

WHY I AM NOT A JEW ... OR AM I?

One of the great joys in my legal life was my relationship with Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. He was brilliant, witty, opinionated, friendly, and fun, all rolled into one. He had a great love for his family, his friends, the law, and his country. He also loved to sing, hunt, talk, analyze, and eat! It was in the midst of these activities that I found myself with him in a humorous interchange.

We were on a hunting trip in South Texas for the weekend. During Sunday lunch, there were six of us feasting on some incredible food when out of the blue, Justice Scalia, who humbly insisted on being called simply “Nino” by his friends, issued forth the question:

“*Lonesome Dove*, what was better, the book or the movie?”

We went around the table answering the question, and since I was seated at his left, I was the last to answer.

“I think I liked the book best. I had already seen the movie, had fallen in love with the characters of Woodrow Call and Augustus McCrae. I found them perfectly captured by the actors Tommie Lee Jones and Robert Duvall. After the movie, I wanted more of them, and I got that in the book. The book gave me the movie sequences and even more. I liked it enough to read the prequel, and then I read the seq...”

I couldn’t finish the word “sequel” when Scalia interrupted me.

“What word did you just use?” he demanded to know.

I replied, “I said I read the prequel, and was about to say sequel.”

He challenged me, proclaiming indignantly, “prequel is NOT a word!”

I told him, yes, it was a word. He asked its precise meaning, and I explained that in a series, the prequel is the preceding item while the sequel is the next item. He then raised his hand dismissively and said,

“Prequel is not a word! It is a combining of the Latin prefix ‘*pre-*’ with the end of the Latin word ‘*sequitor.*’ You can’t do that with language.” (In fairness, Scalia’s father had been a Latin teacher.)

I replied, “Well, words come about through all sorts of ways, and ‘prequel’ is a word NOW in the English language! I never said it was a Latin word!”

He huffed, so I added, “And anyway, the word is in the dictionary.”

This, what I thought was my winning argument, he rejected with a bit of sarcasm in his voice, “Well, maybe it’s in *Webster’s Third Dictionary*, but nobody counts that as a real dictionary!”

I was then on the defensive and wondering how far he would push this, so I threw out a bluff. I firmly asserted, “It’s in the *Oxford English Dictionary*! Surely that counts as a dictionary!”

He gave me his “Are you bluffing?” stare as he asked me directly, “Do you really know that it’s in there?”

I replied, “Of course it is!”

He said, “How do you know that?”

I gave a satisfied nod as I answered, “Because it’s a word in English, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* includes English words!”

He asked me if I knew how to “do that Google thing,” and when I affirmed I did, he urged me to look it up. We found a computer, got on the internet, and looked. Sure enough, the *Oxford English Dictionary* had the word “prequel.” I thought I had finally won the argument, only to have the Supreme Court Justice give me the final un-appealable answer,

“Wow, what has the world come to? The *Oxford English Dictionary* has gone the way of *Webster’s Third*!”

As a footnote to this story, both the Justice and I wrote the Oxford English Dictionary Editor, and urged him to remove the word from the upcoming fourth edition, in an effort to scrub and improve the English language. I got a nice reply from the editor explaining that his job is to put into the dictionary all of the English words. He is not a gatekeeper for the Queen’s English.

This interchange with Scalia came natural to us both. Defining words is one of the most important parts of a lawyer’s job. A contract isn’t clear, if the words aren’t defined. Testimony isn’t precise, if the words are ambiguous. One person can have one idea and a second person an entirely different idea, if the words used have multiple meanings. Definitions are necessary in the world of legal precision. For this reason, although the meaning of being “Jewish” might seem obvious, it is important to consider it first, because the definition is not as precise as one might think!

WHAT IS A JEW?

I have a number of Jewish friends, and I encounter many Jews through daily living. Some of my favorite musicians are Jewish (Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Leonard Cohen, Mark Knopfler, etc.) Of course, there are many famous Jewish actors (Harrison Ford, Natalie Portman, Billy Crystal, etc) as well as writers (Saul Bellow, Franz Kafka, Ayn Rand, etc.) and scientists (Albert Einstein, Jonas Salk, Robert Oppenheimer, etc.). With all of these well-known and famous Jews, we might wonder why anyone would need to ask, “What is a Jew?”

