

# Rome, Judaism and the Rise of Christianity

## Roman Religion

Like the Greeks the Romans were *Polytheistic*. The gods were honored through rituals so people could avoid misfortune. Each god represented and governed a different aspect of Roman life.

Some of their gods were: *Jupiter* (father of the gods), *Juno* (his wife and guardian of women), *Saturn*, *Neptune*, *Mars* (god of war), *Minerva* (goddess of arts and crafts), *Pluto* etc.

The Romans allowed monotheism if believers performed a ritual to show loyalty to the emperor.

The *Romans dispersed (kicked out) the Jews* from the Roman Empire in 70 AD.

Romans *persecuted the Christians*.

Emperor *Constantine the Great* became the first *Christian emperor in 313 AD* and ends Christian persecution.

The Roman Empire makes the Christian church the *Roman Catholic Church in 392 AD*

## Judaism

The *Hebrews* (Jewish People) were a nomadic people who originally lived in the area of Mesopotamia about 2000 BC. They were the *first monotheistic people of the world*. One of the Jewish leaders, *Abraham*, led his people from the Fertile Crescent to Canaan, an area we know as Israel today. When famine hit Canaan, the Jewish people moved closer to Egypt where the *pharaoh enslaved them* to build Egyptian pyramids. Moses forced the Pharaoh to free the Jewish people. Finally, after many plagues, pharaoh Ramses II allowed them to leave. Just as *Moses* and his people headed to the Red Sea, Ramses II changed his mind and set out against them. As Ramses was about to overtake them, Moses parted the Red Sea, crossed the sea and brought it crashing back on Ramses and his men. After 40 years, Moses brought his people back to Canaan. On the way to Canaan, God gave Moses *10 Commandments*, ten rules on moral behavior by which the people were to live. These laws resemble the code of Hammurabi which also established a code of conduct for people. The code was interpreted by religious leaders called prophets. Prophets were messengers sent by God to reveal his will to the people. From 1200 to 600 BC the Jews developed an advanced civilization uniting three areas now called Israel. Around 1000 BC *King David* built the city of *Jerusalem* and made it the *capital of Israel*. In 962 BC. *David's son, Solomon*, took over Israel and became *Israel's most powerful king*. Solomon built a large temple to glorify God. It was the home of the Arc of the Covenant, the box containing the Ten

Commandments. Later in 586 BC., the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's temple. In 539 BC. the temple was rebuilt and completed again in 515 BC. When the Romans gained control of this area, they "Romanized" Jerusalem and renamed the area Palestine. The Jews often revolted against the iron hand of the Romans. In 70 AD. the Romans, tired of dealing with the Jews and their revolts, stormed Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple (all that remained was a part of the western wall now called the Wailing Wall, the holiest of Jewish shrines) and drove the Jews from the Roman empire by 132 AD. This dispersion of the Jews was called the **Diaspora**. With **Diaspora**, the Jewish state ceased to exist for 1800 years. Because the Jews were seen as different and outsiders, in the new areas they entered, they were persecuted wherever they went. Many had only one desire: To return to and form Israel again. The Jewish movement to accomplish this goal was called **Zionism**. The **Zionists** were successful *after World War II* in **1948** when the **United Nations** **partitioned Palestine** and gave half the territory to the Jewish people. The Jews immediately renamed the area **Israel** but **conflicts** between **Jews and Palestinians** have continued until today.

Jews believe their God, **Yaweh**, is like a father. He is the one true God of the Jewish faith and is present everywhere. **Yaweh** made a **covenant (agreement)** with **Abraham** to send a savior called **Messiah** for the Jewish people. They believe they are the chosen people of God. They **worship on Saturdays** and work to obey the Ten Commandments, a code of ethics and moral standards. They celebrate **Yom Kippur**, **Passover**, and **Rosh Hashanah**. Most of their early history was recorded in the **first five books** of the **Bible** called the **Torah**. It is the sacred literature of Jewish law and history. They believe that the covenant between God and the Jews has not yet been fulfilled since they **do not consider Jesus Christ to be the Messiah** (savior). Jews believe that Jesus was only a great prophet and believe their **Messiah** is yet to come.

## Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church

Those Jews who believed Jesus (who was born in the Jewish faith) as the Messiah became the first Christians. The Messiah, a savior chosen by God, stressed love for God and compassion for other people. "Love God with all your heart and love thy neighbor as thyself" were words spoken by Jesus. He also taught people in parables, stories with simple moral lessons. He taught the beliefs of his background in the Jewish faith: obedience to God and the Ten Commandments. Jesus chose twelve disciples as Apostles to carry on his teachings. As he taught, the Roman authorities began to see Christ and his followers as troublemakers. Christians aroused official persecution because they refused to worship the Roman emperors. They were used as scapegoats being falsely blamed for things they didn't do or had no control over such as fires, earthquakes, and defeats in battle. The Romans crucified Jesus in the year 33 AD. However, his Apostles continued to teach the Christian ways throughout the Roman Empire. They taught that Christ's arrest, trial and execution on the cross was a sacrifice for all people and that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Many Jews and others believed that Jesus was the Son of God and became Christians. These Christians became martyrs, those killed for their religious beliefs until the year **313 AD.**, when **Emperor Constantine** introduced a policy of toleration for Christians in a law called the **Edict of Milan**. Constantine even became a Christian on his death bed.

By **395 AD.**, **Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire** and was organized into the **Roman Catholic Church**. The Church was organized into a **hierarchy**, or organization in which the officials are **organized according to rank**. The **Pope** was the head of the Church. The **bishops** were the heads of Church in major cities and in the **dioceses**. The **priest** were the heads of the individual **parishes**. This

hierarchy and the beliefs of the Church as stated in the *Nicene Creed* are still in practice as millions of Catholics practice the Christian religion today. The *beliefs of Christians are similar to Jewish beliefs* in many ways. They believe that there is only *one true God*. Their sacred writings include the *Jewish Torah* and other books of the *Old Testament* as well as the *New Testament*, which is called the Bible. They accept the *Ten Commandments*, but also the new ideas preached by Jesus. All Christians believe *Jesus was the Son of God* while Jews do not. They believe that his mission was to bring salvation and *eternal life* to those who followed him. Jesus taught mercy and sympathy for the poor and helpless. He preached brotherhood and equality for all people before God. Christians attend *Mass on Sundays* and keep holy the Sabbath. They celebrate the birth and death of Christ at *Christmas and Easter* respectively. While Christians, Jews and Muslims have many similarities in their beliefs, they have often found themselves in conflict with each other.

# **Christianity and Judaism: Compare and Contrast**

