The Jewish Religion

To understand Judaism, it is helpful to consider it as a people, a faith, and a covenant.

A People

Judaism represents a single people, or tribe - the descendents of Abraham, the father of the Jews, through his son Isaac. Of course, over the 4000 years since Abraham there has been conversion into, as well as, out of Judaism, and extensive intermarriage and intermingling of people, but Jewish people's identity as the "seed of Abraham" remains as a central theological principle of Judaism.

As a result, Judaism has never considered itself as appropriate for all peoples, and the evangelization of non-Jews has never been a priority. Rather, it represents a covenant made by God to a single people, for the special role that that people were to play among all the nations of the earth. Judaism sees the Jews as having been specially chosen by God to live in a uniquely close relationship with Him, not just for their own sakes, but to intercede for the rest of humanity as a "priestly people"("You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" - Exodus 19:4), bringing the knowledge of God, and His blessings, to the whole world ("I have

given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" - Isaiah 42:6). As a leading rabbi recently wrote:

> "The Jew is a creature of heaven and of earth, of a heavenly Divine soul which is truly a part of Godliness clothed in an earthly vessel...whose purpose is to realize the transcendence and unity of his nature and of the world in which he lives within the absolute unity of God. The realization of this purpose entails a two-way correlation: one in the direction from above downward to earth; the other, from the earth upward. In fulfillment of the first, man draws holiness from the Divinely given Torah and commandments, to permeate therewith every phase of his daily life and environment; in fulfillment of the second, man draws upon all the resources at this disposal as vehicles for his personal ascendancy and, with him, that of the surrounding world."[7]

This self-understanding as a special people chosen for a special vocation often leads Jews to place a primary emphasis on maintaining their separate identity.

A Covenant

Judaism is based on the special covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants through the generations. The story is told in Genesis 12-22, contained in both the Christian and the Jewish Bible. About 2000

years before Christ, when all the peoples of the earth were pagans, worshiping a host of false gods and idols (which were in fact fallen spirits, or demons - "the gods of the pagans are demons", *Ps* 96:5), the one true God revealed Himself to one of the pagans, Abram (later renamed Abraham) and asked him to travel to a distant land, where God would make him the father of a great people. After Abraham demonstrated his fidelity through a series of tests, culminating in his willingness to sacrifice his only legitimate son to God, God rewarded Abraham with the promise of a special blessing on his seed, and that through them all the peoples of the earth would be blessed:

> "I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (*Gn* 22:16-18).

This was the origin of the Jewish people, of the special covenant God made with them, and of God's promise to one day send, through them, the Messiah, to establish God's reign on earth.

A Faith

The Jewish Scriptures

God continued His special relationship with Abraham's son, Isaac, Isaac's son Jacob (later renamed Israel, hence the use of "Israel" to refer to the Jewish people), and Jacob's sons, who became the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. During a time of famine, Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt, where they were later made slaves. One of them, Moses, was appointed by God to be their liberator. Moses led the Jews out of their captivity in Egypt and through the desert to the "promised land", then called Canaan, later called Israel. During the journey through the Sinai God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him the first five books of the Bible, that Judaism calls the "Torah", or "Law." The Torah became the cornerstone of the Jewish faith. Over the succeeding centuries, revelations made to other Jewish prophets were accepted as of Divine Origin and added to the original Torah to make up the Old Testament, which Jews call the "Tanakh". Tanakh is a Hebrew word made up of the initial consonants of the three words "Torah", or "law", the five books revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai; "Nevi'im", or "prophets", referring to the revelations given to the prophets; and "K'tuvim", or "writings", which refers to the wisdom literature such

as the books of Psalms, Proverbs, etc. The Jewish Old Testament in its entirety is accepted as Divine Revelation by the Catholic Church.

The Jewish canon of scripture - that is, the exact collection of books to be considered Sacred Scripture and included in the Tanakh - has varied from century to century and place to place. A few hundred years before Christ, a compilation of such writings were collected and translated into Greek for use by the Jews, many of whom no longer understood Hebrew. This Greek language version of the Jewish Old Testament is known as the Septuagint.

Later, however, a number of books contained in the Septuagint were eliminated from the Jewish canon. When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD and the Jews expelled from that city, the leading rabbis regrouped in the town of Jamnia, which became the center of Jewish learning. There, in the beginning of the second century AD, it was decided that the more recently written books of the Septuagint should be excluded from the canon. The reason for this is unclear, but since it was done by the same rabbis who condemned the New Testament and Jewish followers of Jesus, some think it was done to purify Judaism from the taint of Christianity.

