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Judaism or Christianity - posted by Shanu, on: 2011/1/16 11:09

Judaism or Christianity:

The Law of Moses or the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Judaism or Christianity: Should Jews follow the Law of Moses or the New Testament Gospel? Did Jesus fulfill Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah and His kingdom?

Judaism or Christianity: Which is the true religion of God? Should Jews follow the Law of Moses or the Gospel of Jesus? Are Jesus and the New Testament a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah and His kingdom? Did Jesus do miracles like Moses and other prophets? How should a Christian treat those who hold the Jewish faith?

Introduction:

Judaism is a major world religion, and the Jewish race is widely known throughout the world. In the 1990's there were over 18 million Jews in the world, of whom only about 5 million lived in the nation of Israel. The rest are scattered throughout all the nations of the world.

The purpose of this study is to examine the religion of Judaism.

What do Jews today believe? How does Judaism differ from Christianity? Should we follow the Law of Moses or the Gospel? Are Jesus and the New Testament a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah and His kingdom? How should a Christian treat those who hold the Jewish faith?

Judaism may be defined as the religion that believes in worshiping one God based on the teachings of the Law of Moses as interpreted by Jewish traditions, and on the belief that God still has special blessings for the descendants of Jacob.

There are today three main branches:

- 1) Orthodox Jews are the strictest in following the Old Testament and Jewish traditions.
- 2) Progressive (Reformed) Jews are loosest in interpreting and following the Old Testament.
- 3) Conservative Jews are midway between Orthodox and Progressive Jews.

Zionism is a Jewish movement to restore the nation of Israel, and it includes people of all Jewish branches.

Despite the changes in Judaism, the major differences between modern Jews and Christians are basically the same as in the first century.

Christians can know how to relate to Jews by following the example of Jesus and the first-century church.

Consider the teachings of Judaism regarding the following subjects:

I. Teaching Regarding the New Testament
vs. the Old Testament

Jews reject the inspiration of the New Testament, claiming we should still follow the Law of Moses. They believe God intended the Old Law to be binding for all time, never to be removed and replaced by the New Testament.

A. Evidence for the Temporary Nature of the Old Testament

Old Testament evidence that God intended to remove and replace it.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 - In the Old Testament itself, God promised to make a new covenant not according to the one given at Mt. Sinai. Hebrews 8:7-13 quotes Jeremiah, claiming it was fulfilled when the New Testament of Jesus replaced the law given at Sinai (cf. 10:15-17).

Psalms 110:4; Zechariah 6:12,13 - Christ was prophesied to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Under the Law of Moses, priests had to be of the tribe of Levi, but the Christ was also prophesied to be a descendant of David of the tribe of Judah (2 Sam. 7:14f; cf. Matt. 22:42).

Hence, if the Christ would be a priest, yet of the tribe of Judah, God must have intended all along to change the Law of Moses. This is argued in Heb. 7:11-18. (Note: If the Levitical priesthood was adequate to meet the needs of man, why did God promise a different priest?)

These Old Testament passages show that God never intended the Laws of Moses to be permanent. He said all along that they would someday be replaced by a different system.

New Testament statements about the replacement of the Old Testament

Since Jews do not accept the authority of New Testament teachings, we will first show what the New Testament claims. Then we will present evidence to validate those claims.

Hebrews 10:9,10 - Hebrews gives a detailed comparison between the Old Testament ("first will") and the New Testament ("second will"). It claims that God sent Jesus to "take away" the first and "establish" the second. It then shows the benefits of the New Testament and why we should accept it as the replacement of the Old.

Romans 3:20 - Why then did God give the Old Testament? It was given, not to justify men, but to give men the knowledge of sin. It showed that "all have sinned" (v23). This is proved by numerous quotes from the Old Law itself (v9-18).

Galatians 3:22-29 - The law gave regulations showing people were sinners, but it had no means to forgive sins permanently (Hebrews 10:3,4). It proved that all are sinners, confined under the guilt of sin, so all need forgiveness. This should lead people to accept a system of real forgiveness when it came. Hence, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

This forgiveness is offered by Jesus' death on the cross through the teachings of the gospel (New Testament). Since this system of faith has now come, we are no longer under the schoolmaster (Old Law). By accepting the New Testament, Jews are inheriting the blessing God promised to Abraham's descendants.

