

A comparison between christianity and judaism essay sample



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Judaism and Christianity share a common origin, they share many scriptures and their ethical codes are similar. The similarities are both historical and theological in that Christ is seen by his followers as the fulfilment of Jewish prophecies. The major differences come with the matter of interpretation. Jews have criticised Christians for diluting monotheism with their ideas of the Trinity and Christians condemned for rejecting Jesus as Messiah. The first persecution of Christianity were Jewish, but as non-Jews came to predominate they in turn persecuted the Jews.

The first Christians were after all Jews, as was the founder of Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth and his first followers. After all the coming of a Messiah had been long predicted in Jewish scriptures e. g Isaiah 56 v 1 :-

Thus said the Lord: Observe what is right and do what is just;

For soon My salvation shall come, and my deliverance be revealed.

There are many other verses which were interpreted by Jews and Christians alike as referring to the coming of a messiah or anointed one. e. g. Isaiah 63v 1 :-

Who is this coming from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah

- who this majestic in attire, pressing forward in his great might? It is I
- who contend victoriously, powerful to give triumph.

The major difference between the two groups is their interpretation of who this Messiah is. The Jews were looking for an earthly Messiah. They say that he will herald a time of earthly peace and as this clearly did not happen in

Jesus' life time or afterwards he cannot in the Jewish view have been the Messiah.

Many Jews in the first century however thought that he could have been the Messiah. early on in the New Testament (Mark 1 v 25) we have someone calling out ' " I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' And on Palm Sunday the crowds in Jerusalem call out ' Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!' It seems that even the Roman authorities recognised that Jesus was looked upon as a candidate for messiahship when they made an inscription over him at the time of the crucifixion, ' the King of the Jews' - there had been a number of claimants over the years. The Romans may have been trying to be ironic, or perhaps it was the closest they could come to defining the crime for which this prisoner was being executed, but there were those among the onlookers who had really believed that the description was accurate.

Some 30 or so years later, in a letter to the church at Philippi, Paul quotes from a hymn already in use in the infant church. In Philippians 2 v 6-11 Jesus is clearly identified as not only Messiah, but also as part of the godhead:-

His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus.

This passage, like so many other Christian references refers back to the Jewish scriptures, in this case Isaiah 45, v 23.

In recent years there has been some coming together of the two sides in groups referred to as Messianic Jews. They have their own synagogues, keep Jewish laws, but accept Jesus as Messiah and Saviour. This would mean that they very similar to the earliest Christians. The history of these people is outlined on the web site ' The History of Messianic Judaism'.

Another major difference between the two groups is the method of belonging. Jews are almost always born into the faith, but it is perfectly possible to be a Jew by inheritance (through the maternal line) and have no faith at all. In Christianity the method of joining a church varies a little, but in Roman Catholicism a baby is baptised soon after birth and later comes to the point for themselves at the time of confirmation, where they themselves accept Christ as their saviour. Other branches of the church may or may not practise infant baptism but all would stress the need for a mature understanding of what being a Christian is.

In some cases this is done by vows made at the time of confirmation, but in others it can take the form of adult baptism by total immersion. Whatever the ritual carried out the relationship with Christ as Son of God and Savior is the emphasis. Although Jewish young people have a coming of age ritual in the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah (becoming a son or daughter of the law) in their early teens they are already Jewish. In the case of Christianity one may or may not have Christian parents but one has to come to faith for oneself before it can really be claimed that someone is a Christian. In this sense

Judaism is an exclusive faith whereas Christianity is inclusive. This was a point reached very early in the history of the church. In Matthew 28 v 18 there is what Christians refer to as the Great Commission. The risen Jesus is about to leave his followers as he prepares to ascend to heaven and he says to them :-

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.

In Acts 10 we have Peter's vision when visiting Jaffa. He realised that both Gentile and Jews were to be part of the church and by the end of the chapter former pagans were being baptized. This was the point at which Christianity (then known as Nazarenes or followers of The Way) began to pull away from its Jewish origins. It was no longer a sect of Judaism, but quickly became a faith in its own right. The Jewish food laws and rites such as circumcision were no longer felt to be necessary in order to have a relationship with the living God. Quite quickly the majority of new members were coming from non-Jewish rather than Jewish backgrounds.