The Catholic canon of the Old Testament includes those books dropped from the Jewish canon at Jamnia, while the Protestant canon of the Old Testament rejects

them. It is hard to see why a decision made by Jewish authorities decades after the Church was formed should be considered relevant for the Church, especially when made by the same authorities who anathematized Christians and condemned the writings of the New Testament.

The final stage in the development of the Jewish scriptures took place between the third and the fifth century after Christ, when Jewish authorities wrote down the oral tradition that had developed within Judaism. This became known as the Talmud, or “teaching”. It is the record of discussions and exegesis by leading rabbis over the generations, and is granted an authority within Judaism comparable to that of the Old Testament.

A Jewish Creed

The closest that Judaism comes to an official creed is the "Thirteen Principles of Faith" of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), the primary Jewish sage of the middle ages. They serve as a good introduction to the central tenets of the Jewish faith.

The first five of the principles revolve around the heart of the Jewish faith - the belief in, and fidelity to, the one true, uncreated, creator God (in particular contrast to the polytheistic pagan idol worship of those around them in the times of the Old Testament). They are:

1. God is the Creator and Ruler of all things. He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.
2. God is One. There is no unity that is in any way like His. He alone is our God He was, He is, and He will be.
3. God does not have a body. Physical concepts do not apply to Him. There is nothing whatsoever that resembles Him at all.
4. God is first and last.
5. One may only pray to God. One may not pray to anyone or anything else.

The next four of the principles assert the truth, divine origin, and immutability of the Jewish Scriptures:

6. all the words of the prophets are true.
7. the prophecy of Moses is absolutely true. He was the chief of all prophets, both before and after Him.
8. the entire Torah that we now have is that which was given to Moses.
9. this Torah will not be changed, and that there will never be another given by God.

The next two are:

10. God knows all of man's deeds and thoughts. It is thus written (Psalm 33:15), "He has molded every heart together, He understands what each one does."
11. God rewards those who keep His commandments, and punishes those who transgress Him.

These reflect the belief in God's absolute sovereignty, omniscience, and omnipotence, which is central to Judaism. He knows and sees all things ("You know my resting and my rising, you discern my purpose from afar." *Ps* 139:2). He has given the Jewish people, as his special priestly people, an extensive body of law, much of which applies only to them, that will be a source of peace,

happiness, and blessing to them if they obey it. If they fail to, they will be punished.

Judaism expects, in general, that the reward or punishment for good or bad behavior will occur in this life, as well as in the next. The central prayer of Judaism, recited three times a day, is the "Shema", drawn from Deuteronomy 11, which promises temporal good fortune as a reward for obedience to God:

> If you obey My commandments that I command you...then will I send the rain for your land in its season... And I will provide grass in your field for your cattle, and you shall eat and be sated. Be careful that your heart be not tempted and you turn away to serve other gods and bow to them. For then God will be furious with you and will block the heavens and there will be no rain and the land will not yield its produce, and you will perish quickly from the good land that God gives you. (*Dt* 11:13-17)

Of course, Judaism also recognizes a mystery behind suffering, and that at times the good suffer too (e.g. the story of Job). But there is no well-developed theology of the redemptive value of suffering in Judaism, or in the Old Testament, comparable to what is found in Christianity. This is only logical, from a Christian viewpoint, since it was only with the coming of Christ that suffering took on its ultimate redemptive value, through one's uniting it with the suffering of Christ.

The next of Maimonides' principles reflects the Jewish faith in the coming of the promised Messiah, who will establish God's reign on earth:

12. the Messiah will come. However long it takes, I will await His coming every day.

The belief in the coming of the Messiah is absolutely central to traditional Judaism (although in recent times the more modern forms of Judaism have moved away from this belief). The Old Testament contains hundreds of prophecies relating to the Messiah which detail who he will be, of what lineage, where and when he will be born, what he will do, how he will transform the world, and so forth.[8] Many of them are, however, somewhat mysterious or veiled in nature.

There is also some apparent contradiction between them - in particular, some seem to predict a Messiah who will come to suffer and die in atonement for the sins of the people (e.g. the Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah 53), while others portray a Messiah who will come in victory to restore the glory of the Israel and establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity on earth (*Is* 11, 25).

