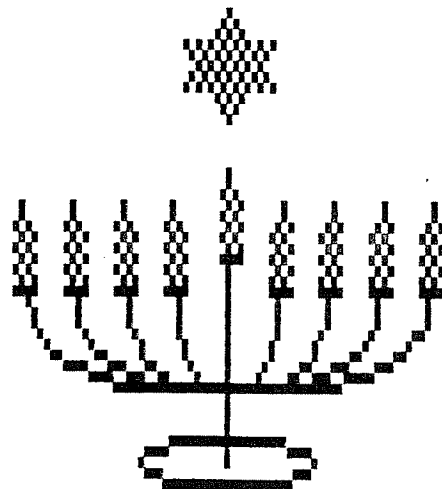


JUDAISM

AN OVERVIEW OF ITS DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT



by

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INTRODUCTION

- I. An Overview of American Judaism Today
 - A. The difficulty in identifying the people and the faith
 - B. The basic beliefs of the different branches
 - C. A contemporary traditionalist's view of Judaism's past
- II. An Overview of the Development of Judaism's False Teachings
 - A. The faith of the faithful few
 - B. The intertestamental influences
 - C. The solidification of Jewish tradition into the Talmudic period
 - D. Further developments
 1. Masoretes and Karaism
 2. The codification of Jewish belief in the 12 century
 3. Philosophers and mystics
 4. Reform from Europe to America
- III. What Jewish rabbis teach today

CONCLUSION

JUDAISM--AN OVERVIEW OF ITS DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

This paper is not really written in memory of James Bassewitz. But the "Classmate" of my Junior year in high school was. Jimmy Bassewitz drowned in the Wolf River during the summer before his senior year.

Jimmy was one of those kids who stood out as being somewhat different in our little town of 5000, in which 50% were German Lutheran, 38% were Irish Catholic, 10% were "protestant of sorts" and 2% were a rather inconspicuous minority.¹ Jimmy's minority background became a little more conspicuous when the Carter-Hansen studio on North Water put Jimmy's flood-lit Bar Mitzvah portrait front and center in its main window. And much to my fascination, through the New London Boy's League and the Lincoln Junior High School Band, Jimmy Bassewitz became my friend.

Jimmy was certainly somewhat of a mystery during my boyhood. He undoubtedly was a Reform Jew, as I'm sure he ate hotdogs that were not kosher, and he even went with us Gentile Lutherans to the Grand Theatre to see "King of Kings." Of course all the way up South Pearl there was an argument as to whether or not Jesus really did rise from the dead. We Gentiles thought we won the argument. Our gospel witness and logical, self-controlled childhood rhetoric had him outnumbered six to one. But I guess it bothered me that Jimmy didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah who had come to save him.

I grew up with a rather limited understanding of and exposure to contemporary American Jews. In New London, Wisconsin, attorney Max Bassewitz (Jimmy's dad), clothing store owner Adolph Lercher (we all said his store smelled funny) and supermarket owner Harold Markman were it. What we knew about Jews was what we observed in these three families, what our religious teachers told us about biblical Jews, and what was voiced within the confines of our somewhat bigoted small-town, midwestern upbringing. We looked upon them as being different racially, which may or may not be true, depending on what WE really are. We summarized their religious convictions in a rather simplistic way: "They believe the Messiah is still coming." I would guess that many Lutherans still think that's what Jews believe.

So when Jimmy suddenly drowned one summer day while swimming with friends who were my close friends, it was not only a shock to us socially. It was a shock to us spiritually. I could not attend the funeral 20 miles away in Appleton (New London had no synagogue). I had to work. I saw the funeral procession drive past the drive-in where I pumped root beer. And I heard about the wailing and the

hopeless despair of his family at the ceremony. It saddened me. It bothered me. A friend, whom I had heard deny that Jesus rose, died and had faced the Righteous Judge in a state of unbelief. Though I did not fully understand the contemporary Jewish way of thinking, I knew enough about it to make an important observation at my young age. It gave you no hope for the future and no certainty about the life to come.

I haven't talked religion to very many Jews in my life. But the ones with whom I have spoken have confirmed the opinion I formed at the age of 16. On the way back from my father's funeral the Jewish lady sitting next to me on the plane wished that she could believe in a wonderful life to come which I told her my father now had, but her rabbi had told her there was no life after death. Another Jewish lady on another plane summed up her "faith" by saying that Jews were supposed to live for the present world instead of living for the world to come, as Christians seemed to do. When I challenged her with Old Testament passages, she said that if her rabbi had been there he could have pointed out what was wrong with my way of thinking. From childhood into adulthood, contemporary American Jews have displayed to me a religion of hopeless despair, even before I began seriously to investigate what it is they believe.

This paper, then, provided me with the opportunity to make the serious investigation. Knowing more of the details, I still make the same observation. It was obvious to me before the research began that fair treatment could not be given to the broad subject of "Judaism." There are libraries full of books on the subject. I also began to see that there are many different ways to look at the word "Judaism" itself. Do we mean the religion of the Old Testament Jews? of contemporary American Jews? of Jews somewhere in between? These questions spawned an idea. If Jews think so differently than we do, and if we both look to the Jewish patriarchs of old as our "ancestors" in the faith, how did Judaism get to be what it is today in respect to its rejection of the basic gospel message, which we as orthodox Christians see so clearly throughout the Scriptures? Even with a subject as "narrow" as that, volumes could be written. Therefore, the limited subject I have chosen to treat is

JUDAISM--AN OVERVIEW OF ITS DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT.

I. An Overview of American Judaism Today

If we define "Judaism" as the religion of the Jews, the first question we must ask ourselves is, "What is a Jew?" I have to admit that for a long time I would

have answered that question something like this: "The descendants of Abraham today who reject Jesus as the Messiah, choose to worship in the traditions of the Old Testament and still anticipate a Messiah to come." That definition is partially wrong on all counts. It's wrong ethnically and it's wrong doctrinally. The difficulty that one has answering the question "What is a Jew?" is that today there is a difficulty identifying the people, and there is a difficulty identifying the faith.

Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer has written a book trying to answer that question. He does not see today's Jews as a people who have a particular racial background. The six million Jews in America are, after all, probably little closer to being the physical descendants of Abraham than you and I are. There are the Ashkenazic Jews from East Central Europe and the Sephardic Jews from the Mediterranean and the Orient, both of which differ in respect to customs and their pronunciation of Hebrew. There are even black Jews ranging from Sammy Davis, Jr. to the American settlers in Israel who are becoming a source of irritation to the Israeli government. And Kertzer does not see them as having a specific unified national interest. For Jews are usually first citizens of their own land, and obviously not all of them want to make the permanent pilgrimage to the Promised Land. Perhaps the closest we could come to answering that question "What is a Jew?" is to say that it is a person who is linked to a group of people with a particular cultural heritage.

Professor Mordecai Kaplan of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York opts for that kind of definition of Jews. He calls Judaism

"a civilization" and describes the Jews as a cultural group, primarily religious, but not exclusively so, linked together by a common history, a common language of prayer, a vast literature, folkways, and, above all, a sense of common destiny. . . . [They are] a people, not in the national or racial sense--but in a feeling of oneness. Judaism is a way of life.⁴

Obviously Professor Kaplan is a liberal, and an Orthodox rabbi may suggest that the end of Kaplan's definition of Judaism sounds a little too much like the promotional theme of the United States Air Force. Though all Jews take pride in their unity in respect to their heritage and their imagined destiny, to get at the heart and soul of Judaism one must delve into the spiritual. Even the liberal Reform rabbi, Arthur Baseman, whom I interviewed agreed with this, for he bemoaned the person who called himself a Jew because "he likes to eat bagels and corned beef sandwiches on rye." He added, "That kind of Judaism is a mile wide and an inch deep. It won't last a generation."

Spiritual Judaism does appear to be a lasting force in American religion. With its 4000 synagogues and four major rabbinical seminaries, it quadruples the WELS numerically. However, the quest for a definition of spiritual Judaism today is an exercise in chasing the nebulous, since Jews, who like to claim a spiritual unity, are nevertheless so diverse in their spiritual attitudes. The beliefs of most Jews are merely philosophic, and spiritual Jews seem to take pride in the fact that they do not have any unifying doctrine to which all Jews must adhere. Concerning Judaism's lack of a doctrinal standard, Rabbi Kertzer writes,

It has no dogma and lacks entirely any formal catechism which all believing Jews--or even all Orthodox Jews--would accept. . . . A rabbi makes no declaration of faith and takes no vow. . . . To understand Judaism one must abandon the search for absolutes in ritual and dogma and examine instead the broad philosophy which underlies our faith. . . . What we believe about the Bible, about miracles, about a life after death, is secondary to what we believe about human potentialities and our responsibilities towards our fellow men.⁵

Though Judaism has no unifying doctrines, it can be broken down into several main groupings. The groupings are similar to synod or denominational groupings in Christianity, though they are not an exact replica. Conservative and Reform seem to be somewhat structured. They operate a seminary program similar to ours, and rabbis must meet certain requirements before being eligible for a position. Orthodox Judaism appears to be far less structured, but it does perhaps have a greater degree of unity in its beliefs. According to Gilbert S. Rosenthal, in his book The Many Faces of Judaism, the beliefs of the four major divisions of Judaism could be summarized as follows. I have taken the liberty of rephrasing Rosenthal's table.

ORTHODOX: This oldest branch of Judaism in America sees itself as having the "right belief" or "right practice." They describe themselves as "traditional" Jews. Some in their group feel they are the only ones who represent true Judaism. They teach concerning:

1. God -- He is a supernatural personal being having the divine attributes ascribed to Him in the Old Testament Scriptures.
2. Truth -- The Torah is God's Word binding on all. The Talmud and law codes of the sages are also part of "Torah" and are also binding. Halachah may only be reinterpreted by the great sages.
3. Practice -- They stick to tradition. Jewish education is emphasized.
4. Israel -- The State of Israel is the holy land of the Jewish people and must be built on Torah, tradition and halachah.

5. Mission -- "The Jewish people are chosen by God to keep the mitzvot and spread God's word to the world."⁴

REFORM: This is the Judaism of the modern liberals and views itself as an evolving religion which must continue to change to meet the needs of our time. They teach concerning:

1. God -- Many ideas of God are acceptable, ranging from the personal to the impersonal concept of God.
2. Truth -- "Only the ethical mitzvot (commandments) of the Torah were revealed by God and are forever binding. Ritual laws were developed by human beings to satisfy the needs of their days. These . . . may be changed with each passing generation."⁵
3. Practice -- It changes with the times.
4. Israel -- It is the spiritual and moral center of world Jewry, but religion and state should be separated in Israel.
5. Mission -- Be involved in social action and develop human life to its greatest potential.

CONSERVATIVE: Conservative Judaism developed as a reaction to the liberalism of the Reform movement on the one hand and the rigid structure of Orthodox Judaism on the other. They view themselves as trying to strike a balance between tradition and change. Their synagogues outnumber those of Reform Judaism four to three in Pinellas County. They teach concerning:

1. God -- He is a personal supreme being, but they are not as rigid in their understanding as Orthodox.
2. Truth -- It "accepts Torah as the revealed word of God, but not in the literal sense."⁶
3. Practice -- It favors tradition, but it has adjusted certain laws on ritual.
4. Israel -- Israel is the holy land and center of world Jewry. It is a mitzvah to settle there. It calls on the state of Israel to separate religion and government.
5. Mission -- It wants to preserve the Jewish people and work for social action and human rights.

RECONSTRUCTIONIST: This is the most radical form of Judaism, and it views itself "as an evolving, changing religious civilization that has always been

developing and is now in the age of democracy and free choice."⁷ They teach concerning:

1. God -- He is a natural power or process, not a supernatural being.
2. Truth -- Torah is "the record of our search for God's presence in our world."⁸
3. Practice -- People have a right to choose which observances they will participate in, and the prayers and ritual should be constantly changing to meet our changing needs.
4. Israel -- Israel is the spiritual center of Jewry and should "enrich world Jewry with new ethical and religious inspiration."⁹
5. Mission -- It is much the same as that of Reform or Conservative. It is social action in which Jews are "to live up to their mission as a people created in God's image."¹⁰

Another smaller group that is significant in its impact on contemporary Judaism is the HASIDIM. They number a quarter million throughout the world, mostly scattered within the United States, Europe, Australia and North Africa. They could be characterized as "mission-minded mystics." They view their existence as an opportunity to experience God (or, as they spell it, G_d), and in this quest they follow the enlightened advice of the rabbi ("rebbe"). To them the human soul is "a temporary gift which enables human beings to share in the divine essence."¹¹ The rebbe gets in touch with God through the study of the Word, and he in turn offers advice to those in his care before they make any important decision. Some are so attached to their rebbe and his divine enlightenment that they will relocate with him when he decides to move. They, with the Orthodox, believe in the coming of a personal Messiah.

