

# JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY – THE TWAIN SHALL NEVER MEET<sup>1</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTION

The idea for this essay was inspired by a very succinct and effective presentation of the differences between Christianity and Judaism prepared by Jews for Judaism.<sup>2</sup> Another factor that contributed to the writing of this essay is the need to respond to the common claim by some Christians, who refer to themselves as "Messianic Jews", that they are practicing Torah Judaism and not Christianity.

A variety of opinions exists on the similarities and differences between Judaism and Christianity. The general trend among all these opinions is that, although there are some similarities between the two faiths, many more differences separate them. The similarities are cultural in their nature, whereas the differences stem from diametrically opposite theologies.

Many people think that the only difference between Jews and Christians centers around Jesus, that Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah, but the Jews do not. The problem with this understanding is that it does not take into account the full scope of the theology on which is based the belief that Jesus is the Messiah. The disparity between the two theologies becomes evident when their major elements are contrasted.

This essay explores several major differences between Judaism and Christianity.

## II. COMPARING THE TWO THEOLOGIES

Several of the key elements Judaism and Christianity share as religions, but differ on their specific theological understanding and practice, are compared below.

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<sup>1</sup> Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in **SMALL CAPS** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
  - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ה is transliterated as "h"
  - The letter ח is transliterated as "ch"
  - The letter כ is transliterated as "k"
  - The letter ק is transliterated as "q"
  - A vocalized **SHVA** (וְ נִיּוֹ) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
  - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagESH** (emphasis)

<sup>2</sup> *Christianity vs. Judaism: The major differences* - [http://www.jewishpassion.com/documents/j\\_compare.html](http://www.jewishpassion.com/documents/j_compare.html)

## SCRIPTURES

The respective scriptures are a logical starting point for a comparison of the two faiths, since in these are contained their foundational principles.

- ☆ The scripture of Judaism is the Hebrew Bible, which consists of 39 Books that are divided into three sections – תּוֹרָה (*torah*, the [Written] Law; also known as the Pentateuch), נְבִיאִים (*n<sup>e</sup>vi'im*, the Prophets), and כְּתוּבִים (*k'tuvim*, the Writings; also known as the Hagiographa). The Hebrew acronym for the three parts, תנ"ך, has the pronunciation *T<sup>e</sup>NACH*, a title that has become a common reference to the Hebrew Bible. The *T<sup>e</sup>NACH* is written almost exclusively in Hebrew, with the exception of portions in the Books of Daniel and Ezra, which are written in Aramaic.<sup>3</sup> Today's *T<sup>e</sup>NACH* represents the Masoretic Text (MT), which is the product of the Masoretes of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E., who reconstructed the canonical Hebrew Bible and added to it vowels and trop markings for the purpose of facilitating and standardizing its reading. The accuracy of the MT, in terms of contextual integrity, has been validated through comparisons with the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>4</sup>

According to traditional Judaism, the Torah is God's word as recorded by Moses, and the remainder of the Hebrew Bible consists of inspired works by various persons. In addition to the **Written Torah**, traditional Judaism holds that an **Oral Torah** also originated at Sinai. This oral tradition was eventually codified and recorded in the *Mishnah* during the second century C.E., and later expounded on in the *G<sup>e</sup>marah*, both of which comprise the *Talmud*. The Oral Torah is part of a living corpus of Jewish Law, *Halachah*, which is continuously updated by the religious authorities in order to keep it consistent with the laws of the land and with changing times. According to the Sages of the Talmud, the Oral Torah was transmitted in the following fashion before it was recorded:

**Pirkei Avot 1:1 - Moses received the Torah at Sinai and [he] transmitted it to Joshua, and Joshua [transmitted it] to the Elders; [the] Elders [transmitted it] to the Prophets, and [the] Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly.<sup>5</sup>**

The Written Torah contains 613 precepts which form the framework of Judaism, and which are regarded as eternal and of utmost value.<sup>6</sup> The Oral Torah contains details concerning these 613 precepts, which are essential to understanding and observing them.

<sup>3</sup> Written in Aramaic are Daniel 2:4b-7:28 and Ezra 4:8-6:18

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, Geza Vermes, pp.174-175, Fortress Press (1999); and *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Biblical Integrity* - <http://www.apologeticspress.org/rr/rr1995/r&r9504a.htm>

<sup>5</sup> *Pirkei Avot*, literally, **Chapters of Our Fathers**, but generally known in English as **Ethics of Our Fathers**, is one of the ten tractates that comprise the Order *Nezikin* of the Mishnah

<sup>6</sup> A detailed and categorized listing of the 613 precepts is presented here - <http://jewfaq.org/613.htm>

There are many other written works by the Sages, including the codifications of Judaism by Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (RaMBaM; Maimonides), Rabbi Joseph Karo, and others, all of which have had their impact on the practice of Judaism. Traditional Judaism also includes a mystical tradition, known as **Qabalah** (often also transliterated as **Kabbalah**), of which the central written work is the **Zohar**.

