



Judaism

An Outline of Prothero's *God is Not One*,
Chapter Seven: The Way of Exile & Return¹



Confucius, Moses, and Solon sculpture,²
East Pediment of the US Supreme Court

General Information

- Judaism is the smallest of the great religions (about 14 million) but may be the greatest in influence—from the accomplishments of individual Jews to the influence on its offspring religions, Christians and Muslims.
- *[Although the patriarch Abraham (c. 1800 BCE) is considered to be the father of not just the Israelites but also the Christian and Muslim religions, there is very little mention of him in either Prothero or Novak. Prothero mentions him briefly as the progenitor of monotheism (p.26). See the Internet for additional insight as to his place in religious history.]*
- The name Israel refers to one who has wrestled with God.
- Jews can be ultra-orthodox or atheist, and everyone has an opinion.
“Wherever you have two Jews there are always three opinions.”

¹ This outline quotes or paraphrases Prothero throughout with occasional Novak references.

² Image of Moses, et al, is from the Internet. Note: Greek Axial Age sage: Solon (born c. 630 bce —died c. 560 bce). All students should know the story of Draco and Solon.

- Argument is very important in Judaism. A Hasidic saying, "If you are proved right, you accomplish little; but if you are proved wrong, you gain much: you learn the truth."
- Judaism is *not* a missionary religion; it has no creed; excommunication is rare; argument is constant; and, it has many interpretations among the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Humanist (essentially atheist) branches.
- Because the Jewish god is just He punishes His people for their wrongdoing; because He is merciful He extends to them the opportunities and responsibilities of a new relationship.
- The task of human life is to walk humbly before God and repair the world.
- Redemption is of this world orientation and accomplished by practicing God's commandments, which brings holiness to our imperfect world.
- Jews believe God is not of human form and is "beyond comprehension and description."
- Judaism is a religion of stories and law, and Jewish communities are held together more by ritual and ethics than by doctrine.

WRITTEN TORAH: Tanakh, the Jewish Bible

- "The Jewish Bible is properly called the *Tanakh*, a diverse anthology of many voices, sources in books about God, kings, commoners, proverbs, prophecies, love poems, history, law, and apocalyptic visions written over 1000 years. *Tanakh* is a word derived from 3 consonants T, N, and K, standing for *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*."³
 - **Torah**, a word that is similar to the Hindu *dharma*, means "law" or "the teaching" and is a term that is used for the entire Jewish bible (Tanakh), but specifically refers to the first 5 books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These are also the first 5 books of the Christian *Old Testament*. And, unlike the Christian 10 commandments, the Torah has **613 Mitzvot** as their commandments of God.
 - **Nevi'im** means "prophets," 21 books that record the words of the Jewish prophets that focused on reminding the Israelites of God's displeasure when they disobey his commandments.
 - **Ketuvim** means "other writings" and refer to the 13 books remaining in the Tanakh, the written teaching of Israel.

ORAL TORAH: The Talmud

- "Tradition holds that God gave the Israelites two teachings, written and oral."⁴ The Talmud, the oral Torah, is a repository of 2000 years of Jewish scholars interpreting and arguing about their law, legends and philosophy.
- According to Prothero, the Talmud is a vast tangle of 2½ million words of

3 Philip Novak, *The World's Wisdom*, (HarperOne, 1995, pp. 175-6). Novak's treatment of the major scriptures of Judaism is useful and used here.

4 Ibid., p. 213

competing interpretations, including arguments between two rabbis, Hillel and Shammai (1st/2nd century CE) over more than 300 issues. In these arguments, Hillel, "Judaism's model human being," wins the arguments most of the time.

- Both sides of the arguments are the words of God, "but the law is in accordance with the view of the house of Hillel."⁵
- "Jews are trained not just to abide ambiguity but to glory in it (ibid.)."

Exile and Return

- The **Problem** in Judaism centers on the community, not the individual, and it is their exile from God and His commandments that is the problem.
- The **Solution**: Return to God by telling the Stories and obeying His Laws.
- *[Prothero doesn't explicitly say this, but the first exile really begins in their story of creation and home of the first humans, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. By disobeying God and eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil they were banished from their home in Eden.*
- *The second exile was when they were captured by the Egyptians and taken into slavery under the Pharaoh. This story of exile (slavery) and return (escape crossing the Red Sea) is so well known it is not included here.]*
- FIRST Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians (Iraq) in 586 BCE. The first Jerusalem Temple built by king Solomon was the sacred center of the Israelite religion. Defeated Israelites were taken to Babylon.
- Without their temple, the Israelites created the synagogue as a place of prayer and study as a "portable" spiritual center of their community.
- 538 BCE, 48 years later, the Persians (Iran) conquered the Babylonians, and Israelites were allowed to return to Jerusalem, if they wished.
- Most stayed in Babylon, but those who returned rebuilt the Second Jerusalem Temple (dedicated in 515 BCE), then compiled the first 5 books of Moses in the 5th century BCE. This period began the story of exile and return that is "the structure of all Judaism(s)."
- SECOND Jerusalem Temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. All that remained and remains today is the western wall (the "wailing wall"), and Jews were sent into exile again. Some stayed and some were scattered throughout the Roman empire.
- 1948, after WWII and the Jewish holocaust the state of Israel was founded. Many returned to the new nation but many remained in their adopted countries where they had lived for centuries.
- TODAY, Orthodox Jews pray 3/day for the restoration of the Jerusalem Temple. BUT, the original temple ground was taken by the Muslims where they built their Dome of the Rock, the oldest Muslim building in the world.
- Dome of the Rock, built in the 7th century CE, commemorates the belief that Muhammad ascended to heaven from that exact spot on a visit to Allah.