These are the claims of the New Testament. Now consider:

B. Evidence that the New Testament Was Revealed from God

Jews must first be challenged to consider the basis on which they conclude that the Law and the Prophets were inspired by God. When they recognize their reasons for accepting the Old Testament as being a valid revelation from God, then we can show that identical evidence exists to prove that the New Testament is also a valid revelation from God.

Historical accuracy

The Old Testament is a reliable historical record, and the same is true of the New Testament.

The Jewish historian Josephus, together with other secular historians, confirm the accuracy of the New Testament on over 40 different points (Paley's Evidences of Christianity, pp. 271-287).

Charles Pfeiffer: "Naturally, archaeological support is not available for every Biblical event. Yet it is true to say that it has corroborated the substantial historicity of the Biblical record from the patriarchal age to the apostolic age" (The Biblical World, p. 65).

The book of Acts, in particular, was confirmed to be accurate by Sir William Ramsay. As a skeptic, he sought to disprove the historical accuracy of Acts. His efforts so completely convinced him of the accuracy of the book that he became a believer in it (Archaeology and Bible History, Free, p. 317).

We must accept the historical accuracy of the New Testament just as surely as we do the Old Testament. This being true, it is valid for us to cite the New Testament as historic fact.

The evidence of miracles

The purpose of miracles

Exodus 4:1-8; 14:31; 1 Kings 18:36-39 -- Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Daniel, and other Old Testament prophets proved they were true spokesmen for God by doing great miracles. Miracles were supernatural acts which men could accomplish only

y if God truly was working through them. This is valid reason to accept their teachings as being inspired by God.

But the same kind of evidence just as convincingly demonstrates that Jesus and the New Testament apostles and prophets were inspired by God.

Consider some examples of their miracles:

John 8:17,18; Deuteronomy 19:15; 17:6 - Old and New Testaments both teach that events are established as historic fact on the basis of the testimony of witnesses. Consider the testimony of witnesses about the miracles done by Jesus and His apostles:

* Raising the dead - John 11:17-44; Matthew 9:18-26; Acts 9:36-42; 20:9-12

* Casting out demons - Matthew 9:32-34; 17:14-18; Acts 16:16-18

* Walking on water and calming a storm - Matthew 14:22-33; 8:23-27

* Feeding thousands of people with a boy's lunch, and having more food left over at the end than existed at the beginning - Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-39

* Instantaneously and completely healing all kinds of diseases, including obvious, incurable diseases such as leprosy, lameness, blindness, deafness, and missing limbs - John 4:46-54; 5:1-9; 9:1-11; Acts 19:11f; 3:1-12; 14:8-10

Remember that the New Testament writers can be trusted as historically accurate, just as the Old Testament writers can. And the New Testament accounts constitute the testimony of eyewitnesses, just like the Old Testament required.

Not even the Jews of the first century could prove these miracles to be frauds.

Even those who did not believe the gospel still admitted the validity of the miracles of Jesus and His apostles.

John 11:47,48 - The Jewish leaders admitted regarding Jesus that "this man works many signs."

Acts 4:16 - They likewise admitted, regarding the healing of a lame man by Peter and John, "For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it."

Many New Testament miracles actually fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (cf. Joel 2:28-32 to Acts 2:17-21).

There is at least as much evidence for believing in the validity of New Testament miracles as there is for Old Testament miracles. If Jews accept Old Testament prophets on the basis of miracles, they must also accept Jesus and New Testament prophets as being from God.

The evidence of fulfilled prophecy

On many occasions Old Testament writers predicted the future, and those predictions came true. This is one of the strongest proofs of the validity of the Old Testament. It proves God was working through these men, else they could never have known about these future events.

However, in order to see the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies, often we must turn to the New Testament. Specifically, as we will study in more detail later, Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies concerning the Messiah.

Likewise, Jesus and His apostles and prophets often predicted future events and those predictions came true just like with Old Testament prophets.

Hence, the evidence of fulfilled prophecy supports the inspiration of the New Testament just as certainly as it does the Old Testament. In fact, any Jew who would attempt to disprove that the New Testament is a revelation from God, would with equal force disprove his Old Testament.

The inspiration of the Old Testament stands or falls together with the inspiration of the New Testament. The evidence for one is equally as valid as the evidence for the other. You cannot consistently accept the inspiration of one and not the other.