It is important to recognize that the Written Torah defines the framework of Judaism through the set of 613 immutable precepts, whereas the dynamic Halachah shapes the practice of Judaism as time goes on.

- ✚ The scripture of Christianity, the **Christian Bible**, consists of an **Old Testament** and a **New Testament**. The Christian Old Testament used by the Protestant denominations of Christianity contains the same books as does the Hebrew Bible, though they are not organized in the same way (i.e., Torah, Prophets, Writings), nor do they appear in the same order. The Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Armenian and the Ethiopian Oriental Orthodox Church include in their renditions of the Old Testament several additional books, namely, **Tobit, Judith, 1&2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch**, which are part of the **apocrypha** in both Judaism and Protestant Christianity. The earliest versions of the Christian Old Testament were Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible known collectively as the **LXX** or **Septuagint**, though the latter is a misnomer, since it was the name of a mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E., no longer extant, translation of only the Torah by 72 bilingual Jewish scholars.

The New Testament contains 27 books. The first four books in the New Testament, **The Gospels**, are claimed to be the teachings of Jesus that were recorded long after his death, and which bear the names of four of his disciples. The rest of the New Testament was authored by several other persons, with Paul of Tarsus being the primary author. The New Testament was originally composed in Greek.

Many Christians consider the entire Christian Bible to be "the breathed word" of God. Yet, it is evident that, for Christians, the New Testament supersedes the Old Testament in its authority. Moreover, whereas the Catholic and Orthodox denominations of Christianity include an oral tradition, Protestant Christianity generally adheres to **sola scriptura**, Latin for **(by) scripture alone**, the idea of the singular authority of scripture. In other words, scripture (the Bible) is the only infallible rule to be used for deciding issues of faith and customs that involve doctrines. In effect, this practice reverses the order of the authority of the Church as it has been followed by the Catholic/Orthodox tradition for many centuries, i.e., that tradition is the interpreter of scripture. In effect, sola scriptura makes scripture the interpreter of tradition.

Early Christian theology developed long before the writing of the New Testament, and it continued to develop and mature through influences from outside of the

New Testament. In other words, unlike the Hebrew Bible, which defines the framework of traditional Judaism, the New Testament does not define Christianity; rather, Christian theology defined the New Testament. This fact is at odds with the idea of sola scriptura – a concept that is absent from the Christian Bible. This also explains the subordination of the Old Testament to the New Testament, which has rendered the 613 precepts in the Torah as non-eternal and of no value to Christianity.

## NATURE OF DEITY

- ✚ The overwhelming majority of those who identify with Christianity believe in the Trinity – a triune godhead consisting of the Father, the Son (who is Jesus), and the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost).<sup>7</sup> Due to rather divergent views among Trinitarian Christians, it is difficult to obtain a coherent and uniform explanation of the Trinity. At one end of the spectrum is the description of the three components as being three separate "persons". At the other end of the spectrum is the admission that the Trinity eludes explanations and is a mystery. In between these two extremes rests the description that the Trinity is a "compound unity" – a single entity that has three different personalities or manifestations. The common thread in this spectrum is that all Trinitarians hold the Trinity to be consistent with monotheism, yet, according to the New Testament, each of the three entities that comprise the Trinity has different knowledge, different powers, and different wills, which is a common characteristic of polytheistic religions.

Except for one verse in the New Testament that invokes three such elements, the Trinity itself is never explicitly mentioned therein (highlighting added for emphasis throughout this document unless otherwise noted):

**Matthew 28:19(KJV) – Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:**

In order to convey the concept of a triune godhead, the verse would have had to be written in the following way:

**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of GOD the Father, and of GOD the Son, and of GOD the Holy Ghost:**

Probably the main reason that Christian commentators generally do not point to this verse as a reference to the Trinity is that it is not written in this fashion.