This apparent contradiction is the topic of extensive discussion in the Talmud, which concludes that there will be, in fact, two Messiahs, one who will come to suffer

and die (referred to in the Talmud as "Messiah son of Joseph"), and one who would come in victory ("Messiah son of David"). This view mirrors quite closely the Christian resolution of the same apparent contradiction, which recognizes some of the Messianic prophecies as referring to Christ's first Coming (to suffer and die), and others to his return in glory at the Second Coming.

The traditional Jewish liturgy contains prayers for the coming of the Messiah during daily morning, afternoon, and evening prayers.

The final principle of faith is:

13. the dead will be brought back to life when God wills it to happen.

Judaism has a much less developed theology of the afterlife than does Christianity, as this principle reflects. The general sense in the Old Testament (typified in the Book of Job) is that there is an eternal life which entails reward and punishment, but the details are best left in the hands of God. (This uncertainty in Judaism about the afterlife is reflected in the New Testament in the disputes between the Pharisees and the Sadducees on just this issue - *Mt* 22, *Mk* 12, *Lk* 20, *Ac* 23). Although there is discussion of both heaven and hell in the Talmud, it leaves room for a variety of opinions on heaven, hell, the resurrection, and even reincarnation.

From a Christian perspective it makes sense that the Jewish scriptures - revelations made to man before Christ - should be vague about the afterlife, since according to Christianity before Christ descended to the dead after the crucifixion, there were no human souls in heaven. Rather, the souls of the just were consigned to a shadowy underworld, the "limbo of the fathers", awaiting His coming to open the gates of Heaven.

Jewish Laws

One distinguishing characteristic of Judaism is the emphasis on following a wide range of ritual laws. Traditional Judaism identifies 613 commandments in the Old Testament, which in aggregate dictate one's behavior in almost every aspect of life. Many of these laws require further elucidation and specification - for instance, what constitutes the sort of "work" that is prohibited on the Sabbath? This elucidation is provided, sometimes at great length, in the Talmud.

From a Jewish perspective, this ritual law is natural and intrinsic to the role of the Jews as a "priestly nation". It is natural that as such, every aspect of their lives is to be consecrated to God. A Catholic can see this as roughly analogous to the difference in the manner of life of an ordinary Christian, or one in religious life, i.e. a monk or nun. It is as though every Jew is called, in Jewish law, to follow the sort of strict regime of laws that characterize

Catholic religious life, especially as it was in past centuries, when almost every aspect of how a religious ate, dressed, behaved, spoke, slept, worked and prayed was dictated by a rule. The rule was a way for the religious to consecrate every aspect of his life to God. That is how Jewish ritual observance, which permeates every aspect of the religious Jew's life, is to be understood.

In the realm of eating, the laws define the foods one is, or is not, allowed to eat; how the animal must be slaughtered; what foods may not be eaten together; and how one is to purify himself prior to eating. They define how one is to dress, the wearing of special clothing with ritual significance (e.g. a head covering at all times, and the "tzitzit", or fringes, on the corners of the garment[9]), what fabrics can be worn and in what combination. They define various aspects of personal grooming, forbidding men from shaving or cutting the hair on their temples, hence the traditional beards and earlocks of strictly observant Jews.[10] They define whom one is or is not allowed to touch, how the Sabbath and festivals are to be observed, how and when one is to pray, and so forth.

Many of these laws may appear arbitrary, foolish, or rude to non-Jews. Yet most come directly from the Old Testament and so the Christian must recognize them as having been commanded of the Jews by God. It was only when Christ came that these laws were lifted from the Jews- they were never commanded of the Gentiles - as

described in the New Testament (e.g. *Mt* 15, *Ac* 10, *Rm* 14). Of course, since Judaism rejects the authority of the New Testament, it considers the laws still binding.

Rabbinic and Temple Judaism

There are nonetheless great differences between today's Judaism and the Judaism that is presented in the Old Testament, especially around the role of animal sacrifice. These changes were necessitated by the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD The sacramental system prescribed for the Jews in the Old Testament required animal sacrifice which had to be performed in one place, the Temple in Jerusalem. Animals were to be sacrificed daily - for the remission of sins, for purification, for atonement, and as thanksgiving. When the Temple was destroyed and those sacrifices were no longer possible, the leading rabbis of the day gathered in Jamnia, which at the time served as the seat of Jewish learning (the Jews had been expelled from Jerusalem under pain of death by the Romans), and developed as an alternative the current system, known as "Rabbinic" Judaism (as opposed to the earlier form, "Temple" Judaism), in which prayers, almsgivings, and good deeds are substituted for the no longer possible animal sacrifice.

