

# Could Judaism Be True?

## An Examination of the Jewish Worldview



### Three Questions

Every worldview has to answer three important questions. First, “How did we get here”? This question is obviously foundational to how it is we see the world around us and how it is we understand our role within that world. Secondly, we have to ask, “How did things get so messed up?” All of us know that there is something broken about the world in which we live and our worldview helps us to understand WHAT has been broken! Finally, we must answer the question, “How can we fix it?” This final question is the culmination and conclusion of our worldview. We begin with an idea related to how we got here, but ultimately find ourselves answering the most important questions of life. Judaism offers answers to these three worldview questions. Let’s examine these answers and see if they are cohesive and relate to the world as we know it...



### A Short History of Judaism

Judaism began approximately 4000 years ago. The Jewish people, also known as “Hebrews” trace their ancestry to “Eber”, the traditional forefather of the Hebrew people mentioned in Genesis 10:21. This same verse of the Old Testament mentions Shem, one of Noah’s three sons. From this name, the word “Semitic” has entered our vocabulary, describing both the Jewish and Arabic people.

Jews believe that God called a descendant of Eber named Abram to leave his family and the adulterous people of Ur of the Chaldees and go to the land of Canaan:



### Genesis 12:1-3

*Now the Lord said to Abram go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your fathers house to the land which I will show you and I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great. And so you shall be a blessing and I will be bless those who bless you and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the Earth shall be blessed.*

This promise to Abram (whose name God later changed to Abraham), was also repeated to Abraham’s son, Isaac, and his grandson Jacob (who was later renamed, Israel). The descendants of Israel (the Jewish people) repeatedly pointed to God’s early communication with their forefathers as proof that they were God’s Chosen People. They continued to see themselves in this way, even when Jacob later moved his family to Egypt to escape a severe famine and they found themselves enslaved to the Egyptians. During this time, they cried out for a Deliverer, and God finally sent Moses to deliver them from the hand of Pharaoh. Moses led the children out of Egypt by the power of God, and this deliverance became the foundation of the Jewish belief in a God who cared deeply for them as His Children and freed them from their bondage. Following their liberation, God gave Moses the Law (including the Ten Commandments). God’s communication with Moses during this time became the foundation for early Jewish Scripture; Moses is the author of the Torah, the first five books of the Jewish Canon, recording the early history of the Jewish people and the Law given by God.

After Moses died, Joshua took over the leadership and the Jews entered the Promise Land. They had to conquer many inhabitants. After Joshua died, the nation of Israel was governed by Judges for 350 years, and during the time of the Judges, the Israelites wanted to be led by a king. God eventually provided this king, even though it was not what He wanted for His People. Saul took the throne as the first King of Israel, and after he nearly destroyed the nation, David became the second King, conquering the city of Jerusalem and establishing it as Israel's capital. After David died, his son, Solomon, became the third King. He built a temple to the Lord, and Israel thrived under his leadership. During this time, prophets rose in the nation of Israel and began to have an impact on the culture and theology of the Jews. Amos, for example, urged the Israelites to develop a personal and national obedience to God; Hosea described God as a source of mercy and love; Isaiah highlighted God's majesty and righteousness; Micah called the Jews to "do justly, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with thy God."

After the reign of King Solomon, the nation was divided into two smaller kingdoms – the southern kingdom known as Judea (with Jerusalem as its capital) and the northern kingdom (with Samaria as its capital). Both the northern and southern kingdoms were continually at war with other nations until both were conquered. The Syrians conquered the northern kingdom in 721 BC and the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom in 606 BC. The Jews found themselves in captivity once again. During this time, the prophet Ezekiel provided a glimmer of hope by encouraging the Jews to worship God in Babylon just as they had in Jerusalem and he cast a vision of a new Jewish nation that would come in the future. He reminded the Jews of God's promises to their forefathers. Those Jews who were not in captivity were dispersed among the nations of the world and it was during this time that the institution of the synagogue developed alongside the office of the Rabbi.