The Trinity is a theological concept that developed over many decades, and which eventually became a formal doctrine of Christianity in 325 C.E., when the Council of Nicea adopted it and included it into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Among the Christian denominations that reject the doctrine of the Trinity are the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Unitarians.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, - <http://www.antiochian.org/674>

- ☆ The deity in the Hebrew Bible, the God of Israel, is an indivisible Unity. The first four of RaMBaM's 13 Principles of Faith codify Judaism's concept of God:<sup>9</sup>

1. God exists
2. God is one and unique
3. God is incorporeal
4. God is eternal

The credo of traditional Judaism, the *Sh'ma*, describes God as being One:

**Deuteronomy 6:4 – Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.**

Since the word "One" in this verse is an adjective, it describes the proper noun "the Lord", which rules out the possibility of a "compound unity". The concept of God as an indivisible unity can also be understood from the following passage:

**Isaiah 44:6 – So said the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer the Lord of Hosts, "I am first and I am last, and beside Me there is no God."**

The declaration by God, "**I am the first**", indicates that He has no father. When He said, "**I am the last**", it means that He has no begotten son. Finally, when God proclaimed, "**beside me there is no God**", it shows that He does not share His role with any other god or entity – He has no "partners".

## MESSIANIC VISION<sup>10</sup>

- ☆ The Jewish messianic vision is an original concept at the heart of traditional Judaism, and the dream of an eventual redemption is one of its foundations. The cornerstone of the Jewish messianic paradigm was set in Genesis 49, and the full picture was developed primarily through the writings of the prophets.

The messianic paradigm of traditional Judaism is founded on the following two main components:

- ⊙ **The central figure, משיח (mashi'ah), who will be in the leadership role, and whose actions will result in major changes to world conditions.**

The משיח, the anointed one, is the individual whose arrival is awaited by the Jewish people. Although he is the central figure in it, the Jewish messianic vision is not focused him; rather, it addresses his achievements. The actions of the משיח will induce changes in the real world that will transform it into the picture envisioned by the prophets.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example - <http://www.ou.org/torah/rambam.htm>

<sup>10</sup> A detailed look at the messianic visions of Judaism and Christianity is presented in the essay *Debunking "Proof Texts" from the Psalms: Part 7 – The "Big Picture"* - <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/PsalmsPrfTxt7.pdf>

The information available in the Hebrew Bible spells out the requirements which a legitimate candidate for the "job" of משיח must satisfy:

- He must be a biological descendant, the זרע (Zera), seed, of King David (Isaiah 11:1; Ezekiel 37:24-25)
- His lineage to King David must go through King Solomon (2Samuel 7:12-16; 1Kings 8:18-20)
- He must be a Jew and Jewish (Deuteronomy 17:15,18-20).

It follows from these requirements that the משיח must be born of two human parents – his biological father will transmit to him the lineage to King David, and his biological mother will provide him with his identity as a Jew.

- ⊙ **The "messianic agenda", which consists of the "action items" (the "messianic prophecies" of Judaism), will be executed and completed for the messianic era to become a reality.**

The messianic vision of Judaism has as its centerpiece a "messianic agenda". This "messianic agenda" consists of prophetic statements which describe, at various level of detail, the conditions that will prevail throughout the messianic era – they represent the output from a nation that was longing for a better life in a better world. The items on the "messianic agenda" comprise the collection of "messianic prophecies" in traditional Judaism. These include handful of significant "messianic agenda items" that will have global impact, as well as few additional "messianic agenda items" that deal with situations, conditions, and events which are of a more local and particular nature with regard to the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

This collection of Jewish "messianic prophecies" is exhaustive and exclusive, which means that, when they are fulfilled, "faith" will not be required in order to experience the impact of their presence – everyone will know it.

- ✚ Although Christianity has adopted Judaism's idea that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David, the Christian messianic paradigm is inconsistent with its Jewish counterpart in all other aspects.

The common messianic paradigm of Christianity is founded on the following two main components::

- ⊙ **The central figure, Messiah, already came once in fulfillment of prophetic statements in the Christian "Old Testament", and will return at a future time.**

The most striking feature of the Christian messianic paradigm is that, by design and unlike Judaism, it is entirely focused on the central figure, Jesus.

According to Christian theology, the nature and mission of the Messiah is that he is both Lord and Savior:

- **Jesus is divine since he has always existed as part of the divine godhead (John 1:1-2).<sup>11</sup>**
- **Jesus was "sent to earth" in the form of a man (God manifest in the flesh) via the "Virgin Birth", thus making him the "Son of God" (Matthew 1:23; Mark 1:1).**
- **Jesus came as the Messiah in order to redeem (or save) humanity by removing the stain of the "Original Sin" through his sacrificial death on the cross (2Timothy 1:9-10; 1John 4:14).**
- **In his "Second Coming", Jesus will reign over the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:19, 7:21; Hebrews 9:28).**

In his role as Lord and Savior, Jesus is said to have fulfilled all the prophecies about him in the Christian "Old Testament".

