

Christianity & World Religions

Judaism

Genesis 12: 1-5

When I was in seminary I had a professor that like to use the word recapitulate. A quick check in my Webster's Dictionary found the word to mean "To give a summary of, to repeat briefly". In honor of Dr. Williams I would like to recapitulate some of the major points of my last three messages.

Over those last three weeks we have looked at 3 of the major religions of the world. We live in a diverse world. There is a good chance we have a neighbor, a coworker, a doctor, a fellow student that is a believer of another faith. Since we are sharing the world with people of other faiths, I thought it would be helpful to know something about these religions.

We began with Hinduism. There are three important concepts that go along with this religion. Those that were here, do you remember them? Do the letters D, K and N help?

- **Dharma** - It is the duty the Hindu is expected to perform
- **Karma** - Literally, "karma means works or deeds" You get good Karma for good deeds and bad Karma for bad deeds.
- If you build up enough good karma and you have done the right dharma, you then reach **Nirvana**. Nirvana means you have freed yourself from the cycle of reincarnation. Nirvana means your Atman, or part of god in you, rejoins Brahman.

Next we looked at Buddhism. As we discovered Buddhism is more like a philosophy than a religion. A Buddhist really has nothing to do with God. It is all about the **four noble truths**. Do you remember what those are?

- Life is characterized by suffering.
- Suffering is caused by attachments.
- We can overcome our attachments
- The Holy eightfold path is the way to overcome suffering.

To recapitulate the **eightfold path**, it is:

- Right views
- Right intention,
- Right speech,
- Right action,
- Right livelihood,
- Right effort,
- Right mindfulness and
- Right concentration.

The last two paths involve meditation and yoga. Those two disciplines can also be used effectively by Christians as we try to deepen our faith.

Last Sunday we looked at Islam. Probably the most important thing to remember from that message was the **five pillars of faith**.

- The faith - there is only one true God and *Allah* is his name.
- The Prayers - praying to Mecca five times a day. I did not mention it last week, but these prayers are to be done at specific times. For today in Detroit, May 16th, the times are 6:09 am, 1:29 pm, 5:28 pm, 8:48 pm and 10:24 pm. You can actually find the times on the internet.
- The Fasting - this is done the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the 9th month in the Islamic calendar. In 2010 Ramadan begins August 11th and goes to September 9th.
- The Charity- giving 2.5% to the poor and needy.
- The Pilgrimage- Muslims are to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in their life time. This pilgrimage is called the *hajj*.

The other important learning about Islam is that they view the Quran the same way we view Christ. Muslims believe the visions that were given to the prophet Mohammed and put into the Quran are the final and definitive words of God. This is what we believe is true about Jesus Christ.

This morning we will look at one other major religion of the world: Judaism. As I began this series I shared some numbers. Of the approximately 6 billion people in the world only about 14 million are Jews. Considering the next lowest is Buddhism at 360 million, the number of Jews is very small.

So why are they considered a “major” religion? It was out of Judaism that Islam and Christianity both came. It is the influence that Judaism had and has on these two largest of the world’s religions that cause it to be considered a major world religion.

As we look at this faith this morning it is a lot less foreign than the other ones we have looked at. We know a lot about their history and story because we read about it in our bibles. The same scriptures our Jewish brothers and sisters claim as holy we find in our sacred text. If we are formal in claiming our faith, we would say we are in the Judeo-Christian faith.

I know most of us are familiar with the story, but it is good to review the history of the Jewish people. It all starts around 2000 BC. God calls Abraham and his wife Sarah to leave their country and be lead to a land flowing with milk and honey. This land, at the time called Canaan, was to be the homeland of God’s chosen people.

Abraham has a son named Isaac. Isaac marries Rebekah and together they have two sons; Esua and Jacob. Jacob wrestles with an angle and has his named changed to Israel. Jacob, or Israel, has 12 sons. These sons become the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel.

During a famine in Canaan, the Jewish people go to Egypt. Life is good there and they have a good relationship with the Pharaoh. Over time they become numerous and a new Pharaoh comes to powers. Threatened by the Jews, they are forced to become slaves. They are kept in this servant hood for 400 years.

God calls Moses to lead God’s people out of bondage and to the promise land. Eventually they make it make to their land and become a mighty nation. Every year at Passover this story is remembered. This story of deliverance and freedom is the defining story for Jews.