When the Persia captured Babylon in 538BC many Jews were allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra. It was during this time that the reading of the Torah and other scriptures became very important. The second temple was built in 520BC. A Priestly Code was developed and formal, legalistic Judaism emerged in this new period of history. Jewish independence was not long-lasting, however. The Roman Empire made Israel a state of Rome in 63BC, and in response to Jewish rebellion, Titus (the historic Roman General) eventually destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in 70 AD. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the Jews were once again scattered all over the world. Following the fall of Jerusalem, Hebrew scholars gathered and eventually established the Jewish canon of scripture, including the Torah (the Law), The Prophets, and the Writings as we have them today. Later the Mishnah, (commentaries on the law) was compiled as well, and as the center of Jewish learning shifted to Babylon, the Gemara (sermonic material that addresses all areas of Jewish life) was also assembled. The Gemara was eventually added to the Mishnah and the combined volume became known as the Talmud. The Torah and the Talmud continue to be recognized as important religious writings that guide the Jewish people.

Today, Judaism continues as one of the oldest of the world's major living religions. In 1982, Judaism reported 14,336,520 followers, and there are currently an estimated 18 million Jews throughout the world, concentrated mainly in North America (approximately 7 million) and Israel (approximately 4.5 million).



### **How Judaism Answers the Question:**

#### **“How Did We Get Here?” (What’s the Nature of the Creator and Creation?)**

While Judaism is clearly the foundation for Christianity, there are a number of important differences and one of these differences lies in the nature of God.

Judaism teaches that there is one universal God; Jews are strict monotheists who view God as a single, indivisible entity (unlike Christians who view God as Trinitarian; a single entity with three personalities, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Jews believe that this God has revealed his nature and will through the Jewish Prophets (of whom Abraham and Moses are particularly important). But Jews also believe that Divine revelation is progressive and continues to this day through the scholars and rabbis of Judaism.

Judaism teaches that humans are the special creation of this God, and that they have been created with special characteristics uncommon to other animals:



#### **Genesis 1:27**

*“So God created man in His own image: in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them”*

Most religious Jews believe that humans, because they have been created in the image of God, do not possess a sinful nature. This is an important departure from the Christian worldview, which maintains that people are inherently fallen (because they have inherited their sin nature from Adam, the first sinner). While Christians believe that people are inherently fallen, Jews typically believe that people are neither inherently fallen nor inherently good. Instead, people are inherently FREE to make their own choice for good or evil. Each human being is accountable to him or herself, having the capacity to be good, kind and obedient to the Laws of God.



### **How Judaism Answers the Question:**

#### **“How Did It Get So Messed Up?” (What Separates Man from God?)**

So, if people are capable of choosing ‘good’, why is the world such a messed up place? From a Jewish perspective, it’s really a matter of choice and behavior.

Jews generally consider actions and behavior to be of primary importance. In other words, “beliefs come out of actions”. This is very different from the conservative Christian worldview. For Christians, ‘belief’ is of primary importance and ‘actions’ simply flow from beliefs. From the Jewish perspective, the world is messed up because people don’t behave as they should. They make wrong choices, perhaps because they simply don’t know how God wants them to behave. Jews do not accept the Christian concept of original sin (the belief that all people have inherited Adam and Eve’s sin when they disobeyed God’s instructions in the Garden of Eden). Jews don’t see man’s fallen nature as the root of the problem because they don’t believe that humans have a ‘nature’ problem in the first place! From a Jewish perspective, the world is simply messed up because people don’t know how it is that God would have them behave, and as a result, they make wrong choices.



### **How Judaism Answers the Question:**

#### **“How Do We Fix It?” (How Can We Be Reunited with God?)**

How can we fix this problem? Well, if the problem is simply a matter of choosing wrong behaviors, then the solution is really quite simple! It’s merely a matter of

learning what the 'right' behaviors are, and then DOING what we have learned we ought to do! This is why Jewish believers place such a high priority on doing good works, making sacrifices, and doing good deeds in order to please God and be saved. While there are a number of branches of Judaism in the world today, all forms of the religion attempt to compel adherents to obey certain Divine Laws as they interpret these from the Old Testament in order to fix the problem we find ourselves in and make the world a better place:

### **Orthodox Judaism**

*This is the oldest branch of Judaism. Orthodox Jews try to follow the 'letter of the law' by obeying the Torah and the original customs and traditions of the earliest Jews. This most conservative form of Judaism includes the Modern Orthodox, Chasidim and Ultra Orthodox movements which share a basic belief in the derivation of Jewish law. Each movement attempts to follow the original form of Judaism as they understand it. They look upon every word in the Torah, Mishnah and the Talmud as divinely inspired. They are rigorous about ritual observances, the dietary laws, and keeping the Sabbath.*