Moses: Liberator and Lawgiver

- Israelites were liberated from slavery in Egypt by God with the help of Moses, but their freedom was not to do whatever they wanted; it was to become servants of God and follow His commandments (Mitzvot).
- Book of Exodus is followed by Book of Leviticus, from freedom to the submission commanded by God's law in the Torah, cataloging in great detail what they can and cannot do.
- The 613 Mitzvot are divided into "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not."
- But, the essence of the Torah, according to Reform Jews, is the Golden Rule. According to Hillel, "Do not unto others that which you would not have them do unto you. That is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary."
- The laws of Leviticus have both an ethical and ritual dimension (i.e., how to mourn, what to eat/not eat, how to observe Shabbat, et cetera).
- Most of the 613 Mitzvot are about the ritual observances, not ethical laws.

When Judaism became Judaism

- Hinduism has its roots in the Vedas; Judaism has its roots in the Tanakh. The Tanakh describes a religion of priests and sacrifices no longer followed after the religion was codified between the 1st destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (586 BCE) and 2nd temple destruction in 70 CE.
- The Israelite religion of priests performing rituals and sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple was transformed into a religion of rabbis reading and interpreting texts in synagogues.
- Today, Jews follow the "dual Torah": the Written Torah (Tanakh) and the Oral Torah (Talmud).
- Shabbat (sabbath) is entering a sacred place set apart by time. On Shabbat everything slows down.
- Afterlife. The Tanakh has almost nothing about life after death. THEN, with the influence of Greek speculation on immortality of the soul, Jews adapt their beliefs to speculate on bodily resurrection (*body*, not soul). Jewish bodily resurrection is the origin of the Christian early ideas about resurrection. Despite the afterlife addition to their beliefs, all Jews affirm the focus should be on *this* life, not the next.

3 Primary Jewish Groups Today

1. Reform Jews: Most liberal; 39% of US Jews; gender equality, female rabbis, emphasis on ethics, but also ritually observant and committed to social justice.
2. Orthodox Jews: 21% of US Jews; defenders of the Torah and tradition, emphasizes the law, the 613 Mitzvot, only male rabbis. Hasidim, considered Ultra-Orthodox, aka the "pious ones" emphasize heart-felt spirituality [see Bhakti Yoga] with an attempt to communicate with God always and everywhere.

3. Conservative Jews: about half-way between Reform and Orthodox, emphasize tradition but open to modern biblical criticisms, looser laws for women and homosexuals and for Shabbat observance than Orthodox, 33% of US Jews.

The Kabbalah

- "Buddhism is strong on the experiential dimension of religion and weak on the ethical dimension; Judaism is just the opposite." Community focus, not the individual is of primary importance.
- Today, Jews that seek a personal spiritual experience frequently explore Buddhism or their own mystical tradition, the Kabbalah.
- Traditionally, the Kabbalah (referred hereafter as "K.") was reserved for married men of advanced age and experience in Torah studies. Most popular in medieval times, then fell into decline with the age of enlightenment's emphasis on reason. Restored in the 20th century but often dismissed as "pop Kabbalism" for the Hollywood crowd.
- K. roots are in 13th century Spain from a collection of books called Zohar that is thought to be from the 2nd century CE, though some believers say it goes back to Moses—and even back to creation itself.
- K. Thesis: Before creation all was one. With creation, the One exploded into many different fragments out into the universe with a spark of the divine in each fragment [*see Stoicism*].
- Our job is to "reverse the primordial exile of the many to the One, returning to the original wholeness" by following God's commandments (Mitzvot).
- K. is full of esoteric speculation not only on God but on numbers, letters, consonants, and vowels. God is endless, limitless, and beyond mental comprehension.
- BUT, God has 10 emanations, one of which is its feminine manifestation, called Shekhina. She has gone into exile, but is drawn back to rejoin the masculine emanations when we follow Mitzvot.
- [*Compare teachings of the K. with Posidonius and early Greek ideas wrt the daimon—evolution of the soul until we become daimones.*]

^^^

Addendum

[The following is AI generated from an Internet entry]:

Jewish Holidays

Passover

A spring holiday that celebrates the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and themes of rebirth and liberation

Rosh Hashanah

The Jewish New Year, a festive holiday that celebrates the new year and is marked by families gathering together

Purim

A holiday that commemorates the overthrowing of Haman's plot against the Jews

Sukkot

A harvest holiday that commemorates the huts that ancient Jews lived in during harvest season

Yom Kippur

The Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year, and the end of a 10-day period of repentance

Shavuot

The Holiday of the Giving, which celebrates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai

Simchat Torah

A day when Jews complete the cycle of Torah recitation and begin a new annual cycle of reading the Torah

Hanukkah

A celebratory time that doesn't carry the same weight as other Jewish festivals

Tisha B'Av

A day that commemorates tragedies that have occurred throughout Jewish history, including the destruction of the First and Second Temples

Bar and Bat Mitzvah

A bar or bat mitzvah is a Jewish coming-of-age ceremony that marks the transition into adulthood and responsibility within the Jewish community. The term "bar mitzvah" literally translates to "son of the commandments," and "bat mitzvah" translates to "daughter of the commandments."

Age

In Jewish tradition, boys become bar mitzvah at age 13 and girls become bat mitzvah at age 12.

Responsibility

The ceremony signifies that the child is now responsible for their actions and can decide how they want to practice Judaism.

Participation

The child may participate in the Shabbat service by reading from the Torah, leading prayers, or giving a speech.

Family

Family members are often honored by being called up to say a blessing or read from the Torah.

History

The bat mitzvah ceremony has become more popular over time, especially in more liberal branches of Judaism.

Plural

The plural of "bar mitzvah" is "b'nai mitzvah," which can also refer to a ceremony for two or more people, or for someone who identifies non-binary.

^^^