

JUDAISM (PART 2 OF 4): THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

Rating: 4.7

Description: Who are the chosen people and did they fall from grace?

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Published on: 02 Apr 2012

Last modified on: 11 Sep 2012

In the last article we learned that that the organised and structured religion revealed to Prophet Moses came to be known as Judaism. The name probably originated from Judah, the son of Prophet Jacob and leader of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, or from the ancient Kingdom of Judah. The Jews, under God's guidance became a powerful people with kings (who were also Prophets of God) including Saul, David, and Solomon, who built the first great temple. More detailed information about the Ancient kingdom of Israel can be found on this website.^[1]

However Jews, as a people, trace their history back to Prophet Abraham, as do Muslims. Islam Judaism and Christianity are known as Abrahamic faiths or the three great monotheistic faiths. In Islam and Judaism the people known as Jews are usually referred to as the Children of Israel. This should not be confused with the state of Israel that exists today in the Middle East. Israel is another name for Prophet Jacob (in Islam Yacub), therefore the term 'the Children of Israel' refers to the descendants of Prophet Jacob.

Over a thousand years after Abraham, the Jews were living as slaves in Egypt; their leader was the Prophet of God known as Moses^[2] to Christians, and known in Judaism as Moshe Rabbenu ('Moses our teacher'). He led his people out of slavery in Egypt and on their behalf he received the Torah that included not only the Ten commandments, but a total of 613 rules (or commandments) that some Jews continue to live by to this day.

Jews believe there is only One God, with whom they have a strong and binding covenant.

"That I will surely bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand that is on the seashore, and your descendants will inherit the cities of their enemies. And through your children shall be blessed all the nations of the world, because you hearkened to My voice." (Genesis 22:18)^[3]

And God said to Moses; "And now, if you obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth. And you shall be to Me

a kingdom of princes and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Exodus 19: 5&6)[4]

According to various Jewish websites, the fact the Jews refer to themselves as God's chosen people does not mean that they are in any way superior to other peoples. Biblical verses such as Exodus 19:5 simply imply that God selected Jews to receive and study the Torah, to worship God only, to rest on the weekly Sabbath, and to celebrate the festivals. Jews were not chosen to be better than others rather they were selected to receive more difficult responsibilities and a more onerous punishment if they fail.

God, they say, appointed the Jews to be his chosen people in order to set an example of holiness and ethical behaviour to the world.[5] This is confirmed in Islamic scripture and literature.

"O Children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you and that I preferred you..." (Quran2:47)

"And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guidance for the Children of Israel (saying): 'Take not other than Me as (your) Protector, Lord, or Disposer of your affairs.'" (Quran 17:2)

"O Children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you, and fulfil (your obligations to) My Covenant (with you) so that I fulfil (My Obligations to) your covenant (with Me), and fear none but Me." (Quran 2:40)

Thus, to fulfil their covenant, Jews keep God's laws and seek to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives. A religious Jew tries to bring holiness into everything he does, by doing it as an act that praises God, and for such a person, life becomes an act of worship. The Quran however goes on to state that the Jews failed to keep their covenant with God.

"And believe in what I have sent down (this Quran), confirming that which is with you, the Torah and the Gospel, and be not the first to disbelieve therein, and buy not with My Verses a small price (i.e. getting a small gain by selling My Verses), and fear Me and Me Alone." (Quran 2:41)

"So, because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them and made their hearts grow hard. They change the words from their (right) places and have abandoned a good part of the Message that was sent to them..." (Quran 5:13)

Islam teaches that all prophets came to their people with the same proclamation, "...**O my people, worship God, you have no other God but Him...**". (Quran 11:50). Among the prophets that Islam recognises is a chain of Prophets sent to the Jews. Prophets that Jews, Christians and Muslims are all familiar with. This chain includes Prophets Moses, King David, King Solomon, Zechariah, John the Baptist and Jesus,

son of Mary. The Jews disbelieve in Jesus son of Mary even though his mission was clear.

“And in their footsteps, We sent Jesus, son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him, and We gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirmation of the Torah that had come before it, a guidance and an admonition for the pious.” (Quran 5:46)

Prophet Muhammad is the last of the Prophets, yet the Jews also disbelieve in him and disbelieve any references made to him in the Torah.

“O you who have been given the Scripture (Jews and Christians)! Believe in what We have revealed (to Muhammad) confirming what is (already) with you...” (Quran 4:46)

In part 3 of this series of articles about Judaism we will discuss the similarities between Judaism and Islam.

Footnotes:

[1] (<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/2435/>)

[2] (More information can be found here. <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/3366/>)

[3] (http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/8217/jewish/Chapter-22.htm)

[4] Ibid.

[5] (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/>)

The web address of this article:

<https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/5124/judaism-part-2>

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