timing, isn't it? They think He's yet future.

We believe He's already come. Do we believe in the resurrection of the dead? You'd better. What does the Apostle Paul say? If Christ is not raised, and there's no resurrection, you are dead in your sins, your faith is vain, and we are of all men most miserable.

So, surprisingly, when these principles were first put out by Maimonides, by the Rambam, they were widely criticized, and they weren't generally accepted. They were ignored by much of the Jewish community for a couple of centuries. But they eventually came to be recognized, came to be acknowledged, and today, Orthodox Judaism says this is obligatory.

You either believe these or you're not really Jewish. That's what the Orthodox ones hold. The Rambam who developed these, Maimonides, was born in 1135 in Cordoba, Spain.

Spain was under Muslim rule at the time. And their taking over of that area kind of brought an end to the golden age of Jewish scholarship and Jewish culture in Spain. Maimonides studied the Torah under his father, Maimon.

Maimonides is M-A-I-M-O-N-I-D-E-S. Well, his father was Maimon. Maimon, M-A-I-M-O-N.

You just put I-D-E-S on the end, you get his name. And they'd been a scholarly family for a long time. So when the Muslims came and conquered Cordoba in 1148 A.D., they gave the Jewish community there a choice.

You can either convert to Islam, die, or leave. Become a Muslim, let us chop your head off, or leave. So, not surprisingly, Maimonides' family, being Jewish scholars and traditionalists and so on, left.

So they traveled around, they left Cordoba, they went to southern Spain and wandered around for a while, for about a decade. And they kept moving around, getting away from the Muslims who kept conquering more and more of Spain. And they eventually went to the town of Fez in Morocco.

Remember the little red hats that look like a bucket upside down? They call it a Fez. Well, that's

where it gets its name. It's from Morocco.

And Maimonides got an education, a secular education, at the University of Fez. And while he was at the university, he composed his commentary on the Mishnah. So then he went to Jerusalem for a while, and then he went down to Egypt and lived the rest of his life there.

He was buried down in Tiberias, which is now in Israel. So he's the guy that came up with all this stuff. It's in the late 1100s.

Well, his principles of the Jewish faith define Orthodox Judaism today. Now, within Orthodox Judaism, you have some subsets, like the Hasidic Jews. You've heard of the Hasidic.

They hold to halakah. If you remember any of the Hebrew I've spoken of here, remember that halak, H-A-L-A-K, remember what that means? We went over and over it in the first chapter of Ecclesiastes. It means to walk.

The verb for walk, W-A-L-K, in Hebrew is halak. It comes to mean to go, or to come, or to travel. So halakah is, what is your walk? What is your lifestyle? So Hasidic Judaism closely adheres to these rules of behavior and conservative forms of dress.

They're the ones that have the little ringlets down, the little curls that the law says you will not trim the corners of your beard or the edges of your hair and your head and so on. They follow a guy named Israel ben Eliezer, who is the Baal Shem Tov. You know all three of these words, even though you don't know it yet.

What does Baal mean? Lord or Master. What does Shem mean? S-H-E-M. Name.

And what does Tov mean? Good. So the master of the good name, Israel ben Eliezer. He's the guy that defined what the Hasidic Jews, the sort of ultra-Orthodox believe.

Now, I said there are three denominations in Judaism. That's the main one, Orthodox Judaism. The others are sort of modern steppings away from that sort of strict thing.

Because Orthodox Judaism not only holds to the Shulchan Aruch, but they also keep Shabbat. They observe the Sabbath of course and all of the ritual worship things that go with that. And Yom Tov.

See how much Hebrew you know. What does Yom Tov mean? What's Yom? Yom is day. What's Tov? So it's the good days.

What do we call good days? Substitute the word holy for good. What do you get? Holidays. The Yom Tov are the holidays, the Jewish holidays, the feasts.

And these are the main three feasts, the ones that required an assembly. Passover, the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, and your Day of Atonement, your Yom Kippur. Passover.

Passover. Yom Kippur. They also believe in Kashrut.

Kashrut. Now, what is Kashrut? Believe it or not, you know this word also. Take out the vowels and take off the T and what do you have? K-S-H-R.

Think pickles and think what word that is. Kosher. Kashrut.

Kosher root. It's the kosher things. This is the dietary laws.

The Kashrut. K-A-S-H-R-U-T. So, Orthodox Judaism believes in watching Sabbath and the feast days.

They believe in the dietary laws and they believe in the laws of family purity. These are the laws of marriage and you'll marry within the faith and all the purity laws in terms of how you conduct yourself in your physical life. Jews who keep these areas are considered observant and religious.

That's your Orthodox Judaism. Now, and within that, of course, you have the Hasidic, you have the modern Orthodox where they kind of step away from some of that and say, well, you know, we're enlightened. We're not Amish.

You know, we're not going to hold with the old stickler ways. We're going to step back from that. But you also have what's known as conservative Judaism.

You think, well, gee, conservative. That sounds good. In the United States, it's called conservative Judaism.

