

A Look at Rabbinic Judaism

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Part I: History

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of If the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! (Romans 11:13-24)

So! We are wild olives. The rootstock is Israel. Grafted in, we are the ones who draw nourishing sap from Jewish roots. These roots are the words of Moses and the prophets. Around us lie branches broken off from the original tree. It is unbelief that separates many Jews from their natural roots. The majority have rejected *Yeshua Hamashiah*, whom we know to be Jesus, the fulfillment of the *Torah*, the *Nevi'im*, and the *Ketuvim*. History, however, is not destiny. The Apostle Paul pleads with us, the engrafted wild olive branches, to bring natural branches back to their natural roots.

Who Are Today's Jews?

Demographers estimate that there are about 19 million Jews worldwide. The country of Israel has 4.3 million. America has just under 6 million, but the percentage of Jews in the general population has fallen drastically from a post-war high of 4 percent to 2.3 percent as a result of a relatively low birth-rate and a high rate of intermarriage.¹ American Jews are found to all states but are concentrated in the states with large urban populations.

Half of those who identify themselves as Jewish people are secular, lacking any significant religious persuasion beyond ethnicity. Of every ten practicing American Jews, two consider themselves "orthodox," three "reform," and five "conservative." These three categories are broadly descriptive of observant Jews in our country today.² All three categories draw upon the legal, philosophical, and mystical heritage of rabbinic Judaism that began about the time the Jewish people lost their Temple forty years after Jesus died and rose.³

¹"Jewish Population Falling" <<http://www.edn-friends-icej.ca/isreport/pop.html>>.

²These divisions are nearly as broad as the Christian categories of Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox.

³The Jewish "diaspora" began with the Assyrian exile of the ten northern Israelite tribes ca. 722 B.C. and intensified with the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians ca. 587 B.C. "Jew" is short for Judean, a member of the minority that returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile late in the sixth century B.C. The diaspora grew greatly after the Jews lost wars to the Romans in 70 and 135 A.D.

Orthodox Judaism considers itself "Torah-true." *Torah* is the Hebrew name for the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. Adherents observe all of the 613 commandments of the Torah.⁴ They believe the Old Testament⁵ to be inspired. Torah truths are expounded in the Talmud, a 2,700 page⁶ transcription of oral tradition that grew after the time of Jesus and before the end of the first millennium. The orthodox are strict Sabbath keepers, eat kosher, and meet in synagogues. Male and female roles are sharply defined. Hebrew is the medium for expressing faith. Their men pray morning, late afternoon, and after sunset and cover their heads with a *yarmulka*. Many await the coming of a Messiah to usher in a golden age of world peace at which time the Jewish people will realize their full destiny as God's special people. Among the orthodox are the *Hasidim*, a pietistic group, recognized by their beards, side curls, and a style of dress reflecting dress in Eastern Europe a century or more ago.

Reform Judaism is a modern movement that began in Germany and is today centered in our country. It parallels liberal, free-thinking Christianity. Adherents believe in a progressive revelation born of mankind's social and religious evolution. Sexes mix. English is used in worship, which occurs in temples not synagogues. Dietary laws have been set aside. The purpose of religion is to improve life on earth. Reform Jews are often at the forefront of charitable enterprises.

Between the two is **Conservative Judaism**. Both Hebrew and the vernacular are used in worship. An attempt is made to keep a Jewish home and observe traditional customs, but in a relaxed way.

Zionism is not a religious persuasion. It is a political movement born in nineteenth century Europe when the spirit of the times inspired many ethnic groups to claim or reclaim their national identity. It is Zionism's goal to return Jews to the land promised to Abraham.⁷ Most early Zionists were inspired by aspects of Jewish religious tradition, particularly in respect to a future restoration of the Jewish people in their homeland, but few were deeply religious. Seven out of ten Israeli citizens today consider themselves nonobservant secularists. Zionism is widely embraced by American Jews. Under their influence America has itself become a solid financial and political supporter of the modern Israeli state. By Israeli law any Jew anywhere on earth has the right to return to Israel and claim immediate citizenship.⁸

A small, but growing number of Jews today think of themselves as **Messianic**.⁹ They practice Christian faith within a Jewish cultural and liturgical framework. Until the last century it was customary for Jews who converted to leave their heritage behind and assimilate with the Christian world. A quarter million Jews became Christian in the nineteenth century, among them such famous men as Benjamin Disraeli, Alfred Edersheim, Felix Mendelssohn, and Franz Delitzsch. In 1865 the International Hebrew Christian Alliance was formed in London. Fifty years later a similar group formed in the U.S. Both groups supported Jewish believers who wanted to live as "fulfilled" or "completed" Jews. Today's Jews for Jesus movement reflects this thinking. Today there are a growing number of Messianic congregations throughout the U.S. The Caspari Institute in Jerusalem supports those who have embraced Christianity but wish to remain Israeli. There is at least one

⁴I searched for a list of the 613 mitzvot. I found no such list exists. This reminds one of the difference of opinion on how to divide the Ten Commandments. The number 613, however, is traditional and widely used.

⁵What we call the Old Testament, Jews call the *Tanakh*, a word derived from the first letters of the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible, *T*orah, *N*evi'im, and *K*etuvim.

⁶In an ancient Hebrew document, a "page" is considered both sides of one leaf in a bound book. Observant Jews attempt to read a page of the Talmud daily, thus completing a reading of the whole in just over seven years.

⁷The kibbutz movement in Israel had as one of its specific goals a return to the soil.

⁸In December 1989 the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that Jews who become Christian may not exercise the constitutional right of return. Recently the same Supreme Court ruled that conversions to Judaism are "legal" if certified by non-orthodox rabbis.

⁹The following website offers a wide-range of information on Jews who profess to be Christian:

<[http://www.crosssearch.com/Church-and-Denominational-Resources/Denominations/Messianic Judaism/](http://www.crosssearch.com/Church-and-Denominational-Resources/Denominations/Messianic_Judaism/)>

Jewish Christian kibbutz in Israel. Several blocks from the Yafo dig at which WELS and ELS volunteers worked in the summer of 1999 is a Hebrew Christian fellowship supported by Scandinavian Lutherans. In America the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod enrolled its first Jewish/Christian congregation in 1994, Beth Emmanuel of Queens, NY.

Rabbinic Judaism's Development

How did the natural branches separate from God's olive tree? How is it that the majority of the people who trace their lineage back to Jacob are not our brothers in the one, true faith? The story is fascinating. It is one not well known, even by those of us who completed seminary. I have found, however, (a) that a basic knowledge of the development of early rabbinic Judaism helps to define the roots of our own faith, and (b) that a basic knowledge of the "filters" through which ancient rabbinic Judaism has reached the modern era is indispensable for us pastors if we are to bring the Messiah into the lives of Jews who as yet don't know the real Jesus or accept him as the Savior.

In Jesus' day. Jesus recognized that many Jews had it wrong in his day. That he was the anointed of God was rejected by the Sadducean priests. Recall the picture of Caiaphas rending his clothes. The Pharisees were dogged in their condescending attempts to discredit our Lord. Scribes and teachers of the law found Jesus at odds with their established interpretations of Torah. Herodians and Zealots were drawn to Jesus at first because he captured the imagination of the common people and demonstrated miraculous (and therefore strategically useful) powers. Surely, they thought, such a one could rally the masses against Rome!

The vast majority of Jews were counted among the *am haaretz* ("people of the land"). The organized groups within Jewry, the Sadducees and Pharisees, used the term contemptuously as a synonym for unsophisticated ignorance. Recall the characterization of the Twelve offered by the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:13. These common folk, however, included in their number those who "searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ [Messiah] was pointing" (1 Peter 1:10). We know a few of their names: Zechariah the priest and his wife Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, the shepherds of Bethlehem, and the fishermen of Galilee.

