# Judaism Descriptive Essay

## Introduction

Judaism is one of the oldest religions, in fact, the oldest monotheistic religion in the world.[[1]](#footnote-0) It is associated with the Jewish people, and is based on the covenant that was made between God and Abraham. Then, Abraham was called to leave his home in Ur and to travel to Canaan, which was a promised land.[[2]](#footnote-1) The second covenant in Jewish history was made 450 years later during the Exodus a time when Moses was supposed to lead Jews out of slavery.

The spread of Judaism begun after the Exodus in Jerusalem and Israel. In 586 BCE Babylonians overpowered Jerusalem, destroying the temple and forcing many of the captives to take exile. Later on, the Jews built a new temple, only to later have it destroyed by Romans. This second destruction of the temple set a future of Judaism where its followers stopped making sacrifices and started concentrating more on examining synagogues.

Before the demolition of the temple by the Romans, the definitive code of the Jewish law called Mishna was compiled. The written interpretation of the scriptures was also written and the rules for the Jewish calendar laid down.[[3]](#footnote-2) The teachings and scriptures made at this time formed the foundation of worship for the Jews during their exile. The first permanent synagogue was built in Australia, Sydney in 1844. The Jewish population then grew through the 1930’s, when they were fleeing the Nazi persecution. This frequent relocation of Jews enabled them to spread Judaism in other parts of the world.

## Characteristics of Judaism

Judaism as a religion that is not defined by hierarchy. The Jews consider that the synagogue is at the core of the religious activities of the Jews, which are led by a teacher (Rabbi). Rabbis were not considered priests, and the Jews themselves did not consider having an intermediary as a necessity to reach God.[[4]](#footnote-3) Each individual could do it for themselves through prayer. Other than that, in places where Judaism is liberal, women are allowed to play the role of Rabbi.

## Beliefs, Practices and Values of Judaism

Judaism is majorly planted on history. The importance of the earlier mentioned covenant between God and the Jews is the guidance it gives to them on its practice. The covenant was a combination of the rituals and morality in God’s commandments. This means that the commandments are connected in such a way that the next one is a continuation of instructions that are related to it, making the rules a whole. It is important to note that each of the commandment is as important as the last.

### The Teachers (Rabbis) and Talmud

The Talmud is a word that stands for study. It is a huge gathering of rabbinic interpretation and a commentary of the Hebrew Bible. This interpretive collection is also called the written law. Those given the gift to interpret the same are considered divinely inspired and sacred.[[5]](#footnote-4) Going through the Talmud, however, one will realize that the current and past interpreters of the same have some disagreement, causing conflict within the religion. Some of the teachers may have differing beliefs such as peace and kindness being vital for fulfillment of the commandments, and others still, feeling that peace is the main virtue. Others yet, have the belief that pride is equal to idolatry, making those who are proud sinners before God. These different beliefs between the teachers have caused controversies in the religion.

Judaism is the ancestor of Christianity and Islam. Jews believe that there exists only one God, who rules and creates all that exists. God is attributed characteristics such as being all present, all knowing and all seeing. Jews believe that they are the light of the world, as the Torah, or God’s law indicates.[[6]](#footnote-5) Abraham, being the biblical patriarch, gave way to Jews being an inheritance and blessing. A lot of emphasis is put on Jews having Judaism as religion, as a practice, thought and in the heart. A recitation called the Shema is used to give importance to Judaism and can be recited every morning or evening. The recitation is derived from a Bible verse.

Hear O Israel the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart (Deuteronomy 6:4-6, NIV).

### Types of Judaism

Orthodox Judaism- This type of Judaism is the most traditional, and emphasizes on the origin of the Torah. It states that following the law defined by Rabbi is essential and an obligation. This makes Orthodox Judaism the strictest in following religious codes of behavior.

Reform Judaism- This is the most liberal form of Judaism. It regards the Torah as a guidance, and not a divine revelation. Believers are of the belief that Judaism is always evolving, and therefore, that revelation is a progressive process.[[7]](#footnote-6)

Conservative Judaism- This branch of Judaism asserts the development of Judaism through history. This allows its believers to make amendments to it since like the Reform Judaism, it changes with time. An emphasis is created on protecting Israelites and Zionism.

Reconstructionist Judaism- This is the most recent branch of Judaism. It was developed by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, who asserts on human values and the centrality of the Jews. It has several features similar to those of Conservative Judaism. Despite having its branches, in totality, Judaism applies the same practices and beliefs.

