



# Judaism

This PASTOR'S GUIDE SHEET was developed by Dr. Joe K. Taylor, Senior Pastor, South Reno Baptist Church, Reno, NV • joe@southreno.com  
Scriptures are printed verbatim with references noted but highlights and underlines are added. Quotes and all primary sources are footnoted.

## Definitions

“**Jew**” can refer to both a religion (“I’m Jewish”) and a nationality (“I am from Israel” or “I have a Jewish heritage”). Jewish people are descended from the ancient Hebrews. “Hebrew” come for *Eber*—an ancestor mentioned in Genesis 10:21. They are also decedents of “Shem” who was a son of Noah also mentioned in Genesis 10:21. From *Shem* comes the word “semitic.”

“**Judaism**” is an ancient monotheistic religion, with the Torah as its foundational text (part of the larger text known as the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible. Christians call this Bible the Old Testament), and supplemental oral tradition represented by later texts such as the Midrash and the Talmud.

The term “Judaism” is derived from “Judah,” the name of the southern kingdom of ancient Israel, while “Jew” is a shortened form of “Judeans.” Academically, Judaism, both the religion and culture of the Jewish people, began in the postexilic period (538 BC) to modern times. Before 538 BC, the religion and people were referred to as Hebrews.<sup>1</sup>



## Some Brief Jewish History

1. The history of the Jewish nation is contained in the Old Testament. The Older Testament (which our Jewish friends call “The Tanakh”) is the only Scripture recognized by the Jewish People.
2. Since the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD, the Jews have had no place to offer sacrifices for their sins as required by the Law of Moses (cf., Deut. 12). Therefore, all Jews consider themselves “ceremonially unclean.”
3. After the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people were scattered throughout the known world.

<sup>1</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (p. 1230). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

4. The Jewish people have been persecuted many different times in history. The worst, by far, was by the Nazis, who murdered over 6 million Jews in the Holocaust.
5. In 1948, for the first time since the destruction of the Temple (circa 70 AD), the State of Israel was born and became the homeland of the Jewish people.
6. In 1967, during the “Six Day War,” the Israelis captured all of the city of Jerusalem. It was the first time they had held the city as free people since 586 BC.



Official Flag of the Nation of Israel

## Jewish Customs and Laws

1. Today, there are four basic **branches of Judaism** (the religion): Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed, and Messianic.

**Orthodox Jews** try to follow the fine letter of the Law. They carefully study the Torah (Law/Teaching) written down by Moses. Orthodox Judaism is the approach to religious Judaism which subscribes to a tradition and adheres to the interpretation and application of the laws and ethics of the Torah as



legislated in the Talmudic text (36 volumes) which is based on the Mishnah—a 1,000 page document on how to live a chaste life. These three books— the Torah, the Mishnah and the Talmud—rule every facet of the Orthodox Jew’s life. “Laws” direct their dress, dietary, marital, ceremonial, Sabbath, and social customs.

**Conservative Jews** have a more lenient interpretation of the Torah, but they do believe the Law is vitally important. Conservative Jews also want to keep alive the Hebrew language and traditions. Outside North America, a Conservative Jew is known as a Masoretic Jew.



## Reformed Jews

have moved some distance away from orthodoxy. They teach that the principles of Judaism are more important than the practices. Most Reformed



Jews do not observe the dietary laws or other laws, such as what a Jew should or should not do on the Sabbath. Like Orthodox and Conservative Jews, they do observe specific calendar holy days. Overall, they frequently simplify or reject traditional religious laws and customs.

**Messianic Jews** combines Christianity—most importantly, the Christian belief that Jesus is the Messiah—with elements of Judaism and Jewish tradition. They believe in Jesus as a personal, saving Messiah. Messianic Judaism believes that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and "God the Son" (one Person of the Trinity), and that the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament both are authoritative scriptures. Note: In 1967, at the end of the Six Day War, Jerusalem was suddenly back into Jewish hands for the first time since biblical days. Tens of thousands of Jewish people accepted Jesus as the Messiah citing biblical prophecy (cf., Deut. 30:1-3; Hos. 3:4-5; Joel 2:28-29; and Luke 2:24.)



