

# Compare and Contrast Judaism and Christianity

## Faith versus good deeds

Judaism teaches that the purpose of the Torah is to show that good works are considered by God just as important as, or even more important than, belief in God, that both are required of people. Although the Torah commands Jews to believe in God, Jews see belief in God as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for being Jewish. The quintessential verbal expression of Judaism is the Shema Yisrael, the statement that the God of the Bible is their God, and that this God is unique and one. The quintessential physical expression of Judaism is behaving in accordance with the commandments specified in the Torah, and thus live one's life in God's ways.

Much of Christianity also teaches that God wants people to perform good works, but all branches hold that good works will not lead to salvation. Some Christian denominations hold that salvation depends upon transformational faith in Jesus which expresses itself in good works (primarily Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Roman Catholicism), while others (including most Protestants) hold that faith alone is necessary for salvation. However, the difference is not as great as it seems, because it really hinges on the definition of "faith" used. The first group generally uses the term "faith" to mean "intellectual assent." Such a faith will not be salvific until a person has allowed it to effect a life transforming conversion (turning towards God) in their being (see ontological faith). The Christians that hold to "salvation by faith alone" (also called by its Latin name "sola fide") define faith as being implicitly ontological--mere intellectual assent is not termed "faith" by these groups. Faith, then, is life-transforming by definition.

A practical outcome of this difference is the attitudes of the two religions to *death bed conversions*. According to most forms of classical Christianity, one may lead an evil life, but on one's death one may repent for one's sins, accept Jesus as Christian dogma teaches, and then that person will be rewarded with a heavenly afterlife by God; this will be the same heavenly paradise that a comparatively less sinful person would receive. In contrast, all forms of Judaism teach that God judges a person based on their whole lifetime of actions and beliefs, and that deathbed conversions have no effect on God's judgement.

## Common Jewish views of Christianity

Jesus plays no religious role in Judaism. Jews are familiar with Jesus primarily due to their being immersed in a Christian-oriented society. Most Jews believe that Jesus was a real person. Many Jews view Jesus as just one in a long list of failed Jewish claimants to be the messiah, none of whom fulfilled the tests of a prophet specified in the Five Books of Moses. Others see Jesus as a teacher who worked with the gentiles and ascribe the messianic claims they find objectionable to his later followers. To still others, perhaps to most Jews, Jesus is simply irrelevant, a central figure in a religion that isn't theirs, much as Muhammad might seem to many Christians.

Jews also do not believe that God requires the sacrifice of any human. This is emphasized in medieval Jewish traditions concerning the story of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac. Thus, Jews reject the notion that anyone can or should die for anyone else's sin. As a religion, Judaism is far more focussed on the practicalities of understanding how one may live a sacred life in this world according to God's will, rather than hope of spiritual salvation in a future one. Jews do not believe in the Christian concept of Hell, nor that only those following one specific faith can be "saved". Judaism does have a punishment stage in the afterlife (i.e. Gehenna, a one year maximum purgatory) as well as a Heaven (Gan Edan), but the religion does not intend it as a focus.

Jews do not celebrate Christmas or any other Christian festivals as these have no religious significance to their beliefs. Celebration of non-Jewish holy days is considered Avodah Zarah or "Foreign Worship" and is forbidden, however some Reform Jews in the West treat Christmas as a secular (but not religious) holiday.

### **Common Christian views of Judaism**

In general, Christians view Christianity as the fulfilment and successor of Judaism, and Christianity carried forward much of the doctrine and many of the practices from that faith, including monotheism, the belief in a Messiah, and certain forms of worship (such as prayer, and reading from religious texts). Other beliefs around original sin atoned for by God giving his son, or the Son (who is God) coming down to earth for the sake of humanity, and a subsequent sacrifice of that Son, and the belief in the triune nature of God, are essential differences.

Christians consider that the Law was necessary as an intermediate stage, but once the world was able to understand the significance of the Crucifixion, then adherence to Law was superseded by faith in Christ as the path to God.

Many Christians today hold to supersessionism, the belief that the Jews' chosenness found its ultimate fulfilment through the message of Jesus: Jews who remain non-Christian are no longer considered to be chosen, since they reject Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. This position has been softened or even completely abrogated by some churches where Jews are recognized to have a special status due to their covenant with God, so that this continues to be an area of on-going dispute among Christians.

Some forms of Christianity which view the Jewish people as close to God, seek to understand and incorporate elements of Jewish understanding or perspective into their Christian beliefs as a means to respect their "parent" religion or to more fully seek out and return to their Christian roots. More evangelistic Christians tend to see Jews as essentially misguided by not choosing Christ, and as a people whom there is a more specific duty to evangelise or convert.