

# Understanding Jews and Judaism

## An Introduction for MFCCs

**Rabbi Michael Lotker**  
**Camarillo, California**



# Relationship Between Christianity & Modern Judaism

## BIBLICAL JUDAISM

Text: The Hebrew Bible

## CHRISTIANITY

**Event:** Arrival of Jesus as God/Messiah/Redeemer of Sin (c 30 CE )

**Text:** The Hebrew Bible & The New Testament

## RABBINIC JUDAISM

**Event:** Destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple (70 CE)

**Text:** The Hebrew Bible & The Mishna and Talmud.

# Jewish Peoplehood



- In ancient times, one's religion and nationality were the same.
  - Romans worshiped Roman gods.
  - Egyptians worshiped Egyptian gods.
  - Greeks worshiped Greek gods.
  - And Israelites worshiped the Israelite God.
- Judaism is the sole survivor of this system.
  - Not every Jew is an Israeli.
  - But every Jew is a member of *Am Yisrael*, the people Israel.



# How Many Jews Are There?

- What's your guess for:
  - The percentage of the worlds population that is Jewish? = **0.2%**
  - The percentage of the US population that is Jewish? = **2%**



# More Than A Religion

- You will meet people who strongly identify with their Jewish identity but who don't practice or even don't believe in God.
- Issues can get very tense when people are “hatched, matched and dispatched” – i.e., at times of birth, weddings and funerals.
  - At such times, you may find extreme focus on the most obscure rituals of Jewish law.
- Jews are one people but many cultures:
  - Ashkenazi: Eastern European (95% of US Jews)
  - Sephardic: Jews of Muslim lands
  - Ethiopian

# Jewish Movements



- **Orthodox:** All Jewish law unchanging & binding on all Jews.
  - Hasidic & Chabad are well known examples
- **Conservative:** All Jewish law binding on all Jews but laws change with the times.
  - Example: OK to drive to synagogue on Shabbat.
- **Reform:** Ethical Jewish laws binding but ritual laws (head coverings, kosher laws, Sabbath observance) should be studied and each individual decides if s/he hears God's voice.

# Faith & Works



- Emphasis on Judaism is Actions
  - Commandments
  - Jewish Law
  - Faith is Important but Secondary
- Emphasis in Christianity is Faith
  - Acceptance of Jesus
  - But Faith Without Works is Dead



# A Religion of Commandments

- Hebrew for Commandment = *Mitzvah*
  - *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* is someone obligated to observe commandments
- Not just the big 10
- 613 commandments in the Torah alone!
  - Love thy neighbor
  - No pork
  - Paying wages to day laborers each day