### **Reform Judaism**

*This movement within Judaism started in the 1790s in Germany, and today, Reform Judaism has moved away from the strict observances of the Orthodox branch of the faith. Reform Jews believe that the principles taught in the scriptures are far more important than the practices. They follow the ethical laws of Judaism, but leave up to the individual the decision whether to follow or ignore the dietary and other traditional laws. They also use modern forms of worship and have loosened the Old Testament regulations and allow female rabbis to lead reform congregations.*

### **Conservative Judaism**

*This form of Judaism began in the mid-nineteenth century as a reaction to the Reform Movement. Conservative Judaism attempts to find a middle ground between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. Conservative Judaism retains much of the tradition of Judaism while making accommodations for modern lifestyles. As an example, some of the dietary restrictions are followed, and rabbinical Judaism is affirmed, but Conservative Judaism adapts the traditions of Judaism to the conditions of the modern world. As a result, Conservative Judaism is less rigid in the formulation of requirements than Orthodox Judaism.*

In each of these three manifestations of Judaism, behavior is the focus of religious activity. Judaism is a faith system that is built on the good works of its adherents. These good works are derived from a number of fundamental beliefs that are accepted by all religious Jews to one degree or another.

The Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, (also known as "Maimonides") is generally accepted as one of the most important Jewish scholars of medieval times. His list of thirteen Jewish principles of faith has been generally accepted by Jews as an accurate reflection and summary of the Jewish faith (even though some liberal branches of the faith might argue a point or two). The list gives us some insight into the driving principles of the faith and provides us with a foundation for asking our Jewish friends deeper questions about Judaism. Maimonides listed the following thirteen principles of Judaism:

1. *God exists and is the sole Creator*
2. *There is only one, unique God*
3. *God has no bodily form or shape*
4. *God is eternal*
5. *We should pray to God and to Him only*
6. *The words of the prophets are true*
7. *The prophecies of Moses are true and he is the greatest of the prophets*
8. *The written Torah and the Talmud are true*
9. *The Torah is not subject to change*
10. *God knows the thoughts of every person*
11. *God will reward those who are good*
12. *The Messiah will come*
13. *The dead will be resurrected*

These thirteen foundational principles help us to understand what religious Jews believe about the nature of God and how we might answer the third question of worldview, but these principles also invite us to ask a few deeper questions about Judaism.



## The Hard Questions Judaism Has to Answer

OK, we've taken a look at the way in which Judaism answers the three most important questions addressed by any worldview ("How did we get here?", "How did things get so messed up?" and "How do we fix it?"). But how do we know if Judaism's answers are actually TRUE? Well, one way to examine the perspective of Judaism is simply to see how well it answers a few important philosophical and theological questions that arise as we better understand what Judaism teaches, so let's ask those deeper questions in an effort to get to the truth. The following questions are designed to gently challenge the claims that Judaism makes about reality and help you to initiate a discussion with your friends or family that may hold this worldview:

### Philosophical Questions

Let's begin by asking a few philosophical questions related to Judaism.

**1** **Judaism claims that humans are neither 'good' nor 'bad' by nature, but instead have moral FREEDOM to choose to do whatever they would like. If that is true, why do so many people choose to do wrong rather than right? And doesn't the Old Testament actually teach that no one is truly 'good'? How can Jewish believers accept an idea that contradicts their own scripture?**

Are we basically good or bad as humans? If we are good, then we may be able to save ourselves, but if we are basically fallen and incapable of obeying the rules in a way that would satisfy God, a Savior may just be what we need! A simple empirical observation of our own lives and the lives of those around us provides us with more than enough evidence to know that people are naturally inclined toward evil (more on this [HERE](#)). If we inclined for evil, we are really incapable of doing anything that God might consider adequate to save ourselves. But more importantly, the Jewish scriptures themselves tell us that mankind is incapable of doing the things that will please God:



### **Jeremiah 17:9**

*The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?*



### **Psalms 14:1-3**

*There is no one who does good. The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*

On a philosophical level, if a religious adherent believes in the truth of a particular religious principle (i.e. “The words of the prophets are true”), and the words of these prophets teach a particular fact (that people are inherently fallen and corrupt and are incapable of seeking after God or obeying His laws, as demonstrated in these two verses), isn’t the adherent obligated to accept the position of the prophets? How is it that Jewish believers deny this truth about the nature of people?