Was holding to the true, historic faith easy? No more then than now! Mother Mary pondered many things in her heart, but she deserved her son's rebuke at Cana and at Nazareth. From prison John wondered if his cousin was "the One," or if he was to wait for another. Nicodemus came by night to test Jesus with his mind and heart. The disciples were pulled this way and that, even though they were in the process of receiving the best seminary training ever given. They scattered at Jesus' arrest and huddled in fear until Pentecost. At Jesus' ascension the Eleven still harbored the hope that an earthly kingdom for the Jews was just around the corner. The Emmaus disciples were perplexed until Jesus traced the roots of their faith from Moses and the prophets to his very life and words. Thomas doubted. Saul/Paul kicked against the goads.

Tradition. Yes, the "tree" of Jewish faith and life had many branches. The branches that broke from Jesus had to find roots for their Judaism elsewhere. The place they discovered was "the tradition of the elders."¹⁰ A fundamental tenet of rabbinic Judaism has been that the written Torah must be understood in the light of teachings handed down orally by the pious from the time of Moses onward to the present.¹¹ To rabbinic

¹⁰ η παραδοσις των πρεσβυτερων. Jesus understood the root of the conflict when he said, "You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Matthew 15:6).

¹¹In parallel fashion Roman Catholic dogma holds that the "teaching authority of the church" stands alongside the Bible as a source of authority in matters of faith and life. The Greek Orthodox hold that the Scriptures are the sole authority, but only in the context of the visible church's unbroken testimony handed down unbroken from the apostles through the fathers to the present. Only in the context of the visible orthodox church and its teaching clergy will these Scriptures find true and authoritative exposition.

Judaism Jesus of Nazareth is not the end for which the Torah was given.¹² Nor do they believe the Torah to be God's servant "put in charge to lead us to Christ [i.e. the Messiah] that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).¹³

A Christian holds that the covenant history of Israel is one of divine grace amid human failure. Salvation history before Christ exhibits long periods of human drift away from God, interrupted every 500 years or so by striking episodes of divine intervention.¹⁴ The God of Israel anointed priests, kings, and prophets with all their ceremonial, institutional, and literary trappings so that his chosen people might anticipate what the prophets call "the day of the Lord" and the apostles refer to as "the fullness of the time."¹⁵ This whole process failed when Israel denied him who is "the End" to which the history of Israel was divinely directed. The aphorism is true: "No Jesus, no peace! Know Jesus, know Peace!" A messianic hope rooted in Scripture gave life and salvation to Israel. Without Jesus as the fixed star for steering faith, Israel became a shell, having a form of godliness without its power.¹⁶

The Great Assembly. After Malachi (ca. 440 B.C.) the Jews recognized that the voice of prophecy had fallen silent. There were no sons of David ruling, because ultimate authority had been handed from one foreign power to another, the Persians to Alexander and Alexander to his successors, first the Ptolemies in Egypt and later, after 200 B.C., to the Seleucids of Syria. During all this time the priesthood in Jerusalem was at the center of organized Jewish life. It was led by the "Great Assembly," an antecedent of the Sanhedrin that tried both Jesus and his disciples.

From the fifth century B.C. onward, the world became more and more cosmopolitan. Some Jews had not returned from Babylonia. Others migrated to the great cities of the Mediterranean world. It was Alexander's hope to Hellenize the world. Jews settled in many of the Greek city states that were founded by his veterans throughout the Near East. Jews became a sizeable force in Alexandria, Egypt, which had become the seat of government for the Ptolemies who ruled Judea. It was from Egypt that the Septuagint translation of the Scriptures emerged. Some Jews, influenced by Hellenism, aspired to philosophy.¹⁷ These teachers contemporized the legal requirements of the Torah. For example, the ban on eating birds of prey was interpreted as the rejection of tyrannical oppression. For another example, the Lord of hosts (*adonai tzebaot*) of the Old Testament was equated with Sabazios, the Thracian Zeus. For still another example, the pre-Flood patriarch Enoch was identified with the mythical Titan, Atlas. Jewish writers of all stripes began to advance their religious views, using the names of biblical sages such as Enoch, Moses, and the sons of Jacob as pseudonyms. Young Jewish men of a less religious bent competed nude in the gymnasium with their circumcision altered.

¹² τέλος νομου Romans 10:4. τέλος is the closing act, fulfillment, or goal to which a movement is being directed, so also in 1 Peter 1:9: "for you are receiving the *goal* of your faith, the *salvation* of your souls."

¹³ ο νομος παιδαγωγος ημων γεγονεν εις χριστον, ινα εκ πιστεως δικαιωθωμεν, Galatians 3:24.

¹⁴The gospel spoken by God to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15) was followed by predeluvian apostasy. Grace to Noah was followed by Babel-inspired rebellion. The Abraham-Isaac-Jacob years ended with a long sojourn in Egypt. After the exodus and conquest came the dark days of the judges that culminated in the destruction of Shiloh, together with its priesthood and sanctuary. David's grand restoration preceded generations of royal decadence that ended with exile and loss of land, Temple, and independence. God raised up prophets to preserve a remnant, but the prophetic voice fell silent over the 400 years that separate Malachi from John the Baptist.

¹⁵So the KJV for το πληρωμα του χρονου in Galatians 4:4.

¹⁶So 2 Timothy 3:5: exontev morfwsin eusebiav thn de dunamin authv hrnhmenoi

¹⁷Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus, was the most articulate of those who attempted to justify Judaism to the classical world. Philo held to the eternal existence of God, monotheism, the world's creation by God, a unit concept of world affairs under divine providence, the eternal existence of a divinely revealed Torah, man's immortality and free will, and the idea of a messiah. Philo made use of allegorical interpretation and therefore stands at the head of the line of such Alexandrian allegorists as Clement and Origen.

Greek vs. Jew. In Palestine the juggernaut of Greek culture bore down on Jerusalem, but was resisted in the villages. The Greek rulers of Syria were involved in perpetual dynastic rivalries. The high priests of Jerusalem soon imitated them. For political reasons they vied with one another to out-Greek the Greeks. A crisis occurred when Antiochus Epiphanes ordered his priestly subjects to end circumcision and Sabbath-keeping altogether. He had a swine offered to Zeus on the Temple's altar. A village priest, Mattathias, who was not from the ruling Zadokite priestly house, and his five sons rallied the country folk. The *hasidim* ("those marked by God's grace") became fervent supporters of the armed rebellion that ensued. These partisans were bitterly opposed to Hellenism, but were not themselves above tailoring Judaism to folk traditions and urgencies of the moment. They decreed that it was lawful for Jews to make war on the Sabbath. These lay purists helped the Maccabees drive the Seleucids from Palestine. They supported the ousting of the Zadokite line of priests as well and helped elevate the victorious sons of Mattathias to the high priesthood. This political marriage, however, did not last. By the third generation the Maccabees had become Hellenic tyrants themselves. The *hasidim* turned on Alexander Yannai (d. 76 B.C.) and were labeled *perushim* ("separated ones," i.e. separatists or heretics). We know these opponents of Yannai as "the Pharisees." Yannai crucified 5000 of them, but urged his wife Salome to sue for peace upon his death. This she did. Legend has it that Salome's brother, Simeon ben Shetach, presided over a golden age of Pharisaism that lasted for almost a decade.

