

The Abrahamic Religions:

An Introduction to World Religions

**Judaism: Historical
Background**

Session Week 4

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Aim and Learning Outcomes – Week 4 Session

Aims

- This session aims to provide the General Background of Judaism Religion.

Learning Outcomes

- Students have some understanding of:
 - Historical Judaism.

Historical Judaism

- Several people have played their part in the development of the religion of Judaism. The most famous fall into two groups:
 1. The Patriarchs and
 2. The Prophets
- Abraham and his descendants Isaac and Jacob are the patriarchs. Of these the first is the most important.
- As we discussed earlier (Lesson 3), Abraham was a patriarch of the 3 Abrahamic Religions, included Judaism.
- Abraham is portrayed in the Holy Bible as a man who trusted the promises of God contained in these words:

“Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

(Genesis 12:1-3 NIV)

The Covenant

- Abraham's travels did not end when he reached Canaan. It is clear from the Holy Bible that he was a nomad, but Canaan seems to have been his base.
- In the story of Genesis 17 is told of an agreement, or covenant, which God Who had led Abraham from Ur and Haran to Canaan made with him.
- Abraham was to walk before God and be blameless, that is, he was to worship this God who had revealed Himself to him and serve him only.
- God, in turn, promised that he would make Abraham the father of many people and give him and his descendants the land of Canaan 'for an everlasting possession'.
- The account of Abraham's relationship with God is:
- To be found in the Holy Bible in Book of Genesis Chapters 12-15
- The covenant with Abraham was renewed with Isaac, his son, and with Jacob, his grandson (Genesis 26:23-25, 28:10-17)
- These were covenants made with individuals.

The Hebrews - Judaism

- Group of Hebrews who found their way to Egypt – the family of Jacob
- The Holy Bible (Exodus 1:8-14) describes the changed fortunes of the Hebrews who now became slaves.
- From among the slaves came a man called Moses (Moses was brought up in the Egyptian court as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Exodus 2:10)
- Moses in good stead later in his life when he found himself of the Hebrew slaves, trying to persuade the Pharaoh to let them leave Egypt for the land of the ancestors, Canaan.
- The Holy Bible suggests that the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses' own father, revealed Himself to Moses and commanded him to return to Egypt to deliver the Hebrew people.
- It is tempting to spend time trying to explain the Mystery of God manifesting Himself through a bush which burned but was not consumed.

The Hebrews – The People of the Covenant

- At mount Sinai the Hebrews were made the people of the Covenant, and a priesthood was established to maintain it through worship.
- The great festivals of Passover, Tabernacles (or Booths), and the Day of Atonement are all associated with the Exodus in the Hebrew Bible (Torah).
- Torah means ‘teaching’, and the tradition of Judaism is that Moses received not only the Ten Commandments at Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17), but the whole of the Torah which he later wrote down.
- Moses was allowed to see the Promised Land, but not to enter in (Deuteronomy 32:48-52 and 34:1-12). This final pronouncement on his life puts him in his place in the Hebrew tradition.
- Moses was but a man, no more, through a great servant of God.
- The Hebrew nation, which at Sinai had become the people of the Covenant, was greater than Moses or any other man or woman.
- After Moses came many other spokesmen, the prophets who were charged with the task of keeping Israel faithful to the Covenant (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

Conclusion

- Judaism - 4000 year old tradition
 - The Patriarchs: Abraham – Moses (19th - 13th cent. BCE)
 - Moses – the Hebrew Monarchy (13th - 6th cent. BCE)
 - The Babylonian Exile and Post Exilic Judaism (6th cent BCE - 1st cent. CE) ("Second Temple" period)
 - Rabbinic period (1st - 7th cent CE)
 - Medieval Judaism (7th - 18th cent. CE)
 - Modern Judaism (18th cent. - current)
 - an ethnic religion
 - Began as a religion of an extended family, a tribe of peoples known as the Hebrews
 - Jewish people today continue to think of themselves as a family, a nation of peoples, as well as a religion
 - God is understood by the Jews to intervene, to act, in and through history time and again, especially in the history of Israel (the people)
 - Jews look to God's action in the world

Next Session

- We continue to cover Judaism and its belief systems.

Reference

- Robinson, George (2001) Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals (Pocket Books)