### ⊙ **The "messianic prophecies" were fulfilled by the Messiah in his "First Coming".**

According to the Christian view, "messianic prophecy" consists of texts from the Christian "Old Testament" which are claimed to deal with the coming of the Messiah at some time in the future, and which were allegedly fulfilled in the person of Jesus, as related through the accounts in the New Testament.

The "messianic prophecies" of Christianity, which number literally in the hundreds, are Messiah-centric, i.e., they deal with the Messiah's origin, his attributes, his personal life's ordeals, and his death and resurrection. This is likely to be a result of the belief by Christians that God, via His direct intervention in human history, made His will and purpose known to mankind when He sent His "Son", Jesus, to fulfill these "messianic prophecies". Thus, for Christians, the concept of "messianic prophecy" is the product of a "new revelation", and that the last word on the meaning of specific "messianic prophecies" in the Christian "Old Testament", accordingly, is found in the New Testament and in Jesus himself. For Christians, the Messiah already came and fulfilled all these "messianic prophecies", and they are now awaiting his return in a "Second Coming".

## **ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHER BELIEFS**

- ‡ Christianity is exclusive in that it claims to hold the monopoly on "The Truth". Accordingly, there is only a single "path to God (the Father)", i.e., having been made righteous by the blood of Jesus, only Christians are "saved" and have earned a place in "heaven":

**Luke 13:23-27(KJV) – (23) Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, (24) Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto**

<sup>11</sup> The overwhelming majority of Christians adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity, though some denominations do not accept the notion of a triune godhead.

you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. (25) When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: (26) Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. (27) But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.

**John 14:6(KJV) - Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.**

This defines a very exclusive "club", indeed.

- ☆ According to Judaism, more than one "path to God" exists, perhaps with the Jewish path being the most difficult. Accordingly, all righteous people, Jew and Gentile alike, have a place in the world to come. The Covenant of the Rainbow, which God made with Noah and his descendants (Genesis 9:1-17) affirms this, and the righteousness of Noah is acknowledged in the Hebrew Bible:

**Genesis 6:9 - These are the generations of Noah, Noah was a righteous man he was perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God.**

The prophet Ezekiel acknowledges Noah's righteousness along with that of Job, two Gentiles, and Daniel, a Jew:

**Ezekiel 14:12-14 – (12) Then the word of the Lord came, saying: (13) "Son of man, if a land sins against Me by trespassing grievously, I shall stretch forth My hand upon it and break its staff of bread, and I shall send famine upon it and cut off from it [both] man and beast. (14) And if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would save themselves with their righteousness," says the Lord God.** [See also the verses immediately following this passage, vs. 15-20, in which this message is repeated.]

One manifestation of the Jewish perspective is the fact that Judaism does not proselytize among the Gentiles. According to Judaism, Gentiles who follow the Seven Laws of Noah are known as **Righteous Gentiles**, or **B'NEI NO'ah**, and they have a place in the world to come.<sup>12</sup>

## **SIN(FULNESS), ATONEMENT, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS**

- ‡ Christianity espouses the doctrine of "Original Sin", which holds that human beings are born inherently sinful, i.e., people are born in a state of sin. This belief is rooted in the following passage:

**Genesis 3:17-19(KJV) – (17) And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; (18) Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; (19) In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat**

<sup>12</sup> These seven statutes, formulated through Rabbinic interpretation, are based on the verses shown, respectively: [1] The prohibition of murder (Genesis 9:6). [2] The prohibition of idolatry (Genesis 4:26). [3] The prohibition of blasphemy (Genesis 4:26). [4] The prohibition of sexual misconduct, especially incest (Genesis 6:12, 9:7). [5] The establishment of courts of justice (Genesis 9:6). [6] The prohibition of theft (Genesis 9:4). [7] The prohibition against eating flesh cut from a living animal (Genesis 9:4).

**bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.**

According to the Christian interpretation of this account, Adam (and Eve), by eating from the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, had disobeyed God, thereby committing the first sin by mankind and introducing death, the wages of sin, into the world. The Christian belief that the sin of Adam and Eve was transferred to all future descendants is reflected in teachings of the New Testament, such as:

**Romans 5:12(KJV) – Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:** [See also Romans 5:15a,19a.]

This means that mankind is condemned to death from the instant of conception.