Roman times. Things changed with the arrival of the Roman general Pompey. From 63 B.C. until 67 A.D. the Herods¹⁸ and a succession of procurators held the effective reins of power in Palestine on behalf of Rome. Jews were forced again to come to terms with the unwelcome return of foreign rule, a rule that brought with it a renewed pressure to cast aside Jewish ways. Midway through this period Jesus was born.

Jewish sects. The Gospels and book of Acts tell us of the tension which existed between Jesus and the Jewish power structure in Jerusalem. *Sadducees* dominated the priestly element.¹⁹ Their power lay in the Temple and their control of its ritual. They did not believe in angels, preferred the Torah over other scriptures, and denied the resurrection of the dead. The *Pharisees* had broad appeal in the countryside and were excessively proud of their piety.²⁰ At this time there were also Jewish parties that were highly political. The *Zealots* dreamed of throwing off the Roman yoke completely, while the *Herodians* believed that semi-independence was the best the Jews could hope for. From Josephus we learn of the *Essenes*, a group not mentioned in the New Testament. They pursued a communal, ascetic lifestyle and held an apocalyptic vision of contemporary history.²¹ Some of their writings survive today in the scrolls recovered from the Qumran caves.²² Spiritual leadership, from the time of the Maccabees to the time of Herod the Great, lay in the hands of five successive *zugot* ("pairs" of men) who concerned themselves with interpreting the written Torah on the basis of tradition (the so called "oral Torah").²³ The most famous of these pairs, Hillel and Shammai, pre-dated Jesus.

¹⁸The Maccabean and Herodian rulers played openly to the messianic hopes of the common people. Both wished to be viewed as restorers of the Davidic and Solomonic "golden age." As a result they built cities, erected temples, and engaged in trade by sending ships westward on the Mediterranean and ships and caravans east and south through the Red Sea and into Arabia.

¹⁹There are two views on the origin of the Sadducees. An old rabbinic tradition holds that two rabbis had a falling out. One, named Zadok, formed the Sadducean party. Another view holds that the Sadducees upheld the legitimacy of the old Zadokite priestly line. Either way, the name is likely derived from the Hebrew *tzadik*, meaning "righteous" or "just." The writings of the Sadducees and all of the sects, with the exception of the Pharisees, perished when the Jews lost their two wars with Rome.

²⁰Rabbinic tradition has this to say about what the Pharisees believed: (a) Every person should abide by the Torah. (b) Tradition must also be observed, (c) Jews should not imitate other nations, but be an example for other nations to follow. (d) There is a life after death. (e) All people are equal before God.

²¹According to Josephus the Essenes (a) held to a strict observance of religious law, (b) lived a simple life, (c) held property in common, (d) performed ritual bathing daily, (e) wore white garments, (f) abstained from meat and wine.

²²The scrolls speak of a "Wicked Priest" and his foil, the "Teacher of Righteousness," neither of whom is identified by name. This illustrates the polarization that was taking place between the lay leaders and the priesthood.

²³The two were respectively the president (*nasi*) of the rabbinic school and the dean (*av bet din*) of the Sanhedrin, the high court connected with the Temple.

Shammai argued for a strict interpretation of Jewish law while Hillel sought ways to make Torah-observance tolerable.²⁴

Jesus did not object to the title *rabbi* ("my great one," i.e., revered teacher). In Jesus we see what the pupils of Hillel and Shammai may have been like. Rabbis gathered pupils. The more popular ones attracted crowds. They were called upon to read and expounded Scripture in the synagogues. Students were not chosen for great intellect. Above all they had good memories, and were able to cite verbatim the words passed down as "oral Torah" from former teachers. Jesus, of course, had an authority that was a cut above the typical *rabbi* (Mark 1:22). Jesus came with a teaching straight from heaven. In speaking the truth, however, Jesus used the standard rabbinic mode of proclamation: "So-and-so says, *but I say to you* "

Rabbinic exposition. Rabbis engaged in two types of exposition. One involved the outward observance of the commandments. The Hebrew word for this is *halakah* ("a walk"). Recall how the Pharisees challenged Jesus regarding Sabbath-keeping. Jesus allowed healing, plucking grain, carrying, compounding a medicine, and lifting an animal from a pit on the Sabbath, all of which were anathema to the Pharisees. Yet Jesus asserted that his *halakah* was true, and that neither he nor his disciples were breaking Torah. Jesus stood for the validity of every stroke of Moses' pen (Matthew 5:18). Moses' words were to be understood in the light of divine justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23). These two things Jesus embodied in his divine-human person perfectly. These two things had to be in the heart and soul of imperfect men through the miracle of faith if outward rituals were to be performed authentically.²⁵ When such true faith was absent, religious observance became no more than an empty, hypocritical shell.²⁶

The other kind of rabbinic exposition, mastered by Jesus and pursued by all the rabbis, was a practical and picturesque elaboration of Jewish life. The Hebrew word for this is *aggadah* ("narration"). *Aggadah* includes homilies, parables, maxims, and story telling. Jesus was a master of parables. His Sermon on the Mount is a classic combination of *halakah* and *aggadah*.

Christians among Jews. Traditional rabbis held that the Messiah would be a "son of David" with a political mission. The Messiah of David would lift the yoke of Roman oppression from the shoulders of the Jewish people. Yet some held that the Messiah had to be a priest, a Messiah from Aaron's line. Only Jesus and his followers knew that the true Messiah would turn out to be a priest-king "in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews, chapters 5 to 7).

Jesus died and rose 40 years before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Roman general Titus. During those forty years Jewish Christians continued to use the Temple regularly.²⁷ Though persecuted at times, they did not see themselves as a new religion, but rather a true and fulfilled manifestation of the old faith. Saul/Paul, with help from Peter, convinced James, the leader of the Jewish Christian congregation in Jerusalem, that God's family embraced Gentiles as well (Acts 15). The Israel of God included *halakah*-observant Jews who acted in the Spirit to live lives of thankfulness for all that Jesus had done. At the same time the Israel of God

²⁴Paul's teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) was a pupil of Hillel. He was the one who counseled the Sanhedrin to take it easy on the Christians (Acts 5:34). Paul (Philippians 3:5) identifies himself as a Pharisee.

²⁵Old Testament sacrifice, for example, was not meant for those who sinned intentionally (literally, "with an upraised hand," Numbers 15:30) but for those who sinned in weakness, inadvertently (so Leviticus 4 and 5, *passim*). The writer to the Hebrews reflects this understanding (10:26): If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.

²⁶The conclusion drawn by Samuel (1 Samuel 15:22); David (Psalm 40:6); and Isaiah (1:11)

²⁷Luke's mention of the rending of the Temple curtain at the moment of Jesus' death (23:45) and John's clear identification of Jesus himself as the true Temple (2:19,21), indicate that the first generation of Christians knew perfectly well that Temple going was a free choice rather than a duty required of the faithful.

included Gentiles who had no history of Torah-keeping and who lived their thankful lives apart from outward forms and rituals of the Torah. Both were free. The Jerusalem Council proclaimed correctly that neither had the right to compel the other to give their way up to conform to the practice of the other.

The split. In the Roman Empire at this time Judaism enjoyed status as a legal religion. Adherents were exempt from emperor-worship and were allowed their own religious courts. For a hundred years after the death of Jesus, the Gentile Romans found it difficult to differentiate clearly between Jews and Christians. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D., however, widened the gap between the Jews who rejected Jesus and those who embraced him. With the Temple in ruins, the sacrifices ceased, and the priests were literally out of work. Those Jews who continued to reject Jesus made a decision to preserve what was left of their Jewish way of life. Leadership in the non-Christian Jewish community passed from the priests and Levites, who had been experts in ritual, to the rabbis, whose excellence lay in teaching.