- The Sabbath** – The Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday night and continues until sundown on Saturday. They have a saying, “More than Israel kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept Israel.” After dinner on Saturday, Conservative and Reformed families go to the synagogue. The main Orthodox service is on Saturday morning.

# Jewish Celebrations

Jewish holidays are full of tradition and rich in history. Some focus on solemn occasions while others are lively and festive.

**Shabbat** is considered the most important of all Jewish holidays. It is the day of rest and weekly observance of God's completion of creation. Starting on Friday night an hour before sunset, it lasts for 25 hours until sunset on Saturday night. (We would call it the *Sabbath*.)

**Rosh Hashanah**, during the fall when the days begin to shorten and the leaves begin to change, Jewish tradition encourages us to look inward as we prepare for the New Year ahead. The Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) is a holiday marked by festive meals with foods symbolizing our hopes for the new year—such as apples dipped in honey for a sweet new year and pomegranates for a year of plenty—and a day spent in prayer or quiet meditation.

**Yom Kippur** is the most solemn day of the Jewish year. Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, offers an entire day devoted to self-examination. Many spend the day in the synagogue devoted to prayer and study while abstaining from food and drink. The goal is to begin the New Year with a clean slate.

**Sukkot**, a seven-day festival, celebrates the fall harvest and also commemorates the time when the Hebrews dwelt in the Sinai wilderness on their way to the Promised Land of Israel. The holiday is celebrated by building (and then dwelling in) ceremonial huts called Sukkah, the waving of four different plant species (palm, myrtle, willow and citron), and many food-filled festive gatherings in the Sukkah. (Watch video explaining Sukkot)

**Shemini Atzeret** is a holiday that literally means the “8th day of assembly.” It is a festive day after the week-long festival of Sukkot, and is marked by the annual prayer for rain recited in the synagogue. In Israel and in liberal (Reformed) communities outside of Israel, it is combined with the holiday of Simchat Torah. Simchat Torah marks the end and the beginning of the annual Torah reading cycle. Every week all over the world, the same Torah portion is read in Jewish communities. On Simchat Torah the cycle ends and begins again. This is accompanied by parading the Torah scrolls about and with singing and dancing.

**Hanukkah** is the beloved 8-day Jewish winter festival that celebrates the miracle of a small cruse of oil when it burned for 8 days, instead of only one. It also celebrates the military victory of the Jewish Maccabees over the powerful Syrian Greek army in 167 BC. The victory was followed by a rededication (Hanukkah) of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. It is from this act that the holiday gets its name.

**Tu B'Shevat** is the Jewish New Year of the Trees. Observances include planting of trees, purchasing trees to be planted in Israel, and a mystical Tu B'Shevat ritual meal that includes different colored wine (from white to red) and different kinds of fruits and nuts.

**Purim** is the name that means “lots”, so named for the lots that were drawn to determine a dark day in Jewish history. As luck would have it, those dark days never arrived, as the evil villains’ plans were thwarted by the clever Jewish Queen Esther, whose story is recounted in the Biblical Scroll of Esther. Celebrations include a public reading of the scroll, giving gifts to friends and to the needy, dressing up in costume, eating a special triangle-shaped pastry (the hamantaschen), and the drinking of alcohol for those of drinking age.

**Passover** is the seven or eight-day festival of freedom that marks the Hebrew exodus from Egypt long ago. The story is told during a festive ritual meal called a “Seder.” During the festival, it is traditional to abstain from all foods containing leaven; that is, foods made from grain that have not been prepared according to a strict Passover cooking procedure. Among the grain foods that are permitted is matzah, an unleavened bread that is baked before it has a chance to rise.

**Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day)** is when Jews all over the world mourn the loss of six million Jewish lives lost during the Holocaust as part of Hitler's genocidal “Final Solution.”

**Yom HaZikaron (Israeli Memorial Day)** is the day where the Jews commemorate the soldiers who have fallen fighting for Israel’s independence and defending its security. This holiday falls the day before Israel's Independence Day.

**Yom HaAtzmaut (Israeli Independence Day)** is a holiday celebrating the independence of the Modern State of Israel. In Israel, the day of Yom HaAtzmaut is marked with fireworks, barbeques, and outdoor revelry. For Jewish communities outside of Israel, it is a time to gather and celebrate their pride and connection to the Jewish homeland.

**Lag B’Omer** marks the 33rd day of the 49-day “Omer” period between Passover and Shavuot. This 7 week period called “the Omer” is traditionally a quiet time on the Jewish calendar, but Lag B’Omer, which occurs on the 33rd day is an exception. Bonfires, outdoor parties and revelry rule the day, which is why it’s also a popular Jewish wedding date.

**Shavuot** is the holiday celebration of the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people. The celebration of Shavuot is also the Festival of First Fruits and Grains, a fulfillment of the promise of Spring. The name means “weeks”, so named for the 7-week period from Passover to Shavuot.

**Tisha B’Av** is an important fast day in the Jewish calendar and is the 9th day of the Hebrew month of Av. The day commemorates the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC and 70 AD.

**Tu B’Av** is held six days after the fast day of Tisha B’Av and is a festival of love! A popular wedding date, the day is celebrated in the best way possible - with wine, chocolate and roses!

## Why did the Jews of Biblical times reject Jesus as the Messiah?

By the time Jesus walked the earth, Judaism was divided into many competing sects. When one realizes the differences, it's easier to see why the Jews, as a whole, rejected Christ as the Messiah:

**Pharisees** had become tradition-bound and focused on outward conformity to the Jewish laws, without the right heart. Pharisees were “keepers of the law” and they weren't very ‘fair-you-see.’ They, like all the sects, wanted to keep the powerful status that they had when Jesus walked the earth.

**Sadducees** emptied Judaism of the supernatural to the extent that it wasn't much different from much of the Greek philosophy of the day. Sadducees were self-assigned the task of authenticating the Messiah. They did not investigate Jesus's birth, and therefore, rejected His deity. Sadducees didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah—that's why they were so ‘sad-you-see.’

**Essenes** sought refuge in ascetic desert communities. As they lived in almost nomadic, isolated camps, they devoted themselves *only* to the copying of Scripture. They seemed to honor the scripture above the One who *was the Word*. Though we are indebted to them for the preservation of the OT scriptures, in their zeal to copy the Scripture, they missed the One of whom the scriptures spoke.

**Zealots** hoped for a national deliverer like the warrior—king David or Judas Maccabeus, who would drive out the Romans and restore the nation of Israel to its ancient glory. They could not even hear the words of the One who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and suffered death on a cross at the hands of the Romans. They did not discern that the prophecies concerning the Messiah would be *spiritual* in nature before they were *physical* in nature.

