

Revision – Jewish Beliefs

Shema..... a Jewish prayer affirming belief in the one God found in the Torah.

Messiah..... ‘the anointed one’; a leader of the Jews who is expected to live on earth at some time in the future.

Covenant..... an agreement; in Judaism it refers to an agreement between individuals, often on behalf of the Jews and God.

Pikuach Nefesh..... the obligation to save a life, even if doing so breaks the Jewish law.

Mitzvot..... Jewish rules or commandments.

Summarise the story of Abraham in five bullet points.

- Abraham was born in the 20th or 19th century BCE at a time when many people worshipped idols of many different gods.
- Abraham became convinced that there could be only one God who created everything (monotheism), and that worshipping idols was wrong.
- God told Abraham to leave his native land and that He would make of Abraham a great nation and bless him.
- Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was unable to conceive children, so God gave them a son, Isaac, as a reward for Abraham keeping his promise in remaining loyal to God.
- Abraham was told by God to sacrifice his son in order to prove his loyalty to God. God intervened to stop this when it was clear that Abraham was going to carry out this action.

List the key moral principles in Judaism and explain each one.

1. Justice: bringing about what is right and fair, according to the law, or making up for a wrong that has been committed.
2. Healing the world: being involved in God’s work to sustain the world; it can involve work to increase social justice or to preserve the environment.
3. Kindness to others: positive, caring actions that should be shown to all living things.

Explain the Jewish belief in the Shekhinah.

- The term ‘Shekhinah’ means ‘God’s manifested glory’ or ‘God’s divine presence’. It refers to the presence of God on earth.
- Many Jewish writings refer to the Tabernacle – a portable structure, similar to a tent – as being the early dwelling place for the divine presence of God. Jews carried the Tabernacle with them on their journey after their exodus from Egypt, through their wilderness, to the conquering of the land of Canaan.
- The Tenakh mentions that the Jews were led on this journey by a pillar of fire or a cloud, which were also possible manifestations of the Shekhinah.

List four Orthodox Jewish beliefs about the Messiah.

- If the Jews are worthy of redemption, this person will be directed by God to become the redeemer and will rule over all humanity with kindness and justice.
 - He will uphold the law of the Torah and will be the ultimate teacher of it.
 - He will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and gather all Jews back to the land of Israel.
 - He will usher in world peace and unite humanity as one.
- *Reform Jews reject the idea of the Messiah; instead of having one specific person who will unite the world in peace, they believe that everyone should work together to achieve peace.
*Jews don’t believe Jesus fulfilled these expectations.

Explain fully the Jewish belief that God is One.

- Monotheism is not just the belief that there is only one God; it is a way of viewing the world and all the contents of the world that they believe God created.
- It is God who is ever present in people’s lives; every sight they see, sound they hear, and experience they are aware of is regarded as a meeting with God.
- “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

Explain the Jewish beliefs about creation and free will.

- Orthodox Jews believe that God literally created the world in 6 days, 6,000 years ago. Other Jews accept that evolutionary theory may be correct and that the universe is much older, but that God made everything happen.
- On the seventh day, God rested and made it a holy day. Jews remember this every week between sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday during the observance of Shabbat.
- As God is the creator of everything, God must have created evil.
- Jews believe that in order for people to have free will, they have to be able to make their own choices between good and bad; this makes doing good more significant.

Explain Jewish beliefs about death and the afterlife.

Jewish customs surrounding death:

- Death is part of God’s plan; so it is an inevitable part of life.
- Judaism teaches that Jews should not die alone, so the dying person’s family should make every effort to visit and look after them.
- Intense mourning follows a person’s death, especially while waiting for their burial, then for seven days after the burial, followed by a further 30 days of lesser mourning.

Heaven and Sheol:

- Teachings about the afterlife imply that the good will enter paradise (Gan Eden) while others will go to Sheol; this is seen as a place of waiting where souls are cleansed.
- It is believed that heaven will be with God, but it is not known whether it is a state of consciousness, or an actual physical or spiritual place.

Judgement and resurrection:

- Some Jews believe they will be judged by God as soon as they die.
- Jews believe that the present is more important than the afterlife; they should focus on living in a way that is pleasing to God.

Summarise the life of Moses in five bullet points.

- About 400 years after God established the covenant with Abraham, Jews found themselves as slaves in Egypt.
- Moses was chosen by God to approach the Egyptian pharaoh and ask him to release the Jews from slavery so that they could return to Canaan; the Promised Land.
- Eventually, after God sent ten plagues to Egypt, the final and worst one being the death of the firstborn child in every Egyptian family, the pharaoh was persuaded to allow them to leave.
- After crossing the Red Sea, the Jews wandered for many years in the desert in the Sinai region between Egypt and Canaan.
- When they arrived at Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments; four of them concerning the relationship between Jews and God and six concerning their relationship with each other.

‘For Jews, the most important belief about God is that God is the Law-giver.’

AGREE

- The Jews are the people of the Law / chosen by God to receive the Torah (Exodus 20).
- They are accountable to God throughout their lives for their obedience or disobedience to the Law, to keep the Law is to keep the covenant.
- The belief that God is the Law-giver is the basis of their way of life e.g. moral laws, Sabbath laws, food laws, if they set that belief aside their whole way of life would be invalid.

DISAGREE

- The belief in God as Law-giver is completed by belief in God as Judge – one without the other is not complete.
- The belief in God as creator determines the relationship between the Jews, all other people and the world.
- The belief in God as ONE makes God worthy of worship, because his is the only controlling power.