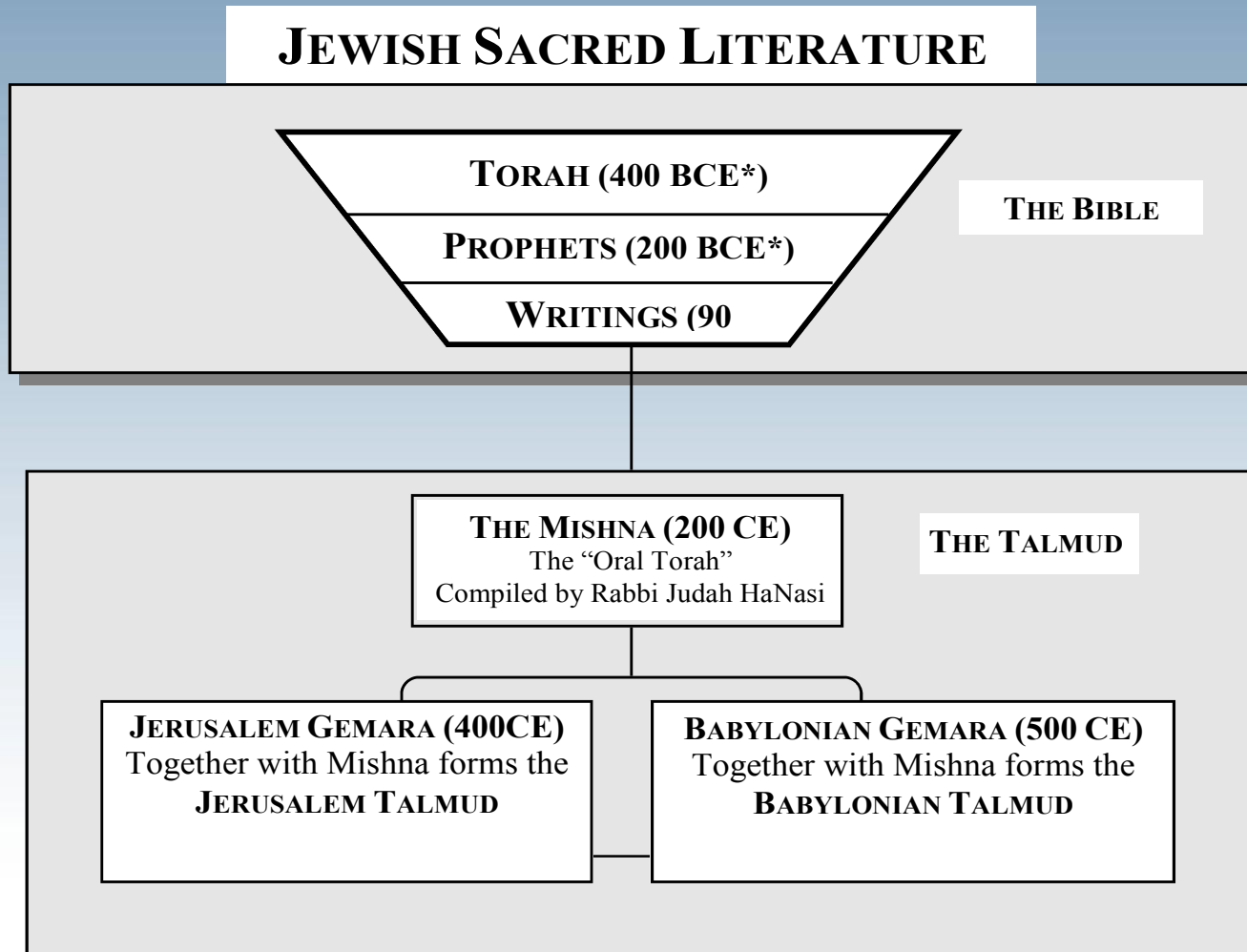




# How Many Commandments?

- 613 in the Torah [1st 5 Books of Bible]
- The Rabbis of the Talmud add 1000s more
  - Against mixing milk and meat
  - Kosher slaughtering
  - Shabbat candles
  - Bar/Bat Mitzvahs
  - Hanukkah candles
  - Detailed rules for Passover Seders
  - Daily prayers

# Jewish Sacred Texts Beyond the Bible



\* Approximate Dates of Canonization

# Torah Scroll



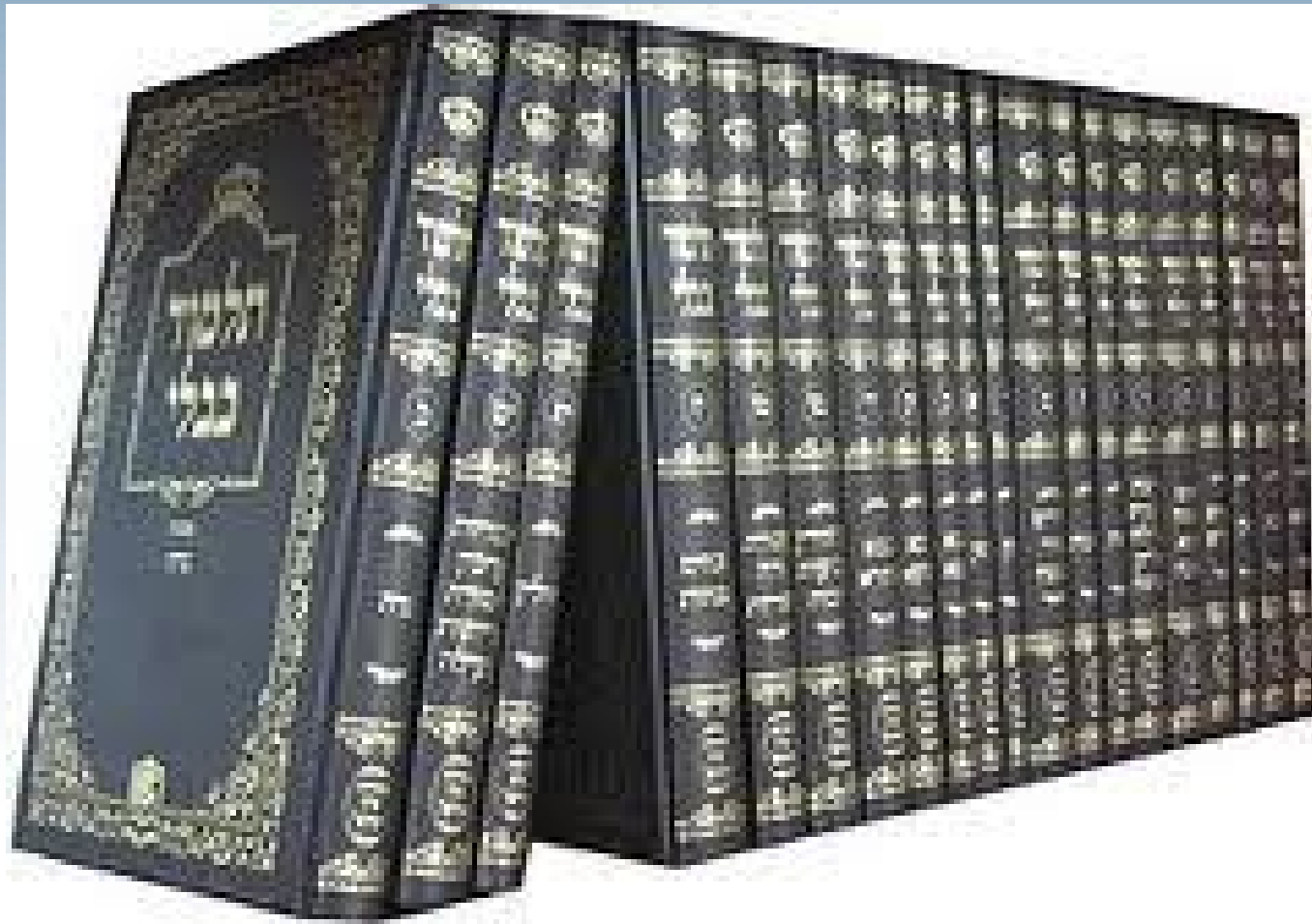
# Mishna Texts – Six Orders (Sections)