Judaism is a religion of laws. The Torah contains 613 commandments, many of them quite precise rules about what may or may not be eaten. These food rules were later codified in the Shulkhan Arukh.. Jesus on the other hand , in Matthew 5 v 17, said that he had come not to destroy the law but to fulfil it. Christianity is more concerned with keeping the spirit of the law than in legalism. Judaism was based upon a sacrificial system with the Jerusalem temple as its center. When the temple was destroyed by the Romans in C. E.

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70 that system came to an end. The priesthood now longer played a part and synagogues and family life became the center of Jewish life . The previous period is nowadays referred to as Ancient Judaism and the more modern version that developed after the fall of the temple is called Talmudic or Rabbinic Judaism. A rabbi leads the individual congregation, but although he or she ministers to the people he is not a priest but rather someone learned in the law. On the other hand many Christian ministers are considered to be priests. They may not be concerned with the sacrifice of animals, but celebrate the sacrifice that Christ is believed to have made.

The Jewish way back to a better relationship with God is by seeking forgiveness. In former times this was done through the sacrificial system. They are felt to be partially removed through prayer and also by putting things right with others. They cannot believe that through the sacrifice of Jesus sins are forgiven.

Some Christians would see their religion as the natural successor of Judaism, but not all agree. The writer of the web page ' The differences between Christianity and Judaism' feels that the differences are too great for this to be considered so. He emphasizes Jewish monotheism, a belief that does not allow that God is made up of several parts, however these are divinely united. Some Jews would see this ' dividing up' of God as a reversion to the many gods of the pagans. Christians on the other hand believe, in some way that is difficult to comprehend with human minds, that God is at the same time one and three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

For many Christians the concept of original sin is an important one i. e. the idea that through the sin of the first man sin entered the world and that this inborn sin is present in each person and must be atoned for. The Jews on the other hand feel that man is free to choose for himself between following an inclination towards good or evil. They see temptation as being an opportunity to choose the good and so being necessary for moral improvement. Many religious Jews believe that Judaism offers the best of ethical system.

There are similarities between the two sides. Both believe that they worship the God who revealed himself to Abraham. It is the nature of that God that they have differing views upon. Their views of each other also vary.

Christians would say that Jews worship the true God, but that their revelation of him is incomplete. Jews on the other hand would say that Christianity, however sincere, is deceived as to the true nature of God.

The symbols of Christianity, the cross, crucifixion, dove, anchor, fish etc are all associated with the person of Jesus Christ. Jewish symbolism has more varied associations, for example with their inheritance - the Star of David which appears on the Israeli flag and is believed to be the symbol that King David carried on his shield. They also have the Mezuzah which, placed on the doorpost, serves to remind the inhabitants and their visitors of the constant presence of God. The Chai symbol also refers to the living God. Another common symbol is the menorah or 7 branched candlestick. It is said to be a reminder that Jews are meant to be a light to the nations as is stated in Isaiah 42 v 6. The web site Judaism 101 gives details of other symbols. The vine is one is one that is referred to several times in the Jewish scriptures. <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-between-christianity-and-judaism-essay-sample/>

The Jerusalem temple was decorated with a large golden vine and it appears on Jewish coinage. It is described on the web page ' the Seven Species' as the symbol of the fertility of the land, but also as symbolic of the Jewish people as a vine planted by God - symbolism that Jesus used in John 15

In Christianity Christ is perceived as having made the ultimate sacrifice, Philippians 2 v 8 ' being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross' and so Christians celebrate this on a regular basis when they come together at the eucharist or communion and participating is seen as a means of grace. In Judaism grace is obtained by adherence to the commandments.

There may be some differences of opinion as to what actually takes place during communion or the Eucharist, but all who take part are convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah, come to save his people. The Jews on the other hand are still waiting. They may think that Jesus really existed, that he told wonderful stories, but do not believe in his resurrection or power of salvation and this remains the biggest difference between the two.

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