To the victorious Romans Yohanan ben Zakkai, the rabbi who convened a council in Yavneh in 70 A.D., would have been indistinguishable from James, who had presided over the first Christian council in Jerusalem some twenty years before. At Yavneh, ben Zakkai rejected the political messianism that had been a strong impetus to the revolt and that had caused factions that deeply divided the Jews in the final year of their war with Rome. At Yavneh prayer replaced sacrifice as the mode of worship,²⁸ and any ten men assembled for prayer constituted a proper house of assembly (*bet kneset*), prayer (*bet tefillah*), and study (*bet midrash*).

For Jewish Christians, Yavneh was unnecessary. There was no parallel compulsion on the part of Jewish Christians to find new leaders, or a new mode of worship, or a new place to worship. Jesus remained their physically absent, but real leader. He had made the final all-encompassing sacrifice. The Temple's burnt offerings and sin offerings had long since become superfluous. When faithful Christ-believing Jews assembled in twos or threes to study and pray in Jesus' name, God's Temple and God's Sacrifice were really present.

The split widens. In spite of the fact that Judaism was moving in one direction and Christianity in another, outsiders like the Romans, as we said, saw little difference between the two. Jews of all persuasions were counted equally among the vanquished. Christian Jews returned to Jerusalem from Pella after the first contest with Rome. They continued to coexist in Jerusalem and Judea with their rabbinic countrymen until the second Jewish war broke out around 131 A.D. Between the wars Yohanan ben Zakkai was ousted as head of the rabbinic academy. The new man in charge, Rabbi Akiba, enlisted Simeon bar Kochba to take up arms. The flash point came when the Emperor Hadrian persisted in his plan to convert Jerusalem into a Roman city. Akiba declared bar Kochba to be the long-awaited Messiah. When bar Kochba lost the war, the Romans banished all Jews from Jerusalem. Jewish Christians shared this prohibition with Akiba and his rabbinic followers.

For the second time in a hundred years rabbis turned away from politics and found an able leader in Rabbi Judah. He saw to it that the oral Torah was gathered, organized, and written down in a more or less systematic way. The product of Judah's work is the six-part **Mishnah**.²⁹ The Mishnah being gathered in

²⁸Ever since, Jewish men are enjoined to pray three times daily, four times on Sabbath, and five on Yom Kippur. Morning (*shaharit*) and pre-dusk (*minhah*) prayers are timed to replace the morning and evening sacrifices of the Old Testament. The nighttime Sabbath prayer is *ma'ariv*. Extra prayers on the Sabbath parallel the doubling of the weekly sacrifices on the Sabbath.

²⁹The six orders (*sedarim*) of the Mishnah deal with agriculture (*zeraim*, "seeds"), holidays (*mo'ed*), women and marriage (*nashim*), civil and criminal law (*nezikim*, "damages"), sacrifices and the Temple (*kodashim*, "holy matters"), and ritual cleanliness (*tohorot*, "purification"). Parts of the Mishnah preserve the wisdom of the early rabbis. One such section is the *Pirke Avot* ("ethics of the fathers"). A typical Mishnaic aphorism is the saying attributed to Simon the Righteous, the brother of Salome, Alexander Yannai's widow: "The world rests upon three things, the Torah, service to God, and good deeds." Another saying, attributed to Gamaliel, Paul's teacher, is similar to the Apostle Paul's words to believers in Thessalonica (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Gamaliel is quoted as saying: "Any study without work leads to sin." Still another rabbinic saying parallels Jesus' words in Matthew 7:12, albeit negatively. Hillel said:

Palestine was carried to Babylon, the second center of rabbinic Judaism. The purpose of this exporting of legal precedents was to stabilize authoritative interpretations in Babylon and elsewhere. Yet Rabbi Judah's Mishnah did not result in a rigid canon of authoritative interpretation. The Mishnah allowed alternatives to stand, one alongside the other. This opened the possibility for future rabbinic development. Some opinions and traditions did not make it into the Mishnah. These, known as *tosefta*, "supplements," were remembered as *beraita*, "extraneous materials."

The oral Torah. Oral law was said to build a "hedge around the Torah." By expanding and interpreting God's words to Moses, pious Jews believed they were insulating themselves from transgression. Oral law conjures up practical situations not occurring in the Bible and adjudicates them. The Torah, for example, forbids plowing with an ox yoked together with an ass. Oral law, seeing the commandment as a humanitarian one, proceeds to outlaw the yoking of any small animal with a large one. Because the Torah says very little about burial practices and mourning for the dead, oral law fills the void. Torah permits a bill of divorce, yet says nothing about a written contract for marriage in the first place. Oral law spells out in some detail how and why a marriage contract is drawn up and enforced. Where the Torah requires "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24), oral law reinterprets. It rejects the plain sense and argues that monetary payments are what God really wants in cases of physical injury. Sometimes the oral tradition of the rabbis appeared to be adding rules that didn't exist explicitly in the Torah itself, but were nevertheless in the spirit of Scripture. An example of this is the saving of a child or animal on the Sabbath, a practice which Jesus cited in Luke 14:5.

Until the end of the third century Christians experienced sporadic and bitter persecution. By the time Christianity achieved the status of a protected religion under the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century, Gentile Christians far outnumbered their Jewish brothers.³⁰ Converts from rabbinic Judaism to Christianity were thereafter required to renounce their Jewish identity completely and to adopt the customs of Gentile believers upon their baptism. The break between Jewish Christians and rabbinical Judaism was now complete in the eyes of the state as well as the church.

Talmud ("that which is to be taught"). Rabbi Gamaliel, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Akiba, and Rabbi Judah are counted among the *tannaim* ("those who study and teach"). When the rabbinic schools in Judea were forced to close, the *tannaim* were succeeded in the third to the sixth centuries by the Galilean *amoraim* ("commentators," "interpreters," or "expositors"). These scholars assembled to discuss the Mishnah twice a year, limiting their authoritative discussions to one topic at a time. The opinions of the *amoraim* formed the *gemara* ("completion"), an authoritative exposition of the Mishnah. Mishnah (including at this time the *tosefta* as well) and Gemara, taken together, formed the Palestinian Talmud.

The Talmud begun in Palestine was never completed. Work on it ceased at the end of the fourth century. The center of Jewish intellectual life slowly shifted from Palestine to Babylonia. By the sixth century the compilation of a second talmud, the Babylonian Talmud, had been completed by the *saboraim* ("reflectors" or "examiners"). It contains its own presentation of the Mishnah in Hebrew and its own Gemara in Aramaic. The Babylonian scholars divided the Mishnah into 63 tractates, each devoted to a different topic. These tractates contain both *halakhah* and *aggadah*.

Gaonic Period. The two talmuds took on the role of textbooks for Jews worldwide. The fact that the Babylonian rabbis came in later and redid what their brothers had already done in Jerusalem, however,

"Do not do unto others what you would not wish others to do to you." Other sayings contradict Scripture. Akiba said: "Everything is predetermined, yet a free will is given."

³⁰One former Jew, Epiphanius, however, became bishop of Constantinople. Another, a rabbinical student of Tiberias, devoted himself to building churches in Galilee. Both men retained their Jewishness as Christians.

established a lasting precedent for rabbinic Judaism. The precedent fostered the right of local academies to exercise independent thinking. The *gaonim* ("excellencies") of Babylonia promulgated basic approaches to liturgy, food practices, Sabbath and holy day observance, and the rites of passage in life. Schools in North Africa, Gaul, Spain, Italy, and Egypt received their work as useful—in fact, indispensable—but none were strictly bound by the letter of gaonic law. Rabbinic interpretation varied wherever a school of scholars gathered to discuss Torah. Geography, culture, and politics pulled in different directions. The heat of the Near East, the cold of northern Europe, the varying occupations Jews engaged in as a function of their geographic distribution, the attitudes of Gentile governments and of the dominant religion (Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Islam) helped form "doctrine and practice." Local custom (*minhag*) often evolved into *halakah*.