# A Page of Talmud



# A Set of Talmud – 63 Tractates





## The Sabbath in the Torah: Exodus 20

**20:8** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

**20:9** Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work:

**20:10** But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates:

## But how does God define work?





# The Sabbath in the Mishna & Talmud

- **MISHNAH (Shabbat 2:2)** The primary labours are forty less one, [viz.:] Sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, bleaching, hackling, dyeing, spinning, stretching the threads, the making of two meshes, weaving two threads, dividing two threads, tying [knotting] and untying, sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, capturing a deer, slaughtering, or flaying, or salting it, curing its hide, scraping it [of its hair], cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters [over the erasure], building, pulling down, extinguishing, kindling, striking with a hammer, [and] carrying out from one domain to another: these are the forty primary labours less one.
- **GEMARA (Shabbat 73b)** Why state the number? — Said R. Johanan: [To teach] that if one performs them all in one state of unawareness, he is liable on account of each separately.



# Judaism and Jesus



**Why Don't Jews Accept Jesus as the Messiah?**



# The Word “Messiah”

English “Messiah” is a translation of the Hebrew “*Mashiach*” [משיח]

- *Mashiach* means “anointed.”
  - Kings of Israel were anointed by pouring holy oil on their heads.
  - 39 references to “messiah” in Heb. Bible
    - Not one refers to future redeemer
- When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (about 200 BCE), the Hebrew *Mashiach* became the Greek “*Christos*” [Χριστός].
- The Greek *Christos* gives rise to the English “Christ.”



# Jewish Understanding of Messiah

- Fully Human and Only Human
- A Political and/or Military Ruler like King David
- Not God in any sense
- Not the son of God in any sense beyond the idea that we are all children of God
- Not connected with redemption of sin
  - Only we can atone for our sins
  - For sins against God, God forgives
  - For sins against others, God cannot forgive unless the person offended forgives
- Messiah not at the heart of Judaism



# Jewish Prophecies Concerning Messiah

- A time of peace on earth
  - Peace among people
  - Peace among animals
- All the world will come to know the one God
- Details unresolved
  - Mystics see the time as supernatural
  - Rationalists believe that we will do the work to make the world perfect
  - Many believe in a Messianic Age rather than an individual Messiah.







# Why Don't Jews Accept Jesus As Messiah?

- No world peace, no Messiah
- The Second Coming not a Jewish idea
- But the larger issue is whether Jesus is God
  - The idea of God taking human form, suffering with us and dying for our sins is
    - Beautiful and inspiring
    - But not Jewish!
- This is why I can have great respect for Christianity but less sympathy for “Jews for Jesus” and “Messianic Jews”
- **This issue is not “Who was Jesus” but “Who is God.”**



# Antisemitism: The World's Oldest Hatred

- Pervasive: since Greek times.
- Universal: Every nation that has had a significant Jewish population has expelled their Jews (with the single exception of the US).
- Affects Jewish law and practice.
  - For example Jews don't seek converts
  - There is often great distrust of Jews for non-Jews and of Christianity.
- Thus, you should understand that Jews may react with suspicion to Christian symbols (cross, fish, etc.).