How can people extricate themselves from this sentence of death? The answer is, according to Christianity, through the blood of Jesus. It is only by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior that God's "grace" (remember, for Christians, Jesus is God manifest in the flesh) returns to mankind – a belief in Jesus "saves" a person and provides salvation:

**Acts 15:11(KJV) - But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.** [See also Romans 5:15b,19b,21.]

According to Christianity, if Torah observance were effective for the purpose of the remission of sins, then the death of Jesus on the cross would have been for naught. However, the New Testament teaches that Jesus was the last a final sin sacrifice:

**Hebrews 10:10,18(KJV) – (10) By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (18) Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.** [See also Romans 6:10; Hebrews 9:12.]

Consequently, "the Law" (meaning, the Torah) is impotent, and righteousness can only be attained by following Jesus:

**Galatians 2:21(KJV) - I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.**

- ☆ The Christian doctrine of "Original Sin" is anathematic to Judaism and contrary to the teachings of the Hebrew Bible. According to Judaism, mankind enters the world with "Original Purity", free of sin and with a pure soul – everyone starts with a "clean slate". Human beings are endowed with two impulses from birth, **the good inclination (YETZER HA'TOV)** and **the evil inclination (YETZER HA'RA)**.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> **The good inclination (YETZER HA'TOV)** is the moral conscience, the inner voice that reminds one of God's Law when he or she considers doing something that is forbidden. **The evil inclination (YETZER HA'RA)** is commonly perceived as the selfish nature, the desire to satisfy personal needs (food, shelter, sex, etc.) without regard for the moral consequences of fulfilling those desires. This is not necessarily a

According to the Hebrew Bible, it is only in a person's youth, when he or she has learned the rudiments of right and wrong and the basics of good and evil, that the evil inclination starts to "act up" and, at times, overpowers the good inclination:

**Genesis 8:21** - And the Lord smelled the pleasant aroma, and the Lord said to Himself, "I will no longer curse the earth because of man, for **the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth**, and I will no longer smite all living things as I have done.

Human beings sin because they are not perfect. The ability to exercise their **free will** may also lead people to act in a way that transgresses the path delineated by God. At the consecration of the Temple he built, King Solomon says to God:

**1 Kings 8:46** - If they (Israel) sin against You, for **(there is) no man who does not sin**, and You will be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, and their captors will carry them away captive to the land of the enemy, far or near. [See also 2Chronicles 6:36.]

Recognizing that all people sin, Judaism specifies a process, which is rooted in the Hebrew Bible, for the atonement of sins and becoming righteous. According to the Hebrew Bible, sins are lifted and forgiven through –

### Prayer,

**2 Chronicles 7:13-14** – (13) If I shut up the heaven and there be no rain, and if I command locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence upon My people. (14) **And My people, upon whom My name is called, humble themselves and pray and seek My presence and repent of their evil ways, I shall hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.** [See also Hosea 14:2-3.]

### Contrite repentance,

**Psalms 51:16-19[14-17 in Christian Bibles]** – (16) Save me from blood, O God, the God of my salvation; let my tongue sing praises of Your charity. (17) O Lord, You shall open my lips, and my mouth will recite Your praise. (18) For You do not wish a sacrifice, or I should give it; You do not desire a burnt offering. (19) **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; O God, You will not despise a broken and crushed heart.** [See also Deuteronomy 4:27-31; 2Samuel 12:13.]

### Good deeds,

**Daniel 4:24[27 in Christian Bibles]** - Indeed, O king, may my counsel please you, and **with charity you will remove your sin and your iniquity by showing mercy to the poor; perhaps your tranquility will last.**" [See also Hosea 6:6; Proverbs 10:2, 11:4, 16:6, 21:3.]

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bad thing since it was created by God. Without the desire to satisfy personal needs, man would not build a house, get married, have children, or conduct business affairs. Although **the evil inclination is not** a desire to do evil in the way we normally think of it in Western society - a desire to cause senseless harm, it can lead to wrongdoing when it is not controlled by **the good inclination**. There is nothing inherently wrong with hunger, but it can lead one to steal food. There is nothing inherently wrong with sexual desire, but it can lead one to commit rape, adultery, incest, etc.

Among these components of the atonement process, acts of kindness, i.e., acts of charity, are deemed as the most important, since Judaism is a religion based on deeds, with particular emphasis on charity.