When the rabbis searched out and investigated biblical texts, their conclusions came to be known as *midrash* ("that which is searched out or investigated"). The words and very letters of the original sacred text were held in high reverence, a fact underscored by the close correspondence between the eleventh century Masoretic texts and the Dead Sea scrolls. At the same time rabbis did not shrink from a creative abuse of context. Words and phrases could be extracted, bent, blended, and pasted together at will. As a result rabbinic exegesis is not bound by our Lutheran hermeneutical principles. The concept of a "single, simple sense" existed, but it was overshadowed by the compulsion to adapt written texts to prevailing circumstances that could be practical, personal, or political.³¹

Synagogue worship. A standard order (*siddur*) for synagogue worship emerged at this time. For worship a *minyan*, a minimum of ten males 13 years old or older, was required. Three things opened a service: the call to prayer (*bareku*), the *shema*³² ("Hear, O Israel," found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9; and including also at this point in the service the commandment about wearing tasseled garments, Numbers 15:37-41), and a blessing (*berekhu shem kevod*, "blessed be his holy name"). Next came the *amidah* ("standing") which consisted of eighteen benedictions (*shmoneh esre*)³³ recited while standing up. The first three praise God and the last three offer him thanks. These six never change. The middle blessings may differ from one service to another. Six of the variable benedictions are personal petitions. The other six express in a variety of ways the aspirations of the Jewish people. After the *amidah* selections from the Torah are read, bracketed by further prayers. On the Sabbath a reading from the prophets (*haftarah* "conclusion") is added. The service ends with a pair of doxologies, *alenu* ("it is our duty to praise") and *kaddish* ("sanctification").

The Dark Ages. During the fifth and sixth centuries the Roman world in the West disintegrated in the face of the barbarian invasions. In the East the Byzantines warred incessantly with their Persian adversaries. Jewish sects multiplied in the midst of this confusion. Then in the mid-seventh century Arab armies swept from Arabia to the Atlantic and from the gates of Byzantium to the borders of India. Islam put an end to pagan practices wherever they ruled. Muhammad rejected talmudic wrangling and was not impressed with the way Christians argued over the single letter that separated *homoiousious* from *homoousious*. Mohammed decreed that the scriptures of Jews and Christians were both corrupt. Nevertheless, corrupt scriptures were better than none at all, and Jews and Christians were tolerated as "people of the book."

³¹The rabbis could say אי מקצא מידוי פשוט, "a biblical verse never departs from its plain meaning." This *peshat* approach sought to expose the meaning of Scripture by considering its context, using philological insights and historical awareness. Literalness was expressed in the words דברי ככתב "the words as written." Nevertheless it was permitted routinely to read אל תקרי "not as written." Hillel established seven *middot* (hermeneutical rules) to loosen interpretation. They included permission to (a) infer from the minor to the major, (b) draw inferences by analogy, (c) infer on the basis of common features within a single passage, or (d) on the basis of common features in different passages, (e) generalities, (f) comparisons, and (g) context.

³²The *shema* is the closest thing to a creed in rabbinic Judaism. It is recited morning and evening and also just before the moment of death.

³³A nineteenth "benediction" was added for only a short time. This "extra" statement expressed gratitude to God that rabbinic Jews have not embraced Christianity.

Islam proved a benevolent master for the Jews in the East from the mid-seventh to the tenth century. Islamic rulers even allowed Jews to be served politically by a prince of Davidic ancestry. The Talmudic academies continued in the shadow of Baghdad until Baghdad itself lost political significance at the end of this period. The Khazars of southern Russia converted en masse to Judaism in the tenth century. In Spain Jewish culture flowered under the protection and encouragement of Islam until the twelfth century. While Europe went through the Dark Ages, Spain preserved the culture of the ancient world. Jewish Spain produced such great minds as Maimonides, ibn Gabirol, Judah Halevi, Rashi, and Ramban.

In the eighth century a dissident Jewish group known as the *Karaites* ("readers of Scripture") arose in opposition to the worldliness of many who professed to be Jews. Karaites believed each Jew had the right and duty to study Scripture himself. They rejected the oral law as developed by the rabbis.

Middle Ages. By the eighth century Jews had established themselves throughout western Europe, becoming international merchants (eighth to tenth centuries), and town builders (tenth and eleventh centuries). The Crusades (1095-1270) failed to liberate the Holy Land from Islam permanently. Crusaders, heavily in debt to Jewish moneylenders, turned on the Jews and wiped out many of their communities in northern France and the Rhineland. Jews were subjected to heavy taxation and lost the right to belong to the medieval guilds. In western Europe as well as the Islamic east, Jews were barred from owning land and pursuing agriculture. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215), led by Pope Innocent III, branded Jews as "Christ killers." As a result Jews were expelled from France and England. Here and there Jews were ordered to live apart from the general population and to wear red or yellow "badges of shame." The doge of Venice created the first Jewish ghetto.³⁴ The last line of Islamic rulers in Spain also turned on the Jews. When the Black Death swept Europe, Jews were blamed. For a short time Christian Spain was the only safe haven for Jews, and many allowed themselves to be baptized. A century later the same Ferdinand and Isabella that sent Columbus to the New World gave the Jews two months to leave their kingdom. The Inquisition enforced this royal edict and set to work ferreting out any Christian suspected of being a Jew in secret (labeled *marranos*, "swine"). The Jews who fled the Spanish Inquisition settled widely, but principally in northern Africa, preserving the Sephardic (i.e. the Spanish) tradition within Judaism. Jews from northern and eastern Europe spoke Yiddish (a mixture of High Middle German and Talmudic Hebrew written with Hebrew letters). Yiddish-speaking Jews formed the Ashkenazi (i.e. "Saxon") tradition.

The Middle Ages spawned a mystical movement within Judaism. *Kabala* means "tradition," but it soon became identified with a yearning to experience contact with God personally and intimately. Kabbalists sought a reconciliation between good and evil. They concerned themselves with the mysterious relationship between a hidden Creator and his visible creatures. They also reached for spiritual perfection. Kabbalism produced the *Zohar* ("splendor"), a work attributed to the second century, but actually written in thirteenth century Spain. It milks meaning from the words of Scripture on four levels, the literal (*peshat*), the allegorical and philosophic (*remez*), the expository (*midrash*), and the mystical (*sod*). In the *Zohar* God manifests himself in this world through a series of ten emanations (*sephirot*). The human soul has three parts (the *neshamah* or divine spark, the *ruah* which embraces morality, and the *nephesh* out of which spring the baser instincts). Each part of the human soul traces itself to one of the ten divine emanations. Torah, according to the *Zohar*, was given so that the essence of man might merge with the true nature of God through a series of purifications involving human piety and good works. The *Zohar* taught that a man must mystically enter the body of another human being at least once during the process. The kabbalist Shabbetai Tzevi led a messianic movement with himself as messiah in the mid-seventeenth century. The *Zohar* has injected rabbinic Judaism with a legacy of ecstasy in prayer and abstract symbolism in the handling of Scripture.

³⁴So called because the Venetians in 1517 segregated Jews in a quarter known as the *ghetto nuovo*, the "new foundry" quarter.