# Important Values and Characteristics of Jews



- Respect for education – focus on children’s education, college education, etc.
- Respect for tradition, elders, teachers
- Value of peace, non-violence (connection to *kashruit*)
  - *Shalom Bayit*: Peace in the home
- Argumentative/analytical nature: Jews literally bred for these characteristics
- Business focus – but we don’t always live up to our ethical ideals
- Fear/sensitivity to Antisemitism



# Important Values and Characteristics of Jews (continued)



- Matriarchal family structure (Ashkenazi)
  - But opposite is true for Sephardic Jews (Iranian, Israeli, etc.) where man is viewed as king and 1<sup>st</sup> born sons have special rights.
  - Sephardic husband and Ashkenazi wife can lead to problems.
- Problems associated with intermarriage
- Xenophobia – fear/distrust of others
  - Your Jewish client may want a Jewish therapist, especially associated with family issues.
  - Lots of Christian symbolism may arouse distrust



# Jewish Contributions to the World

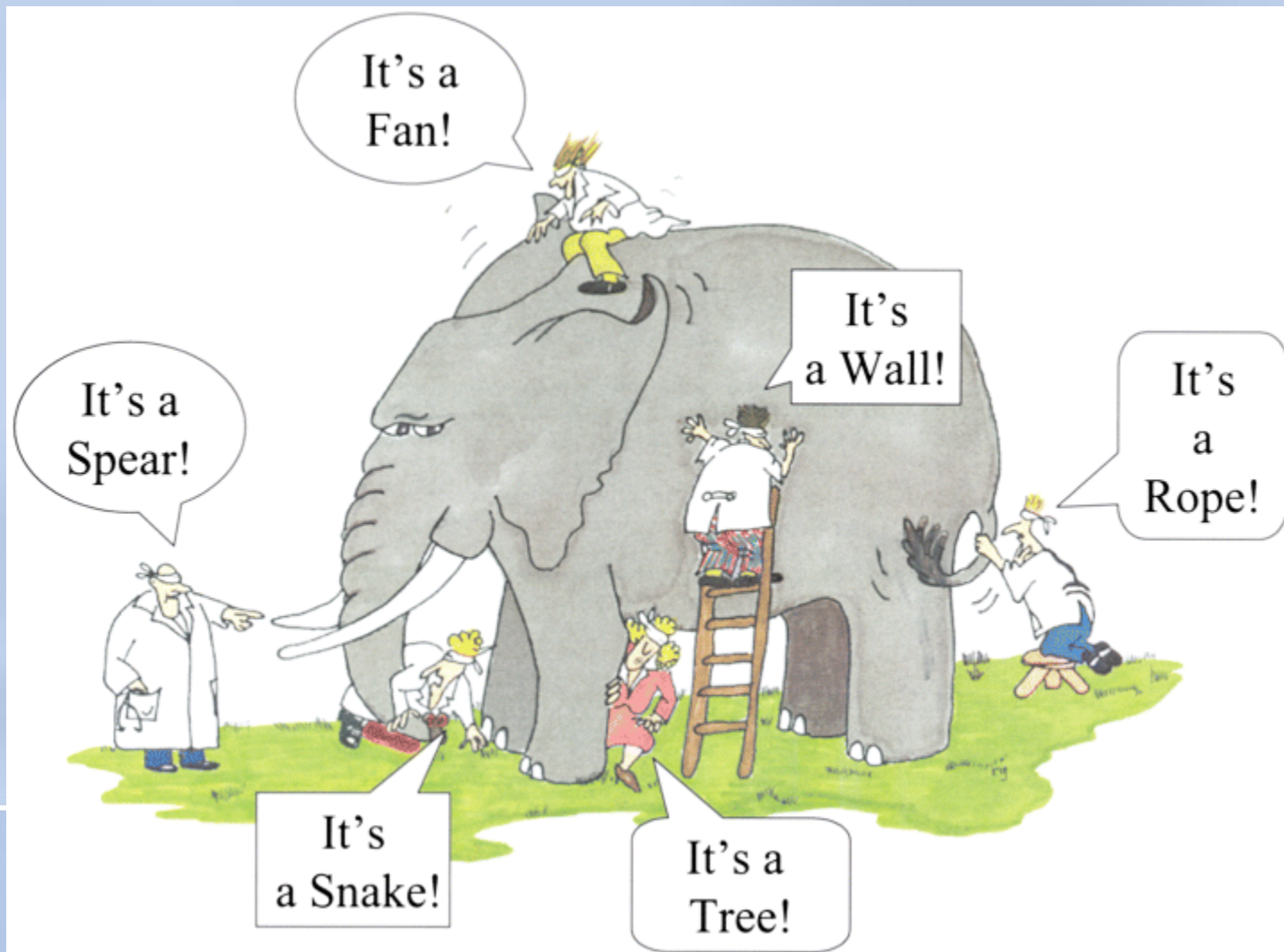
- The Bible – First System of Ethics & Monotheism
- Ten Commandments
- Ideas like “Love thy Neighbor as Yourself”  
ואהבת לרעך כמוך
- Judeo Christian Heritage founded on Jewish ideas
- 740 Nobel Prizes Between 1901 and 2004  
- 156 are Jews
- Medicine – 29%
- Chemistry – 19%
- Economics – 38%
- Physics – 26%
- Peace – 10%