Although one may petition to be forgiven for sins at any time, as devout Jews do in their daily prayers, the annual Holy Day of **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement) is the time designated in the Hebrew Bible for atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34; Numbers 29:7-11). Yom Kippur is intended to be a vehicle that enables a person to contritely repent for his or her transgressions of the year that passed, and to resolve to do better in the coming year. It is important to recognize, however, that Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and God, not for sins committed against another person. To atone for the latter, one must first seek reconciliation with the person who was wronged, righting the wrongs and the damaging effect of the sinful acts committed (this includes compensation where applicable). Since sinful acts against any of God's creations are, in effect, also sins against God, once reconciliation between people has been reached, the offender can commence the above-described process.

In sharp contrast to Christianity, Judaism embraces the path provided in the Hebrew Bible for achieving righteousness. It is up a person to make the choice.

## **NATURE OF SATAN**

- ✚ Christianity's belief in Satan is rooted in the event that took place in the Garden of Eden, where the serpent, believed by Christians to be a manifestation of Satan, is the perpetrator of evil who succeeded in tempting man into disobeying God's command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. According to the Christian perspective, which is based on a misinterpreted passage from the Hebrew Bible (Ezekiel 28:13-18), Satan was originally one of the angels in the Heavenly Host, but his rebellion against God caused him to fall from grace, ergo the common reference to him as a "fallen angel":

**Revelation 12:9(KJV) - And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.**

Satan/"the Devil" has his own power and authority, which is used to oppose God and perpetrate evil – a view that reflects the influence of pagan religions, such as the religion of ancient Greece, which had the corresponding Hades-Zeus dyad, and the religion of ancient Rome, which had the Pluto-Jupiter dyad. This dualism of the forces of good and evil in a state of constant battle with each other that will prevail till the "end times", characterized these and other ancient pagan religions.

The author of the Book of Revelation, the last book in the New Testament, has a vision of the "end times", when Jesus will overpower Satan/"the Devil" and finally destroy him:

**Revelation 20:10(KJV) - And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.**

As part of the discussion of the Christian view of Satan, it is worthwhile to comment on the name **Lucifer**, which, for many centuries, has been linked to Satan/"the Devil" in Christian writings.

The name Lucifer is absent from the New Testament. Origen, the late-second-early-third century C.E. Greek Church Father, is recognized as the first one to identify Satan with Lucifer.<sup>14</sup> Since that time, the name has found its way into Isaiah 14:12 in several "Old Testament" translations: Jerome's Latin Vulgate (BSV; 405), the King James Version (KJV; 1611), the Darby Translation (Darby; 1890), the New King James Version (NKJV; 1982), and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version (KJ21; 1994). The KJV renders the verse as follows:

**Isaiah 14:12(KJV) - How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!**

The application of the name Lucifer in these Christian translation may have been motivated by the work of Origen, via the supposition that the entire passage, Isaiah 14:4-21, describes Satan, and from the belief that Isaiah 14:12 is explained in the New Testament via passages, such as:

**Luke 10:18(KJV) - And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.**

However, this interpretation of the Isaiah passage turns out to be problematic for Christianity. The name **Lucifer** means **light-bringer** in Latin, and in Greek it is **phôsphoros** (φωσφορος). Both are also references to the planet **Venus**, which is known as the **morning star** or **star of the morning** [αστηρ ο πρωινος (**aster o prô'i'nos**)]. In the New Testament, both titles, the light-bringer and the morning star, are applied to Jesus:

**2 Peter 1:19(KJV) - We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star [φωσφορος] arise in your hearts:**

**Revelation 22:16(KJV) - I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star [ο αστηρ ο λαμπρος ο πρωινος].**

For this reason, with few exceptions, Christian theologians have generally rejected and abandoned this interpretation of the passage in Isaiah, as is evident from the meager number of translations that use the name Lucifer.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, p. 131, Cornell University Press (1981).

<sup>15</sup> Regrettably, a highly respected translation by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg also contains the name Lucifer, although for a different reason, as stated in the commentary on the verse: "**This is Venus, which gives light as the morning star.**" [*The Book of Isaiah, Volume One*, p. 125, The Judaica Press, Inc. (1992)]

☆ Judaism includes a belief in שָׂטָן (*ha'satan*), **The Satan**, but not in “the Devil”. This title derives from the root verb שָׂטַן (*stn*), which has several related meanings: **[to] denounce, [to] condemn, [to] be an adversary, [to] persecute, [to] hate**. The verb is used in the Hebrew Bible in this context as well (e.g., Zechariah 3:1; Psalms 38:21[20], 109:4). The noun שָׂטָן derives from that root verb, and it has several related meanings as well: **an accuser, an adversary, a foe, a hindrance, a prosecutor**. Of the 30 applications of this noun in the Hebrew Bible, it is used in this context on 11 occasions (Numbers 22:22,32; 1Samuel 29:4; 2Samuel 19:23; 1Kings 5:18, 11:14,23; Psalms 71:13, 109:6,20,29). The remaining 19 instances are all examples of its usage as a title/name. With one exception, all these instances utilize the explicit form of the title, inclusive of the definite article הַ (*ha*), and appear as שָׂטָן, **The Satan**, also known as **The Adversary**. The single exception is at 1Chronicles 21:1, where it appears simply as שָׂטָן, **Satan**, where the context clearly indicates this is a reference to שָׂטָן.