The answer is not so clear-cut because “Jewishness” can refer to a number of things. Consider as an example, J.D. Salinger, who wrote *The Catcher in the Rye*. He was “Jewish,” yet he was also a Hindu. Referring to one as a Jew might refer to her or his nationality, culture, ethnicity (genealogy), or religion. Each of these has a different nuance infusing “Jew” or “Jewish” with a special meaning. Not surprisingly then, my reasons for the statement “Why I am not a Jew...” depends on what one means by Jewishness.

If one refers to living in or being a citizen of the nation of Israel, then I must quickly acknowledge, “I am not a Jew; I am a Texan!” If one refers to culture, then again, I would say, “No, I do not keep *kosher*, and I wasn’t *bar mitzpha*’d, so I am not Jewish.”

Many people set aside those meanings of Jewishness, and instead mean a genealogical one. For many, being a Jew is a reference to people born as ultimate offspring of Abraham and Sarah, the Old Testament people we read about in the Biblical book of Genesis. The story of this beginning of Jewish people is very ancient.

Roughly 2,000 years BC (“before Christ”), or BCE (“before the common era”) at a time when Abraham had no children, God made a promise to Abraham.

And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be” (Gen. 15:5).

Abraham felt that his wife Sarah was far too old for such a promise, so with his wife’s consent, Abraham impregnated his wife’s servant Hagar. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, whom the Muslims accord as the father of the Arab peoples. It was after Ishmael’s birth that the aged Sarah became pregnant. By God’s miraculous touch, Sarah gave birth to her and Abraham’s child, naming him Isaac.

Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob fathered twelve sons who were the progenitors for the twelve tribes of Israel. According to tradition and the Biblical account, these form the genealogical tree from which Jews exist today.

The term “Jew” does not stem from all these tribes, however, but from the tribe of Jacob’s son Judah. The Old Testament account has the families from Jacob’s twelve sons living in Egypt for several centuries while enslaved by Pharaohs. This lasted until Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, through the wilderness and to the Promised Land. This deliverance happened somewhere around 1400 to 1200BC, depending on which theory of the Exodus one accepts. The Israelites settled in the land of Canaan, and the land was apportioned among the tribes, with the tribe of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon getting the southernmost part of the land.

For centuries, Israel then existed as a loose confederation of the various tribes ruled by judges who arose in various places at various times. Eventually, the people demanded a change in the governing structure. The people wanted a king. With the anointing of Saul, around 1030BC, the nation of Israel became the Kingdom of Israel. This lasted for only three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon. After Solomon’s death, the kingdom was severed into two, a Northern Kingdom and a Southern Kingdom, around 931BC. The Northern Kingdom was ruled by one line of kings while the Southern Kingdom was ruled by the progeny from Kings David and Solomon.

After several centuries, the Northern Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrian Kings Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II, around 720BC. Many of the northern tribes were transported away from Israel and assimilated into other people groups in the Middle East, while others fled to the Southern Kingdom and integrated into that population.

The Southern Kingdom was also known as the Kingdom of Judah, since Judah was the predominant tribe. It lasted longer than the Northern Kingdom, but was eventually conquered by Babylon in campaigns waged between 597 and 582BC. Most of the people were deported to Babylon, fled to Egypt, or disappeared in the surrounding lands. Around 539BC, a number of the people were allowed to return from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the city as well as the temple. These people of Judah are what many today term “Jews.”

Our English word “Jew” derives from the name for the tribe descended from Judah. The German word for this group is “Jude,” pronounced “yu-de.” (In an adjective form this becomes pronounced “yu-desch,” or more commonly “yiddish,” which is a German form of the Hebrew language.)

This might make one easily answer the question of whether one is Jewish by simply tracing lineage back to Jacob; however, even that is not so simple. There is a huge political overlay on anything like this, and politics influence the term. Part of the Biblical promise to Abraham was not just that his offspring would be so numerous, but also that God promised them the land that currently comprises Israel (and a bit more than that). Accordingly, in the Middle East, Israel asserts a divine right to its land tied ultimately to their status as the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but other nations challenge that right.