## What do Jews and Christians have in common today?

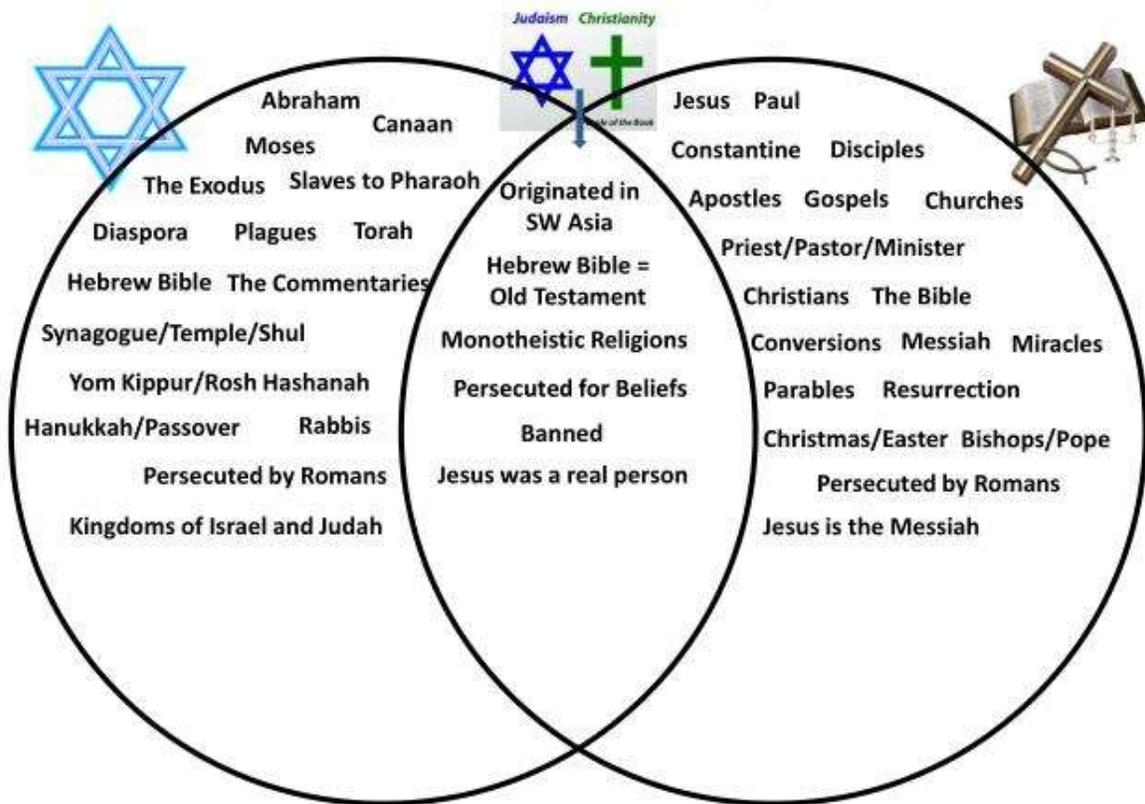
Christians and Jews share a great deal in common. Both believe in the Old Testament. Both share moral and ethical teachings of the Bible. Both accept the Law given by the living God who created the world and is still the Lord of creation. Both need to worship God. Both lift up the importance of the family and the obligation to love one another. Many Jews accept Jesus as a great prophet and find good things in His teaching (but that is as far as it goes).

## What do Jews and Christians disagree on?

The great division began when Jesus walked on the earth. Jews do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah—Christians do. Followers of Christ see many Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in Christ. Judaism is the foundation of both faiths, but, they are still looking for a Messiah.



# Judaism & Christianity Venn Diagram Comparison



## Important Terms in Judaism

**Adonai** - One of the holy names for God



**Afikomen** - Name given to the matzah, eaten at the conclusion of the Sedar Meal of Peasah (Passover)

**Aggadah** - Narrative part of Talmud and Midrash (teachings of Moses and their interpretation)

**Alenu** - Prayer used at the end of the synagogue service

**Ark of the Covenant** - In ancient times, the container for the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. In modern times, the cupboard or cabinet in a synagogue where the scrolls of the Torah are kept. The lid was called the mercy seat. It sat over the law.



**Ashkenazim** - The descendants of the Jews who settled in East and Central Europe

**Atonement** - Coming back to God after doing something wrong

**Bar Mitzvah** - When a boy reaches the age of 13, he is "Bar Mitzvah" (Son of Commandments). It is also the name given to the special ceremony celebrating this event.