The Jewish Liturgical Year

Judaism strives to consecrate every aspect of the Jew's life to God - through obedience to the laws, through prayer, and through the observance of the Jewish liturgical year. Home observances, as opposed to sacraments that take place outside the home, are the heart and soul of Jewish religious life. These observances are driven by the regular cycles of the Jewish liturgical year.

The Weekly Sabbath

The basic rhythm of Jewish religious life is set by the weekly Sabbath. The Sabbath begins shortly before sundown on Friday, and ends with nightfall the next day. During that period, all "work" is forbidden, which for observant Jews includes riding in a car or other vehicle, buying or selling, lighting a fire, turning on electric lights or appliances (hence no television, radio, etc.), walking any significant distance, carrying anything, sports activities, writing, cooking, gardening, or doing any secular work.

Sabbath observance traditionally starts with the woman of the house lighting the Sabbath candles shortly before

sundown on Friday, followed by an elaborate meal that is accompanied with special prayers and blessings. The following day is devoted to synagogue worship, religious study, and family activities. The religious and family orientation of the day is ensured by the Sabbath observance laws, which prohibit most of the activities which might tend to draw family members apart, or to inject a worldly element into the day. The Sabbath is so observed in fulfillment of the commandment found in Exodus 20:

> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work...for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." For in your radiance the world will be bright.

Sabbath ends on Saturday evening with the Havdala ceremony which makes use of a special multi-wicked candle, a spice box, and wine, along with special prayers and blessings, to conclude the Sabbath.

The Festivals

Most of the Jewish festivals share the same restrictions on "work" as the Sabbath, and much of their celebration and

observance takes place in the home, often accompanied with special foods, objects, or activities unique to the feast. A brief description of some of the major holidays follows:

Rosh Hashanah "New Year"
& Yom Kippur "Day of Atonement"

These two holidays are separated by ten days, and usually fall in September or 11 October. Rosh Hashanah is considered the anniversary of God's creation of the world, and it is the day that God looks at the deeds of each individual to determine their destiny for the coming year. This sobering prospect is reflected in a central prayer of Rosh Hashanah, the "U'Netaneh Tokef" ("How utterly holy this day is"):

> All will pass before You like members of the flock. Like a shepherd pasturing his flock, making sheep pass under his staff, so shall You cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living; and You shall apportion the fixed needs of all Your creatures and inscribe their verdict.
>
> On Rosh Hashanah will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur will be sealed how many will pass from the earth and how many will be created; who will live and who will die; who will die at his predestined time and who before his time; who by water and who by fire, who by sword, who by beast, who by famine, who by thirst, who by storm, who by plague, who by strangulation, and who by stoning. Who will rest and who will wander, who will live in harmony and who will be harried, who will enjoy tranquility and who will suffer, who will be impoverished and who will be enriched, who will be degraded and who will be exalted.

Since the verdict will be inscribed on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur, the ten days between the two holidays are an intense time of prayer, almsgiving, and reconciliation aimed at averting the "severe decree" before it is too late. They are known as the "ten days of Repentance".

Yom Kippur serves as the climax of this period of repentance. It is observed as a strict fast day, with no food or water being taken from sundown to sundown (in addition to fasting, also prohibited are wearing leather shoes, bathing or washing, anointing oneself with oil, and marital relations). Most of the day is spent in the synagogue praying the most solemn liturgy of the year. When the Temple still stood in Jerusalem (it was destroyed for the final time in 70 AD), Yom Kippur was the one and only day of the year that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, making atonement for the sins of the Jewish nation as well as his own. Today's Yom Kippur liturgy still reflects that unique solemnity.

Sukkot

Sukkot (or "booths"), falls four days after Yom Kippur and lasts one week. It is one of the most joyful holidays of the year. It celebrates the harvest, and also commemorates the forty-year period during which the Jews wandered in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt, living in temporary shelters. In observance of this, during Sukkot observant Jews live in temporary shelters ("Sukkot", or "booths") outside the home, and work is prohibited on the first and second days. The observance of the holiday was directly commanded by God in the Old Testament (*Lv* 23).