The following attributes of שָׂטָן are evident from the Hebrew Bible:

⊙ **שָׂטָן is an angel, a bona fide member of the Heavenly Host.**

This is evident from the following passage in the Hebrew Bible:

**Job 1:6 - Now the day came about, and the angels of God came to stand beside the Lord, and the Adversary [שָׂטָן], too, came among them.**

⊙ **As one of the angels of God, שָׂטָן was created without a free will.**

Though there is no direct reference to this in the Hebrew Bible, it can easily be deduced from the various accounts of angels and their missions, as well as an understanding of what "free will" really means.<sup>16</sup> In the simplest terms, "free will" means the ability to say "no". In all the narratives in the Hebrew Bible where angelic missions and actions are noted, there is not a single instance where an angel refused an assigned mission.<sup>17</sup>

⊙ **As an angel, being a messenger of God, שָׂטָן obediently carries out the mission assigned to him by God.**

שָׂטָן has the job of "testing" people's character in terms of their ability to control the evil inclination<sup>18</sup>. As such, he acts as "the prosecutor", accusing and presenting the collected evidence in support of the case against the "defendant".

The Book of Job is where this battle between שָׂטָן and the good inclination plays out, and where it is evident that (a) he is completely under the control of God, acting

<sup>16</sup> The idea that angels have no free will is first discussed in the Talmud and in the Midrash (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat, Folio 88b; Genesis Rabbah 48:11).

<sup>17</sup> The Talmud and Midrash speak of angels going on a single mission at a time (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Bava Metzi'a, Folio 86b; Genesis Rabbah 50:2). The Talmud and Midrash also note that angels possess an intellect and an inner life, and that they argue (but never refuse an assignment) and are capable of erring (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, Folio 38b; Midrash Psalms 18:13).

<sup>18</sup> שָׂטָן is often identified as a manifestation of the evil inclination in extra-Biblical Jewish sources.

solely with divine permission to carry out torment, and (b) a person's virtue, a manifestation of the good inclination, can prevail.<sup>19</sup>

A religious belief in an entity that competes with God and has its own power and authority to oppose Him violates the basic tenets of monotheism. Judaism views **יְטִשְׁה** as an angel who works for God, not against Him, and who must obtain permission from God for every action that he takes. **יְטִשְׁה** actually facilitates human growth by providing the necessary challenge. Had God wanted mankind to just "be good" at all times, He would have created automata. Instead, humans were created with a free will, which gives them the ability to make choices:

**Deuteronomy 30:15,19 – (15) Behold, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil, (19) This day, I call upon the heaven and the earth as witnesses [that I have warned] you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; and you shall choose life, so that you and your offspring will live;**

Of course, God wants us to "choose life" and to strive for the good. In stark contrast with the Christian idea of Satan/"the Devil", by challenging mankind, **יְטִשְׁה** serves God in making human goodness a true choice and an opportunity to continuously excel.

### **CONCEPT OF "HELL"**

- ‡ According to Christian beliefs, **Hell** is a terrestrial underground location ruled by Satan/"the Devil", and its inhabitants are subjected to punishment inflicted by an environment of fire and brimstone. The New Testament describes the nature of this place on numerous occasions, such as:

**Matthew 8:12(KJV) - But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

**Matthew 25:41(KJV) - Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:**

**Revelation 14:10-11(KJV) – (10) The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: (11) And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.**

According to the New Testament, for the souls condemned to live there, Hell is a place of darkness, fire, sulfur, and lakes of fire and brimstone, where weeping, gnashing of teeth, and torment are the constant state of affairs.

Opinions on the eternity of Hell vary among the Christian denominations. Many teach that Hell is eternal. Some believe that Hell is only temporary, and after

<sup>19</sup> The Talmud and Midrash describe angels to be subordinate to the righteous (Babylonian Talmud, Tractates Sanhedrin, Folio 93a & Nedarim, Folio 32a; Genesis Rabbah 21 & Deuteronomy Rabbah 1).