As you read through the Old Testament you will find a consistent pattern. There is covenant making and covenant breaking. After a time of punishment, the covenant is restored for awhile, but then it is broken again.

One thing you will notice when reading the Hebrew Scriptures is the anticipation of a messiah. The prophecy points to a savior who will come and restore the fortunes of the Jewish people. We believe that happened in Jesus. For the Jews they are still waiting for the messiah.

Before I touch on the differences between our faiths concerning Jesus, I do want to lift up a several things about modern day Judaism.

For the Jew there are two significant books. There is the Torah, what we call the Old Testament and the Talmud. I have learned from interfaith conversations that if we want to viewed favorably by our Jewish brothers and sisters, we would refer to the first 39 books of our bible as the Hebrew Scriptures.

If you put yourselves in their position, it does make sense. To say something is old, what does that suggest? Outdated, obsolete, maybe not really practical! Calling someone's sacred text as old is not that kind.

You might have heard of the Talmud. It is the oral tradition that developed in interpreting the law. First and foremost, it includes commentary, called the Mishnah. Over the centuries rabbis wrote the Mishnah to help people interpret the Torah for their lives.

One other helpful thing to know about Judaism is that it is not a monolithic faith. Just as there are denominations within Christianity, there are branches or divisions within Judaism. In the United States there are 3 major divisions: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Part of what divides these groups is how they view The Torah and the Talmud.

I will have us watch a part of a DVD with Rabbi Mark Levin, the leader of a Reform congregation in Leawood Kansas. In a nut shell, the Orthodox and Conservative branches are more strict when following the instructions within the Torah. For example, if you are an Orthodox Jew you do not work on the Sabbath. Driving a car, cooking, even turning on a light switch is deemed to be work.

There are other tings I could bring up, but I don't think we want to be here all morning. Before I end I want to say a few things about Jewish Christian relationships.

As I said before Jesus Christ is the dividing factor between our faiths. We see him as the fulfillment of scripture. There were many in Jesus' day that felt the same thing. We have to remember that the first to follow "the way" were Jews. The word Christian and the dividing of the two faiths came later.

For the Jews that did not acknowledge Jesus as the Savior, they pointed to scripture and their understanding of the Messiah. In their thinking the Savior was going to bring "peace". This peace meant occupying and controlling your own land. It was to return to the glory years of King David.

Jesus Came and went and the Romans were still in control. The Jews were still at the mercy of a ruthless Roman army. How could Jesus be the one they were waiting for when nothing seemed to change?

Early on there was tension between the two faiths. The Jews tended to be low key. The Jews would try to make deals with the authorities, thereby watching out over their interest. The new followers of Jesus often were disruptive. All you need to do is read the book of Acts to see how much trouble Paul caused.

A major turning point came in 312 when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Since the church at the time became Roman, it stopped claiming that the Romans were the primary actors in killing Jesus. Instead, Christians claimed that the Jews crucified the Messiah. Thus began anti-Semitism amongst Christians.

Over the years Jews have faced anger and distrust from Christians. Sometimes it has been overt violence while other times it is behind the back put downs or black balling. This history taints the relationship between Jews and Christians.

Several months ago I was talking with a holocaust survivor at my gym. Mike knows I am a pastor of a Christian church. He was asking where the Christian church was when it all happened. What is my message now about such an event?

I told Mike the church was wrong to be silent. The lesson learned from that event is to speak out against injustice whenever you see it happening. It may not be popular, you may risk some things, but one can't sit by and watch people being hurt, maimed or killed all because of who they are.

Over the years much has been done to better Jewish Christian relations. On a personal level we can try our best to be more understanding of all those different than us. Whenever we find a stereotype entering into our mind, chase it out. When we hear others making prejudiced comments, challenge them. When we have opportunities to talk about our differences, do so with a curious mind.

When we do those things others will respect us and be more open to listen to us. Christ did commission us to make disciples. It is very hard to convince someone who has a strong faith to give their lives to Christ. All we can do is share what we believe and live our lives following Jesus' example. If we speak love and show love, then others might just be willing to hear what we have to say.

Having looked at 4 religions of the world, I still believe Christ offers a salvation you cannot find anywhere else. I respect those of other faiths. I would never want to come off with an arrogant attitude. Only God knows what is in the heart of others. And whether a person is going to heaven or hell when they die, well that's God's call not mine.