Not surprisingly, a number of people have challenged the historicity of Abraham, his offspring, and even whether or not there was a Moses. What might be more surprising is that this group of skeptics include several Israeli scholars. These select scholars attempt to propagate their opinion in the public arena as if it is fact. It is not hard to find a number of places where Abraham is labeled a myth, and Jews today and the ancient Israelites are supposed to be simply Canaanites who banded together and composed some great mythology of origins.

For example, if one were to look up the Wikipedia site for “Jew,”¹ one would find:

Modern **archaeology** has largely discarded the historicity of the Patriarchs and of the Exodus story,^[53] with it being reframed as constituting the **Israelites'** inspiring **national myth** narrative. The Israelites and their culture, according to the modern archaeological account, did not overtake the region by force, but instead branched out of the **Canaanite peoples** and culture through the development of a distinct **monolatristic**—and later **monotheistic**—religion centered on **Yahweh**,^{[54][55][56]} one of the **Ancient Canaanite deities**. The growth of Yahweh-centric belief, along with a number of cultic practices, gradually gave rise to a distinct Israelite **ethnic group**, setting them apart from other Canaanites. The

Although written as fact, this is nothing but conjecture and a political opinion cloaked as “archaeology.” The authors cited do not represent the larger scholastic community, and their opinions fail to take into account significant evidence.²

It would seem logical to look to genetics to help address this question, but that is a constantly evolving science. Genetic studies have indicated that Jews and Arabs have a common ancestor, but not from some Canaanite infiltration in the 1,000BC era. At least one study of the Y-chromosomes has indicated that Jews and Arabs have a common ancestor that lived roughly 4,000 years ago, about the time of the Biblical Abraham. The same study indicates that the high priestly line of Jews had a common ancestor around 1300BC, roughly the time of the first high priest Aaron.³

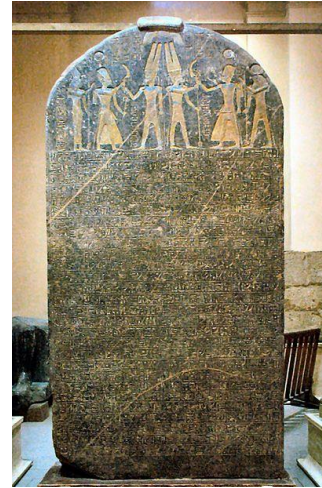
The oldest archaeological reference to the “Israelites” by that name comes from a stone called the “Merneptah stele.” Currently in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, this ancient

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jews>.

² A well-documented and thorough response to these arguments is found in Kitchen, Ken, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans 2006).

³ Klyosov, Anatole, “Origin of the Jews and the Arabs: Date of their Most Recent Common Ancestor is Written in their Y-Chromosomes – However, There Were Two of Them.” Available from Nature Proceedings <http://precedings.nature.com/documents/4206/version/1>.

granite carving was originally made around 1208BC. It was discovered by famed archaeologist and Egyptologist Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) in 1896.



The stele commemorates the victories of the Egyptian Pharaoh Merneptah over a host of others. The stele describes a number of states conquered by the Pharaoh, including Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yano'am. There is also a reference to Israel. "Israel is laid waste and his seed is not." Israel is referenced differently in the stone. The way this is written in hieroglyphics, it speaks of Israel as a collective group of people, but not a kingdom. In other words, unlike the people in Ashkelon or Gezer, the people of Israel had no king, and were more of a loosely affiliated confederacy of people, fully consistent with the Biblical picture.

While the whole area of historicity is worthy of a book itself, especially with the political overlay, it is sufficient for this endeavor, that if one were to type my DNA, I suspect it would show that I am not one of those descended from the common ancestor of Abraham's era! Hence, in that sense, I am not a Jew either.

This leaves a last definition of a Jew, and that is the religious one. We might here speak more properly of Judaism. This group contains not only those who are practicing adherents that are born genetically Jews, but it also includes those who convert to Judaism. Even here, however, there is a great deal of diversity.

