

# Book review on main topics and important definitions

[Religion](#), [God](#)



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## **Introduction**

Judaism is one of the five main world religions. The other four include Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Evidence available from archaeological and historical work shows that human beings in virtually all societies have since their humble beginnings held beliefs in supernatural beings they revered and worshiped. Religion is a set of beliefs that involves attributing the origin and cause of the universe as well as all things found in it and nature to a supernatural being (s) commonly known as God(s) who is held to be all knowing and all powerful. Religion can also be understood as an associative body of believers like Judaism and others who uphold a given separate and distinct body of values and virtues held to be Godly, true and righteous. This task is a brief summary of Mary Fisher’s book titled “ Living Religions” on Judaism.

One of the most important themes that come out at the beginning of this chapter is the divergence of Christianity from Judaism. Fisher argues that Judaism was on the brink of extinction during the destruction of Judea and that it was Rabbis one of the survivors of this destruction who founded the

post-biblical Judaism. She also adds that Christianity emerged around Jesus of Nazareth and survived the destruction. Comparatively, Fisher asserts that the two religions have used the Hebrew Bible as a fundamental document but in the long run the two have advanced each on its own way.

From a cultural standpoint Fisher argues that even though every one in a judaistic cultural setting was taught the basics of Torah (the five books of Prophet Moses) a majority of men kept themselves busy with an in depth learning of the scriptures. As a result, of the cultural understanding of the different men's and women's duties and roles, women were not allowed to take part in formal Torah study Fisher (233). Literacy was largely a preserve for the male members of the society. It is important to note that, the tendency to give men a leading role and first position in societal affairs be it social, economic or political have been a common cultural element in virtually all of the diverse world societies for the better part of the history of humanity.

Judaists tendency to centre their beliefs in the books of Moses and their teachings as opposed to a geographical location or a priesthood that is susceptible to politics have enabled the scattered Jewish community to preserve a sense of unity and common inheritance of law, language and way of life. This characteristic is also observable in other oriental religions especially Buddhism, Hinduism and to some extent Islam. The expert teachers of law (Torah) popularly known as the Rabbis took the responsibility of interpreting the Hebrew scriptures through a study process known as Midrash. Their study gave rise to two types of teachings and decisions one

legal (halakhah) and the other non-legal(haggadah) Fisher (233). The author further adds that the rabbis also undertook the application of the teachings to their contemporary lives and that the task of living the interpretation was introduced by Hillel the Elder who lived between 30BCE and 10 CE.

From a Rabbinical traditional point of view, Moses was given two versions of the Torah that is the written Torah and the Oral Torah. Fisher adds that the Midrash process resulted into enormous legal teachings and spiritual literature and that in about 200 BCE, Judah the Prince finished a publication of legal teachings of the oral Torah which came to be known as Mishnah. Fisher terms Midrash as an open ended process because important commentaries have continued to come up over time and that there is no solitary influence that have dominated the reading and interpretation of Torah. She also notes that Rabbis have naturally disagreed in their interpretations but the disagreements from different times have been presented together. Fisher (234) argues that the perpetual interlinking of these chronological observations as if all the Jews were taking part in a single Torah-study race has been a crucial unifying factor for the widely dispersed normally maltreated Jewish people. Midrash teaches that Shekhinah (God's presence in the world, in a relationship to people) came to the earth during creation but as a result of human wickedness she went back to heavens.

During the middle Ages Jews settled in different parts of the infamous Roman Empire but larger numbers established themselves among the Zoroastrian Persians in Mesopotamia. While there Jews continued with their intellectual

endeavors in spite of the completion of the authoritative Babylonian Talmud Fisher (234). Fisher argues that mystical yearning has been part and parcel of Jewish traditions and that during the Middle Ages Jewish magical traditions known as Kabbalah was put in writing. The most important Kabbalah book is recorded as The Zohar . Isaac Luria's works who is hailed as the most influential scholar in Kabbalah led to a different form of Kabbalahism in the eighteenth Century known as Hasidism Fisher (238). Hasidism first developed in Ukraine and Poland and later in other parts of Eastern Europe and upto date its influence continues within Judaism.

According to Fisher (240), American Judaism was founded by progenies of the Jewish exiles from Spain in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in 1654. However; massive Jewish migration to the US began during the mid-nineteenth century when large numbers of Jews emigrated from the German-speaking Europe. She records that by 1880 there were 250, 000 Jews in the US and that today the US has the largest population of Jews of roughly six million Jews. The chapter also records Holocaust the murder of almost six million European Jews by the Nazi leadership during WWII. These Jews constituted a third of the Jews in the world.

## **Conclusion**

As briefly demonstrated above, Judaism has a wide history of Evolution and a rich culture that traces its origins to the distant period in the history of the Jews. Fisher's chapter on Judaism is an informative record of this religion which provides precious knowledge on the above mentioned religious elements of Judaism. Other features discussed within the chapter include:

the love for God, monotheism or believe in one historical God, suffering and Faith among other significant characteristics of Judaism.

### **Work cited**

Fisher, Mary, P. Living religions 7th edition, New York: Prentice Hall, 2007.