A group which we will simply mention, though they do not represent Judaism as such, are the Messianic Jews. They are Jewish culturally and ethnically, but they are Christian in that they accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. Similar to "Jews for Jesus," they wish to retain their messianic faith in the context of their Jewish heritage.

Although there is quite a divergence of opinion on spiritual issues among contemporary Jews, there are some basic similarities in their ways of thinking which stem from their rejection of Jesus as their Savior and King. These similarities have to do with their attitude toward God's revealed Word. This

attitude becomes evident even among those who label themselves as "traditionalists" and would therefore take a more conservative stand on biblical authority. One such 20th-century "traditionalist" is Isidore Epstein, who has written a book entitled Judaism--A Historical Perspective. The goal of his book seems to have been to connect Israel's glorious past with the present in order to demonstrate what a glorious future there is in store for the world if it follows the teachings of Judaism.

I believe it is fair to take Epstein as an example of one who holds to this century's traditionalist Jewish thought. Yet, as we examine his comments, we see how far afield from the true message of the Scriptures even the most conservative Jews are.

As a traditionalist, Epstein attempts to convince people of how logical it is to accept the biblical record, and he does treat much of it as historical fact. Yet he falls short of promoting inspiration the way we understand it. Abraham is held up as the first great monotheist, though the source of his knowledge is not attributed to God revealing His will to man in His Word. Concerning Abraham's knowledge of the true God, Epstein says, "Perhaps he reached it by way of speculative reason . . . and his own innate nobility of character. . . . Or, possibly the whole of his religious faith might have come to him by means of some inner illumination, a mystical experience, a revelation."¹² Epstein and all his fellow Jewish traditionalists are blind to the gospel promise given to Abraham. Knowledge of God's Law is substituted for knowledge of the Savior to come, and Abraham's purpose was said to be that he would become the founder of "a nation which was to bring the knowledge of God to the world, and the blessing which flows from such a knowledge to all the families of the earth."¹³

The traditionalists' blindness to the gospel promise causes them to distort the Scriptures in yet many other ways. The prophets' role is not to hold forth the messianic promise but merely to interpret God's will for man. Their future vision is said to be "a world unity and harmony in which all men and peoples acknowledge and reverence God, the Lord of all the earth."¹⁴ The Suffering Servant of Isaiah is the people of Israel, and the Lord's New Covenant with His people is that "the knowledge of God become the common possession of all Israel and through Israel of all the nations of the world."¹⁵ The "Christian error" is said to be the result of certain groups, especially the Essenes, placing too heavy an emphasis on the apocalyptic Jewish authors, particularly Ezekiel and Daniel. "Salvation" is the moral transformation of the individual and the society in which he lives, and

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concerning life after death, "Scripture found it necessary to cast a veil over the whole question of survival beyond the grave, in order to wean people away from the idolatrous cult of the dead."¹⁶

Thus the Jewish traditionalist's view of Judaism presents a distorted view of the past, a self-righteous view of one's present, and a hopeless view of the future. The present purpose and future goal of their religion is so far from the true belief of God's faithful people because they have twisted the message of God's revealed Word to suit their own preconceived notions.

But where did these preconceived notions come from? They certainly did not come from Scripture, nor are they a 20th-century innovation. The false ideas of Judaism have developed over the centuries. Having taken an overview of where American Judaism is today, we consider an overview of the forces that were instrumental in causing the development of its doctrinal errors.

II. An Overview of the Development of Judaism's False Teachings

A. The faith of the faithful few

Since all of God's inspired Word is true and without error, one cannot find any false teaching in Scripture itself. Yet the Bible does present plenty of examples of people in the scriptural account who held to false beliefs. Even mighty King David falsely thought for a time that he could hide his sin from God. The history of the divided kingdom portrays king after king who led God's people into the false worship of idols. The prophets' messages were directed at people who would face the Almighty's harsh judgments because they were holding to a false belief which led them into sinful practices. The Scriptures, however, use these negative examples to teach us positive truth about man's relationship with the God of Israel. There were always the faithful who accepted the admonition and believed the Promise. God said through Isaiah that his Word would always accomplish its divine purpose of working God-given faith in the hearts of people. So even 400 years following the completion of the last prophet's book we find the faithful--Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph and even gentile visitors from the East. The true faith was always there and it always will be. The Lord's "remnant" will be saved.

It is obvious even to the casual reader of the Bible that one makes an abrupt jump when he turns from the last page of Malachi to the first page of Matthew. After 400 years of silence one jumps into the world of Jesus and finds things quite different from what they had been. On the political scene we find Roman

occupational forces and a Jewish Sanhedrin. On the social scene we find somewhat of a "caste" system, with the "leaders of the people," made up of the political and spiritual elite, wielding a tremendous influence over the masses. On the religious scene we find new meeting houses called synagogues and new groups called scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. From what the New Testament tells us about Jesus' confrontations with the spiritual leaders of his day, we see that many false beliefs had developed during the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments in spite of the fact that the "faithful few" were still around.

Yet the true hope for the true Messiah was alive in the intertestamental period. Though, as Edersheim observes, during the Maccabean and post-Maccabean period the distorted view of a nationalistic messiah-king rose to prominence, the true messianic hope was still alive among God's faithful people.

Evidence of this is found in the Jewish liturgy of the first century. Among the Diaspora there arose 19 benedictions in the Jewish daily prayers. The tenth, dating back previous to 70 A.D., states: "Proclaim by Thy loud trumpet our deliverance, and raise up a banner to gather our dispersed, and gather us together from the four ends of the earth. Blessed be Thou, O Lord! Who gatherest the outcasts of Thy people Israel."¹⁷ If this prayer was already in common use shortly after the time of Christ, we can only surmise that it had its roots in the intertestamental period.