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II. Teaching about Oral Tradition

In addition to the Old Testament, Jews accept oral traditions as religious authority. These traditions were supposed to have been handed down by word of mouth from the time of Moses throughout many generations till the third to sixth centuries A.D., at which time they were written down, along with the comments of rabbis, in the Talmud. The rabbis also give official interpretations of these traditions and even modify them to adapt them to changing times, and the people are expected to accept these teachings.

A. The Old Testament Itself Condemned Human Tradition as Authority.

Matthew 15:1-9 - One of Jesus' major criticisms of the Jews was their adherence to the traditions of the elders. He said it made their worship vain, because it was based on man-made laws. But Jesus here quoted Isaiah 29:13, where the Old Testament itself said God is displeased if we fear Him on the basis of commands of men.

Deuteronomy 4:2 (12:32) - Men are forbidden to add to or take from God's revealed commands. Only God has the right to change His commands, and we have seen that eventually He did so. But men have no such right.

Leviticus 10:1-3 - Nadab and Abihu illustrate God's attitude when men presume to modify His instructions. They were slain because they took the fire for the incense from someplace other than where He instructed.

Servants of God must always have valid Divine authority for their practices. Over 1700 years passed from the time Moses lived till the time oral tradition was written down. What proof is there that these traditions are really of divine authority? And what right do religious teachers have making changes in God's law and then binding them on others?

B. Traditions Sometimes Plainly Contradict the Old Testament.

First-century examples

Matthew 15:1-20 - Contrary to the Law, Jews justified people who refused to care for their elderly parents, provided they made a contribution to the temple service.

Matthew 12:9-14 - Contrary to the true meaning of the Law, the Jews condemned Jesus for doing good to others on the Sabbath. Jesus had not violated the law, but only man-made tradition about the law.

Modern-day examples

Since the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, Jews have offered no animal sacrifices, nor have they kept the feast-days, etc. Yet the Old Law plainly commanded these as conditions of forgiveness of sins.

Violation of the Sabbath and many other acts were capital crimes under the Law, yet Jews do not kill people today for violating those laws.

Other examples demonstrate that, Jewish traditions constitute man-made laws that are added to God's law or in some cases flatly contradict it. This is true today, as it was in Jesus' day.

III. Teaching about the Nation of Israel

Jews believe that, for all time, they will remain God's chosen people according to the covenant with Abraham. In particular, they look forward to the reign of the Messiah on earth, during which time Jews will always have a favored status over non-Jews. Non-Jews may receive some benefits of the Messiah's kingdom, but never as fully as Jews do. Jews must always receive dominant blessings.

Non-Jews can receive eternal reward after the Messianic age, if they meet certain conditions; but Jews are born to receive that destiny. Jews reject any doctrine which gives Gentiles equal standing with Jews in the Messianic kingdom or which affirms Jews and Gentiles will receive their eternal rewards on the basis of the same conditions.

Consider the Bible teaching about these points.

A. The Old Testament Prophesied that Gentiles Would Receive the Blessings Offered by the Messiah.

As is characteristic of prophecy, these truths are not stated as clearly as in the New Testament fulfillment. But when viewed in light of first-century events, the meaning of the prophecies is clear.

Isaiah 49:6 - The servant (Messiah) who would restore Israel, would also be a light to the Gentiles and extend salvation throughout the earth. This is cited in Acts 13:47 showing the blessings of Jesus were for Gentiles too.

Amos 9:11,12 - When God restores the tabernacle of David (i.e., his family would rule as king), all nations (not just one nation) will be called by God's name. This is quoted in Acts 15:13-18 to show Gentiles could be saved on the same conditions as Jews.

Genesis 26:4 - God made great promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (12:3; 22:18; 28:14). He said their descendants would become a great nation and receive the land of Canaan, and also that through their descendants all nations would be blessed.

This is fulfilled in Jesus who came as the Messiah and offered forgiveness to all people of all nations (Gal. 3:8,16; Acts 3:25f). Note that this blessing was to come through Abraham's descendants, but it was to come to people of all nations.

This was the last of the three promises to Abraham. When it was fulfilled at Jesus' death, there was no longer any reason for Israel to have any special status in God's plan. All promises to national Israel have been fulfilled.

