

Study Guide for the Week of May 14, 2006

Christianity and the Religions of the World, Part 5--Judaism

This study guide is designed to help you to become more familiar with the Bible. Study these passages on your own, with a friend, or with a group. If you or someone you know needs a Bible, please take one from under a chair in the Worship Center. They are there for you to take home and use! Sermon manuscripts are available at www.saintpauls-umc.com.

Monday – Today we begin our study of the Bible and Judaism by reviewing Abraham’s story and the promises God made to him. **Read Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-6 and 17:1-27.** These two stories, and several others, constitute what biblical scholars call the “Abrahamic Covenant” – the binding agreement between God and Abraham. What did God promise Abraham? What did God expect of Abraham? Christians believe that we, too, are a part of the fulfillment of God’s promises – we among the descendants of Abraham more numerous than the stars in the sky. What was Abraham’s response to God’s promises and call on his life (15:6)? What does this teach us about God’s desire for us?

Tuesday – Abraham’s son Isaac had a son whose name was Jacob (he was also called Israel). Israel had twelve sons. Within a few generations of Abraham’s death his descendants became slaves in Egypt, and remained there for 400 years. The central saving act of God toward the Israelites, an event which still defines Judaism to this day, is called the Exodus – the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. **Read Exodus 3:1-10.** The rest of the book of Exodus is the story of this deliverance of the Israelites. After they were set free from slavery, God made a covenant with them – biblical scholars call this the “Mosaic Covenant” because it was made through Moses. This covenant included God’s promise to be Israel’s God, to love and care for them, but it required that Israel obey God’s Laws which included the Ten Commandments God wrote in stone, and 603 other laws recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. **Read Exodus 34:27-35 and Deuteronomy 5.**

Wednesday – Two hundred years after the time of Moses God made another covenant, this time with David. It was in addition to, not replacing the prior covenants. David was a man after God’s own heart, and the greatest king Israel ever knew. **Read II Samuel 7:8-16.** This is known as the “Davidic Covenant” and it is repeated frequently throughout the Old Testament as a promise that brought the Israelites hope that God would deliver them from their enemies, knowing that God had promised that someone from the line of David would rule over Israel forever. **Read Psalm 89:3-4, and Jeremiah 33:19-21.** 2000 years ago Jesus was born of the line of David. For 2000 years there has been no other king from David’s line ruling over Israel.

Thursday – After God gave Moses the Law as his covenant with Israel, the rest of the Old Testament is the story of Israel’s repeated struggle to keep this covenant – the books of Judges, Kings and Chronicles and most of the Prophets record these struggles in which the Israelites repeatedly turned away from God and God’s laws. Ultimately God spoke by the prophet Jeremiah saying he would one day make a New Covenant with Israel. **Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Matthew 26:26-28** where Jesus is clearly indicating that he is fulfilling Jeremiah’s words. Christians believe that through this New Covenant, established through Jesus’ death and resurrection, God superseded the Old Covenant made through Moses. Jesus fulfilled this Old Covenant on our behalf and he made a new Covenant with all who would enter into this covenant by faith. The sign of our entrance into that covenant is our baptism. We trust in Christ’s work for us, God forgives our sins, gives us life, and we then seek to follow him, not to win salvation, but in response to the salvation already given us.

Friday – Gentile Christians have become a part of God’s Covenant people thanks to Jesus Christ. The first Christians were all Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Today there are many Jews who follow Jesus, though clearly a minority of all Jews. **Read Romans 11** for Paul’s discussion of the Jews, noting in particular verses 28-29. **Hebrews 8 and 9** offers another picture of how the early Christians, Jewish Christians, understood Jesus’ work in fulfilling the prophecies and establishing a New Covenant. The Jews are God’s covenant people – always. We have been welcomed in by grace. How should Christians relate to Jews?