

# JUDAISM

There are approximately 14 million Jewish people in the world today, with close to 6 million living in the U.S. and about 5 million in Israel. Although Christians believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and are followers of the Jewish Messiah, we don't have as much in common with our Jewish friends as you may think.

Judaism is ranked as the sixth largest organized religion in the world, but it may surprise you to find that many Jewish people don't believe in God. It's amazing, but it's true. More than half of all Jews in Israel today call themselves "secular," and according to a recent poll, only 30% of all Jews are "absolutely certain" that God exists, 34% are "somewhat certain," 24% aren't sure, and 12% believe there is no God.<sup>1</sup>

So it's possible to be secular, agnostic, and *even an atheist* and still be Jewish. Some Jews even believe in reincarnation. If your mother is Jewish, that makes you Jewish, no matter what you believe. So being Jewish is not the same thing as following the religion of Juda-



ism. Being Jewish is like having a *citizenship*; but following Judaism is living a certain lifestyle. To Jewish people, what they believe about God and the afterlife isn't as important as how they live.

### Background

There are three main branches, or movements, in contemporary Judaism:

**Orthodox:** Orthodox is the most strict form, and until 200 years ago, it was the *only* kind of Judaism. Orthodox or “traditional” Jews emphasize tradition and pride themselves on faithfully keeping the Laws of Moses. They make up 10% of the Jewish population in America.

**Reform:** On the other end of the scale is the liberal or “modern” movement, called Reform. The Reform movement began in the 18th century to bring Judaism’s “old and outmoded ways of thinking” up to date. Reform Jews say they keep the good values of Judaism, but don’t have to keep strict religious laws. These are most of the Jews you’ll meet today.

**Conservative:** In between the Orthodox and Reform are the Conservatives. Conservative Judaism arose in the 19th century, as a middle ground between the other two branches. They’re traditional but believe the rabbis can change Jewish laws to suit the times. About 30% of American Jews are Conservative.

Because Judaism emphasizes behavior instead of theology, there is a wide variety of beliefs even within each of the

branches. With such diversity, it's difficult to generalize about their beliefs.

### **Who is God?**

Orthodox Jews believe there is only one God. He is a Spirit who is all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present, and eternal. Jews often recite something called the *Shema*:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”  
(Deuteronomy 6:4)

Reform Jews, however, can interpret the “God concept” however they like, and that's still within the boundaries of their Judaism. They can be atheists, naturalists, religious humanists, but they all agree on one concept: “The truth is that we do not know the truth.” So if you want to know what Reform Jews believe about God today, it really depends on which Jewish person you ask.

### **Scriptures**

Orthodox Jews (the strict believers) believe that the Torah was written by God through the hand of Moses. The Torah is the Hebrew name for the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They also believe the rest of the Old Testament, which is called the Tanakh, but don't give it as much authority as the Torah. There is also the Talmud—the teachings of the Jewish rabbis—which they believe has great authority.

But Reform Jews (the more liberal ones) don't necessarily believe that the Scriptures were written by God. Most

believe they were merely written by men. They feel it's a good book for preserving history and culture, and helps to live a good life, but the bottom line is, it wasn't written by God, so it's not binding.

### **Heaven and Hell**

Orthodox Jews do believe there is life after death in the *Olam Ha-Ba*—the World to Come. They believe that the righteous of all nations will live forever with God in a perfect place of peace and prosperity, and that the unrighteous will suffer—but they don't all agree on where those people will go. Some believe nothing happens when you die. Others believe you go to She'ol, or Gehenna, a place of purification (kind of like a Jewish purgatory). Then you either go directly to Paradise, or you are destroyed and cease to exist, or you continue to live in a state of unending remorse. Again, today's Judaism leaves it open to personal opinion.

In the Reform and Conservative branches, most have no concept of personal life after death. What is most important is the here and now—being a good person, and making the world a better place.

### **Sin and Salvation**

None of the branches of Judaism believe in original sin. They teach that man is created in the image of God and is born morally pure. They either think of humanity as neutral—with the potential for both good and bad—or as basically good. Although men do sin, they believe that God's justice is tempered with mercy.

