

This week, Pastor Andy continued the series on Christianity and World Religions with his sermon on Judaism, which is part 5 of the 6-part series. The history of Judaism is also a history of Christianity, because it is the story of God and a chosen nation of people. The history is recorded in the first five books of the Christian Old Testament, which is also the same books that comprise the Jewish Torah. In essence, it is a story of God's covenant making and Israel's covenant breaking.

The history of Israel originated when God gave a son named Isaac to Abraham and Sarah. Isaac had a son named Jacob, whose name God later changed to Israel, who had 12 sons and several daughters. They lived in the land of Canaan until a famine caused them to resettle in Egypt. There, they fell into slavery and remained that way for 400 years until God used an unlikely candidate named Moses to plead with Pharaoh to set them free to travel to the promised land.

Through the writings of the Old Testament and the Torah, most people are familiar with the Biblical Judaism, but there is also a modern Judaism consisting of three branches. The first is the Orthodox branch, which follows the strictest adherence to the rules. The second is the Conservative branch, which also follows the rules closely but allows for changing of the laws within the legal system. The third is the Reform branch, which is the most progressive and liberal. All three branches believe in the Shema, which is contained in the verse, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

The differences between Judaism and Christianity lie in the identity of the Messiah. Jews believe the Messiah brings peace on Earth, while Christians believe the Messiah brings peace with God. Christianity believes that humanity cannot achieve salvation by following the 613 laws, which is why the Messiah paid the price for our sins. The Bible says, "We aren't saved from sin's grasp by knowing the commandments of God because we can't and don't keep them, but God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent His own Son in a human body like ours - except that ours are sinful - and destroyed sin's control over us by giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins" Romans 8:3 (LB).

There are elements of Christianity and Judaism that can be used to build bridges. For example, Jews and Christians use the same 39 books of the Bible. They also agree that God is the ruler of the universe, that He created humans in His own image, and that He chose Israel to display His glory. The tenet to "Love the Lord your God," contained in the Shema, is a universal belief of both faiths. Pastor Andy concluded with the call that Vineyard Community Church be the type of church that would reach out to all people regardless of differences. Do you see any bridges you can build upon with people you know?