Even if someone could see in the above prayer a false hope for a political deliverer, there are other passages in Jewish writing which show that a spiritual Redeemer was awaited. Two authors from around the second century B.C. (or B.C.E., "before the Common Era," as the Jews prefer) write about this spiritual hope. In the Testament of Judah (24.5,6) the author speaks of a stem which shall arise out of Jacob, from which "shall grow a rod of righteousness to the Gentile, to judge and save all that call upon the Lord."¹⁸ In the Testament of Benjamin (9.2) it is said that all the Gentiles are to be gathered together equally with the twelve tribes to the last Temple (more glorious than the first) "until the Most High shall send forth His salvation in the visitation of the only-begotten prophet."¹⁹ It could also be added that the messianic hope was also expressed in the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha (writings of the intertestamental period to which false names of authors were attached) and the Talmud (to be discussed later in a different context).

Thus, even outside the body of the inspired New Testament books, we find that there had been alive in the days following the close of the Old Testament a true hope for God's true Messiah based on faith in God's true promises.

Still we are faced with some stark realities--the reality of agnostic humanism among today's Jewish liberals, the reality of a legalistic work-righteousness among today's Jewish Orthodox, the reality of a chosen people who, for the most part, rejected our Lord Jesus in toto when he came and announced the messianic fulfillment in himself. We find, therefore, among the Jewish people a stubborn rejection of God's truth that has been woven into the fabric of Jewish thought. We see the threads being spun if we examine some of the things that influenced Jewish doctrine during the intertestamental period.

B. The intertestamental influences

SCRIBES One of the groups that had the greatest influence on the development of Jewish beliefs between the Testaments was the scribes. In the gospels they are linked frequently with the Pharisees as those who opposed the teachings of Jesus. Their influence over Jewish thought was tremendous. That powerful influence had developed over a period of hundreds of years.

The scribes appear to have been active already at the time of Josiah as copyists to preserve the Written Law. They were active in all places to which the Jews had been scattered during and after the captivity. Oscar Siegler describes the development of their activity as follows:

Their first function was that of scholars, copying and editing the Law of Moses. They were skilled professional bookmen, and to them is credited the change from the archaic Hebrew alphabet to the later square characters. Continuing as editorial revisers, correcting, combining, harmonizing the texts of the Law, they soon expanded into the field of interpretation and exposition. Then, as many unwritten legal traditions grew up, they also became the custodians of these unwritten laws. And, as the change in environment and life created many problems for which there was no rule either in written or oral law, by means of exegesis often artificial, the Scribes deduced new rules to fit new cases. Nor was this all. Not satisfied with deducing new laws by means of devious exegesis, they busied themselves creating ordinances for every conceivable case that might occur. . . . Hence, from being merely copyists, then interpreters of the Law, they became themselves legislators. This process went on for centuries.²⁰

Thus the scribes were the law makers for all Jews. But of course they were not concerned with mere civil legislation. "The real concern of the Scribes was . . . religious. It was not a matter of simply interpreting and administering a code but of setting forth the divine revelation and correlating the will of Jahweh with the realities of daily life."²¹ But we dare not assume simply because their concern was "religious" that the result of their work was scriptural, for an examination of their legislation "reveals a number of religious ideas which seem

to have little connection with the Torah or with any other part of the Scriptures, but which nevertheless loom large in the daily life of the people."²²

Consider the following trivial example concerning what constituted "work" according to the Sabbath Day regulations.

In Shabbath (vii,2) the list includes thirty-eight prohibitions, which seems fairly comprehensive. But this does not settle the question, for the careful student of the twenty-first prohibition (against making a knot) or the twenty-second (against undoing a knot) may well feel doubts as to exactly what constitutes a knot, and a whole chapter (xv) is devoted to giving the decisions and opinions of the Rabbis on this vital problem.²³

It is difficult to comprehend how such a tremendous influence could be wielded by a group of men who told others how they could tie or untie knots on the day of worship, yet such was the mentality of the Jew in the days before Christ. So honored were the scribes by the common people that Edersheim writes,

Each Scribe outweighed all the common people, who must accordingly pay him every honour. Nay, they were honoured of God Himself, and their praises proclaimed by the angels; and in heaven also, each of them would hold the same rank and distinction as on earth. Such was to be the respect paid to their sayings, that they were to be absolutely believed.²⁴

The scribes were influential because their legislation went beyond the stipulations laid down in Scripture, and because the people allowed that kind of influence to develop. The scribes found companionship in yet another group of people who strove to put into practice what the scribes legislated. That group, which was also influential in the development of Jewish beliefs, was the Pharisees.

PHARISEES The group in the New Testament that appears to be most threatened spiritually by the teaching and preaching of Jesus is the Pharisees. Because they keep popping up so frequently in the gospels, we're quite familiar with their way of life. We've often seen their outward piety, and we've often heard Jesus condemn their inner corruption.

The Pharisees, or "separated ones," (from Aramaic *perisha*) were "a fraternity boasting a unique acquaintance with the Law of God."²⁵ They formed during the Maccabean period when they separated themselves from the court-appointed, and therefore defiled, priesthood. Because they saw themselves as their own priests, they believed that they had to carry all the regulations for ceremonial purity outside the temple and into their everyday life. They viewed themselves as walking temple sacrifices. This self-righteousness so permeated their thinking that they crossed "the line of death" from being concerned about ceremonial purity to seeing themselves as their own saviors. That's why the majority of the New Testament Pharisees had no use for Jesus. That's why the

post-temple Pharisee Yohanan stated, "We have a means of atonement as effective as the Temple, and it is doing deeds of loving-kindness."²⁶

How unfortunate that with their destructive self-righteousness the Pharisees played an important role in the development of Judaism's beliefs. They provided such strong leadership among those who rejected the Savior that Epstein, our 20th-century traditionalist, can write concerning their role following the destruction of the temple, "The Pharisees alone stood at their post and were left to rebuild the shattered fabric of the spiritual life of Israel."²⁷ Central to their leadership role was the pharisaic way of life that meticulously put into practice the scribal interpretation of the law. The very reason they existed as a distinct group was to provide exemplary spiritual leadership to the people of Israel by observing the Law with an ever-increasing exactness and by imposing their legalistic way of life on others. What became so destructive in the leadership role they assumed was not only their rejection of Christ's authority, but also their acceptance of an extra-biblical authority. The Pharisees "held that the oral law was a necessary and living supplement to the written law."²⁸ Judaism's concept of "oral law" will be discussed a little later. Let it be sufficient simply to say in this context that it was an addition to the Scriptures which eventually was written down by the scribes and rabbis.

Thus the Pharisees helped develop Jewish false beliefs by perpetuating the ideas that man is right with God through his own efforts and that the authority to which one is to submit is to be found somewhere other than in the writings of Moses and the prophets.