Many Jewish people never ask the question, “What do I have to do to get into Heaven?” since Judaism teaches that all good people from all nations will go to Heaven. And because most Jews don’t believe in Hell, they don’t think of needing to be “saved” from anything. Remember, they believe they already have a favored standing with God as His “chosen people.”

Many Jews do believe that studying the Torah, praying, and doing good deeds will earn them a *better* place in Heaven, but they get a “Free Pass” as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Scripture has something to say about that kind of thinking:

“And do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.”  
(Matthew 3:9)

### **The Messiah**

So, what do Jewish people think about the Messiah today? Again, it depends on who you ask. Most Jewish people aren’t waiting with anticipation for a coming Messiah. The Orthodox Jews are still holding to that hope, but they fail to see the Messiah as divine, or as having to suffer as the Scriptures prophesied that He would. They believe that the Messiah is simply going to be a great political leader who brings peace to Israel and extends his rule over all the earth. One thing most Jewish people do agree on today is that Jesus is not that Messiah.

The other branches place their hope not in a person but in a “messianic age”—a Utopian age that mankind is progressing toward.

### **Jewish Customs**

It is traditional for most Jews to celebrate certain life events, such as circumcision of male newborns, and a *bar mitzvah* (for boys) or *bat mitzvah* (for girls)—which is a coming-of-age ceremony at age 13. Many also observe the Sabbath as a weekly day of rest.

Most Jewish people observe at least some of the Jewish holidays, though it's often to connect with their heritage more than for religious reasons. The most solemn are the High Holy Days: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is when Jews fast and pray for the forgiveness of their sins.

The most popular of all the holidays is Passover, which remembers the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. During the week of Passover they eat *matzo*, which is unleavened bread, and hold a *Seder*, or Passover meal.

### **How to Reach a Jewish Person**

First, here are some tips on what *not* to do as you're talking with a Jewish person:

- Don't be intimidated by thinking that all Jewish people are well acquainted with the Scriptures. Although they do give the Old Testament respect, there's a very good chance you know the Bible better than they do.

- Unless it's in a phrase like "Orthodox Jews," using the word "Jews" can sound anti-Semitic. It's best to refer to "Jewish people" instead.
- Since they view Jewishness as a way of life, avoid using the term "convert," which implies leaving behind their Jewishness. Instead, talk about becoming a "follower of Jesus."
- While it's fine to mention "Y'shua" as the Hebrew name of Jesus, people will not realize that you are referring to the historical person Jesus of Nazareth unless you also use the name "Jesus."
- The term "Savior" is not understood by Jewish people, so instead speak of a Redeemer and use the word "Messiah." Because of the Passover *Seder*, the concept of "redemption" is more familiar, so use that term rather than "salvation." You can explain that as God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, so He wants to free us from the slavery to sin in our lives.

It shouldn't surprise us that Jewish people are difficult to reach with the gospel. One reason is that many of them equate Christianity with Roman Catholicism. And why shouldn't they? When they watch the news at Christmas or Easter, who is upheld as "the head of the Christian Church"? The pope. They therefore believe that Christians bow down to graven images and that they worship Mary and many other saints. To them, Christianity is a false religion, and

should be kept at arm's length because it directly violates the First and Second Commandments.

Many Jews even equate Christianity with Adolf Hitler—despite the fact that biblical Christianity is soaked in love of humanity, while Hitler's philosophy was saturated in the blood of pure hatred. Hitler infiltrated the church by installing his own leaders and Nazi "pastors," then used the church structure to mock the Bible and teach that Jews were "children of the devil." So in the eyes of many Jews, the evil of Nazism came directly through the Christian church.

As a result, when we approach Jewish people with a New Testament in our hand, or a cross around our neck and sweetly say, "I would like to talk to you about Jesus," to them we might as well be saying, "Hi, I represent an institution that is filled with pedophiles, bows down to idols, worships false gods, and was responsible for the murder of six million Jews." No wonder they are reluctant to talk with us.