Haskalah. Europe's Enlightenment did not spare Judaism. Baruch Spinoza (seventeenth century) challenged traditional views on the authorship of the Torah and other books of the Bible. He questioned rabbinic observances openly and was excommunicated for it. A century later a popular movement, the Haskalah, led by Moses Mendelssohn, made an attempt to revitalize Judaism by broadening its intellectual base and by modernizing its traditions. The Haskalah's ultimate purpose was to liberate Jews from the ghetto, yet stop short of encouraging assimilation. Haskalah promoted a revival of Hebrew as a living, spoken language useful for everyday living.

Hasidism. Another reaction to tradition came from eastern Europe. There latter day Hasidim ("those marked by divine grace"), led by Rabbi Ba'al Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name," also known as "the Besht," *בש"ט*) preached equality, piety, and joy. This rabbinic teacher believed that God had left a spark of divinity in every man. These sparks are wrapped in husks that have to be stripped away if mankind is to be free. People, he said, do not need great learning to seek God. Simple prayers coming from the heart are sufficient. The Hasidim believe that Messiah is soon coming to repair all things.

Anti-Semitism. The French Revolution conferred citizenship on the Jews of France. A generation later the Rothschilds, a Jewish banking family, financed Napoleon's wars. Many brilliant and successful Jews assimilated. Yet anti-Semitism in Western Europe ran deep. Following the defeat of France at the hand of Germany in the 1870s, Alfred Dreyfus, a member of the French general staff, was framed as a traitor and banished to the horrific French penal colony on Devil's Island, solely because he was a Jew. In eastern Europe the Russian czars tried to force assimilation by enrolling Jewish children in Russian Orthodox run schools and by conscripting Jewish children into the Orthodox-dominated Russian army. On many occasions the Russian state looked the other way as mobs looted Jewish villages and slaughtered their inhabitants. Such pogroms ("acts of violence") drove many Jews from Eastern Europe to seek asylum and safety in America.

Zionism. Theodore Herzl and other liberal Jews championed Zionism as a way to rise above persecution. Jews had as much right to a national home, they believed, as any of the other ethnic groups that sued for political independence. Emigration from Europe to Palestine began in 1882 with the first *aliyah* ("return," literally "going up"). The first world Zionist congress was held in Switzerland in 1897. It inspired a second *aliyah* that came to an end with the outbreak of World War I. Victorious Britain inherited Palestine because the Ottoman sultan had sided with vanquished Germany. During the war the British promised this land to both Jews and Arabs, a factor that stimulated the tension that grew between them over the next three decades. A third, fourth, and fifth *aliyah* occurred prior to the rise of Hitler. The small Arab population of Palestine deeply resented these waves of Jewish immigration. Britain reneged on its promise to allow a Jewish state and put a stop to further Jewish immigration. As war broke out in Europe, the Arab mufti of Jerusalem openly espoused the German cause. The more radical of the Jewish immigrants went underground, attacking Englishman and Arab alike. Once the war was over and it became widely known that Hitler's war machine had eliminated millions of European Jews, Britain washed its hands of the Palestine problem and allowed the United Nations to partition the country between Jews and Arabs. Israel declared its independence in May 1948 and defeated the Arab armies that tried to wipe out the infant state. The continued independence of Israel has had a profound impact on the Judaism of our generation. At one extreme the ultra-orthodox refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of any secular state, including Israel, because they believe that Messiah's coming, and it alone, will inaugurate Jewish rule on earth. At the other extreme ultra-secular Jews view Israel as just one more place for Jews to live and work. Between the extremes are many who are motivated to defend and financially support Israel as the highest expression of their Jewishness.

Part II: Key Beliefs

Rabbinic Judaism's Key Beliefs

God. Rabbinic Judaism rejects the Trinity. God is one. This is something professed at the opening of private prayer as well as at synagogue worship. *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one* is the closest thing to a creed in Judaism.³⁵ We would agree to this creed (a) in respect to man-made idols, (b) over against the dualism popular in ancient Zoroastrianism and modern Taoism, and (c) in respect to atheism which denies the existence of God at all. But radical monotheism rules out the central truth of God's salvation, namely that God, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, left heaven to be fully human and fully Savior. The God of rabbinic Judaism is therefore remote. The very uttering of the divine name is discouraged. Circumlocutions are used. God is "the Name" (*hashem*) or "the Place" (*hamaqom*), or "the Presence" (*hashekinah*). Even in English God is written G-d. At the same time many movements in rabbinic Judaism have been driven by a search to bring God nearer in some way or another.

Man. As Creator God made man in his image. We believe that the fall into sin infected God's highest creation with sin. As a consequence we believe that mankind does not have the free will to please God or to satisfy his holiness. Furthermore, we believe that the sinful nature is passed on from generation to generation. Rabbinic Judaism disagrees in the following ways. Being made in the image of God means men are inherently good and retain a freedom to choose to do good or to do evil. These two tendencies are at war. A man's duty is to win the war and come out ahead in the end, more good than bad. God forgives, but forgiveness is earned through repentance, prayer, and doing the righteous thing as defined by the Torah and its rabbinic exposition. In the process of doing God's will, the sinner is expected to take the initiative and organize his life to please God. Jews forfeit God's forgiveness by heinous crimes or by a refusal to walk God's way (*halakah*). All deeds are recorded by God in a book.

An important requirement is to remain ritually clean. Women must bathe and cleanse themselves after giving birth and after menstruation. All observant Jews must obey the laws of *kashrut* ("ritual cleanliness") which distinguishes what food may or may not be eaten. Meat is kosher if it fits the categories permitted in the Torah: animals that are split-hooved and cud-chewing, fish with scales and fins, certain birds (not scavengers or birds of prey), and certain insects, primarily grasshoppers. Blood must be thoroughly drained through soaking, salting, and rinsing. A maimed, sick, or disfigured animal, though classified as clean, may not be eaten. Nor may meat contain any fragments of bone.³⁶ Meat may not be eaten at the same table with dairy products, observing the commandment not to cook a kid in its mother's milk (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; and Deuteronomy 14:21). A dairy meal and a meat meal must be separated by a six-hour interval.

Messiah. The more religious among non-Christian Jews hope for divine deliverance in the last days. The deliverer is called Messiah, "the anointed one." Some believe that the Messiah refers to the Jewish nation as a whole whose destiny it is to lead humanity into a golden age of brotherhood and peace. Some believe that the Messiah will be a person, a "super" Jew. All Jews who wait for a Messiah, however, deny what we believe, namely, that Messiah is the incarnation of God, both true God and true man in a real person. For many observant Jews the idea of Messiah is remote, and the affairs of this world have pushed messianic dreaming into the background.³⁷ For some the State of Israel embodies messianic hope. The ultra-orthodox dream of a new Temple and a revival of the ancient priestly sacrifices. Recall the recent hubbub created when a red heifer was

³⁵ שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד

³⁶ Jews also observe the prohibition against eating the tendon attached to the hip (Genesis 32:32).

³⁷ Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, a contemporary of Jesus, is quoted in the Talmud saying, "If you should have a sapling in your hand when they tell you that the Messiah has arrived, first plant the sapling and then go to greet the Messiah."

reportedly discovered in Israel. Other Israelis are deeply troubled by the militarism that stirs up hatred in the Arab world, particularly with those living directly under Israeli authority. For them the nation of Israel has become a bitter disappointment.

Salvation. Rabbinic Judaism's error regarding the nature of man leads to the belief that man is a partner with God to effect his salvation. Doing God's will overcomes sin and merits God's favor. The will of God is laid out in the 613 commandments of the Torah as elaborated and amplified in rabbinic tradition. Study of Torah is considered the highest of human pursuits and understood to merit God's special favor. The emphasis given to study explains the large number of accomplished Jews in any profession that requires a disciplined and well-developed intellect. It also explains why many Jews lead charitable enterprises. A great many Jews live to insure that their deeds live after them in human memory.