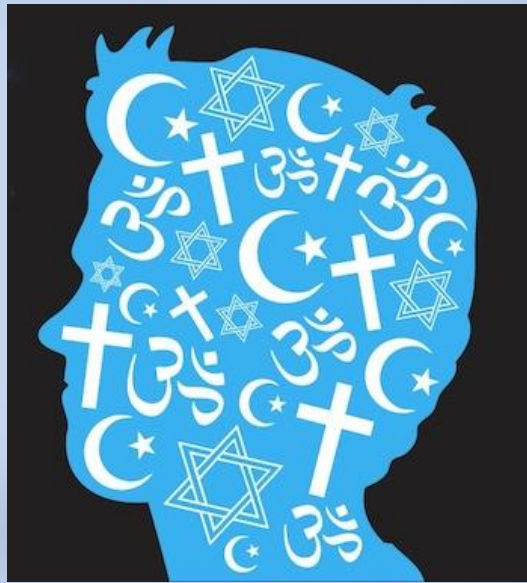
# The Rabbi is Your Resource and Your Friend

- You should always feel free to call your “friendly neighborhood rabbi” to ask questions about specific issues.
- To find the local Reform synagogue, just go to [www.urj.com](http://www.urj.com) (this is website of the Union for Reform Judaism)
- I think most rabbis welcome interesting questions and the opportunity to be helpful.
- Always feel free to contact me at
  - [www.lotker.com](http://www.lotker.com)
  - [lotker@aol.com](mailto:lotker@aol.com)
  - 805-558-0578

# The Blind & the Elephant



Perhaps we each can see/understand  
only a portion of God's totality.



Our error is in our certainty that our  
view is the only truth.



The blind people all hear the creature speak .... and they all hear the Golden Rule, this rabbi's test for a *Kosher* religion.





## A Short Hebrew Lesson

The Hebrew word for angel is, *malach* מלאך

And the Hebrew word for messenger is מלאך

Judaism teaches that God sends us into the world to complete creation:

- Are we simple messengers or divine angels?
- Speaking Hebrew, there's no difference!