So, how do we reach a Jewish person? Well, there are many different ways you could try. Paul said he reasoned with the Jews both out of the Law of Moses and out of the Prophets, so you could show them how Jesus fulfills the Jewish prophecies of the coming Messiah. (For just a few of the many fulfilled prophecies, see the "Messianic Prophecies" chart on the following page.) But sadly, many Jews don't care about this evidence because they don't have much regard for the Scriptures. And, if you have someone who esteems the Old Testament, he may argue that you're just "reading Jesus into the Scriptures."



## MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
Messiah will be from the lineage of Abraham (Gen. 18:18); Isaac (Gen. 21:12); Jacob (Gen. 28:13,14); Judah (Gen. 49:10); Jesse (Isa. 11:1,2,10); and David (Jer. 23:5,6).	"Jesus... the son of David, the son of Jesse, ... the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham." (Luke 3:31-34)
Messiah will be born of a virgin. (Isaiah 7:14)	"An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.'" (Matt. 1:20,21)
Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2)	"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?'" (Matt. 2:1,2)
Messiah will be declared the Son of God. (Psalm 2:7)	"Suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" (Matt. 3:17)
Messiah will perform miraculous healings. (Isaiah 35:5,6)	"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are

## MESSIANIC PROPHECIES (CONT'D)

PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
	raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.'" (Luke 7:21,22)
Messiah will be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. (Zechariah 11:12)	"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver." (Matt. 26:14,15)
Messiah will be crucified. (Psalm 22:16)	"And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called . . . Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center." (John 19:17,18)
Messiah will not have any bones broken. (Psalm 34:20)	"Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs." (John 19:32,33)
Messiah will be resurrected. (Psalm 16:10)	"[David], foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses." (Acts 2:31,32)
Messiah will ascend to heaven. (Psalm 16:10)	"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." (Mark 16:19)

Another approach is to try to answer all of the person's objections to Christianity. For example, how we as Christians can believe in the Trinity and yet believe in only one God, not three, or that Jesus will set up His earthly kingdom at His *second* coming, not His first. All this information is good, but be forewarned: if you are speaking to someone who has a proud heart, this may stir up a zesty argument.

That's why when we talk with a Jewish person about God, we must start with the Law of Moses. It's really very simple, so don't complicate it. Find out if the person is proud or humble by asking the question, "Would you consider yourself to be a good person?" If he says "yes," then take him through the Ten Commandments, just like Jesus did with the rich young ruler (see Mark 10:17). Let those ten great cannons humble him and show him that he'll be guilty on Judgment Day and will need God's forgiveness, which can be found only in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

If his heart is humble, then unashamedly reveal the love of God displayed on the cross—that God Himself provided a Lamb for our atonement. Then trust in His great faithfulness to bring the person to everlasting life that is in Jesus alone.

### **Witnessing to a Jewish Person**

**You:** Hello. Nice day.<sup>2</sup>

**Jeremiah:** Yes, it is.

**You:** Where are you from?

**Jeremiah:** New York.

**You:** I love New York. Amazing place. My name is Ray.

**Jeremiah:** I'm Jeremiah.

**You:** Nice to meet you, Jeremiah

**Jeremiah:** Nice to meet you, too.

**You:** I have a question for you, Jeremiah. What do you think happens after someone dies? Do you think there's a Heaven? Do people get reincarnated?

**Jeremiah:** I don't know.

**You:** Do you think about it?

**Jeremiah:** Sometimes. I'm Jewish.

[You need not panic and begin trying to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Your aim at this point is simply to bring the knowledge of sin, using the Law, so that he will see that he needs God's mercy.]

**You:** So you think Heaven exists?

**Jeremiah:** I hope so.

[A statement like this should put you at ease. Jeremiah is human. He *thinks* about the issues of life and death. His "I hope so" reveals that he's not angry or anti-God.]

**You:** Do you think that you are good enough to go there?

**Jeremiah:** Yes, I believe so. [See Proverbs 20:6.]

**You:** Have you kept the Law of Moses?

[The reason a Jew thinks that he is a good person is found in Romans 10:3. It says of the Jews, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God." The opening of the spiritual nature of the Law will show him God's standard of righteousness. Jews have the Law of Moses, but like the Pharisees they twist it or ignore it, therefore making it void to themselves.]

**Jeremiah:** Sort of.

[If he says that he has broken the Commandments, ask which ones. Then still go through the Law. You need to *personalize* his sin, as Paul did in Romans 2:21–24.]