"Means of Grace." We would have to say that the rabbinic "means of grace" are the works of the law accomplished through study and prayer. The Judaizing error of New Testament times remains entrenched. Prayer is counted among the highest duties and privileges. A devout Jew who follows rabbinic teaching adds prayer to as many occasions each day as possible. These prayers in the main praise and thank God, but they also include petitions and pleas for repentance. Most prayers begin the same way, "Blessed are you, LORD, our God, king of the universe, who have sanctified us by your commandments and have ordered us concerning" ³⁸

Rabbinic "church and ministry." A Jew inherits Jewishness by having a Jewish mother. Males are circumcised ³⁹ on the eighth day, even if it falls on the Sabbath or Yom Kippur. A firstborn male is redeemed on the 33rd day following birth by a payment of silver. At age 13 a boy is declared sufficiently mature to begin observing all the commandments of God. The boy becomes a *bar mitzvah* (Aramaic for "a son of the commandment"). ⁴⁰ He prepares for manhood by learning Hebrew. On the day marking his maturity he stands in the synagogue to read aloud from the law and the prophets in the presence of other adult men.

Observant Jews distinguish themselves as members of the community by their dress. Heads are covered with a skullcap as a sign of respect for God. ⁴¹ Prayer shawls (*tallit*) are worn over the head or shoulders respecting the commandment in Numbers 15:38 to wear tassels with a blue thread as a reminder of God's commandments. Phylacteries (*teffelin*) are strapped, first to the hand and then to the forehead, during prayer. These little boxes contain the Great Shema of Deuteronomy 6 and the words following which obligate the faithful to "tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads" (v. 8) and to "write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (v. 9). Such a box fixed to a doorway or gate is a *mezuzah*.

Any ten men of age form a quorum (*minyan*) for public prayer. There is no mediating priesthood in rabbinic Judaism, although certain Jews claim a lineage that goes back to the Levites (*leviim*) and priests (*kohanim*). As such they are called upon to preside in certain rites. One of them is the redemption of the firstborn. By and large the faithful deal directly with God in spiritual matters. Rabbis are spiritual counselors.

Marriage and divorce. Rabbinic Judaism considers marriage a blessing from God. A written agreement between bride and groom is drawn up, signed by non-relatives, and read at the wedding ceremony. The nuptial agreement contains a provision for a payment of money in case of divorce. Marriages are performed under a

³⁸ ברוך יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על . . .

³⁹The ceremony makes a male Jew a participant in God's ברית "covenant." Following the Ashkenazi pronunciation which shifts final "t" to "s," American Jews refer to a circumcision as a "bris."

⁴⁰Liberal Jews have created a *bat mitzvah* for girls at age 12.

⁴¹Ultra-orthodox leave side curls in obedience to the command in Leviticus 19:27 not to cut the hair on the sides of the head or edge of the beard.

canopy (*chuppa*). At the conclusion of the ceremony the groom smashes a goblet with his foot in remembrance of the destruction of the Temple. Divorce must be done in the presence of witnesses. The man serves the bill of divorcement to the woman in writing on parchment. Remarriage is possible after ninety days.

Death. When a person dies, his next of kin tears his clothes publicly, on the left side for parents and on the right side for other relatives. The bereaved is not permitted to work for seven days. The Kaddish ("holiness") prayer is recited daily for eleven months following a person's death. Burial is carried out within a day of a person's death. On the anniversary of death (Yiddish: *Yahrzeit*) a candle is lit, a special prayer said, and a donation made to charity. The dead are also remembered on Yom Kippur and at the close of the three pilgrim festivals.

Eternity. Belief in a resurrection from the dead exists in the Talmud and is hoped for by some Jews. They speak of the righteous joining their fathers on the other side in *gan Eden* ("the garden of Eden"). A man is judged worthy of the resurrection if the following meritorious deeds are present: honoring father and mother, charity for the poor, regular Sabbath study and attendance, hospitality to strangers, visiting the sick, providing a dowry for daughters, accompanying the dead to their graves, devotion to prayer, and achieving peace between men. As important as all of these are, however, the study of Torah surpasses them all.⁴² The emphasis for most Jews, however, is on this present world. Reform Jews put much stock in preserving the Jewish people through posterity and worry much about being remembered by those they leave behind.

The Rabbinic Calendar

The weekly **Sabbath** remains the best known of special Jewish days. It begins with family worship at home on Friday night. Mother prepares a special meal before sunset. The lighting of Sabbath candles is the mother's prerogative. The father speaks *kiddush*, the Sabbath blessing, over a glass of wine. On Saturday the readings of the Torah for the week are repeated and selections from the prophets (*haftarah*, "completion") are added to them. Work of all kinds, including the making of journeys, is forbidden. Saturday evening is the "going out of the Sabbath" and is customarily a time for socializing and merriment.

Rosh Hashana (head of the year).⁴³ The Jewish year, counted from Creation, falls on the first new moon of autumn. It celebrates God's act of creating the world and it anticipates the end of time as well. Thirty days before Rosh Hashana and ten days after it are set aside for self-examination.⁴⁴ Special penitential prayers are offered at dawn before regular morning prayers. On new year's day the ram's horn (*shofar*) is blown. After services people greet each other with the wish, "May you be inscribed in the book of life for another year." The third day of the month (Rosh Hashanah is celebrated over two days) is the fast of Gedaliah, recalling the murder of the governor the Babylonians appointed over Judah after they had sacked Jerusalem. This day is the first of five separate fast days spread throughout the year.

Yom Kippur (day of covering [sin], i.e. the Day of Atonement). The tenth and last day of self-examination is the Sabbath of all Sabbaths. In ancient times it was the day on which the high priest sprinkled blood on the cover that rested upon the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. It was also the day the high priest sent a goat bearing the sins of the people into the wilderness to die. Today as then, observant

⁴²Recall how Jesus resisted this kind of thinking when he (Mark 7:11) chided the rabbinic legalist who justified the financial neglect of parents by declaring a gift to God of higher importance.

⁴³When does the year start? The feasts of autumn are said to occur at the "turn of the year" (Exodus 23:16). Yet Passover's month is declared to be the first in the year (Exodus 12:2). The first day of Elul (the month before Rosh Hashana) is the "new year" for tithing animals, and the 15th day of Shevat (one month before Purim) is the "new year" for planting trees. The Talmud therefore declares that there are not one, but four "new years."

⁴⁴These forty days for the Jews are similar to the forty days of Lent.

Jews abstain from all work, food, and marital relations. The evening service on Yom Kippur is preceded by a special prayer (*kol nidre*, "all vows") in which rabbinic Jews formally renounce every promise not kept during the previous year. The book of Jonah is read to draw attention to a God whose mercy was great enough to spare even the wicked of Nineveh. Five prayer services mark Yom Kippur, the most of any day in the Jewish year. One prayer service preserves the memory of the daily closing of the Temple gates long ago. It brings to mind a belief that the gates of heaven will also close following the day of judgment at the end of time.

Sukkot (temporary shelters). At the full moon of the first month Old Testament believers converged on Jerusalem to celebrate a joyous feast. Worshipers set up poles, covered them with cut branches, and lived in these huts for eight days. In ancient times the *sukkot* celebration occurred just after the grapes had been harvested and new wine made. The date, fig, and olive trees had survived the long, hot, Palestinian summer and yielded their bounty. It was also a time to pray for a return of rain so that the farmers could plow the soil and sow the barley and wheat for the spring harvest six months later. Jews today continue to put up temporary shelters and march around the synagogue with a citron (*etrog*) in one hand and a bundle of branches (*lulav*) in the other. Today the readings of the Torah are brought to completion on the last day of the feast. This day has evolved into a festival of some importance called **Simchat Torah** ("joy of the Torah").⁴⁵ The book of Ecclesiastes is read on the Sabbath day that falls within the octave of *sukkot*.