-serving their time there, the souls are destroyed. Others believe that, after serving their time in Hell, souls are reconciled to God and admitted to heaven. The Roman Catholic Church views Hell not as a place but a state of separation from God, which results from dying in mortal sin without repenting and accepting His merciful love.

The population of Hell consists of the souls of those who were out of God's grace when they died, that is, people who died in sin and without repentance, including all "bad" Christians and all non-Christians, regardless of how they behaved during their lifetime, as well as Satan/"the Devil" and his angels (the demons). In the "end times", the souls and bodies of those condemned to Hell will be reunited and remain there to be tormented, but never consumed, by an eternal fire.

**Revelation 21:8(KJV) - But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.**  
[See also Revelation 20:10 above.]

- ☆ Judaism's concept of "hell" is post-Biblical. The Hebrew Bible makes no direct reference to a place that fits the common Christian concept of Hell and has no specific word to name it.

The Talmud speaks of a place to which are consigned the souls of persons who did not lead exemplary lives on earth, the Hebrew word for which is גֵּיהֵנוֹם (*geihinom*). This term derives from the Biblical place known as both גַּיא־הַנֶּזֶם (*GEI-hinom*), [the] Valley of Hinnom (e.g. Nehemiah 11:30) and גַּיא־בֶן־הַנֶּזֶם (*GEI-ven-hinom*), [the] Valley of the Son of Hinnom (e.g., Jeremiah 19:6). This is a valley located south of Jerusalem, where the fire-god Moloch was worshipped (via the sacrifice of children) by the Ammonites. During the times when the Temples stood in Jerusalem, the same place served as a garbage dump where the carcasses of the animals that were offered as sacrifices at the Temple were burnt.<sup>20</sup>

Views vary about the nature of גֵּיהֵנוֹם and what transpires there, whether it is a physical or spiritual place, and whether the dead or their souls inhabit it. The prevalent opinion within traditional Judaism is that all but the souls of the most righteous spend some time in גֵּיהֵנוֹם, a period that may last up to, but not exceed, 12 months. The place can be likened to a spiritual forge where the souls of decedents are cleansed of the stains from the sins for which the people did not repent prior to dying. Once all sins have been purged from it, the purified soul ascends to the "world to come". The only exceptions to this are the most righteous and the profoundly wicked. The souls of the most righteous are said to ascend directly to the "world to come". According to some, the souls of the

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<sup>20</sup> The Greek New Testament uses the term γέεννα (*Ge'enna*) on 12 occasions for the place of eternal punishment by fire, and which is generally translated into the English as **hell** (e.g., Matthew 5:22).

profoundly wicked people are destroyed after 12-months in גיהנום, or they continue to exist, but remain in a constant state of remorse, according to others.

There are also different views on the actual process that takes place in גיהנום during the time that the souls spend there. Some describe it as place of severe punishment, somewhat reminiscent of the fire and brimstone treatment according to the Christian perspective. Others simply view it as a time when the decedents get an objective picture of their lives where they see the wrongs they have done, and experience remorse for these deeds. Some Jewish mystics hold that a demon is created for every sin a person commits during his/her lifetime, and after a person dies, he/she is punished by the very demons that he or she created.

### III. SUMMARY

Some of the major differences between Judaism and Christianity were explored by comparing the respective views on several of the basic components they share. These comparisons bear out the fact that Christianity and Judaism are two fundamentally different theologies that happen to share a distant common origin. However, by rejecting the basic tenets of Judaism nearly 20 centuries ago, Christianity carved out its own "niche" among world religions.

The results of this comparative analysis demonstrate the absurdity of claims by Christian missionaries who engage in Jewish evangelism, such as Christianity being "fulfilled/completed Judaism". The following statement succinctly captures the essence of how different the two theologies are:

**Scholars tell us that Christianity could be reduced to "faith in God," and Judaism to "wrestling with God." As Jews, we are obliged to question, struggle with and even, in extreme cases, take God to a holy court for the injustices of the world – where do you find this in Christianity?<sup>21</sup>**

Jews, while they must respect the fact that Christians, just as the followers of any other religion, have their own beliefs, also need to understand that Christian theology, regardless of denominational banners, is at odds with what the Hebrew Bible teaches and, therefore, is not suitable for Jewish people.

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<sup>21</sup> Taken from a letter by Jim Brule to the "Readers Page" in *The Post-Standard*, a daily newspaper in Syracuse, NY (date and page information is not available).