RELIGIOUS JUDAISM

Religious Judaism comes in many shapes and sizes. Scholars generally speak of three approaches to religious Judaism that cover the majority of practicing or religious Jews. At one end of the spectrum are Orthodox Jews. Orthodox Jews are the most strictly adherent to the Hebrew Law or "*Torah*." (This is the designation for the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, i.e., of the "Old Testament.") At the other end of the spectrum are Reform Jews." Reform Jews see the *Torah* as a set of guidelines, but do not think they must be strictly adhered to as unalterable, divine and eternal commandments.

A good contrast between these came about when I was eating lunch with one of my Hebrew professors who had grown up in an Orthodox home. My professor ordered a ham and cheese sandwich. I looked at him somewhat stunned. He told me that he grew up Orthodox, but was now Reform. He then poked his finger in my face and added, "Moses never would have forbade ham, if he'd tasted it the way my wife makes it!" Now I am not saying that all Reform Jews see things as Dr. Klein. I'm not sure I even see things as Dr.

Klein! (I don't eat pork, for example.) But this story shows a contrast that can exist between two different sets of religious Jews.

In between the two ends of the spectrum, Orthodox and Reform, lies a middle ground – Conservative Judaism. Conservatives are more likely to adhere to a good bit of *Torah*, even though they do not adhere to it all.

If we go back in time 2,000 years, the Jewish religious sects were not classified as Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. There were sects, but they bore different names. The sect we know most about was called the “Pharisees.” Most scholars believe the Pharisees came out of the Hasidaeans movement that arose in the second century before Christ.⁴ The Hasidaeans (aka “Hasidim”) were Jews fully devoted to the Law of God as governing life and religion, at a time when that way of life was under attack.

After Alexander the Great (356-323BC) had conquered much of the known world, the Greek way of life (with a good bit of Greek religion) became fashionable throughout the Ancient Near East, including the territories of Judah and Israel.

In the Apocrypha, we read of this Greek influence:

In those days there appeared in Israel men who were breakers of the law, and they seduced many people, saying: ‘Let us go and make an alliance with the Gentiles all around us.... Some from among the people promptly went to the king, and he authorized them to introduce the way of living of the Gentiles. Thereupon they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem according to the Gentile custom. They covered over the mark of their circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant (1 Maccabees 1:11-15).

Things reached a point where the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes issued a decree forbidding the practice of the Jewish faith. This decree brought about a Jewish revolt spearheaded by the Maccabee brothers. The Hasidim, who gladly sacrificed themselves to keep the religion of Moses from extermination, fought valiantly in aid of the revolt.⁵

These Hasidim were the fathers to the Pharisees. In its purist form, Pharisees sought to protect the true Jewish faith and practice.

⁴ “Pharisees,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (Keter Publishing House 1972), Vol. 13, at 363; F. F. Bruce, Paul, *Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans 1977) at 47ff. See also *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday 1992) III at 66.

⁵ This is the same revolt from which came Jewish Hanukkah celebrations, commemorating the lasting of oil for the lamps during the rededication of the temple.

Another sect we know of was called the Sadducees. They were generally considered a more secular group who were the upper economic and political group of Jews. They generally oversaw affairs of state, regulated relationships with the Romans, and maintained the Temple in Jerusalem. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus (37-c.100) explained that the Sadducees did not believe in the afterlife, something the New Testament writings also note. They also followed mainly the *Torah*, but limited their Scriptures to those five scrolls.⁶

The third sect of which we know even less were the Essenes. The Essenes lived separated out from normal Jewish life, sacrificing on their own rather than in the Temple. They held all things in common, and Josephus notes there were only about 4,000 of them.

By the middle of the first century, another Jewish sect was recognized. It is worth noting here that the Greek word for sect is “haireisis” (αἵρεσις). It is the word used in the Bible to reference the Sadducees (Acts 5:17) as well as the Pharisees (Acts 15:5). This same word was used in the 40–50AD era for the Jewish sect variously called “the Way” or “the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5, 14). This is the group we now call Messianic, or Jewish Christians (see also Acts 28:22).