Matthew 28:19f; Mark 16:15f - Salvation is now available to all people from all nations in the whole world on the basis of the same conditions. He who believes and is baptized will be saved.

Isaiah 2:2,3 - When the Lord's law went forth from Jerusalem and His house would be established, all nations would flow into it. This is fulfilled in the New Testament church, which is the Lord's house (1 Tim. 3:15). Gentiles as well as Jews may enter (Eph. 2:11-20).

B. The Conversion of Gentiles in the New Testament Was Expressly Confirmed by Miracles.

As discussed previously, the purpose of miracles was to confirm teachings as being revealed by God. God expressly sent numerous miracles expressly to confirm the doctrine that Gentiles can receive the blessings of salvation by the gospel on the same conditions as Jews.

Acts 10 & 11 -- The first Gentile convert of the New Testament was told God is no respecter of persons. He will accept people of all nations if they will fear Him and work righteousness (10:34,35). God gave several miracles to confirm this conclusion to Peter and the Jews with him. Peter cited these miracles to confirm his action of baptizing Gentiles (11:4-18):

- * Peter received a vision teaching him not to call unclean those things that God had cleansed (11:5-10)
- * The Holy Spirit expressly told Peter to go with the messengers sent from Cornelius (11:11,12).
- * An angel appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter who would tell him what to do to be saved (11:13,14).
- * The Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and his household, granting them miraculous powers (11:15-17).

The conclusion was that these miracles proved God granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life (v18). To reject this conclusion would be to withstand the revelation of God (v17). This is exactly what is done by Jews today, when they reject the salvation of Gentiles according to the gospel.

Acts 15:1,5,7-13 - The first-century Christians debated the question of whether Gentiles could be saved on the basis of obedience to the gospel. The issue was settled on the basis of the Old Testament prophecies previously cited and on the basis of the miracles that confirmed the work of Peter and Paul in converting Gentiles.

The Jewish nation served a very important role in bringing Christ into the world. All people should appreciate this. But this work has been completed, and salvation is now available to all people of all nations on the same basis. We are now in the Messianic age, and there is no favoritism for Jews now nor in the future.

IV. Teaching about the Kingdom of the Messiah

Jews anticipate a Messianic age sometime in the future. Some believe the Messiah will be a person who reigns; others think Old Testament references to the Messiah are just symbolic references to a coming age.

In this kingdom Israel will be an earthly nation richly blessed as it was under David and Solomon. The dead will be raised and temptation to sin will end. God will protect Israel from all foreign oppression and give her revenge over her enemies. This age will last for a limited period of time and afterward men will receive eternal rewards. Current events in the state of Israel are taken as signs this Messianic age may be about to begin.

This concept is basically the same as was held by Jews in the first century. Hence, we can respond to it in the same way that Jesus and His apostles did then. It is also similar to premillennial doctrine among professing Christians, so we can respond to it much as we would to that doctrine.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus is the Messiah and His kingdom now exists. It is the church, which is a spiritual or religious rulership (Col. 1:13; Matt. 16:16-19). Old Testament prophecies are not as clear regarding the nature of the Messianic kingdom as is the New Testament fulfillment. Nevertheless, several Old Testament passages confirm the spiritual nature of the kingdom and are difficult to harmonize with the Jewish view.

A. The Messiah Would be A Prophet and a Priest

Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19 predicts a prophet like Moses. This is fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 3:22,23). If the Messiah were also a prophet, this would imply a spiritual aspect to His work. Note that any who would reject this prophet (as Jews have done) would be held accountable by God.

Psalms 110:4; Zechariah 6:12,13 - The Messiah would be a priest while He was king, a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was both king and priest at the same time (Gen. 14:18). This clearly prophesies a kingdom that would be spiritual in emphasis. It is fulfilled in Jesus (Heb. 5:6-10; 6:20; 7:17).

B. The Jewish People Would Reject Their Messiah When He Came.

Isaiah 53:3 - He would be despised, rejected, and not esteemed by His people.

Psalms 22:6-8 - He would be reproached, despised, mocked.

Psalms 118:22,23 - He is compared to God's chief cornerstone, yet the builders would reject Him. This was fulfilled when the Jews rejected Jesus (Acts 4:11).

Instead of picturing a rulership with great honor to the Jews and victory over their enemies, the prophecies say the Jews would actually reject their own Messiah when He did come. This is exactly what they did and still do to Jesus.

