



Gutenberg College

Oktoberfuss 2011 • How Jewish Was Jesus?

Notes for Talk 3: What Is Old Testament Judaism?

What Is The Message of the Old Testament?

by Earle Craig

I. Introduction

A. Overall, we are answering the question, “How Jewish Was Jesus?”

1. Short answer—very, but what does this mean?

a. There is the Jewishness of the Jews, who are morally depraved and in need of God’s eternal mercy.

b. There is the Jewishness of Jesus, who is God incarnate and morally perfect, and who fulfills the role of the final Messiah as God’s ultimate prophet, eternal king, and intercessory priest for both Jews and gentiles who need God’s eternal mercy.

2. Biblical definition of a Jew (other than Jesus) – A physical descendant of Abraham through Isaac who believes in and follows the one, true God by obeying the Bible as the sole source of inerrant, authoritative truth and specifically the Mosaic Covenant with proper inwardness and awaits God’s fulfillment of all his promises to Abraham and David, including the temporal, earthly Kingdom of Israel and the eternal, heavenly Kingdom of God and including granting him, the Jew, eternal life in the Kingdom of God through the final Mosaic prophet, Davidic king, and Melchizedekic priest, i.e., the Messiah, whom the New Testament identifies as Jesus of Nazareth.

B. My job in this session – to present an explanation of Old Testament, i.e., biblical, Judaism, which, in the final analysis, is an explanation of the message of the Old Testament, because it is mainly about the Jews, as well as to point out the central ingredient that distinguishes biblical Judaism from the unbiblical Judaism that Jesus encountered in his day and, regarding this central ingredient, that is still lacking in parts of Judaism and parts of Christianity today.

C. Four things to understand in order to grasp fully the message of the Old Testament (and really the whole Bible) and to understand Old Testament Judaism –

1. God is the transcendent and rational creator of all reality that exists apart from him, who has provided humanity with the Bible as the sole source of inerrant and authoritative truth (with all due respect to Elie Wiesel).



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2. God selected one man, Abraham, from all of humanity with whom he would have a unique relationship and whom he would use in human history in order to fulfill his eternal plans and purposes by making several promises to Abraham –
 - a. Land – of Israel
 - b. Descendants – the Jews, the nation of Israel, through his son Isaac; Jesus is such a descendant of Abraham and therefore a Jew
 - c. That he would make of Abraham a great nation
 - d. Eternal life
 - e. That Abraham would be the location of eternal life for both Jews and non-Jews, i.e., gentiles

3. God has related to and interacted with the Jews through a series of agreements, called covenants, that have placed certain responsibilities on the Jews, particularly the responsibility of a proper inwardness, and certain responsibilities on him as a means for him to fulfill his plans and purposes –
 - a. Abrahamic Covenant
 - b. Mosaic Covenant
 - c. Davidic Covenant
 - d. New Covenant

4. God's overall project is to bring about two kingdoms, one on earth, the temporary Kingdom of Israel, and the other in heaven, the eternal Kingdom of God, with one of Abraham's descendants, who also is one of David's descendants and the Messiah, as the ruler of these kingdoms and as the person who presents the final message of God to human beings and intercedes before God on behalf of those with biblical inwardness because of their recognizing their need for God's mercy and forgiveness.

II. God is the Transcendent and Rational Creator, and the Bible is the Sole Source of Inerrant and Authoritative Truth

A. Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

1. The transcendent God has brought into existence all of reality that is not him. While he is uncreated, all the rest of reality is created.

2. Implied by this verse and verified by the rest of the Bible –
 - a. Reality continues to exist because of God's ongoing creating activity. Therefore, the creation is God's ongoing story that he is constantly "writing" as the transcendent storyteller.

 - b. We can understand this statement (and all other statements presented in the Bible about God and reality). Therefore, God himself is rational (his mind uses the same principles of thinking that he has given us, and the creation that he has made works in such a way that our minds can understand what is going on within it, too).

 - c. The Bible is the sole source of inerrant and authoritative truth so that it is necessary for each one of us individually to learn the Bible as best as we can and not ultimately rely on extra-biblical sources for our understanding of God and reality.