**The theology of the Old Testament, as described in the Torah, implements and requires a sacrificial system in order for sins to be forgiven. How does the modern Jew think he or she can save themselves when there is no longer a sacrificial system or temple in which to make these forgiveness sacrifices?**

How now does the Jewish believer receive the forgiveness of God for those times when he or she is less than obedient to the Law? And why was the historic sacrificial system and practice suddenly NOT required by God?



**Do Jewish people recognize that Jesus was a real man? If so, do they believe that he did miraculous supernatural deeds?**

The early Jews certainly did believe that Jesus was real and performed supernatural acts (more on this [HERE](#)). There is good evidence that Jesus actually lived and claimed to be the Messiah. Jewish people are divided on the true identity and existence of Jesus, but the early Jews did recognize His existence and claims to deity.

## **Biblical Questions**

As we look at the list of thirteen guiding principles formulated by Maimonides, we immediately observe that Jews and Christians agree on many things. But Maimonides’ principles highlight a couple of areas that require further examination:



**Principle number six maintains that the words of the prophets are true and principle number twelve maintains that the Messiah will come. Doesn’t Jesus fit the description of the Messiah as described by the Prophets?**

The Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah. How does the Jewish believer account for the fact that Jesus fulfills all the Old Testament prophecies for the coming Messiah (more on this [HERE](#))? Consider just these few prophecies and think about the way in which they describe Jesus:

## The Messiah Would Come from the Tribe of Judah



### **Genesis 49:10**

*The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.*

## The Messiah Will Appear After the Jews Return to Israel



### **Jeremiah 23:3-6**

*'I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,' declares the LORD. 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.'*

## The Messiah Would Be Born in Bethlehem



### **Micah 5:2**

*'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.'*

## The Messiah Would Be Preceded By a Messenger



### **Isaiah 40:3**

*A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD ; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'*

## The Messiah Would Enter Jerusalem While Riding on a Donkey



### **Zechariah 9:9**

*Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

## The Messiah Would Suffer and Be Rejected



### **Isaiah 53:3**

*He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

## The Messiah Would Be Betrayed for 30 Pieces of Silver



### **Zechariah 11:12-13**

*I told them, 'If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'--the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.*

## The Messiah Would Be Silent Before His Accusers



### **Isaiah 53:7**

*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*

## The Messiah Would Be Wounded, Whipped and Crucified



### **Isaiah 53:5**

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

## The Messiah Would Suffer at the Crucifixion



### **Psalms 22:1**

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?*



### **Psalms 22:7**

*All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:*



### **Psalms 22:8**

*'He trusts in the LORD ; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'*



### **Psalms 22:16**

*Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.*



### **Psalms 22:17**

*I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.*



### **Psalms 22:18**

*They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*

## The Messiah Would Be Crucified With Criminals



### **Isaiah 53:12**

*Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

## The Messiah Would Be Buried in a Rich Man's Tomb



### **Isaiah 53:9**

*He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

The central issue that separates Jews from Christians is the issue of Jesus Christ. Our conversations with Jewish believers may take many different forms and directions, but this issue about the nature and identity of Jesus is the most important topic, by far. Isn't it interesting that the Jewish scriptures themselves are the best and most thorough source available to us as we try to understand the identity of Jesus? The Old Testament points to Jesus as the Messiah that the Jews have been waiting for.

This Messiah was predicted by the Old Testament prophets as the one who would redeem His people from their sins. But by the time Jesus appeared, legalism and tradition had influenced Judaism and eroded their belief in original sin (the inherent fallen nature of mankind inherited from Adam). As a result, Jews in the first century were no longer looking for a personal Savior but were instead looking for a warrior King (like David) who would liberate them from Roman domination. Jesus simply didn't fit their expectation, and it's easy to see why. But it is Jesus alone who fits the prophetic description offered by the Jewish scripture.



### **So, Could This Be True?**

Every worldview has to be both internally consistent (measure up against itself) and externally consistent (measure up against the world it proposes to describe). Judaism has so much to offer to help us understand the world around us. Jewish believers have enough scripture at their disposal in the Torah to both describe and understand their world and identify the Messiah when presented with Him. The challenge for Judaism is simply to be consistent with its own teaching and to recognize Jesus for who He truly is. There are a number of philosophical questions that need to be addressed, but more importantly, the Biblical Questions related to Jesus show us the deficiencies of this ancient and foundational theistic worldview. Judaism passes many internal and external tests of reason and empiricism, history and archeology. It's fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the Christian worldview, however, provide it with its ultimate value and contribution theistic believers across the globe.