C. The Messiah Would Suffer and Be Killed.

Rather than the victorious earthly king that the Jews expect, many prophecies picture a suffering, dying Messiah.

Zechariah 12:10 - They would look on Him whom they pierced (the context is Messianic). This was fulfilled (John 19:37).

Zechariah 13:7 - A sword would be turned against the shepherd. He would be smitten and His sheep scattered. This was fulfilled according to Matt. 26:31.

Isaiah 53 - He would be as a lamb led to the slaughter (v7), cut off out of the land of the living (v8). His grave would be with the wicked and with a rich man in His death (v9). He would pour out His soul to death (v12). The whole context describes one who dies as a sacrifice for the sins of others (v5-12). It is applied to Jesus in Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32ff.

One of the main reasons Jews reject Jesus is that they cannot believe in a Messiah who suffers and dies instead of reigning gloriously over an earthly kingdom. Yet this is exactly what their Scriptures predicted. It also shows the spiritual purpose of His coming and His kingdom.

D. The Messiah Was Greater than Any Mere Man.

Psalms 110:1 - The Messiah would be David's lord.

Matthew 22:41-46 - Jesus asked the Jews of His day how this could be. They believe the Messiah is just a descendant of David who would be a king like David. Why then would David call him his master or ruler? First-century Jews could not

answer, and neither can modern Jews.

The New Testament shows that the Christ was Divine. He was not just an earthly man, a descendant of David. He was also the Son of God, the eternal Creator, God in the flesh (John 1:1,14; 20:28). Hence, He was both David's son (descendant) and David's Master ("lord").

It is true that some Old Testament passages, if taken literally, could be viewed as prophesying a literal, earthly kingdom. But it must be remembered that many prophecies were never intended to be taken literally but figuratively or symbolically.

All the passages we have cited conflict with the Jews' view about the Messianic kingdom. And all these passages harmonize with the New Testament concept of a spiritual or religious reign. The New Testament gives an inspired interpretation of these Old Testament prophecies, showing their fulfillment in Jesus. And remember that the New Testament teaching was confirmed by the miracles done by Jesus, His apostles, etc.

V. Teaching about Jesus

Jews generally reject Jesus as the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. Some accept Him as a great teacher, even a prophet. But none accept His miracles, resurrection, Deity, or that He was Messiah. Their reasons for rejecting Him are:

- * He established a spiritual kingdom, not an earthly one.
- * He claimed Deity.
- * He suffered and died.
- * He rejected and violated the Jews' oral traditions.
- * He taught that forgiveness and the blessings of the kingdom are the same for all men, with no favoritism for Jews.
- * He taught that the Law of Moses would be removed.
- * He rebuked the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, who then became jealous of His following (Matt. 6:1-18; 13:10-15; chap. 23; 27:18; John 7:7ff; 12:42f; etc.).

We have dealt specifically with nearly all these points elsewhere in this study. Consider now Jesus' claims and the evidence that they are true.

A. Jesus' Claims

- * He claimed He would rise from the dead (Matt. 16:21 and other verses below).
- * He accepted worship (Matt. 28:9; cf. 4:10).
- * He claimed power to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12).
- * He claimed to perform miracles (Matt. 9:1-8; 11:2-6; 12:22-37; 17:1-8; John 5:1-18,36; 9:1-41; 10:37f; 11:47; etc. - see previous notes on miracles).
- * He blessed people for calling Him God and the Son of God (John 20:28-31; Matt. 16:15-18).
- * He claimed that people must believe in Him as the savior of mankind or they would die in sin (Luke 19:10; John 8:24).
- * He claimed to be the Messiah/Christ (Matt. 16:16f; Luke 4:16-21).

Jews deny all these claims. Therefore, they cannot consistently accept Him as even a good man or great teacher. Either His claims are true and He is who He claimed, or else His claims are false and He is a fraud, a liar, an impostor, and a blasphemer.

John 8:17,18; Deuteronomy 19:15; 17:6 - Remember the principle that a man's guilt or innocence must be determined on the testimony of witnesses. Consider the testimony of the witnesses for Jesus' claims.

B. Jesus' Miracles

We earlier discussed the evidence for Jesus' miracles, thereby validating His claims on the basis of eyewitness testimony. The evidence for Jesus' miracles is stronger than that for any other prophet, including Moses, Elijah, and other Old Testament prophets. If Jews deny Jesus' miracles, they may as well deny the miracles of all their own prophets.