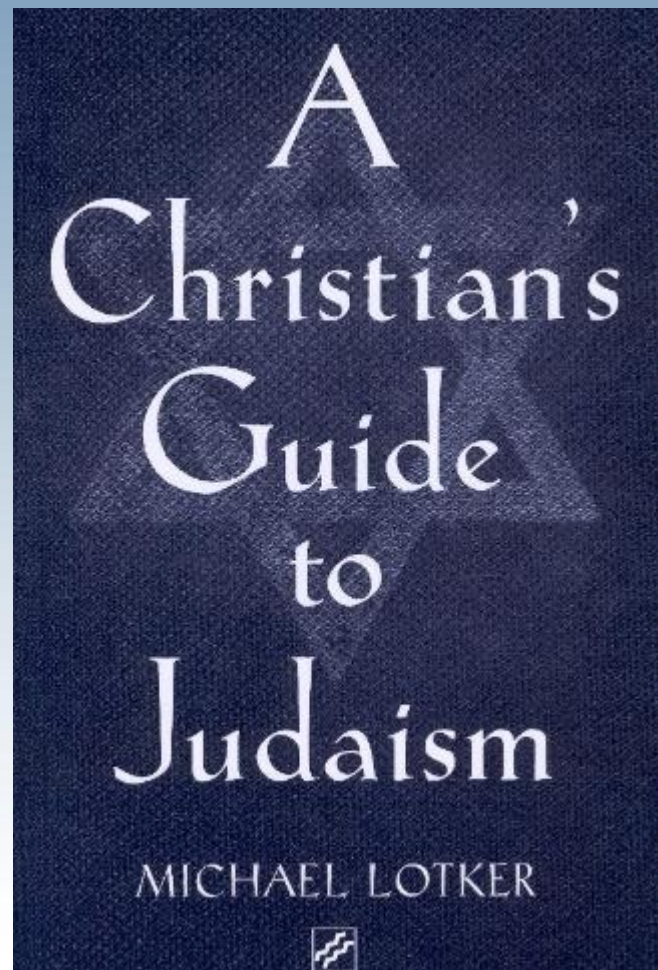
# **You Are Angels In Training**

**And I am proud  
and honored to  
have played  
this small role  
in your sacred  
mission!**





**Want to Learn More?**



Paulist Press, 2004

**Contact Rabbi  
Lotker at:  
[lotker@aol.com](mailto:lotker@aol.com)  
or  
[www.lotker.com](http://www.lotker.com)**



*YOUR TURN*

*QUESTIONS ??????*

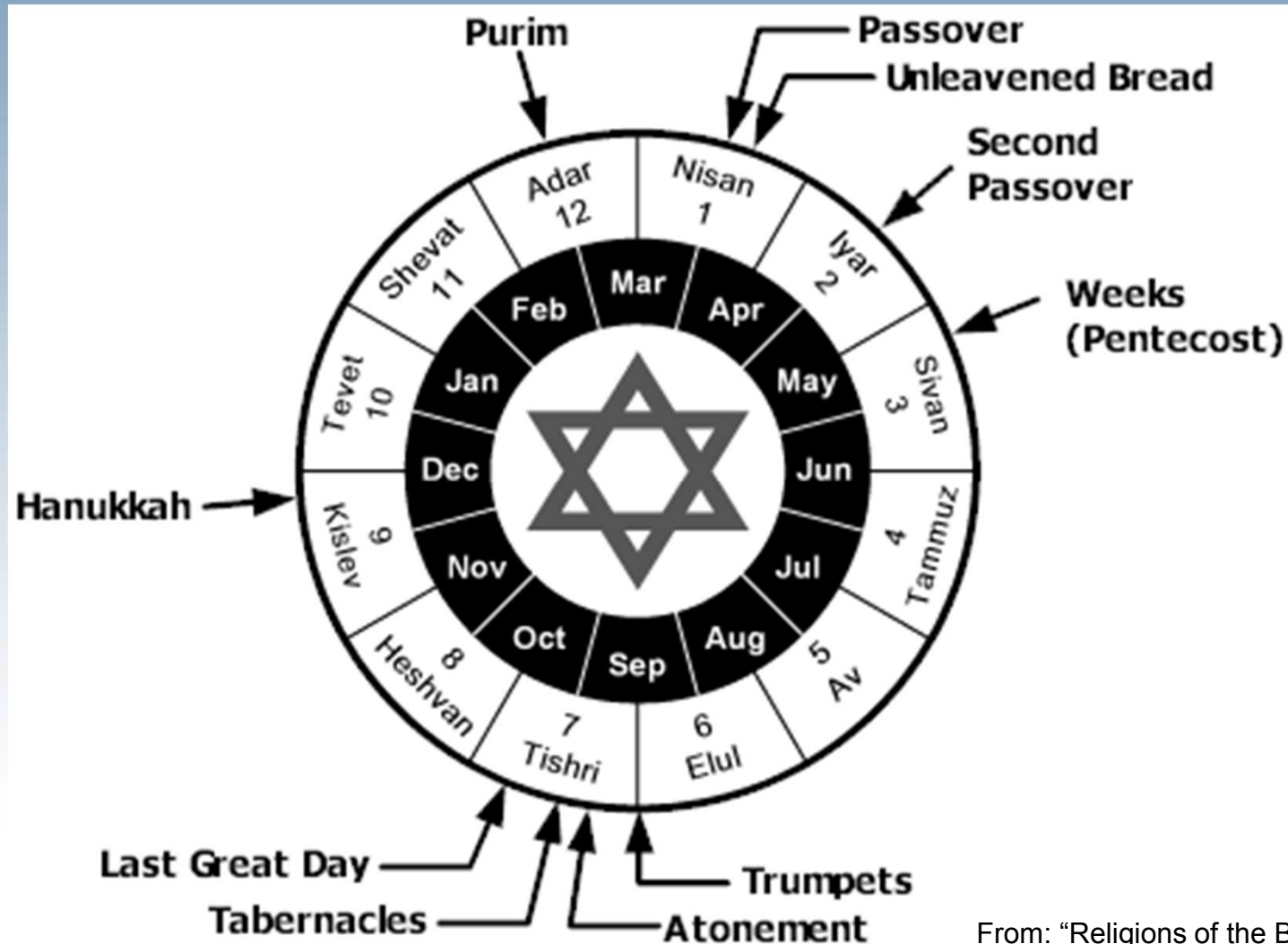
*AND (I HOPE) ANSWERS*



# Hebrew Calendar: “Lunisolar”

- Twelve “months/moons” (alternating 30 or 29 days)
- Total 353, 354 or 355 days (cf.  $365\frac{1}{4}$  solar days)
  - or 383, 384, or 385 days in “Leap Years”
- Extra month (Adar II) added in Leap Years
  - Years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17 & 19 of each 19-year cycle