Hanukkah

The eight-day festival of Hanukkah begins on the 25th of the month of Kislev on the Jewish calendar, which usually falls around Christmas. Originally a relatively minor holiday, it has assumed a much greater weight because of its proximity to Christmas, and the alternative it provides. The holiday is mentioned in 1st and 2nd Maccabees. It celebrates the victory of the Maccabees against the Emperor Antiochus who, after coming to power over the Jews, forced them to follow pagan practices, and desecrated the Temple. When the Maccabees defeated Antiochus they recaptured and rededicated the Temple, enabling the resumption of the sacrifices so central to the Jewish sacramental system.

As soon as they reconsecrated the Temple, the Maccabees relit the multi-branched lamp (Menorah) which was to burn uninterruptedly in the Temple. However, due to the just-ended war, only enough oil for a single day could be found. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days, until a new supply could be found. In commemoration, Hanukkah lasts for eight days, and a Menorah with eight branches is lit each evening - one candle the first night, two the second, and so forth, until on the last night all eight are lit. There are special prayers and songs for the lighting of the Menorah, and it is customary for children to receive gifts each night. There are also traditional foods and children's games associated with the holiday.

Passover

The Jews' "Exodus", their being freed from slavery to the Pharaoh in Egypt, is commemorated by an eight-day feast called "Passover". Passover is inaugurated by the Passover Seder, a festive meal in the home replete with special ritual foods, extensive prayers, and narrative thanking God for freeing the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. Before the destruction of the Temple, the Passover meal included a lamb sacrificed in the Temple in commemoration of the lambs killed by the Jews just before their flight from Egypt, the blood of which was daubed on the doorposts of their houses to tell the angel

of death to "pass over" the house[12] - hence "Passover". On the first and last day of the feast no work is to be done; during the entire 8-day period no leavened bread, or any forms of leavening, are to be eaten.

Shavuot (Pentecost)

Shavout falls on the fiftieth day after Passover. The name "Shavuot" literally means "sevens", for it falls seven weeks after Passover. It commemorates the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai; therefore many religious Jews observe the holiday by spending the entire night in Torah study, either at home or in synagogue.

Judaism Today

There are currently about 14 million Jews in the world today, or about two-tenths of one percent of the world population. Of these, about 6 million live in North America, 5 million in Israel, and 1 1/2 million in Europe. Their prominence is far disproportionate to their numbers. For instance, since the Nobel Prize was founded in 1901, over 20% of its winners (between 158 and 173, depending on the definition of being Jewish, out of 758) have been Jewish - in the sciences, almost 30%. Of course, within the Jewish community can be found a wide range of beliefs and practices.

"Orthodox" Judaism

Only a minority of Jews today attempt to follow the full range of Jewish law and observance, adhering to a strict interpretation of Jewish law and practices as they appear in the Old Testament and the Talmud. These are generally referred to as "orthodox Jews", and account for 10% of the Jews in the U.S., 17% of those in Israel.[13] In practice, Orthodox Jews, with the exception of the "ultra-Orthodox", described below, often live and work among non-Jews, but distinguish themselves by an

observance of Jewish laws which set them apart. These laws include:

- a strict prohibition against working - which is defined as including driving, turning on an electric device, lighting a stove, etc. - on the Jewish Sabbath, which begins Friday at sunset and ends at sunset on Saturday.
- the requirement for men to keep their heads covered (hence the wearing of skullcaps)
- a prohibition against men shaving (although some interpret the law to allow electric shavers)
- strict dietary laws, such as the prohibition against eating any milk products and any meat products at the same meal, eating any unclean animal (defined in Leviticus 11 as including shellfish, pork, etc.), or any animal not properly slaughtered according to Jewish law (detailed in Leviticus 17).

The orthodox subscribe to the Jewish faith as described in the "13 Principles", including the belief in the coming of a Messiah, the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the resurrection of the dead. Their liturgy and religious study is conducted almost exclusively in Hebrew.