### Rites and Ceremonies of Jews

For a Jew to be considered devoted, he/she should pray thrice in a day. This is most preferred when at least ten other adults have gathered in a synagogue. Alternatively, the Jews can conduct their prayers in their homes, or at an agreed meeting place. During certain occasions or on the Sabbath, an additional morning worship service is done. On holy days, there are special prayers set aside for same.[[8]](#footnote-7) For all male Jews, except a few Reform Jews, the males wear a skull cap, or a normal hat. A big number of the Orthodox male believers cover their heads as a sign of veneration to God.[[9]](#footnote-8) During the mornings where no other special prayers are taking place, two small leather boxes are attached to the foreheads of the adult male Orthodox worshippers with leather straps. These items are free for others to view, but are restricted to the qualified Rabbi to view their content. Jews also attach a small scroll, which has writings of this practice, which is kept inside a container for protection to their doorposts (their upper right-hand corner) to their homes or synagogues. In cases where a Jew is more observant, the parchment scrolls may be placed on the doorposts of all rooms but not on the bathroom. Prisons are not considered appropriate for the placement of the same.

On the corporate aspect of Judaism, a Minyan is supposed to run a full Jewish worship service. However, a lesser count of both Jewish females and males can conduct a corporate prayer where certain sections of the service can be skipped. Individuals who are not entirely, or experienced in Judaism cannot serve in such a service. Additionally, if one is not a Jew, there are certain blessings they are forbidden from uttering, and certain liturgical events they cannot participate in. Holy writings that are often specified, on the other hand, are read in public on holy days. The Pentateuch is divided into weekly segments that are read publicly throughout the Jewish calendar year in synagogues. Some parts of the same are further read publicly on Monday and Tuesday mornings. For all the readings mentioned, there are special persons who are trained to conduct them. Again, in a prison, difficult conditions require to be met if the same readings are to be conducted there.

### The Sabbath

The Sabbath is a day, once a week, which is set aside for the worship of God through religious actions. Of all holy days, the Sabbath is given the utmost importance. The start of Sabbath is every sunset on Friday. Candles are lit, and two of them per household are required, with each having to be capable of burning for more than one and a half hours. The candles should also be allowed to burn out on their own. Someone who is completely familiar with the Jewish religion is then required to recite a prayer over the candle. After the morning worship service on Saturday, a special prayer is said over wine or grape juice, again by an individual properly conversant with being Jew. Special bread is eaten before meals on the Sabbath. The Jewish inmates are also allowed to observe the Sabbath by keeping off any kind of work, and instead, may replace the non-Jews on days the Jews have no Holy days.

### Succoth

Succoth is a period of rejoicing for the Jews that runs for eight days. Small huts may be built in the yards of the Jews, where the followers have their meals all day and sleep. Leaves of plants such as the palm, the citron, willow and myrtles are tied together and used during services in the huts, and synagogues.

### Simchat Torah

This holiday corresponds to the last day of Succoth, but carries a different purpose and is a day on its own. Jews usually have a festive meal on this day, along with other activities such as the annual reading of the whole Pentateuch, and an introduction of the reading for the subsequent year.

### Rosh Hashanah and Yorn Kippur

This religious holiday lasts two days. During this period, the Jews are required to conduct a self-reflection. A horn, known as the Shofar is blown, to indicate looking into one’s soul and correct the devious ways. During the eve of the ceremony, Jews are required to eat apples dipped in honey, a way to wish a sweet year. Foods comprised of pomegranate, sweet carrot or Challah bread are eaten. It is also customary to send greeting cards at such a time to the relatives and friends. Of the ten days set apart for repentance and atonement, this particular day is considered most solemn since it is believed that is the day that God judges how a Jew’s year will be like. The individuals spend the day praying and fasting, where garments are worn and worship services conducted.

### Chanukah

The celebration comes after the eight day Simchat Torah. It commemorates the recapture of the Holy Temple in 165 B.C.E from the Greek oppressors. In the celebration, Jews light candles on the evening of the day with the first being lit on the first evening, and the other two being lit in the second evening. For the entire holiday, 44 candles are required since an additional candle is used to light the others. Children are given coins and are used to play spinning games. On this day, potato pancakes and jelly filled donuts are fried in oil.

