



When the Rabbis
Changed G-d
Executive Summary

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ENHANCING MORALITY SERIES

Executive Summary

We commonly and mistakenly equate Judaism with Rabbinic Judaism. Today's Judaism or Jewish religion is Rabbinic, but it wasn't always so. Indeed, we were Biblical Israelites for a lot longer period of time than Rabbinic—for many good reasons. Significant elements of that Israelite religion has been adapted and lost in the exegesis of the rabbis known as the Talmud.

This book reviews Pentateuchal and Rabbinic texts, stories and lore, social media scrolls, cemetery and synagogue membership lists, and archaeology evidence to shed insights into Judaism's earlier past, conflicted present, and promising future. It examines (a) the characteristics and meaning of Yahweh belief and practice through Jewish history, especially before there were rabbis; (b) the transformative development, theology, social media transmission, and implications of normative or Rabbinic Judaism (developed in the period 100-600 CE) when compared with its antecedent, formative beliefs, governance and practices, and (c) the contemporary implications of that transformation in Israelite theology, modes of practices, and communal tensions, as well as the choices, limits and challenges that an ethically-oriented, conscience-driven Jewish people contribute to and into today's world.

Judaism was a civilization and orally-transmitted religion two thousand years before there were rabbis or an Oral Torah. Indeed Judaism was YHWH of Old-based for far longer than it has been Rabbinic. Israelite rites, theology, governance and norms as practiced in Genesis, and in Exodus, and in the time of the Prophets and in the time of the rabbis underwent substantial changes. Many authorities, serious Jews, Bible scholars and common folk (*am ha'aretz*) underappreciate the differences between Israelite Biblical or Yahweh Judaism, on the one hand, and today's normative or Rabbinic Judaism, on the other. The rabbinic Talmudic exercise was simultaneously transformative and reactionary, as well as responsible and divisive.

In the pivotal period 100 BCE-600 CE, new institutions and challenging teachings emerged for Jews living in Israel, the Hellenistic World, and Babylonia. They were subject to Jerusalem Temple sieges, widespread death and dispersion, and challenges from other G-d fearing sects. Arguably, in 50-100 CE, Judaism had the unmatched long history, stories, moral practices, and widespread attention from religious folk and pagans alike to be poised to triumph over all other competing sects and become the dominant monotheistic religion throughout the Roman Empire.

The Jewish people in early rabbinic times faced hard choices. Institutional pillars like the sacrificial cult, traditional orally-based knowledge, Temple-based worship, and commitment to the Land of Israel were imperiled. A new, small class of unelected, pious scholars would transform a theology, create a different authority structure, and birth a new scroll-based social media and knowledge transmission system. These rabbis acted to channel, interpret and re-define Yahweh-inspired traditional Israelite practice. Their followers struggled insofar as they were a minority in their own land, notably Jerusalem, and in diaspora. These rabbis engineered a momentous switch from kleristocracy to homocracy. Their revolution in theology and governance engendered a

fundamental split among brethren between committed religious *haverim* and committed non-religious, *am ha'arets* or secular Jews. This division—which persists until today as a pernicious fraternal problem for Jews-- happened 1,500 years before most historians accept. Most scholars see that split arising much later in the Period of the Enlightenment.

At the time of the sages and rabbis, Judaism was poised to contend for the role of dominant monotheism in the pagan Roman Empire. There were eight reasons why Judaism didn't realize that promise. Rabbinic Judaism, which is the "normative" faith that Jews have inherited and practice today, is responsible for acceptance of certain texts, rejection of other sources, and deciding what were accepted and unaccepted behaviours. Rabbinism forged new dogma, communal practices, and internal controls. A different Oral Law would replace traditional written and oral law.

Revisionist Rabbinism, however well intended, promoted gaps between minority adherence and majority tolerance. It changed a belief system that otherwise was gaining adherents and winning the battle against both paganism, Neo-Platonism, and a new offshoot religion called Christianity.

Rabbinical exegesis proved incapable of yielding a simple, explainable, embracing and acceptable credo to believers and prospective converts alike. This new Jewish normative religion would survive but its leaders lost not only that battle, but also a plausibly winnable war with other competing sects and faith systems, when measured in such terms as spirituality leadership, member loyalty and adherence, consistency with original YHWH belief, and religious harmony or tolerance.

These transformations would astonish Abraham, his progeny, Moses, Samuel or King David, were they to be asked. To this day, the new faith continues from the inside to repel or reject large numbers of committed Jews, sympathetic G-d fearers, and potential Jews by choice or converts. Such changes to tradition give rise to moral and theological questions about whether Yahweh Himself has cause to question what has been lost from His ancient covenant with Israel. People and faith change, and we need reflect on alterations to the original content, promise and core of Jewish ethical monotheism.

The prescriptive parts of this book ask what G-d wants of us as well as vice versa. What should be the form and content of a necessary reconciliation and dialogue, both among Jews and with other faiths? Can we return to some of the ideals, lost practices, and wisdom teachings of the pre-Rabbinic period? Can our Yahweh, who is omnipotent, be acknowledged to have made changes in His covenant and be capable of harm as well as good? Do we need to review and resurrect certain traditional roles of men, women, educators, revelation, and the Divine-human relationship? This includes belief in personal angels, restitution of ongoing revelation, and an intimate nearness to G-d. Can these ideas recover lost truths and repair rifts in our tradition? Will they represent an end to end the legacy of Jewish powerlessness and our inability to make righteous sense of a post-Shoah (Holocaust) world? This necessitates recovering older truths and rethinking thoughts about G-d and human free will.

Rabbinic Judaism survives, with a rich philosophy and legal code, but it carries within a core set of beliefs, practices and governance norms that are far more ritualized, legalistic, and exclusive than the Genesis, Exodus or Temple Period practices of our forefathers and foremothers. Though their own writings in Talmudic and other sources, we see that the Midrashic rabbinic enterprise engendered a fifteen hundred year separation between non-religious and religious Jews, long before the Enlightenment. With such a legacy, normative Judaism today may be not only unwilling but also unable to engage with challenges post-Shoah modernity. Rabbinism's Oral Law telescopes tradition and requires an untenable rationale that no YHWH theology change has occurred, while perpetuating chronic internal barriers to Jewish solidarity and conversion.

The author is an ethicist, not a professional historian, academic or theologian. As a serious and committed Jew, he is interested in better understanding his relationship to G-d, community and history. Like any serious and passionate Jew including our namesake Abraham, he struggles, which is no less than what Jewish belief entails. His solution for others like himself who are looking to live an ethics-driven life is to: (a) reacquaint ourselves with what was YHWH of Old's original purpose for Creation and human life, (b) recover or renew lost elements of Judaism in order to address belief challenges after the Shoah; (c) engage in intentional fraternal dialogue on values and roots shared by religious and secular Jews, and (d) please Yahweh by returning toward what was original ethical-orientation, covenantal Judaism.

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