Within the orthodox is found smaller, even more observant, subgroup, known as Hasidim (3% of U.S. Jews, 5% of Jews living in Israel). They were founded in

Poland in the mid-18th century by Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name"), who wished to put love of God at the center of Judaism, rather than the dry legalism that he saw around him. As he said, "I have come into this world to teach how to live by three precepts: love of God, love of Israel, and love of the Torah." Hasidic Judaism is characterized by a charismatic element. Their worship often involves joyful chanting, or even dancing, and some of their rabbis are famous for such charismatic gifts as the reading of souls, foreknowledge of events, and miracle working. Hasidic Jews follow a strict interpretation of traditional Jewish law often living apart in separate communities under the authority of a rabbi. The strictness of their religious observance can limit their interaction with the outside world. Nonetheless, their numbers have doubled in the last twenty years, as a result both of their high birthrate and successful evangelization of non-Hasidic Jews, making them one of the fastest growing groups within Judaism.

"Reform" Judaism

Following the emancipation of the Jews in Germany in the 19th century, when Jews were for the first time accorded full civil rights, including the right to live and operate freely in the non-Jewish community, a liberalizing trend that came to be known as "Reform"

Judaism emerged, and soon spread throughout Western Europe and America. Its aim was to modernize Judaism by replacing the traditional Hebrew liturgy with one in the vernacular and make it more closely resemble Protestant services; allowing the individual to decide for himself what laws to follow; applying modern "higher criticism" to the understanding of scripture; replacing the tradition Jewish emphasis on ritual observance and worship with a concern for social justice: and embracing the customs, mores, and dress of modern culture. They account for 35% of U.S. Jews.

"Conservative" Judaism

In the late 19th century in Germany a countervailing movement emerged among Jews who wanted to participate fully in the modern world, and rejected the literal interpretation of Jewish scriptures and law, yet still wanted to conserve more of the Jewish tradition than the "Reform" movement did. Hence it came to be known as the "Conservative" movement. It falls in a middle ground between orthodox and Reform Judaism, mixing both Hebrew and the vernacular in the liturgy; adopting a historical-critical method in the interpretation of Jewish scripture and law; and adopting a positive attitude towards modern society. It accounts for 26% of U.S. Jews.

"Messianic" Jews/Jewish Converts[14]

Another, somewhat controversial, group to consider is Jews who recognize Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Although most of them still consider themselves Jewish, usually the rest of the Jewish community does not. Some enter the Catholic Church or one of the conventional Protestant denominations, others remain separate in distinct "Messianic Jewish" congregations which maintain some of the traditional Jewish liturgical practices.

This group is growing - there may be more Jewish conversion to Christianity underway today than at any time since the early days of the Church. The statistics which exist are for Messianic Jews; their numbers may serve as a proxy for overall Jewish conversion. Before 1967, there were only a few thousand Messianic Jews in the U.S., and at most four or five Messianic Jewish synagogues[15] - today there are over 150. By the mid 1970's, Time magazine placed the number of Messianic Jews in the U.S. at over 50,000; by 1993 this number had grown to 160,000 in the U.S.[16] and over 350,000 worldwide. There are currently over 400 Messianic synagogues worldwide, including at least 150 in the U.S and consist of about 2% of Jews in the U.S.A.

Of particular interest is the spread of Messianic Judaism in Israel itself. Despite opposition by the Israel government, there is now practically no town or city in

Israel without a "Messianic Jewish" congregation, and over 5000 Jewish converts to Christianity in Israel.[17] This cannot help but call to mind the prophecy that Jesus made when he sent his apostles out on their mission to evangelize (*Mt* 10:6-7, 23):

> [Go] to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'... When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes.

Unaffiliated Jews

The final group is that of Jews who do not identify with any of these forms of Judaism, holding a variety of religious beliefs or none, yet still consider themselves Jewish. They account for 29% of U.S. Jews.

Jewish-Christian Relations

The history of the relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities has been a complex one.

In the first few decades after the death of Jesus, Christianity was seen as a new sect within Judaism, one that consisted of those Jews who believed Jesus to have been the Messiah. This would make it no anomaly at the time - every few years a new pretender to the title of Messiah would emerge with his group of followers. Thus the early Christians, almost all of whom were Jews by origin, were seen as "apostate" Jews, and subject to punishment by the Jewish authorities as heretics. And they themselves, too, still saw themselves as Jews, albeit ones who followed the new "way" that was introduced by the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. Hence they continued to participate in many Jewish practices, including synagogue and Temple worship. This only ended definitively around 132 AD, with the emergence of another claimant to the title of Messiah, Bar Kochba. When Bar Kochba called on the Jews to take up arms and violently overthrow their Roman oppressors, the only Jews who refused to participate - because they knew that Jesus, not Bar Kochba, was the true Messiah - were those