**Bat Mitzvah** - When a girl reaches the age of 12, she is Bat Mitzvah.

**Berachah** - A blessing Baruch

**Bimah** - The platform in the synagogue used for prayer

**Capel Skull Cap** (Yiddish) also Kippah and Yarmulke

**Cantor** - A prayer leader in the synagogue chosen to sing prayers

**Challah** - Special braided loaf of bread eaten on the Sabbath

**Chametz** - Anything that is leavened (bread)

**Chanukah** – (Hanukkah) The feast which celebrates the re-dedication of the Temple. It lasts for eight days – often referred to as the Festival of Lights.

**Charoset** - A mixture of apples, wine and cinnamon and nuts made into a paste and eaten during the Passover Meal.

**Chupah** - Marriage Canopy (see Huppah)

**Circumcision** - The rite of cutting the foreskin of a baby boy eight days after birth. It is a sign of the covenant Abraham made with God.



**Covenant** - Found in the Tenakh. It is a promise made by God to grant blessings if Abraham and his descendants kept God's law.

**Diaspora** - The dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world

**Dreidel** - A spinning top

**Elohim** - Hebrew name for God

אלהים

**Etrog** - A citrus fruit resembling a lemon (symbol used at Sukkot)

**Exodus** - The flight of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt, led by Moses. Also, the name of the second book of the Bible.

**Haggadah** - The prayer book used at Seder (the meal on the eve of the Passover)

**Havdalah** - The service in the home at the end of the Sabbath (Shabbat) – literally “separation”. A time to say farewell to the Sabbath

**Hebrew** - The language in which the Jewish scriptures are written

**Huppah** (or Chupah) - Canopy on four posts beneath which the Jewish bride and groom stand for the marriage ceremony. Symbolic of the future home

**Israel** - The name given by God to Jacob and so his descendants were called the “people of Israel”

**Kaddish** - Prayer said by a mourner praising God

**Kashrut** - Jewish food laws

**Ketubah** - Marriage contract, kept by the Jewish bride

**Kippah** (also **Carpel** or **Yarmulkah**) - A small round cap which Jewish boys and men wear on their heads. Some wear these only when praying, others wear them all day.

**Kittel** - A plain white garment worn by Jewish men on the Day of Atonement

**Kosher** - Categories of food permitted, and also the preparation process of such food. Rules regarding these are given in the Torah. Kosher foods include fruit and vegetables, cereals, and foods which grow in or on trees. Only fish with fins and scales are permitted and animals which eat grass and vegetables and have split hooves (cows). Animals and birds must be killed in a special way, (i.e. blood is drained). Today, even restaurants are made kosher when the rabbi prays a blessing over it. →



**Lulav** - Palm branch; one of the four plants used in prayer during the festival of Sukkot

**Magen David** - The six pointed star which is also the Shield of David



**Matzah** - Unleavened bread made from flour and water with no yeast. It is eaten particularly during the Passover.

**Menorah** - A seven branched candlestick. The original one burned continuously in the Temple of Jerusalem. ↻

**Messiah** - The Saviour of the Jews, whom they believe will one day come to earth bringing lasting peace.

**Mezuzah** - Small metal or wooden container which holds texts from the Torah (Shema – found in Deuteronomy 6). It is fastened to the doorposts in a Jewish home and touched each time someone enters the door. →



**Mikveh** - A pool of naturally gathered water (from either rain, river or sea) which is used for ritual cleansing.

**Mohel** - A person who carries out circumcision

**Orthodox Jews** - Jews who follow strictly the teachings of Moses

**Pesach** (also known as **Passover**) - The festival which celebrates freedom from slavery which came about during the Exodus from Egypt

**Pentateuch** - The first five books of the Bible, called the Torah

**Phylacteries** (also **Tefillin**) - These are small leather boxes containing religious texts (Shema), worn on the forehead (to be close to the mind) and left arm (to be close to the heart)

**Purim** - The Feast of Lots, which celebrates the success of Esther in preventing a massacre of the Jews by Haman

**Rabbi** - A teacher of the law; He / She is important in the community and has authority over the people in the community.