It was not until sometime after the destruction of the second temple at the end of the first century, that Christianity was excised from normative Judaism. Before that, it was considered a growing Jewish sect.

Because of this great diversity, today and historically, it is difficult to give strict definitions to religious “Judaism;” however, we can still find some useful generalizations by examining core teachings of key people.

One of Judaism’s most famous teachers lived in the Middle Ages, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides. Living from about 1138 to 1204, Maimonides was a rabbi, philosopher, and doctor, all rolled into one. Jewish history still reckons him as one of, if not the, preeminent Jewish scholar on the *Torah*. An introduction to a leading book on Moses Maimonides describes his significance,

Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) is one of the greatest religious thinkers of all time. In Jewish tradition, he is often called the Great Eagle, the philosopher who rose to great heights and whose vision covered an extensive range. A popular saying among Jews is that “From Moses [of the Torah] to Moses [Maimonides], none has arisen like Moses [Maimonides].” Indeed, it can fairly be asserted that from the days of Moses Maimonides until our own

⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Ch. 1:3.

time, no Jewish thinker has had a more significant impact on Jewish religious thought than Maimonides.⁷

Maimonides published thirteen principles of faith, and I will use those principles as core definitions of what it means to be Jewish in a religious sense. These thirteen principles are what I examine to determine, whether I am a Jew or not.

Principle 1

The first principle is belief in a Creator, a being who is himself complete in existence, and who caused all that exists.

I find myself in agreement with this first principle. This principle also exists in the Christian faith. It is the idea that God has always been complete in every manner of existence by himself. Christianity teaches that God has fellowship within the Trinity, and hence has no need of company, no need of others to express or receive love, no need of anything whatsoever. God is full unto himself. Yet this same God created all there is. The Jewish rabbi and Christian apostle Paul wrote of God, “who created all things” (Eph. 3:9).

Again, in writing to the church at Colossae, Paul spoke of Jesus as God,

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:16-17).

This sounds much like Maimonides who wrote,

the Creator, may He be blessed... is the Cause of all that exists. He maintains their existence, and their existence is dependent on Him.⁸

So, on this first principle of Judaism, even as a Christian, I find myself in agreement.

Principle 2

The second principle centers on the unity of God, that God is One.

⁷ Rabbi Marc D. Angel. *Maimonides—Essential Teachings on Jewish Faith & Ethics*, (Jewish Lights Publishing 2012), Introduction.

⁸ *Ibid*, at 196.

Again, as a Christian, this same principle exists. The New Testament apostle James, who was also the brother of Jesus, wrote of the importance of believing that God is one, noting that even the demons had this figured out!

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! (James 2:19).

The rabbi and apostle Paul wrote similarly,

For there is one God (1 Tim. 2:5).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul waxed poetically about this truth,

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:4-6).

Now some may raise the question, “but don’t Christians believe that Jesus is also God?” Yes, Christianity certainly does teach that Jesus is God, yet that truth exists alongside the truth of God being one. God is one as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a truth considered even in the Old Testament. God spoke within himself in the Creation account, “Let *us* make man in our image, after *our* likeness” (Gen. 1:26). We read in the same creation account of the Spirit of God moving over the face of the deep (Gen. 1:2).

The Hebrew Scriptures also, fully affirming that God is one, spoke of a coming Messiah who would be God as well.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

The difficulty, according to the Christian faith, is that humanity has no way of truly understanding the nature of God, beyond the ways that God has revealed himself. It is a bit like trying to read Russian if you cannot read or speak it. Someone might teach you that “God” in Russian is “бог,” and that would enable you to identify it when you see it. Then if someone were to reference “публика галерки,” you might be vehement that the word has nothing to do with God (or god). From the frame of reference of one who understands only бог, that would be right. Still, the picture gets bigger the more one learns.