**You:** Let's go through a few of the Commandments to see how you do. How many lies do you think you have told, in your whole life? I don't mean "white" lies—*real* lies.

[You will regret it if you don't make a distinction between what he perceives as permissible lies and "deceitfulness." He will more than likely trivialize his lying, if you don't get an admission from him that he has actually borne false witness.]

**Jeremiah:** Lots.

**You:** Lots? Five? Ten? Hundreds?

**Jeremiah:** Hundreds?

[People will often boast of their lies, because at this point there's no accountability to God. So they are more than happy to admit their sins.]

**You:** What do you call someone who tells lies?

**Jeremiah:** Human.

**You:** Yes. But what would you call *me* if I told lies?

**Jeremiah:** A liar.

**You:** We often think lightly of lying, calling them “fibs” or “white lies,” yet Scripture tells us that “lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.” That means lies are “extremely detestable” to Him. Have you ever stolen anything, in your whole life?



**Jeremiah:** Yes. I have, in the past, when I was younger.

[It is normal for people to trivialize sin with phrases such as, “Just little things,” “When I was young,” etc.]

**You:** What do you call someone who steals things?

**Jeremiah:** A thief.

**You:** Have you ever used God’s name in vain?

**Jeremiah:** Plenty of times. I know it’s wrong.

[Don’t hesitate to gently show the serious nature of sin. This is extremely important. If he thinks lightly of his sins, then he won’t see the mercy of God in offering forgiveness. The greater he sees his transgressions, the greater he will understand God’s love expressed at the cross.]

**You:** Think about that. God gave you life. He gave you eyes to see the beauty of this creation. He gave you ears to enjoy good music, taste buds to enjoy good food. He lavished His goodness upon you, and then you used His holy name as a cuss word to express disgust. That's a very serious sin—one that is called “blasphemy.”

**Jeremiah:** I know it's bad.

[It is a great encouragement when someone admits their sins like this.]

**You:** Jesus said, “Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Have you ever done that?

[If you are anything like me, you will be concerned that you will turn a Jewish person off if you quote Jesus. But whatever you do, don't hesitate to say “Jesus said.” Remember that Jesus was a Jew (see John 4:9) and that the first 8,000 Christians in the Book of Acts were Jewish. Always remember, when you are using this verse you are quoting the Word of God, which is living and powerful (see Hebrews 4:12).]

**Jeremiah:** Plenty of times.

**You:** Then you have committed adultery in God's eyes. So, Jeremiah, here's a summation of what we have found. You are not a “good” person. By your own admission (I'm not judging you), you are a lying, thieving, blasphemous, adulterer at heart.

**Jeremiah:** Wow. I never thought of it like that . . .

**You:** And you have to face God on Judgment Day. If He judges you by the Ten Commandments, will you be innocent or guilty?

**Jeremiah:** I will be guilty.

**You:** Will you go to Heaven or Hell?

**Jeremiah:** I think I will still go to Heaven.

**You:** Why?

**Jeremiah:** Because those things were in the past. Besides, I'm Jewish. We are the chosen people.

**You:** Being Jewish doesn't mean that you get an automatic pass. So, when did you last lust after a woman?

**Jeremiah:** A few minutes ago. Okay, I see what you are saying, but *most* bad things I've done were a long time ago.

**You:** Actually, *everything* you have done has been "in the past," and God sees the sins of your youth as though it were yesterday. If you died today, you have God's promise that you won't go to Heaven. The Bible warns that all liars will have their part in the lake of fire. No thief, no blasphemer or adulterer will inherit the Kingdom of God. Does it concern you that if you died right now, you would go to Hell, forever?

**Jeremiah:** Yes, it does.

**You:** That makes sense. You love life. Do you know what God did for us, so that we could avoid Hell?



**Jeremiah:** No. What did He do?

**You:** Do you remember what happened at Passover?

**Jeremiah:** Yes.

**You:** Moses instructed the children of Israel to put the blood of the lamb on the door posts, so that death would “pass over” them. All those who applied the blood were saved from death. When John the Baptist saw Jesus for the first time, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” This is clearly spoken of in Isaiah 53. God became a Man in Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible says that God “was manifest in the flesh,” and the reason for that was so that as “the lamb of God” His blood could cause death to pass over us. He came to suffer and die for the sin of the world.