**Rimmonim** - Silver ornaments found decorating the Torah Scrolls

**Rosh Hashanah** - Jewish New Year. This begins ten days of penitence culminating in Yom Kippur- the Day of Atonement.

**Seder** - The meal and service of the Passover (Pesach)

**Sephardi** - The descendants of the Jews who settled in Spain/Portugal

**Shabbat** - The Sabbath – the day of rest (Saturday)

**Shabbat Shalom** - A greeting used at Sabbath

**Shalom** - Hello, Goodbye, Peace

**Shavuot Festival of Weeks** - celebrated 50 days after Passover. It marks the beginning of the harvest and commemorates the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

**Shema** - The most important Jewish prayer. It is the first learned by children and the last spoken by the dying. It is also put into the Mezuzah on the door posts of Jewish homes. Taken from the book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 6, it declares the oneness of God.

**Shepatrani** - The declaration made by a father that their son or daughter is now responsible for their own actions.



שלום

**Shofar** - The ram's horn trumpet blown in the synagogue at the services of Rosh Hashanah and at the end of Yom Kippur Shul (Yiddish)



**Synagogue Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles/Shelters)** - This harvest festival is a reminder of the time when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness after escaping from Egypt with Moses.

**Tabernacle** - The tent of meeting, prayer and sacrifice made by the Israelites in the wilderness. The two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved were kept there.

**Tallit** - Prayer shawl worn by Jewish men and boys



**Talmud** - The teachings and discussions of the oral law of Moses

**Temple** - The holy building in Jerusalem built by King Solomon, and the focal point for Jewish worship. It was destroyed by fire in 70 AD.



**Tanakh** - Hebrew for Bible

**Ten Commandments** - Laws given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai as a guide as to how to live Torah Hebrew word for "Law". It applies particularly to the Law of Moses (Pentateuch).

**Yom Kippur** - The most solemn of Jewish Holy days. It marks the end of the ten days of repentance of the festival of Rosh Hashanah.