But the purpose of miracles was to confirm that a prophet really was speaking by the guidance of God. If we grant Jesus' miracles are true, then we must admit the truthfulness of every one of His claims.

C. Jesus' Fulfilled Prophecies

John 5:39 - Jesus claimed that He fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and therefore His claims must be true. Here are a few of the prophecies He fulfilled:

- * Born in Bethlehem - Micah 5:2 (Matt. 2:1,6)
- * A descendant of David - 2 Sam. 7:14f (Acts 13:22f)
- * Born of a virgin - Isa. 7:14 (Matt. 1:23; Luke 2:26ff)
- * A prophet to prepare His way - Isa. 40:3ff; Mal. 3:1 (Matt. 3:3; 11:10; Luke 3:4,5; John 1:23)
- * A prophet Himself - Deut. 18:15-19 (Acts 3:22,23)
- * A priest - Psa. 110:4 (Heb. chap. 5-7)
- * Perform miracles - Isa. 53:4 (Matt. 8:17)
- * Deity - Psa. 45:6; 110:1; 97:7 (Heb. 1:6-8,13; Matt. 22:42-46; John 1:1,14; 20:28)
- * Triumphal entry into Jerusalem - Zech. 9:9 (Matt. 21:5; John 12:15).
- * Betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver - Psa. 41:9; Zech. 11:12f (John 13:18; Matt. 27:9,10).
- * Killed (including many details of His death) - Zech. 13:7; 12:10; Isa. 53; Psa. 22:18; Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Psa. 34:20 (John 19:36,37,24; Matt. 26:31; Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32f)
- * Raised from the dead - Psa. 16:10 (Acts 2:25-28; 13:33-35)
- * Rejected by the Jews (see previous notes).

In addition, Jesus Himself made many predictions, which came true (Matt. 16:21; chap. 24; 26:33-35; John 13:21-30).

The Jews' own Scriptures confirm Jesus' claims to be true. How could He fulfill all these prophecies and not be the Messiah? If the Jewish Scriptures are true, then Jesus is the Messiah. To deny He is Christ is to deny the truthfulness of Old Testament Scriptures.

D. Jesus' Resurrection

The apostles preached everywhere that Jesus was raised from the dead (Rom. 1:4; Acts 2:14-36; etc.). If Jesus really was raised from the dead, then this is surely a great miracle, which validates His claims. Consider the strength of the testimony regarding His resurrection. And remember that the Law itself clearly teaches that historic fact is determined on the testimony of witnesses.

The number of accounts

The following New Testament accounts testify about the events surrounding Jesus' death:

- * Matthew 27,28

* Mark 15,16

* Luke 23,24

* John 18-21

* Acts 1,2,9 (and other sermons by the apostles)

* 1 Corinthians 15

The number of eyewitnesses

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 lists a number of appearances to various eyewitnesses. The accounts listed above give additional appearances. Altogether over 500 people saw Jesus alive after He had died.

The nature of the accounts

These accounts are presented calmly with many historical details. Jesus appeared to people, spoke to them, ate with them, and let them touch Him. The tone is completely factual, not fanatical or imaginative.

These appearances were to individuals and to large groups under various conditions and in various places. The witnesses were skeptical and inquiring, not gullible. They did not believe till after conclusive proof was given.

Since the truthfulness is determined on the basis of eyewitness testimony (Deut. 19:15; etc.), how can this testimony be explained away? Can the witnesses be proved incompetent? If not, then on the basis of the principles of their own law, Jews must accept Jesus' claims as valid.

The empty tomb

It cannot be denied that Jesus' body was gone from the tomb. If it had not been, the Jews would have produced it and disproved the disciples' claims as soon as they began to preach Jesus was raised.

How can the empty tomb be explained? What happened to the body?

The lack of contradictory evidence in the first century

The disciples began to preach the resurrection within a few weeks of the event. Many enemies disbelieved the claim and who would have gladly disproved it if they could. If it could be disproved, those who were present at that time would have been in the best position to do so. They had at least as much reason to try to disprove it as modern Jews do.