- So months remain in the same solar seasons:
  - Tishri in Fall (Sept/Oct); Nissan in Spring (Mar/Apr), etc.
- *Rosh Codesh* (1<sup>st</sup> day each month)
  - Specials Psalms; Women free from work

# Months and Festivals/Holy Days



From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just

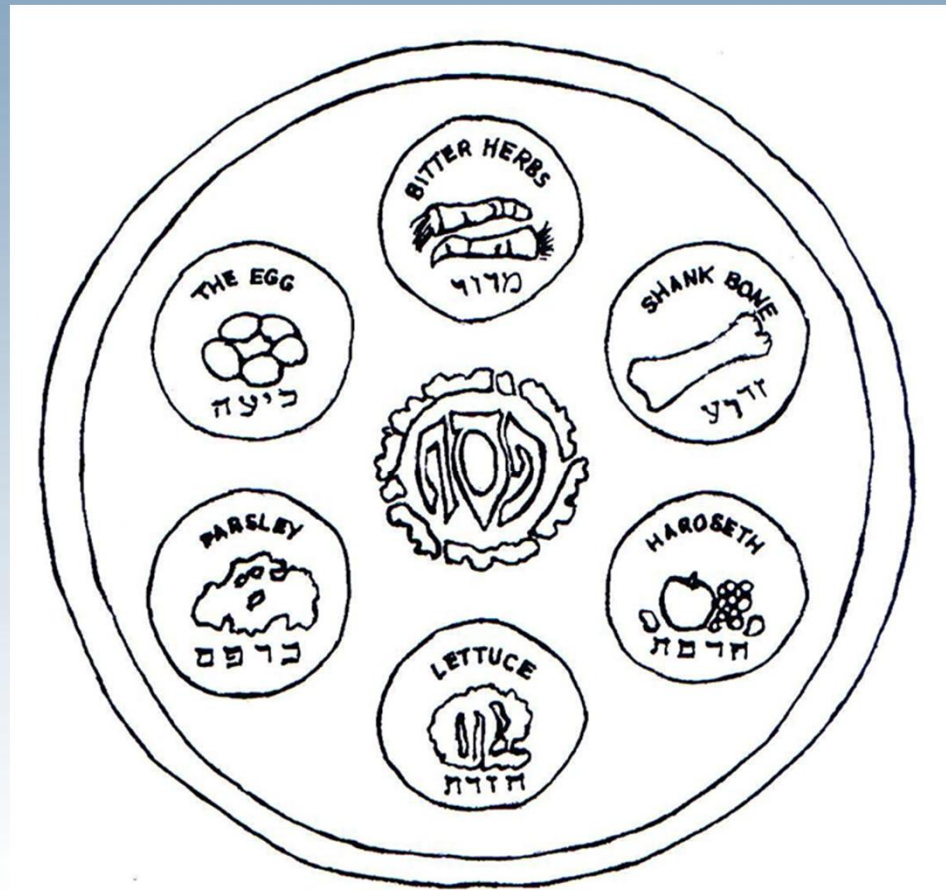


# **Major Jewish Feasts (Overview):**

- 1. Rosh Hashanah / Jewish New Year**
- 2. Yom Kippur / Day of Atonement**
- 3. Sukkot / Tabernacles/Booths**
- 4. Pesach / Passover**
- 5. Shavu'ot / Weeks/Pentecost**
- 6. Hanukkah / Feast of Lights**
- 7. Purim / Feast of Lots**
- 8. Simchat Torah / Rejoicing in the Torah**
- 9. Tisha B'Av / 9<sup>th</sup> of Av: Destruction of Two Temples**



