

A history of the Jewish faith

Overview of the course and the explanatory guides

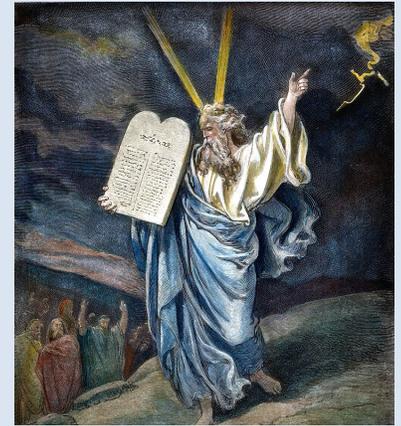
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What is this series about?

This is a series of 6 lectures covering the major developments in the evolution of Judaism over nearly 4,000 years, with an emphasis on the historical stages rather than a theological or philosophical analysis.

Why have explanatory guides?

The history of Judaism is quite complicated and made much more difficult by the fact that there are not only many characters involved, but their names are also based on a variety of languages (Spanish, Yiddish, Hebrew, etc.). Further, there are many terms (such as Tannaim and Amoraim) which are not only in a foreign language, but they are also used as proper nouns, that is, there really is no acceptable English name even though one can translate the words. For all these reasons, an explanatory guide should assist participants to follow what is happening in this course.



Moses descending from Mount Sinai

How are the guides organised?

Each guide covers the relevant lecture using the same section headings where possible. The entries are in approximate chronological order. I considered writing the terms in alphabetical order but felt that it would be easier to follow a lecture if the guides mirrored the content of the talks; they are not supposed to be dictionaries. Each entry is only a couple of sentences long. In some ways, they only serve as an aide-mémoire. I make no claim to originality; the descriptions have been taken mostly from internet sources such as Wikipedia or Britannica.

What topics do the lectures and their explanatory guides cover?

1) Ancient (biblical) Judaism (1800 BCE – 70 CE)

- Foundations – Patriarchs, Exodus, Revelation at Sinai, etc., including a discussion on who wrote the Bible
- 1st and 2nd Temple Judaism
- Hellenistic Judaism
- Jewish sects – Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Christian Jews

2) Medieval (rabbinic) Judaism (70 – 1750)

- The sages - Tannaim, Amoraim, Savoraim, Geonim and Rabbinic Judaism

- Rabbis: The 'first ones' (Rishonim)
- Rabbis: The 'later ones' (Acharonim)
- Philosophical Judaism – Saadia Gaon, Maimonides
- Mystical Judaism – Kabbalah, Lurianic Judaism
- Messianic Judaism - Sabbateanism

3) Modern Judaism (1750 – today)

- Hasidism vs Mitnagdim ('opponents')
- Reform vs Neo-Orthodoxy
- Positive-historical and Conservative or Masorti Judaism
- American Reform Judaism
- 20th – 21st century – Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Judaism, Reconstructionism, Humanistic Judaism, Religious Zionism, secular Jews and others