Yet the only attempt they ever made to disprove the evidence was to claim the disciples stole the body while the guards slept (Matt. 28:11-15). Yet how could the men know what happened while they slept? Since the penalty for losing a prisoner while sleeping on guard was death, why would the guards admit this if it really were true? Why would the disciples preach the resurrection and then suffer and die for it without ever retracting it, if they knew it was a lie?

Instead of disproving the resurrection, many first-century Jews accepted it and became Christians. The others simply persecuted the Christians to try to keep them quiet. But no one ever disproved the claim of the resurrection. If people then could not disprove it, how could anyone today even hope to disprove it?

The Jews' reasons for rejecting it

We should not be surprised that Jews rejected Jesus' claims. Their rejection of Him was prophesied (see passages already cited). And throughout their history they have rejected God's messengers (Isa. 6:9f; Matt. 23:29-37; Acts 7:38-41, 51-53). The surprising thing is not that they rejected Jesus. The amazing thing would have been if they had accepted Him!

The Jews' rejection of Jesus does not prove He was not the Messiah. It just proves the Jews were true to the practices of past generations! Honest Jews need to open their hearts to consider the evidence for who Jesus is, not just reject Him because Jews have traditionally done so.

VI. Teaching about Forgiveness of Sins

Jews generally admit that they violate their law from time to time. How can they be forgiven of these sins?

They are not forgiven by the sacrifice of their Messiah.

Jesus died to save Jews as well as all other people. But the Jews reject Him and the sacrifice He offered, so they cannot be forgiven by it (John 8:24; Mark 16:16). Furthermore, they deny that their Messiah will die for their sins when He does come. Hence, they cannot be forgiven by their Messiah's sacrifice. They are not forgiven by Old Testament animal sacrifices.

Ezekiel 18:20 - The soul who sins would die. The Old Testament condemns all who did not keep it sinlessly. The only way to avoid condemnation under that law was to keep it perfectly (Lev. 18:5).

Romans 3:10-18,23 quotes numerous Old Testament passages showing the Jews did not keep their law sinlessly. Hence, all were condemned by it.

Jeremiah 31:34 predicted that, unlike the Old Testament, the New Testament would provide a way by which sins would never again be held against the people. As the New Testament explains, the sins of the people under the Old Testament were remembered every year (Heb. 10:3-6,17).

So even if the Jews offered animal sacrifices, their sins would not be permanently removed. By seeking to stay under that system, they attempt to continue a system that condemns them for their sins and gives no solution to the problem! In fact, they do not even offer the animal sacrifices any more.

Since the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, no sacrifices have been offered at all. Jews today believe that offerings are not needed; rather they believe they can be forgiven simply by repenting and praying.

Yet the law, which they claim is still in effect, clearly required the sacrifices (see Scriptures listed previously). By failing to offer them, the Jews leave themselves with no means of forgiveness. In fact, they even compound their sin by disobeying the commands to offer the sacrifices.

Leviticus 17:11 explains that atonement requires the shedding of blood. Sin requires death as a punishment (as described above). God allows one who is innocent to die in the place of the one who is guilty. But the life is in the blood, so shedding of blood is necessary for forgiveness (Heb. 9:22).

The animal sacrifices were only a symbol looking forward to Jesus' perfect sacrifice. But without a sacrifice there is no forgiveness, and the Jews are without a sacrifice.

Every Jew stands condemned by the very law to which he claims allegiance. It condemns his sins but offers no permanent forgiveness. Jews no longer attempt to attain even the temporary forgiveness the law offered, and they reject the sacrifice of the Messiah. Hence, Jews are condemned by their own law to be sinners with no means of forgiveness!

Conclusion

The differences Christians have with Jews today are the same differences we have always had. Therefore, we must offer Jews the same evidence we have always offered them. Only by accepting the gospel can they receive the real blessings their law offers.

The gospel fulfills the Old Testament. It promises that all men, Jew and Gentile, can be saved by the sacrifice of Jesus.

Isaiah 59:20 - "The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the Lord. But to be saved, Jews must believe in that redeemer (Isa. 28:16). These prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus. All Jews who want forgiveness can have it freely through Him. But those who do not believe will die in their sins (John 8:24).

Every Jew on earth ought to rejoice to accept the gospel of Jesus. Their Messiah has come. Let them accept Him and rejoice!

Note: If you would like to study further about related Bible topics, we have a number of other study materials on our web site that should interest you. Please see the links listed below.

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