

Judaism

by Judah Etinger

The sermon explores the origin and nature of Judaism, highlighting the importance of actions over beliefs and the significance of the Exodus story in Jewish tradition.

Scripture: Exodus 9:16

Topics: "Jewish Heritage", "Faith And Works"

Description

Judah Etinger delves into the origin of Judaism as depicted in the Tanakh, focusing on the story of Abraham, the father of the Jews, who was declared righteous by God due to his faith. The covenant God made with Abraham, promising him descendants as numerous as the stars and their own land, is highlighted. Etinger explains that being Jewish is more of a nationality than a religion, emphasizing the importance of actions over beliefs within Judaism. He also explores Maimonides' 13 principles of faith and the significance of the Ten Commandments in shaping moral values across cultures. The sermon concludes with a detailed account of the miraculous events in the biblical Book of Exodus, showcasing God's power and intervention in the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt.

Transcript

The primary source of information regarding the origin of Judaism is found in the Tanakh (the Old Testament portion of the Christian Bible[16]). The story of the first Jewish person, Abraham, who is considered the father of the Jews, is told in the Old Testament biblical Book of Genesis.[17] According to the account, God declared Abraham righteous because of his faith (Gen. 15:6). God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him: Abraham would be the father of not just one nation, but a multitude of nations with descendants as numerous as the stars. This covenant was to be everlasting from generation to generation. God also promised Abraham that his descendants would have their own land (some of which is modern Israel). As a sign that they had accepted the covenant, Abraham and his descendants were to circumcise each male among them. This covenant was confirmed through Abraham's second son, Isaac, and through his descendants, who are today's Jews.

Today, a Jew is any person whose mother was a Jew. It is important to note, however, that being Jewish does not necessarily have anything to do with what one believes or what one does. A person born to non-Jewish parents who believes everything that Orthodox Jews believe and observes every law and custom of Judaism is still a non-Jew, even in the eyes of the most liberal movements of Judaism.[18] A person born to a Jewish mother who is an atheist and never practices the Jewish religion is still a Jew,

even in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox. In this sense, being Jewish is more like a nationality than a religion.

Jews regard actions as more important than beliefs, although there is certainly a place for belief within Judaism. The closest that anyone has ever come to creating a widely accepted list of Jewish beliefs is Maimonides' 13 principles of faith. Maimonides' 13 principles of faith, which he thought were the minimum requirements of Jewish belief, are as follows:

God exists.

God is one and unique.

God is incorporeal [having no material body or form].

God is eternal.

Prayer is to be directed to God alone and to no other.

The words of the prophets are true.

Moses' prophecy supercedes that of any other prophet.

The Written Torah and Oral Torah were given to Moses (teachings that are contained in the Tanakh and other Jewish writings).

There will be no other Torah.

God knows the thoughts and deeds of men.

God will reward the good and punish the wicked.

The Messiah [Savior] will come.

The dead will be resurrected.

These are very basic and general principles. Yet as basic as these principles are, the necessity of believing in each one of them has been disputed at one time or another by various Jewish movements; the liberal movements of Judaism dispute many of them. All movements of Judaism, however, forbid belief in the Christian Bible's New Testament;^[19] only the Bible's Old Testament portion (known as the Tanakh) is accepted, along with the Talmud (a collection of Jewish law and commentary).

Although beliefs are important within Judaism, actions are regarded as more important. According to Orthodox Judaism, these actions include 613 commandments given by God in the Tanakh, as well as laws instituted by the rabbis (the Jewish religious teachers), and long-standing customs such as the well-known Bar Mitzvah that almost every 13-year-old Jewish boy experiences.

The most famous of these 613 commandments are the Ten Commandments, which the Bible states God himself supernaturally engraved on tablets of stone. Many of these commandments, such as "Do not murder" and "Do not steal," serve to form the basis of morality in almost all cultures today.

The biblical Book of Exodus contains one of the most famous stories of the Bible, a story which has recently been dramatized by Hollywood in the feature film *The Prince of Egypt*. Around the second

millennium B.C., when the Hebrews had become slaves in the land of Egypt, God came to the rescue. Through a man named Moses, God performed many wondrous miracles which compelled the stubborn Egyptian ruler to finally let the Hebrews go free. Here is a brief description of these miracles, in chronological order:

Water turning into blood.

Vast hordes of frogs sweeping across Egypt, so many that even ovens and beds were filled with them.

Dust turning into swarms of gnats.

Swarms of flies sweeping through Egypt (as with the frogs), but not in Goshen (where the Hebrews lived).

A deadly plague afflicting only Egypt's livestock (horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep), but not the Hebrews's livestock.

Animals and people of Egypt breaking out with terrible boils.

A severe hailstorm covering only Egypt (but not where the Jews lived), worse than any in Egypt's history, destroying everything in the fields -- people, animals, trees, and crops alike.

Locusts covering the entire country -- so many that people couldn't see the ground -- and devouring everything that escaped the hailstorm.

A terrible darkness descending on the land of Egypt for three days, with the exception of the Hebrew areas.

A deathly plague killing all the first-born sons of every family in Egypt, with the exception of Hebrew families, who were unaffected by this plague (this event is known today as the Jewish holiday called Passover, when death "passed over" the Hebrews and only killed the Egyptians).

And finally, the escape of the Hebrews through the Red Sea, where a path opened up before the people through the water, and all the people walked through on dry ground.

The Exodus account states that God caused these miracles to happen so that the people might see His power, and so that His fame might spread throughout the earth (Exod. 9:16), causing people to believe in Him.

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