If there was one positive aspect of pharisaic thought it was at least the idea that there is a life after death, and that man's goal in life is to seek a proper relationship with God in this life as he looks forward to the life to come. The other group which teamed itself with the Pharisees in their opposition to Jesus did not share even this basic religious view. They were the Sadducees.

SADDUCEES We know the Sadducees (either from Zadok, mentioned in the Mishna as having received the Oral Law from Simon the Just, or from sedek and therefore meaning "righteous ones") as the group which denied the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul and the existence of angels and demons. They were strong believers in the freedom of the will. Regarding their influence on Jewish society, Siegler describes them as "the hereditary priesthood, a group of wealthy, autocratic, world-minded men, who welcomed the Hellenic culture, were natural diplomats, more interested in politics than religion."²⁹ The

Sadducees, then, were the humanistic skeptics. Though they had less of an influence on the religious views of Jews in their immediate historical context, they laid the foundation upon which future generations of humanistic Jews would build their house of sand. From a spiritual point of view there is little difference between a Sadducee of yesterday and a Jewish social activist of today.

The Sadducees were very concerned about being and remaining the dominant ruling party. They were the party of the high-priestly families, and Josephus writes that "they only gain the well-to-do."³⁰ In their quest for control and power they strove to become part of a judicial system that had another influence on the shaping of Jewish thought. The majority of this judicial system, however, tended to be less "enlightened" than the Sadducees, and it governed in a way that was more attuned to the Pharisees' and scribes' way of thinking.

SANHEDRIN In discussing the influence of the Sanhedrin, let us mention merely the underlying principle by which their decisions were made. Though we often have a tendency to compare it to our own civil court system and may have even told our confirmation classes, "It was like the Jewish Supreme Court," yet this Jewish high court was different in a most important way. It dealt primarily with religious issues. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it made a religious issue out of everything. Guignebert writes,

The Sanhedrin dealt with every problem that had any connexion with religion, however remote. There were the offences dealt with by the Law, questions of marriage and divorce, heretical opinions, genealogies, the calendar, and all those cases on which it was often difficult to get a clear ruling, but which were of great importance for the Jews. . . . [The Sanhedrin] had the opportunity of turning every case into a religious problem.³¹

The Jews, therefore, before and after the days of Jesus had an intense desire to develop a sophisticated legal system insofar as the Roman authorities would allow. The fact that it was based on the spiritual legislation of the scribes and rabbis gave their decisions great weight in the lives of the spiritually faithful. The fact that their decisions were made on the basis of man's additions to God's inspired law helped contribute to the spiritual downfall of the Jewish people.

SYNAGOGUE Hastening Judaism toward the destruction of false doctrine even moreso than the Jewish court was the Jewish house of worship. The synagogue ultimately became more harmful than the Sanhedrin.

That assessment may seem somewhat harsh and a bit ironic in view of the fact that the synagogue had the positive effect of getting the village people together on a regular basis for hearing the Word and for prayer. It also provided the

structure for the spiritual education of the young. Nevertheless there was a force behind the synagogue meetings which aided and abetted the development of false doctrine. The force was simply the activity which the synagogue embraced. Guignebert describes it as follows:

The synagogue was used not only for reading, listening, singing and praying, but also for discussion, an exercise for which the Jews soon showed a peculiar talent. They took to this intellectual warfare so readily and derived such pleasure from it that arguments would be started on every possible occasion, and they became more and more passionately addicted to subtle and ingenious interpretations. The Scribes who had done so much to develop this very spirit naturally welcomed its appearance in the synagogue, and if their teaching, which was the fruit of their own schools, remained rigid, they themselves revelled in this propitious atmosphere. . . . Any synagogue possessing the services of a Rabbi specially skilled in this work would carry the subtlety of its exegesis of the Scriptures to the point of absurdity. . . . Thus it was through the medium of the synagogue that the whole existence of the Jews became enmeshed in the web of pious obligations that is generally regarded as the distinguishing mark of Late Judaism.³²

What God's people can develop for their own spiritual good God's enemy can demolish in his own devilish scheming. When man's sinful reason becomes a tool in the hand of the devil, nothing but false belief can be the result. In his craftiness the devil not only ignited the spark of destructive human reason within the context of Judaism's own religion. He also fanned the flames of this holocaust with the influence of foreign philosophy and religious thinking.

HELLENISM AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY A scattering of the Jews took place following the conquests of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. Following this scattering, another scattering took place with the rise of Alexander the Great. It was the scattering of the Greek culture and language throughout the Mediterranean world. Millions of Jews therefore found themselves living in a Greek world. It is estimated that several million lived in the remnants of the Babylonian Empire, several million lived in Egypt, with a strong nucleus in Alexandria, while only 50,000 came back to Palestine following the decree of Cyrus. And these "hellenized" Jews found themselves in centers of learning with a thirst for learning. The Jewish thirst for secular and spiritual learning displayed itself in the literature that appeared during this period of Hellenization.

The Targumim were produced during this period. They were Aramaic paraphrases of the Scriptures written because the scattered people could no longer speak or understand the Hebrew of the Old Testament period. The Targumim were condemned by the hard-line rabbis and spiritual leaders, but they were very popular, and many synagogues began to allow their use.

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The next step beyond the Targumim was the Septuagint (LXX). This Greek translation of the Scriptures was not only easily read by the Greek speaking Jews, but many rabbis considered it a much more faithful rendition of the Scriptures than the Targumim. The result of this was that the LXX, according to Edersheim, became "the people's Bible" and "the starting point for Hellenism" in its effect on Judaism.³³

The "evolution" of hellenized Jewish literature continued with the Apocrypha, many of which were written in Greek. Though one of the purposes of the Apocrypha was undoubtedly to fill in the gaps in Jewish history and arouse within the scattered Jews a national loyalty, "the next object was to show that the deeper and purer thinking of heathenism in its highest philosophy supported--nay, in some respects, was identical with--the fundamental teaching of the Old Testament."³⁴ The Apocrypha were quoted in Talmudic writings, and this subtle approval of Greek philosophy continued in yet other ways.