# Pesach / Passover



From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just

# Sukkoth / Tabernacles/Booths



From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just



# Rosh Hashanah / New Year



From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just



# Yom Kippur / Day of Atonement



From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just

# Hanukkah / Holiday of Lights



From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just

# Purim / Feast of Lots



From: "Religions of the Book" by Felix Just



# Israel in the Middle East



From Joseph Sonnenblick

# Israel: A Tiny Nation Surrounded

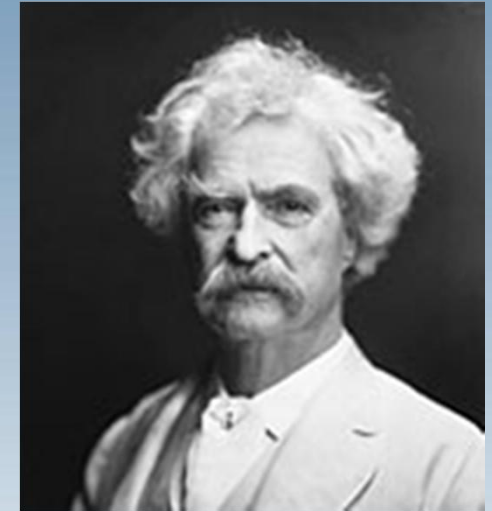


- ◆ Arab Population  
187 million  
Israel 6 million
- ◆ Arab Countries Square  
Miles : 1.9 million Miles  
Israel: 8000 Miles
- ◆ Arab Armies: 1.6 Million  
Israel: 600,000(includes  
reserves)

# The Miracle of Jewish History

Mark Twain  
Harper's Magazine, 1898

“The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then . . . passed away. The Greek and the Roman followed. The Jew saw them all, beat them all... All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”





# The Miracle of the Jewish People

“A Jew who does not believe in miracles is not a realist”

David Ben Gurion -  
First Prime Minister  
of the State of Israel:



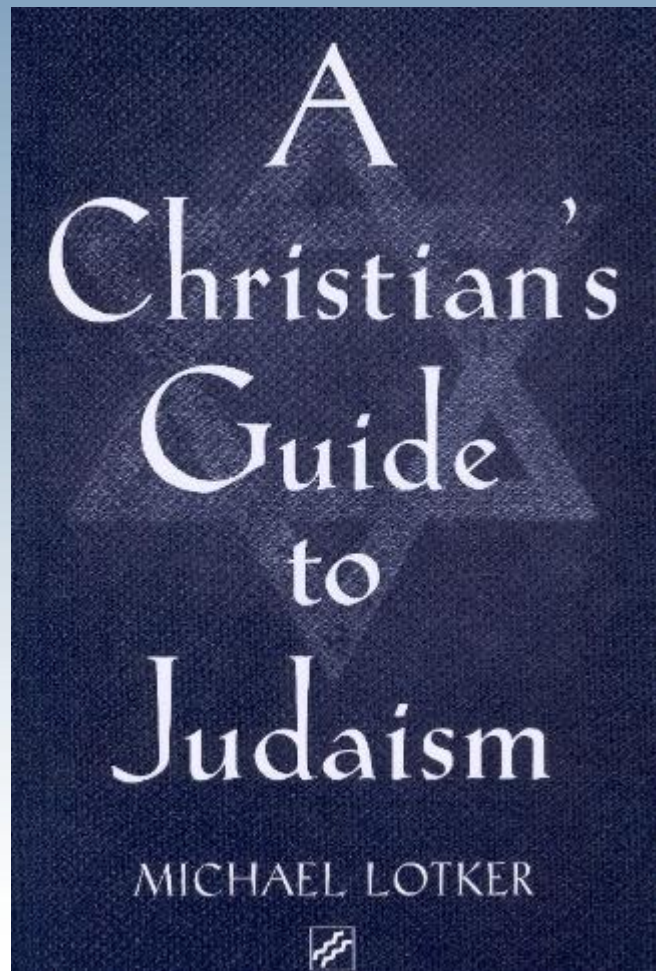


# **Theodicy: Evil & Tragedy**

**One of these statements must be false:**

- 1. God is All Good and All Just.**
- 2. God is All Powerful.**
- 3. Bad Things Happen to Good People.**

**Want to Learn More or Get Copies  
of These Slides?**



Paulist Press, 2004

**Contact Rabbi  
Lotker at:  
[lotker@aol.com](mailto:lotker@aol.com)  
or  
[www.lotker.com](http://www.lotker.com)**