Hannukah (dedication). Jews celebrate a feast of lights near the shortest day of the year, the 25th day of the third month counting from Rosh Hashana. This feast is traced, not to the Torah, but to the time when the Maccabees cleansed and rededicated the Temple which the Greek rulers of Syria had polluted. The story is told of the discovery of a tiny vial of the special oil that was used to fuel the candelabra (*menorah*) that once stood in the Temple's Holy Place. Tradition holds that the oil lasted for a full eight days, signifying God's blessing on the reopening of the sanctuary. Hannukah today has taken on many of the trappings of the secularized Christian Christmas.⁴⁶

Purim (lots). In late winter a month or two⁴⁷ before Passover (on the thirteenth and fourteenth of Adar), Jews celebrate a fast followed by a feast. In Persian times Jews faced annihilation one day and experienced deliverance the next. The Jew-hating villain who plotted to rid the world of Jews was Haman. He was foiled by the courage of Queen Esther and Mordecai, her nearest kin. On the feast day of Purim the book of Esther is read. Noisemakers and catcalls greet every mention of Haman's name. The heroes, however, are honored by the exchanging of gifts, by remembering the poor, and by putting on banquets and plays.

Pesach (passover) and **Hahag Hamatzot** (the festival of unleavened bread). On the first full moon of spring Jews gather in the evening at home to eat and recall the night the angel of death passed over Israel in Egypt. Children ask, "Why is tonight different from all other nights?" and fathers teach them the answer, using the food on the table, passages from the Torah, songs, and traditional games. Bitter herbs and unleavened bread are still eaten, but lamb has not been a part of the Passover meal since the destruction of the Temple. Homes are still swept clean of leaven in preparation for Passover and no bread with yeast is eaten for seven days. The Song of Songs is read on the Sabbath of Passover week.

⁴⁵The last day of Sukkot and Simchat Torah is celebrated on the same day in Israel but on separate days elsewhere.

⁴⁶An old tradition is that of the *dreidel*, a square top with letters written on the sides that are the first letters of the words (in Hebrew): "a great miracle happened here."

⁴⁷Jews insert a thirteenth month in seven of every nineteen years. Purim falls in the "last" month, the month of Adar. The "leap month" is called second Adar. Purim always falls in the first, the "regular" Adar.

Lag B'omer (the 33rd day in [the counting of] the omer).⁴⁸ On the day after the Passover Sabbath, the firstfruits (*bikkurim*) of the barley harvest were gathered and a measure (*omer*) was waved before the LORD in ancient times. Seven weeks were then counted from that day to mark the duration of the harvest season. About 100 years after the death of Jesus a plague struck the Jews who were fighting Rome under bar Kochba. The joy of harvest was turned to a time of mourning, except for one day, the thirty-third day in the fifty-day count. On that day the plague ended, and the Romans went down to defeat, if only temporarily. During the plague and the terrible war, the legend is that one pious man hid youngsters in a cave and instructed them there. For this reason Lag B'omer is observed today as a day for children as well as the only day during the counting of the omer on which weddings are permitted.

Shevuot (sevens). In ancient times the summer drought began approximately fifty days after the waving of the *omer*. The fiftieth day (Pentecost), the day falling after the completion of seven seven-day weeks (hence, the "feast of weeks"), closed the grain harvest. As they had on Sukkot and Pesach, adult males presented themselves at the Tabernacle or Temple. Another presentation of first fruits was made, this time in the form of two leavened loaves.⁴⁹ Today the feast celebrates the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai.⁵⁰ The day is marked by extensive readings from Torah and Talmud and the special reading of the book of Ruth.

Shiva Asar B'tammuz (the 17th of Tammuz) and **Tisha B'av** (the 9th of Av). Tammuz and Av are the two months that fall in the middle of summer. Tradition holds that the Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem on Tammuz 17, a day that also marked the end of the daily sacrifices. Tradition also holds that three weeks later on Av 9 the Temple was torched, not only by the Romans in 70 A.D. but also by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Both days are marked by fasting and no weddings or other joyous celebrations are scheduled during the three weeks between them. There is a tradition also that the Messiah will be born on Av 9, a "phoenix" rising from the ashes. The book of Lamentations is read on Tisha B'av.

The modern Jewish calendar has added **Yom Hashoah** in spring to remember the Holocaust of World War II.

Evangelizing Uncompleted Jews

Any review of rabbinic Judaism should make it quite clear that the majority of Jews need a Christian witness and that they are lost without it. It should also be clear that Christians may approach the Jewish people best if they are well-versed in the Old Testament scriptures and take the time to discover points of contact that lead to a fuller knowledge of what Moses and the prophets were written for in the first place.

Jews are extremely sensitive to anti-Semitism. They are also generally as ignorant of Christians as we are of them. A former student of mine counted both Hitler and Stalin among this century's most significant Christians. It is wise to gain the respect of Jewish people before entering into a religious discussion. They have heard too many stories of forced Christianity. Be aware that it is chic today on college campuses to blame Martin Luther for Hitler's abominable treatment of the Jews. Luther, like all of us, had his moments when he

⁴⁸In ancient times letters of the alphabet were used as numbers. The number 33 was written with a lamed and a gimmel hence the word *lag* (לג).

⁴⁹First fruits were also cut on the day after the Passover Sabbath and waved before the LORD. Paul has the Passover first fruits in mind when he speaks of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 7 as the first to rise from the dead. The Pentecost first fruits were twin loaves, both leavened. They remind us of how the Christian Church was born fifty days after Jesus' resurrection in order to harvest souls, both Jews and Gentiles.

⁵⁰The giving of the Ten Commandments occurred in the third month after the Exodus, but the Bible does not specify that it occurred exactly 50 days following Passover.

said and wrote things that were intemperate and even wrong. Luther's comments on the Jews, however, were on balance no different than comments he directed against the Papists and Anabaptists.

Once friendship has been established, it is my experience that Jewish people exhibit a deep interest in religious matters. Many are seeking to fill a void only the Savior can fill. Some are simply curious about what a Christian really believes. Beware. Undisciplined, selfish, or hypocritical living will be a quick turn-off. Before any Jewish person listens to you about your faith in Christ, he will "read" the sermon of your life. Though many Jewish people live lives of checkered morals, rabbinic values have shaped their thinking. Rabbis prize piety and good works. Jews feel guilt more deeply than most. You have the good news. Above all, don't confuse the trappings of Christianity with the gospel. Allow Jewish people to hold on to their birth identity while showing them how Jesus, a Jew himself, filled the Torah and the other Scriptures full of meaning. Keep a sense of humor. Have you noticed how many Jewish people are successful comic performers? Self-deprecating humor is normal for them. If you take yourself too seriously, they will conclude that there is no joy in knowing your Savior.

Finally, read Romans 11 every once in a while. The Jewish man who loved us Gentiles so much that he endured prison, floggings, lashings, beatings, stonings, shipwreck, hunger, and a thousand other vicissitudes so that we through our forefathers might be part of the Israel of God—this same Saul/Paul had a heart that ached for his own people.

We honor Christ's love for Paul and Paul's love for us when we make it our task to do everything we can to bring the gospel of *Yeshua Hamashiah* to Paul's people...*that all Israel might be saved* (Romans 11:26).

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