The classic example of a man who tried to intertwine Jewish religion and Greek philosophy was Philo of Alexandria. This Jewish scholar and author lived in the learning center of Egypt from around 30 B.C. - 54 A.D. and is credited with having popularized the influence of Greek philosophy among the Jewish people. His toying with Greek philosophy in his writing is said to have affected Judaism in that there arose to a greater degree (1) an allegorical and symbolic interpretation of the Bible, (2) a weaker nationalism among Mediterranean Jews and a willingness to embrace all peoples who lived a righteous life, (3) less attention to ritualism than was part of earlier Judaism and (4) a weaker version of the Messianic view of Palestine.³⁵ Undoubtedly his allegorical method of interpreting Scripture was the most destructive force in shaping the false beliefs of Judaism.

Many Jews deny that Philo had much of an influence on the shaping of Jewish thought, yet just one small example of how Philo handled Scripture displays the same perverted use of the Bible of which today's Jews are still guilty. Philo wrote that the burning bush out of which God appeared to Moses was a prickly bramblesh. So therefore God was saying, "Do not lose heart; your weakness is your strength, which can prick, and thousands will suffer from its wounds."³⁶ Develop that kind of hermeneutical principle over the centuries and one can easily understand how a Jewish rabbi today could state that Cain was justified in killing Abel because the Bible says, "Cain rose up against Abel, his brother," (Gen 4:8, KJV) and if Cain rose up against him, Abel must have knocked him down first.

Therefore it was self-defense. [This was stated in all seriousness at a lecture attended by Pastor Keith Kruck.]

Edersheim, however, is a little kinder to Philo. Though he sees in Philo a man who contributed to the deteriorating Jewish attitude toward God's revealed Word, he nevertheless finds a positive influence in Philo in that he tended to negate some of the rigid formalism of Rabbinic Judaism. He states that, in Philo,

Hellenism had completed its cycle. Its message and its mission were ended. Henceforth it needed, like Apollos, its great representative in the Christian Church, two things: the baptism of John to the knowledge of sin and need, and to have the way of God more perfectly expounded. On the other hand, Eastern Judaism [centered in Babylon] had entered with Hillel on a new stage. This direction led farther and farther away from that which the New Testament had taken in following up and unfolding the spiritual elements of the Old. That development was incapable of transformation or renovation. It must go on to its final completion--and be either true, or else be swept away and destroyed.³⁷

Edersheim therefore sees Hellenism as a positive influence that helped prepare western Jews and the rest of the western world for the coming of the true Messiah. The new freedom found in Greek thought would have helped prepare for Christ the heart and soul that had been dragged away from the true gospel faith of the Old Testament promises to the apostate beliefs of rabbinism and Jewish tradition. The faithful would find messianic fulfillment in a Greek New Testament written, preached and shared in a world whose stage had been set through the influence of Hellenization.

Nevertheless the influence of Jewish groups, Jewish organizational systems and foreign ideas helped develop the apostate beliefs of rabbinism and Jewish tradition, and these false and destructive concepts stuck. The majority of today's Jews are, to a certain extent, still stuck in them. As we look at the solidification of Jewish tradition into the Talmudic period, we see how this apostate view of God and his revelation actually replaced the clear teachings of the sacred Word.

C. The solidification of Jewish tradition into the Talmudic period

It's difficult to understand how the Lord's chosen people could develop so many beliefs that contradicted the clear Word which He had revealed to them. As we read the Old Testament we find again and again the familiar phrase, "This is what the LORD says." We read that Moses "wrote down everything the LORD had said." (Ex 24:4) And we know from the doctrine of inspiration that the rest of the Bible's authors responded in a similar way to the Spirit's in-breathing. We never read in the Bible of another Word of the Lord apart from the Scriptures themselves. Yet this notion of another "Word" is very basic to Judaism, and it must have developed sometime during the intertestamental period. The heretical

notion elevates an oral tradition to the same plain as the inspired Scriptures, and that tradition is said to have been preserved, amplified and finally written down in a rather complicated chain of events over a period of hundreds of years. It is significant to note that our Savior came to bring us the full revelation of God's truth right in the middle of that unfortunate time period.

Perhaps we can best sift our way through the verbal jungle of oral tradition if we define terms and add appropriate comments.

ORAL TRADITION The belief developed among the Jewish people that when Moses received the Law of God on Mt. Sinai he not only received the Written Law but also the Oral Law. This Oral Law was a second law given to Moses, a more complete communication from God, which Moses did not write down but later recited. This Oral Law was the Word of God and was to be passed down from father to son through all future generations. The Sadducees were the only ones who later rejected the binding nature of the Oral Law. The fact that this Oral Law existed gives us added insights into such statements of Jesus as, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago . . ." and "It has been said . . ." (Mt 5:21,31) Edersheim even suggests that Jesus was objecting to the perverted interpretations of the Oral Law when he said, "The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.'" (Mt 15:18) This oral tradition was carefully repeated and studied in the synagogues and was held in such high regard by the Jewish rabbis that "the great Hillel was actually wont to mispronounce a word, because his teacher before him had done so."³⁸ Because human nature is the way it is, we can conclude that many additions, changes, amplifications and mistakes took place as this imagined "Oral Law" was passed on from generation to generation.

MISHNAH AND MIDRASH (I) As was mentioned previously, the scribes and the rabbis were not satisfied merely to pass on a tradition which they inherited from others. Any respected teacher worth his salt was to expound on the Torah and even add new insights into situations and circumstances which the Lord chose not to treat. Around the time of Christ the teachings known as Midrash ("sacred study") and Mishnah ("instruction") developed. These were still in oral form until into the second century A.D. The Midrash treated the written text of Scripture and its interpretations, and the Mishnah dealt with extra-scriptural laws and insights that were to be memorized and repeated.

MISHNAH (II) Eventually the Jewish rabbis saw a necessity to write down the Mishnah. This was essentially the work of Rabbi Jehudah the Holy of Galilee,

who died at the end of the second century A.D. The Mishnah was a law code divided into six volumes, each of which was divided into 63 chapters. It was considered to be the Oral Law in written form, part of God's Word to man, and "second only to the Scriptures themselves."³⁹

GEMARA AND TALMUD Other writings were also added, some of which were commentaries on the Mishnah. These were collected into what was called the Gemara ("that which is completed"), written from the third to the fifth centuries. Eventually the Mishnah and the Gemara were gathered together into what became known as the Talmud ("that which is learned"). Two versions of the Talmud developed, the Babylonian Talmud, the more authoritative and most widely accepted, and the Palestinian Talmud.