**Yahweh** - The highest name for God in the Hebrew language.

יהוה

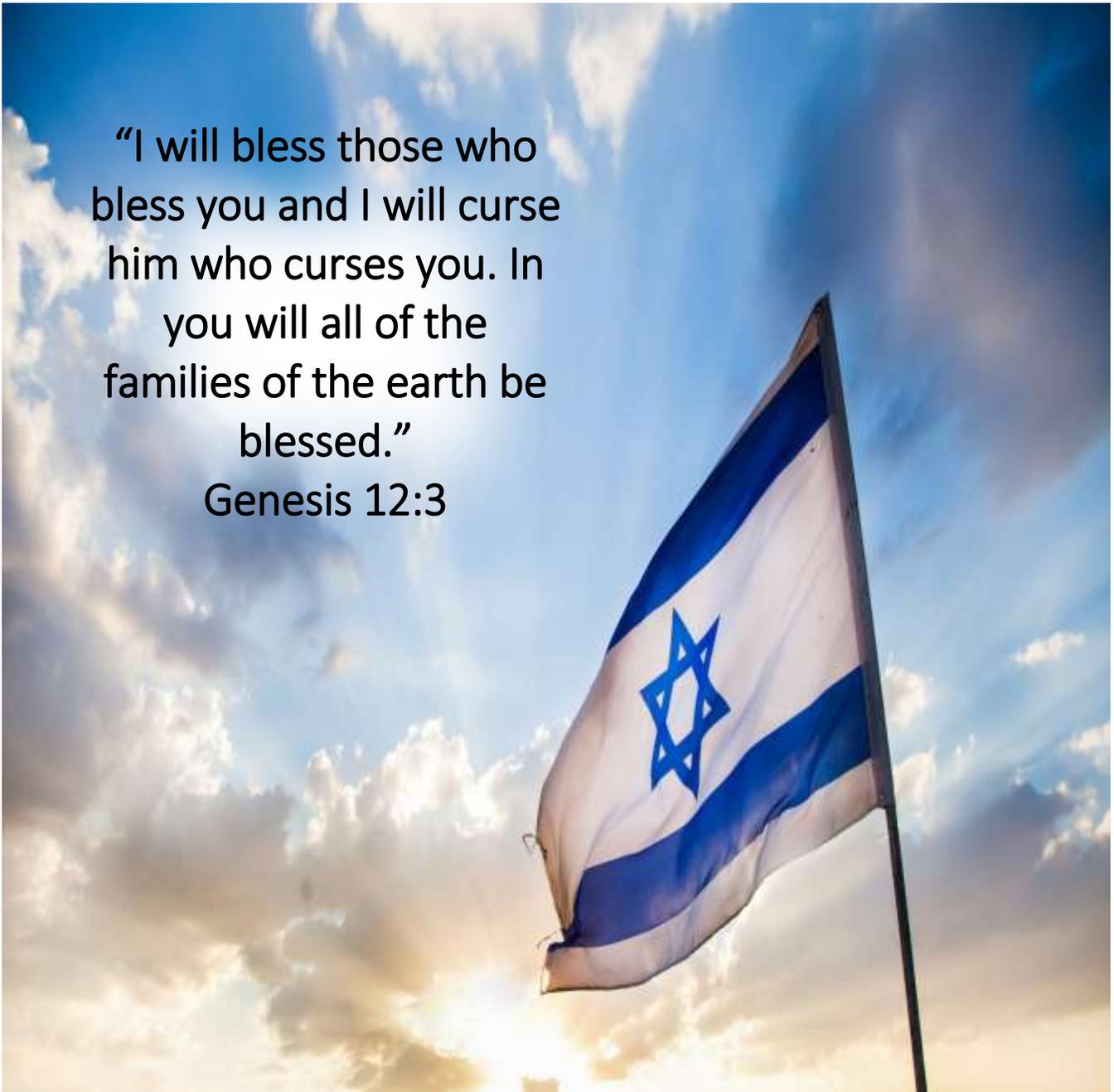




# WE STAND WITH ISRAEL

“I will bless those who  
bless you and I will curse  
him who curses you. In  
you will all of the  
families of the earth be  
blessed.”

Genesis 12:3



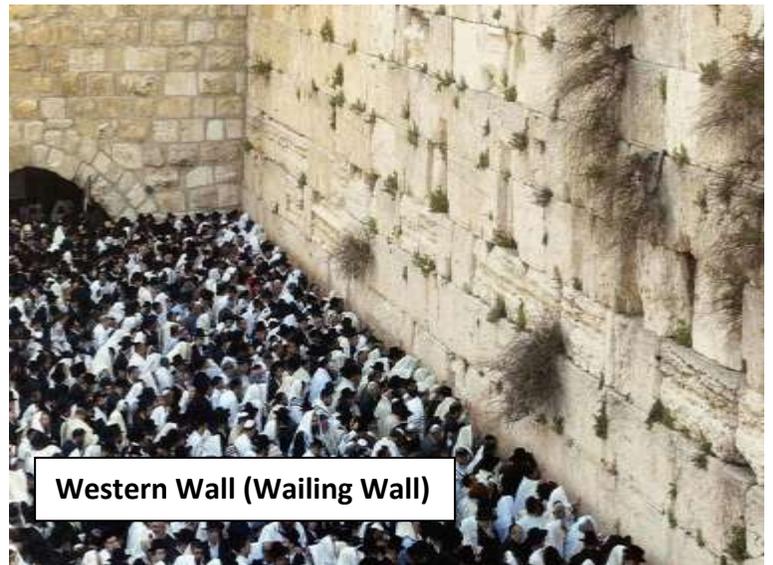
# Pictures from Israel



Jerusalem—The Holy City



Masada



Western Wall (Wailing Wall)



Beit She'an



The Empty Tomb



Calvary's Hill