Elsewhere, it's called Masorti. M-A-S-O-R-T-I. And some people said, well, we need to observe the laws and customs like Shabbat and Kashrut, but we need to step back from a lot of the doctrines.

We're going to do the traditions, the observances, but the doctrines are harsh. Let's just step back from that a little bit. So they're non-fundamentalist.

They have a real positive attitude toward modern culture. They think change is good. Adaptation is good.

Do you see a parallel in the church? You know, why hold to these doctrines that are unpopular? You know, boo on homosexuals. Why do we need to hold to that? That's unpopular. Boo on women holding leadership positions.

Why do we need to hold to that? That's a cultural thing from the past. Let's let loose of that and be more positive and be more open and be more receptive to modern ideas. So conservative Judaism says, oh, sure, you know, we're going to keep the Sabbath.

We'll watch the dietary laws because this sort of sets us apart and is distinctive, but we've got to

let loose a lot of these negative, frowning crease between the eyes type of things that are unpopular. So they think that the law is not static, but that it develops and it morphs and it changes to fit the needs of the day and that distinguishes it from Orthodox Judaism that says, no, no, no, the law never changes. The law is immutable, just like God.

Conservatives say, well, you know, you've got to adapt. You've got to adjust. And so they treat the oral law, which continues to be formed and continues to evolve, the interpretations, the sort of Mishnah Talmud understandings where you can take things and say, well, that's really figurative and this is really just illustrative.

This is more of a parable than a reality. It's the principle that counts, not the literal fulfillment. This is just as authoritative as scripture itself.

So scripture is what you want it to be. Scripture is what you make it. It's how you apply it in the modern day.

This is conservative Judaism and it really kind of betrays its name. I would call it liberal Judaism if it was me because it's really not conserving anything except Shabbat. But, of course, you can see this is a modification and a dampening down and a falling away from Orthodoxy.

Now, that's the second kind. The third kind of Judaism is progressive Judaism and this comes under several subheadings. I won't go into great detail here.

You have reform Judaism that says we don't have to do stuff in Hebrew anymore. Let's do it in the language of the vernacular, whatever country you're in. If you're in America, why it should be English.

And it's kind of like the Vatican II thing where let's not do Latin anymore. Let's update. Let's be modern.

Let's reform Judaism and make it relevant. Let's make it vital. Let's make it hip and grab people's attention.

So, they're prayer services and they don't really care what you believe about Judaism as long as it's personal to you and you're kind of committed to it and you feel good about it. It's kind of a feel-good Judaism. Just pick the parts of Judaism that you like and say it in your own language and let's just all feel good as we do our Judaism.

That's progressive. Another kind is Reconstructionist. Doesn't believe that any Jewish laws require observance at all.

But their emphasis is on the community. Let's all get together and be a little support group for each other and let's connect and let's relate and let's talk. Let's all be a group.

That's Reconstructionist Judaism. Then finally, you have Jewish Renewal which is North American. Began in the 1960s and this is sort of a social action Judaism.

Let's have social justice. Let's be spiritual and look for right in society. But it doesn't look at the law either.

It just says let's push for ethics and good stuff in society more so than just our local group. So all of this is under the heading of progressive Judaism. Well, as we conclude, there's a lot you can say and a lot you can learn about Judaism but here's the critical thing.

What's missing in all of this? What's the emphasis and what's the focus? It is the same as it has always been. Read Romans 9, 10 and 11. Not understanding the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own.

The role of faith, the role of substitutionary atonement even though obviously the sacrificial system of the Levites and the acknowledgement that there is sin and so forth, it's kind of like people who say, oh yes, I believe the Bible is the word of God and I believe in the Holy Spirit but it doesn't translate into healthy Christian life and a daily walk that vibrates with the power of God. It's a token nod to the importance of Scripture. They'll never argue with you that the Bible is important and Bible study is important and they'll never argue that the Spirit isn't important and that you should walk.

They'll give great agreement to all these things but it doesn't translate into the reality of a life that is fundamentally rooted and grounded and guided by those things. This is what has happened in Judaism. It gives, oh yes, certainly the law defines sin and of course there's sacrifice and there's a picture in those sacrifices that God has a solution for sin but in practice, Judaism is just an ethical philosophy.

That's what it boils down to. It doesn't access God's grace. It doesn't access God's power.

It doesn't access transformation of the inner man. Why? What's number one in Orthodox Christianity? Person and work of Christ. If you miss Christ, you miss the power.

God has made him to be our righteousness, our peace, our sanctification, our wisdom. We are alive in Christ whereas by one man sinned under the world and death by sin. Life comes through Christ and if you miss Christ, you miss the life of God and that's the fundamental problem with Judaism.

There's a lot more on this. If you want to get the details, you can research any of these terms that we've talked about tonight but that's what you need to know when you talk to someone who's Jewish. That's the shortcoming of Judaism.

Well, we close here with that topic tonight. We'll look at Islam next week. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the power, for the transforming grace that we have through Jesus Christ. We pray that the Holy Spirit will impress these truths in our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.