MIDRASH (II) The Midrash in written form is an exegesis and exposition of revealed Scripture and developed concurrently with the Mishnah and Gemara. It is looked upon by modern Jews as a method of investigation. It is the theological system of the Jew, is found in his library in volumes separate from the Mishnah and/or Talmud, and contains two different kinds of theological study, the Halakhah and the Haggadah. Perhaps an apt comparison might be to call the Mishnah the Jewish Book of Concord and the Midrash a set of Jewish dogmatics books.

HALAKHAH AND HAGGADAH Halakhah ("that which had been heard") and Haggadah ("that which had been said") are the two different types of theological writing in the Midrash. Both of them developed as part of the oral tradition and were later written down. Halakhah (from halakh, "to go") was "the Rule of the Spiritual Road, and, when fixed, had even greater authority than the Scriptures of the Old Testament, since it explained and applied them."⁴⁰ Haggadah (from nagad, "to tell")

was only the personal saying of the teacher, more or less valuable according to his learning and popularity, or the authorities which he could quote in his support. . . . Haggadah had no absolute authority, either as to doctrine, practice or exegesis. But all the greater would be its popular influence, and all the more dangerous the doctrinal license which it allowed. In fact, strange as it may sound, almost all the doctrinal teaching of the Synagogue is to be derived from the Haggadah.⁴¹

A simplification of the difference in modern Judaism would be to say that Haggadah has to do with the narrative portions of Scripture and Jewish theological writing and is therefore open to varying interpretations, while Halakhah has to do with binding laws. In contemporary Judaism (except for Orthodox), which tends to reject the binding nature of anything and everything, it makes little difference whether a theological statement is Halakhah or Haggadah.

as Messiah had permeated its authors and readers so that no real truth could be claimed by either. This unbelieving attitude and a perverted hermeneutical principle inherited over the centuries led to a Talmud that "would carry the subtlety of its exegesis of the Scriptures to the point of absurdity."⁴⁶ And in their absurd interpretation of spiritual things, the rabbis did not approach their subject matter in humble faith as believing students of the Bible, but they were "men who take nothing on faith, who doubt, and doubt again."⁴⁷ So perverted were the Talmudic writers in their attitude toward Scripture that Rabbi Baba stated, "He who busies himself with Scripture only (i.e. without either the Mishnah or Gemara) has merit, and yet no merit."⁴⁸

The Jewish attitude toward the Talmud, nonetheless, is that it be held in high regard as "the greatest single cohesive force in Jewry."⁴⁹ Though it is not necessarily accepted as true and applicable today, the Talmud is respected as a book on Jewish religion and ethics containing

moral reflections, homilies, apologues, maxims on wordly wisdom, metaphysical speculations, tales of Israel's past, both historical and legendary, visions of its future, and of the universal messianic salvation, as well as obiter dicta, often showing remarkable powers of observation on geometry, medicine, astronomy, physiology, botany, and other scientific subjects.⁵⁰

A Christian, however, does not see it quite that way. Edersheim, who had crossed over from Judaism to Christianity, saw the Talmud in a whole different light. So familiar with its contents, he characterized it as follows:

If we imagine something combining law reports, a Rabbinical 'Hansard' [official report of the proceedings and debates of Parliament], and notes of a theological debating club--all thoroughly Oriental, full of digressions, anecdotes, quaint sayings, fancies, legends, and too often of what, from its profanity, superstition, and even obscenity, could scarcely be quoted, we may form some general idea of what the Talmud is.⁵¹

What a tragedy that though the Lord had said to Israel that his truthful Word was to be treasured as something "more precious than gold," (Ps 19:10) the majority of his chosen nation turned their interest and enthusiasm toward an imagined "Oral Law," of which the written interpretation is characterized by a Christian as "profanity, superstition and obscenity." Only the devil, whose first question to humanity was "Did God really say?" (Gen 3:1) could trap people in such a delusion that something so foolish could become a substitute for something so important. Thus, by the time Judaism's theology appeared in written form, its proponents were caught in a quagmire of distortions and lies from which it could never free itself. Further historical developments only perpetuated the problem.

D. Further developments

Very little in Judaism's theology seems to have changed in the centuries following the completion of the Talmud. Before the eighth century the only work of significant consequence was done by the Masoretes (from the Hebrew verb "to hand down"). They also formed in two separate schools, the Palestinian and Babylonian. Their efforts were not in the field of theological writing, but the Masoretes developed the pointing of the Hebrew language and wrote the Masorah, critical notes on the Hebrew text.

About the middle of the eighth century there arose a reform movement in Judaism called Karaism (from the Hebrew root meaning "to read") under the leadership of Anan ben David. He "renounced the Talmud and founded a new movement, which . . . denied the validity of the oral tradition and took its stand exclusively on the Bible in its literal simplicity."⁵² Modern Jews see this movement as a crisis which threatened Judaism "with complete disintegration."⁵³ Though it sounds to us as though it may have been a Lutheran Reformation a la Judaism, it had little lasting effect since it differed only in the application of the ceremonial law and retained the allegorical interpretation of Scripture that was characteristic of rabbinic Judaism.

After the rise and fall of Karaism, the next significant thing to happen in Judaism was in the 12th century under Rabbi Maimonides. He codified the traditional teachings of Judaism under thirteen principles: 1-5 Existence, unity, spirituality, eternity and worship of God; 6-9 Prophecy, Moses, revelation, Torah; 10-11 God's omniscience and justice; 12,13 Messiah and resurrection.⁵⁴ From the 10th to the 17th centuries various Jewish mystics and philosophers added some fresh ideas to Jewish teachings. Modern Jews who embrace the evolutionary development of religious thought view the philosophers and the mystics as having "each made their specific contribution to Judaism, the former by clarifying its teachings in the light of reason, the latter by probing its mysteries with the aid of mystical illuminations."⁵⁵ What the renaissance philosophers added, therefore, was more of the same--reason over Scripture.

In the late 1700's some significant things happened in the world of Judaism. Moses Mendelssohn and David Friedlaender began the Reform Movement in Germany which was "aimed at adjusting the old forms of Jewish life and practice to the spirit and culture of the peoples into whose history the Jews were being drawn."⁵⁶ Friedlaender went so far as to request of the Lutheran Church in Berlin that he and his associates be allowed to hold membership in the Lutheran

Church on the condition that they be allowed to deny the divinity of Jesus and be excused "from practicing the distinctive rites of Christianity." (Baptism and Communion)⁵⁷ Fortunately back then even the Lutheran state church of Germany was conservative enough to reject the request!