III. God Selected Abraham And Made Covenants With Him And His Descendants In Order To Bring About An Earthly Kingdom and An Eternal Kingdom With One Descendant, The Messiah, As Ruler, Prophet, And Intercessor For Other Human Beings, Both Jews And Gentiles

A. Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12-22)

1. Genesis 12:1-3 –

[Gen. 12:1](#) Now the LORD [Yahweh] said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you;

[Gen. 12:2](#) And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

[Gen. 12:3](#) And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” [NAS95]

a. Five promises that God obligates himself to keep, as long as Abraham and his descendants obey with proper inwardness

i. Land

ii. Descendants (through Isaac, not Ishmael – cf. Genesis 21:12)

iii. Being made a great nation

iv. Eternal life

v. Location for eternal life for both Jews and gentiles

2. The importance of proper inwardness that manifests itself in belief and pursuit of obedience to God

a. Genesis 15:6 –

[Gen. 15:6](#) Then he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. [NAS95]

b. Genesis 17:1,2 –

[Gen. 17:1](#) Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.

[Gen. 17:2](#) “and I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly.” [NAS95]

i. It becomes clear by the rest of the Old Testament (and New) that God is requiring that Abraham be a man of changed heart and authentic belief and obedience. This is his and his descendants’ responsibility and the condition that they must meet in order for God to fulfill his promises to them.



B. Mosaic Covenant (Exodus-Deuteronomy)

1. The Mosaic Covenant was intended to be a kind of add-on to the Abrahamic Covenant –

[Deut. 4:1](#) “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

[Deut. 4:2](#) “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. [NAS95]

2. Comprised of 613 commandments that God gave to the nation of Israel

3. These commandments address three categories of human experience –

a. moral – “You shall not murder”

b. religious/ritual – the offering of dead animals on an altar as part of the Jews’ appeal to God for mercy; the celebration of Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Booths, etc.

Side note – Cain, an unbeliever, was the first person to offer something to God in worship (Genesis 4).

c. societal/civil – eat kosher (only certain foods); not move their neighbor’s boundary markers; replaster the walls of their homes when they detect leprosy on them

4. This covenant also included an inward requirement (Deuteronomy 10:16, “So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.”) –

a. God thus commands the Jews to have proper inwardness, i.e., a heart of belief and the pursuit of obedience to the covenant in the light of all human beings’ fundamental hostility towards God, that the Jews’ attempts to obey the covenant apart from God’s miraculously giving them this inwardness exposes.

b. This inwardness is the key to biblical Judaism (and Christianity). In its entirety, it involves –

i. Recognition of God as the transcendent and rational creator who is worthy of obeying and whose truth is right to believe

ii. Recognition of a one’s own problematic moral condition – that we are all stuck in a state of hostility and rebellion towards God

iii. Facing into one’s problematic moral condition and appealing to God for his eternal mercy and forgiveness, i.e., that we can escape the consequences of our rebellion only by means of God’s gracious mercy and his changing us internally



- c. Without biblical inwardness, the result is unbiblical Judaism (and Christianity) – convincing oneself that it is possible to please God and obtain the fulfillment of his promises, including eternal life, without *his* changing one's inwardness, thereby thinking that one can actually earn God's promises and blessings.
 - i. Unbiblical Judaism (Christianity) can look outwardly just like biblical Judaism (Christianity),
 - ii. But unbiblical Judaism (Christianity) remains hostile towards God (e.g., the Jews' response to Jesus and Christians' response to those who differ with them doctrinally).
4. Bottom line for being Jewish – God requires that the Jews be a peculiar people throughout human history who obey the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant with proper inwardness in order to receive the fulfillment of the promises that he made to Abraham.
5. God's explicit statements that he will have to change the Jews' hearts miraculously (Deuteronomy 29-30) –

Deut. 30:1 And it will happen that all these things will come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have presented before you, and you will change with respect to your heart among all the nations where Yahweh your God has banished you,

² and you will return to Yahweh your God, and you will obey his voice with all your heart and with all your soul according to all which I am commanding you today, you and your sons,

³ and Yahweh your God will restore you from captivity, and he will have mercy on you, and he will turn and gather you from all the peoples where Yahweh your God scattered you—

⁴ (if those of you who were banished are at the end of the heavens, from there Yahweh your God will gather you and from there he will take you)—

⁵ and Yahweh your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you will possess it, and he will cause good to happen to you, and he will cause you to be more numerous than your fathers,

⁶ and Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants in order to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul in order that you may live,

⁷ and Yahweh your God will place all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you who persecuted you.

- a. God must and will change the Jews' inwardness so that it conforms to what he requires in Deuteronomy 10:16 because they are incapable of doing so themselves.
- b. Down through history, God has inwardly changed certain individuals within the nation of Israel, but he will change an entire generation at some point still future to us and fulfill all his promises to the Jews that he gave through Abraham, including their living securely on the land of Israel and obtaining eternal life (cf. the Old Testament Prophets).



C. Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7)

1. God had said that he would provide the Jews with a king (Deuteronomy 17:14,15).
 - a. Their demanding a king when they did was premature (1 Samuel 8).
2. David, a member of the tribe of Judah (in contrast to Saul, who was of the tribe of Benjamin), was the first in a long line of kings as a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 17 (2 Samuel 2-5).
3. Then, God made a covenant with David that one of his descendants would be not only the final king of the Kingdom of Israel, but also the king of the eternal Kingdom of God (2 Samuel 7, etc.).
4. In Psalm 110, David speaks about Yahweh's granting his "Lord," who, we can surmise, is one of David's own regal descendants, authority over the creation and the role of priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," thus making David's "Lord" even his own intercessor before God (cf. Hebrews).

D. New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

[Jer. 31:31](#) "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD [Yahweh], "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

[Jer. 31:32](#) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

[Jer. 31:33](#) "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

[Jer. 31:34](#) "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." [NAS95]

1. God would eventually end up finding the Jews lacking in proper inwardness.
2. Therefore, God would make a New Covenant with them whereby he promises to fulfill his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 of making of him a great nation and his promise to the Jews in Deuteronomy 30 of creating proper inwardness within them.
3. An important effect of his changing their inwardness would be that he would forgive them completely and eternally. This, in fact, is the effect for any human being whose inwardness God changes.
 - a. David writes in Psalm 110 that God's forgiveness of the Jews (and gentiles) would occur by means of his "Lord" being a priest according to the order of Melchizedek who intercedes before God on their behalf (cf. Hebrews).
 - b. Isaiah 53 indicates that this special person would offer himself to God through death in order to qualify for his role as priest and intercessor.



Conclusion – What Is Old Testament Judaism?

1. Belief in the transcendent and rational creator God who has provided an inerrant and authoritative source of truth, the Bible.
2. Living as a descendant of Abraham and Isaac, i.e., as a Jew, while looking forward to God's fulfilling his promises of land, descendants, making of Abraham and them a great nation, eternal life, and using the Jews as a means for both Jews and gentiles to obtain eternal life.
3. Obeying the Mosaic Covenant with proper inwardness in order to obtain the Abrahamic promises and in order to demonstrate through even the many strange commandments of the covenant that the Jews are God's chosen people within human history as long as the present realm exists.
4. Being a Jew who accurately understands the profundity of his problematic, human moral condition, faces into it, and appeals to God for his gracious, eternal mercy, while recognizing that no external actions in and of themselves can please God.
5. In Old Testament times, looking forward to a descendant of David, who would act as ruler (king) of the earthly Kingdom of Israel and the heavenly, eternal Kingdom of God, who would act as God's ultimate prophet and spokesman, and who would act as intercessor (priest) before God for his mercy on behalf of other human beings, and who would qualify for these roles by offering himself to God through death.
 - a. Biblical definition of a Jew (other than Jesus) – A physical descendant of Abraham through Isaac who believes in and follows the one, true God by obeying the Bible as the sole source of inerrant, authoritative truth and specifically the Mosaic Covenant with proper inwardness and awaits God's fulfillment of all his promises to Abraham and David, including the temporal, earthly Kingdom of Israel and the eternal, heavenly Kingdom of God and including granting him, the Jew, eternal life in the Kingdom of God through the final Mosaic prophet, Davidic king, and Melchizedekic priest, i.e., the Messiah, whom the New Testament identifies as Jesus of Nazareth.

[Ezek. 36:22](#) “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.

[Ezek. 36:23](#) “I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

[Ezek. 36:24](#) “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

[Ezek. 36:25](#) “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

[Ezek. 36:26](#) “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

[Ezek. 36:27](#) “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

[Ezek. 36:28](#) “You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

[Ezek. 36:29](#) “Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you.



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[Ezek. 36:30](#) “I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations.

[Ezek. 36:31](#) “Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.

[Ezek. 36:32](#) “I am not doing this for your sake,” declares the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!”

[Ezek. 36:33](#) “Thus says the Lord GOD, “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt.

[Ezek. 36:34](#) “The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by.

[Ezek. 36:35](#) “They will say, ‘This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.’

[Ezek. 36:36](#) “Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it.”

[Ezek. 36:37](#) “Thus says the Lord GOD, “This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock.

[Ezek. 36:38](#) “Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”” [NAS95]

Psalms 122:6, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you.’” [NAS95]