### Pesach

The Pesach/ Passover festival is a commemoration of the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. The festival lasts for eight days, with the first two evenings being seder ceremonies. During this period, the deliverance from Egypt is recalled with reference to a special book called Haggadah. In the Passover, meals such as unleavened bread, bitter herbs, wine and grape juice are consumed.[[10]](#footnote-9) Any products with leavening are condemned during this period. Inmates are also supposed to follow a Passover diet.

There are several other ceremonies and holy days that are celebrated by Jews following the religion. Some of the ceremonies take hours, and others, days. During such holy days, Jews are required to keep off work alongside observing other requirements. These religious ceremonies are to be experienced by as many Jews as possible including those that have been arrested. This also means that joint worship activities are given a lot of importance.

## Strategies of Evangelizing Judaism

Evangelizing the Jews has been one of the most difficult goals by Christians. Several past attempts in the past have proved this futile. One of the reasons Christians are working hard on this is the belief that Judaism is quickly becoming Christian. To evangelize Judaism, Christian churches are beginning to take the structure of synagogues to lure more Jews into them. There are Christian Rabbis, by birth, who are devoting to making Christianity more palatable to the Jews. This strategy so far, has become a good way to convert more Jews to Christianity.

Other than that, there are Christian missions that have been set up to help make more conversions.[[11]](#footnote-10) With the increasing numbers of these individuals who can conduct conversion crusades, it has summed up to their being even more people converting. The individuals used to evangelize, in this case, are called missionaries. The attitude people have towards these missionaries, however, has been one of the challenges faced while converting Jews to Christianity. Many people tend to view them as individuals who forcefully evangelize, or who have offices that run the evangelization business. Changing this perspective among the Jews, will be the first step to reaching more, and making more positive and permanent conversions among the Jews.

Another strategy that could be used to evangelize is to conduct civic education on Christianity.[[12]](#footnote-11) During the biblical times, the Jews believed that gentiles were non-believers. This made them hate Gentiles with a passion. In the modern day religious world, Jews view Christians as Gentiles. Again, driving this mindset away by inculcating a more positive attitude towards Jews will enable more self-willed conversions from Jews. The problem is that, most of the Christians committed to converting Jews are the born again, fundamentalist Christians, who are too driven by the conversion process, they forget to consider many other factors therein. While converting, those who do so right are advised to be as natural as possible. Again, despite there being Jew-Christian individuals who convert, it is more essential, if a full Christian did the converting.[[13]](#footnote-12) These are the same people who will help the Jews aspiring to be converted to understand Christianity better.

Again, making references to the scriptures, reasons to convert Jews is stipulated, and the New Testament greatly supports the conversion of Jews. In the book of Matthew, Paul declares, Go to the Jew first, to the Greek (Gentile) (Matthew 10:5, NIV). This verse urges the conversion of Jews to Christianity.

However, as expected, there is much resilience met from the Jews by Christians. The Jews hold beliefs such as them being the chosen nation. They also believe that the chosen nation was significantly reduced, but still remains the light of the world.[[14]](#footnote-13) Several Jews associate this reduction to events such as the Holocaust. Again, as seen above, there are Churches that use Jewish symbols to lure Jews into them, after which they are converted. This is another factor that is likely to be met with much opposition, especially owing to the fact that such conversions are misled, or as a result of brainwash. No one informs the unsuspecting Jews that such Churches are not actual synagogues. This conversion by lack of will is by far the most unfair way to conduct evangelization, and is more likely to avert Jews to conversion. Other than that, the staunch Christians who make compulsory initiative to convert the Jews may use force to achieve this. In such a case, one will find that Jews are harassed into converting to Christianity. None of these methods makes it appropriate, which is a put off to the many Jews that may aspire to join Christianity.

## Conclusion

Judaism, as seen above, was the mother religion for Islam and Christianity. Most of the beliefs between the three religions are shared. However, there are numerous differences experienced therein that make it increasingly difficult to collaborate.

Again, as seen above, Judaism carries a numerous set of rituals that make it a strict religion. It carries a source of identity and spiritual nourishment for its followers, which makes the conversion of the same to Christianity a controversial issue. Other than that, the right to practice religion is in many ways violated from the forceful, or misleading conversions by Christians to Judaism. It is important that Christians or evangelists conduct their conversion processes with careful consideration and fairness. Despite their being scriptures supporting the same, they need to consider that the religion, having carried the longest history of all the religions, is a source of identity to its followers. While converting, careful consideration to both sides needs to be made.

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