So is the Christian understanding of God, commonly known as the Trinity. We cannot expect to know God as a full being. The one who created all and holds all together is a being far beyond our comprehension. Heavens, that we should think God simply a supersized human. He is definitely not! So for Christians, there are three things we best

understand about God. First, he is One. Not two. Not three, but One. Second, the Father, Son, and Spirit are all God. Finally, the Father, Son, and Spirit are not the same. With that mystery, Christians readily accept the truth taught by Maimonides,

The Unity of God; namely, that we must believe that He who is the cause of all is One. [This “One”] is not like one of a pair, or one of a kind, or one person composed of many parts, and not one like one physical thing that can be divided and separated infinitely. Rather, The Most High is One and a Unity unlike any other unity. This second principle is taught in the phrase “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.”⁹

The key is found in another statement of Maimonides, that “The *Torah* speaks in the language of man.” God is described as One, and that unity cannot be diminished. Nevertheless, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinct yet not three gods.

Principle 3

God is Spirit, not flesh. God is not subject to the things that affect bodies, such as movement or fatigue. When the Bible speaks of God in physical terms (walking, standing, etc.) it is a metaphor. It is using the language of people.

This was the teaching of Jesus as well, and it is readily embraced by Christian orthodoxy. When Jesus was speaking with the Samaritan woman at a well where she was getting water, the conversation turned to worshipping God. The woman tried to get Jesus into a debate or dialogue over whether God should be worshipped at one physical location or another. Jesus responded that the true worship of God proceeded from the heart. God is not a physical God and we should not get wrapped up in an idea he is physically located in one place or another. Jesus explained,

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24).

Over and over in the Hebrew Old Testament, we read of God’s Spirit coming upon people, giving them words of prophesy (1 Sam. 1:10), helping them walk in the ways of God (Ezek. 36:27), and empowering them (Mic. 3:8). These same things are spoken of in the same language in the Christian writings of the New Testament (Acts 2; Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:12-17).

Some might think that because Christians believe that Jesus is God, and because Jesus was a human, that this invalidates the idea that God is spirit. Such is not the case, however.

⁹ *Ibid*, at 197.

When the Jewish rabbi and Christian apostle Paul wrote about Jesus both before and after the incarnation, he used some majestic language that illustrates the point.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, *though he was in the form of God*, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but *emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*. And being *found in human form*, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5-11).

Clearly, Jesus was not a human prior to the incarnation. Human form was something much less than he was when “in the form of God.” Humanity was a form Jesus took to work his redemption, it was no more his actual form than the human messenger (aka “angel”) that was identified as God in the Old Testament was God’s true form. Consider this passage from the Jewish book of Judges:

Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, “The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor.” And Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?’ But now the LORD has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian.” And the LORD turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?” (Judg. 6:11-14).

The Lord God took a human form to deliver a message to Gideon. God is Spirit, not flesh, but can and has taken on human form. On this, there is alignment between the Christian teaching on the nature of God and the Jewish teaching.

Principle 4

God is Primordial, meaning that he is absolute and no one or nothing existed before him.

This is a Christian truth, applied to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The one God was before all others. There is no time when God was not. Of Jesus, the apostle John wrote,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (Jn. 1:1-2).

Jesus is the “Word” in John’s writing, as he made clear in the fourteenth verse explaining, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Again, as per the third principle of Maimonides, Jesus had to become flesh; he was not a human God. Yet John does teach the preexistence of God that we call “the Father” as well as Jesus, or God we call “the Son.” Paul taught the same thing of Jesus. In the Colossians 1:17 passage set out earlier, Paul wrote about Jesus, “he is before all things.”

Again, there is no difference in the Jewish and Christian views of God in Principle 4.

To be continued...

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).*

I read this and wonder how on earth I could ever seek anything beyond humility. God have mercy on me.

2. *“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24).*

We are in a constant tug of war with truth when we try making God into super-sized humans. God is real. God really is a being beyond our ability to categorize, figure out, or put into words. We struggle to do the best we can, but are inherently limited by who we are and what we’ve experienced. The sooner I get my head to accept that, the better!

3. *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).*

We have many titles for Jesus. We need to see him in each of these in our lives. He is our counselor, our God, our Father, and the Prince of our Peace. Amen!