Engaging World Religions

Session 6: Engaging Judaism

Where Christianity differs from ALL other religions:

Nature of God, Jesus (being God and man, His death and resurrection), Man, Sin, The Gospel (Salvation), Eternal Life, the Bible (our source of Authority)

Judaism

- 14 million followers (6 million US)
- Small #s but heavily influential on world culture, affairs, and history

- Some important early historical pieces
  - Babylon (586 AD)
    - Developed their faith without a temple or a land
    - Judaism "developed" in Babylon
    - Development of the Synagogue back in the days of Babylon
    - Then return
  - Destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD
    - The Synagogue is the Judaism that survived the destruction
    - then dispersion in 132 AD
- Babylonian Talmud
  - Mishnah – comments on Pentateuch
  - Gemara – comments on the comments. Also includes morality in stories
  - Application of the laws in new settings that weren't in the Hebrew Bible
  - Written and Oral tradition is accepted as authority
  - Religion of the books (plural, not just Hebrew Bible but Talmud, etc.)
- Classical Judaism
  - Pharisees (attached to the Synagogue) and Sadducees (attached to the Temple)
  - After destruction of temple, Sadducees (Levites) 'died' off in influence
  - Pharisees survived, dominance
  - Essenes – "Dead Sea Scrolls". Wiped out, they were separatists and celibate
  - Zealots – killed
  - Only 2 forms followed the destruction
    - Pharisees
    - Messianic (lasted about 3 centuries before Gentile church took over dominance)

The key issue between Christians and Muslims is not first and foremost the identity of Allah, but the fact and meaning of the death of Jesus Christ. This is also true for Judaism and Christianity: Who was this Jesus and why did he die? Both Judaism and Islam deny the essence of Christianity—that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah, the divine Son of God, who was crucified and raised from the dead to bring forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who believe in him.

This makes Jesus incredibly relevant and controversial in the 21st century. The massive movement of Islam (over 1.3 billion people), and the comparatively small people of Israel have explosive significance in world affairs. The most critical issue between Islam and Judaism on the one hand, and Christianity on the other, is *not* whether Islam and Judaism are monotheistic. Nor is the issue whether Islam and Judaism try to honor Jesus.

The issue is: *Do Islam and Judaism—or any other faiths besides Christianity—cherish the righteous suffering and death of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, as the only ground of our acceptance with God?*

John Piper

- Contemporary Jewish groups today
  - Is Judaism a religion, a set of ethical practices, or something else? YES, it is all
  - Pull a religious string, and the national unravels
  - Jewish Worldview: religion, nationalism, ethics, community (all to varying degrees depending on group)
  - 2 parts of the Jewish faith:
    - Belief (of God, etc.) – not emphasized
    - Practice – when and how you follow the holidays, Sabbath, daily rituals, yamaka
  - Rejection of Jesus is rarely due to religious reasons, but because of ingrained worldview that isn't very religious
  - Orthodox – traditional group
    - Pray (3 times a day like in older days), attend services
    - Ritual temple replacement
    - Gather with other men (need 10 to form a prayer meeting)
    - Wear Jewish garb
    - Most Traditional: in belief and practice
    - Historical flow of Judaism
  - Reformed – liberal group (18th century)
    - Reaction to cold, orthodoxy (Hebrew services, etc.)
    - More Liberal, Less intensity
  - Conservative
    - Not very conservative
    - Greater respect for the Bible and study it, but not necessarily hold to everything in it.
    - Adherence to practice is less
    - Socially, culturally different. (Women and gay rabbis)
  - Secular or Cultural
    - Blended into the culture
    - Not practicing, except maybe a couple times a year (like a Christmas-Easter Christian)

Judaism today IS NOT the Judaism of the Bible

Don't assume that since you know the Jews in the Bible, that you know the Jews of today