We broke His Law (the Ten Commandments) but because Jesus paid our fine on the cross 2,000 years ago, God can forgive us. God can dismiss your case. He can commute your death sentence. The Bible says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God proved His great love for you through the cross. Then Jesus rose from the dead, and defeated the power of the grave. If you repent and trust the Savior, God will forgive your sins and grant you everlasting life. What you need to do is repent and trust the Savior that God provided. Does that make sense?

**Jeremiah:** Yes, it does.

**You:** Jeremiah, you aren't guaranteed tomorrow. That comes only by the grace of God. So if you died today, where would you go?

**Jeremiah:** I would probably go to Hell.

**You:** So what are you going to do about it?

**Jeremiah:** I need to pray.

**You:** That's right. Repent and trust the Savior. When are you going to do that?

**Jeremiah:** Right now.

**You:** Thanks for listening to me.

**Jeremiah:** Thank *you*.

### *From Judaism to Christ*

Years ago, my wife made a comment that our marriage could only be better if we invited God in. In my pride and desire to live with the personal religion I'd created, I said, "Oh, really? Which God—yours or mine? You believe in some guy who died 2,000 years ago and I believe in God. Are you planning on going to a synagogue? Because there's no way I'm going into a Catholic church." Result: Discussion over.

After moving to Georgia, good friends of ours (who were Christians) consistently showed us love and kindness and were more than willing to answer my ignorant ques-

tions about what Christians believed. I learned that true believers in Christ (which I found was the Greek word for *Messiah*) would never believe in Replacement Theology nor would they have done acts like the pogroms or the Holocaust. True believers in the Messiah of Israel would only show their love for Israel and their love for the Messiah's people, the Jews. They were faithful to answer my questions and go no further. They must have known that my pride would have pushed me the other way.

These friends asked my wife to go to church with them and I had no problem with her going—I'd assumed that there would be no change in our lives. The day my wife came home and shared with me that she'd become a "born-again Christian" immediately brought me back to a day 20 years prior: My brother came home from college and shared that his best friend had become a "born-again Christian." I'd never heard the term before. It would be another 20 years before I heard it again. My father's response had stuck with me so subconsciously that I couldn't believe it came back so quickly and so clearly: "Those are the worst kind," he said. This was exactly what popped into my head when my wife told me of her decision.

Life slowly started changing. My pride reared its ugly head once again as I heard her teach our two-year-old daughter how to thank Jesus for our food: "What are you doing thanking a dead guy for the food I worked for?" When it came to the small fish symbol on the back of her car: "Do you realize people will think that I believe in *your* Jesus when I'm in your car?"

I concluded that I had to stop this. I spoke with an Orthodox Jew who was close to both my wife and me. Her

response was disheartening: “I’ll tell you, there are only two possibilities in a mixed marriage like yours—divorce or conversion.” I didn’t talk with her again about it. I spoke with a rabbi, but his response was lacking. I knew I couldn’t speak with a Gentile believer because he wouldn’t have the Jewish perspective that I needed; besides, his mind would be already made up. I’d have to look for myself into the Book I never wanted to look into before—the Hebrew Scriptures.

After a year of studying and seeing irrefutable evidence in prophecy and seeing that there are no contradictions in Scripture, I realized the amazing fingerprint of God throughout this Book. Days before Passover, a Jewish believer in Jesus was speaking on “Messiah in the Passover” at my wife’s church. After seeing his presentation, I spoke with his wife and she asked, “So, what do you do with Isaiah 53?” I asked what she was talking about. We grabbed a Bible and she had me read it. It was the straw that broke the camel’s back, but my pride wouldn’t relinquish its grip just yet.

I stewed on this for another couple of days. Then the day before Passover, I humbled myself in order to ask the Lord to forgive me and to cover me with His blood as He did the doorposts in Egypt. Where my wife felt overwhelming peace in receiving His Gift, I wept. I was overcome with the realization that He died for my transgressions as so clearly stated in Isaiah 53.

—*Scott D.*