The Reform Movement in Judaism spread to England and America in the 1800's. Reform Judaism's official start in the United States was 1885 in the city of Pittsburgh. Conservative Judaism was organized in 1892 in response to Reform Judaism. Reconstructionism came onto the American scene in 1881, a short time before Reform Judaism's official beginning. From this period of "enlightenment" and into the present a liberalized attitude toward Jewish tradition has taken hold with the result that many old Jewish values have gone down the drain along with a right relationship with the God of Israel, which vanished centuries ago. The sad state of Judaism's present beliefs became apparent to me in an interview with a Reform Judaism rabbi.

III. What Jewish Rabbis Teach Today

I interviewed Rabbi Arthur Baseman of Clearwater's synagogue B'nai Israel. Rabbi Baseman is a Reform rabbi, middle-aged, and married with a family. His appearance, his manner of dress and his work place were all very similar to what one might expect from any protestant Christian pastor. Of course the rabbi's library and the synagogue and office decor presented some stark contrasts to the Christian setting. I also wanted to interview a Conservative rabbi, but after Rabbi Berman failed to return my call two times, I got the impression that he did not want to take the time for the interview. [He did seem rather congenial on the phone the one time I spoke with him. He said, "David Beckman, huh? You could pass for a Jew!" I assured him he was not the first person who had mentioned that.]

In my conversation with Rabbi Baseman, which I would characterize as depressingly fascinating, I asked him the following set of prepared questions:

1. What do you see as the primary difference between the Christian way of life and the Jewish way of life?
2. What is your concept of God and of how He has revealed His will to mankind?
3. How would you describe your faith?
4. Do you see anything in your faith as being a constant or an absolute?
5. What is the role of the Bible in the worship life of the synagogue? in the personal life of the average Jew? [Is it available in English translation, read in the synagogue service, etc.?



Rabbi Arthur I. Baseman of Temple B'nai Israel, Clearwater, was elected president of the Pinellas County Board of Rabbis. He was president when the board was founded in 1971.

6. How much religious instruction does the average member of your congregation receive? What does it entail?
7. Do you believe in the "immortality of the soul"? If so, what is your understanding of that concept?
8. What is your understanding of Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53?
9. Many Christians have viewed the Jewish laws for worship as God's way of showing His people that the only way that atonement for sin could take place was through a substitute victim who would give up his life so that the death penalty could be removed from the sinner. Christians have seen this as a picture of Jesus and his work of redemption. How do you react to this?
10. What do you believe is your God-given mission to humanity?
11. What do you feel is the most important purpose of your synagogue's worship experience?
12. What is your reaction to the group "Jews for Jesus"?

Rabbi Baseman enthusiastically expounded at length on nearly all of the questions. He sees the Jewish way of life and the Christian way of life as stemming from the same system of ethics, but he feels that Christians put far too much emphasis on the life to come and on getting ready to die. He readily admits that in Reform Judaism the concept of God runs the gamut from the humanist to the deist, though he himself takes a traditionalist's view of God and sees Him as a personal being. However, that personal being, he says, though having a limitless desire to do good, is limited in his ability to carry it out. The rabbi arrives at that view because of the evil he sees in the world. This view of a weak God has been popularized by the book When Bad Things Happen to Good People, authored by a Jewish rabbi.

The rabbi sees his faith as living by the mitzvot, the commandments which contain God's ethical standard for humanity. Since God's revelation of himself to man is constantly changing, he says, and because God speaks in different ways to man from one generation to another, about the only thing he sees as a constant is his vague concept of a weak God. The Scriptures were "God's Word THROUGH man in that generation, not God's Word TO man for all time." The rabbi's purpose on earth, as well as the purpose of all human beings, he says is to strive to live up to our full potentialities and better our own and other people's lot in life. He is not too much concerned about what lies beyond this life. He believes his spirit goes back to God, and what state that spirit will be in will depend on how well he has lived up to his potentialities in this life.

Regarding his understanding of key messianic prophecies, he simply states that Isaiah wrote of a servant which is Israel, not Jesus, and that "Rabbi Joshua" (Jesus) and Levi were both Jews who knew Psalm 22; that's why they quoted it in the context of Rabbi Joshua's death. The Christians distorted the entire concept

ADDENDUM (Insert as first full paragraph on p 24.)

Concerning the blood atonement of the Old Testament, Rabbi Baseman simply dismissed it as unnecessary. Having an evolutionary view of religion's development, he stated, "We've outgrown it. We no longer view God as bloodthirsty." To prove the validity of his statement he cited the story of Abraham offering up Isaac, noting that at the end of the story God was willing to accept an animal instead of a human--quite an evolution in that short a period of time, even for God! Thus man's concept of God grew from a God desiring human victims to a God desiring animal victims to a God desiring no victims. God and His requirements, therefore, are whatever man wants to imagine them to be.

of Jesus' death and read him into the Old Testament to justify further their new faith.

Rabbi Baseman views "Jews for Jesus" as "basically insecure people." Because he sees Judaism as a religious conviction and not merely a cultural heritage, he believes that people with a Jewish background who accept Christ should call themselves Christians, not Jews. If one of his members told him that he believes in Jesus as his Savior, he would say to him, "Go with my blessing." But he would definitely say, "Go."

The synagogue offers a very thorough religious education program for all ages, similar to what might be offered in a large, liberal Christian congregation. Besides the usual instruction for children and the Hebrew classes leading up to Bar Mitzvah ("son of the commandment") and Bat Mitzvah ("daughter of the commandment"), adults are offered courses in ethics and philosophy. Personal Bible reading in the English language is encouraged, but it is not done frequently. [Rabbi Baseman's joke: Why did they give a Bible and an umbrella to the Jewish boy on his Bar Mitzvah? At least he would open the umbrella!] The purpose of synagogue services is "to lead people closer to God," and whatever that might mean is up to the individual.

Rabbi Baseman gave me a fascinating tour of his beautiful, plush synagogue, including a trip into the "holy of holies," the "ark" where the five velvet-draped scrolls of the Torah are kept. One of them is from Eastern Europe and predates the Holocaust. On the way out the door the cordial rabbi wished me luck on my paper and closed with the remark, "Give 'em hell, David!" (Of course he had denied the existence of such a place in our conversation!) As I walked back to my car a few seconds after the rabbi's remark, a lightning bolt struck close to where I was. The passage came to mind, "God cannot be mocked!" (Ga 6:7)

CONCLUSION

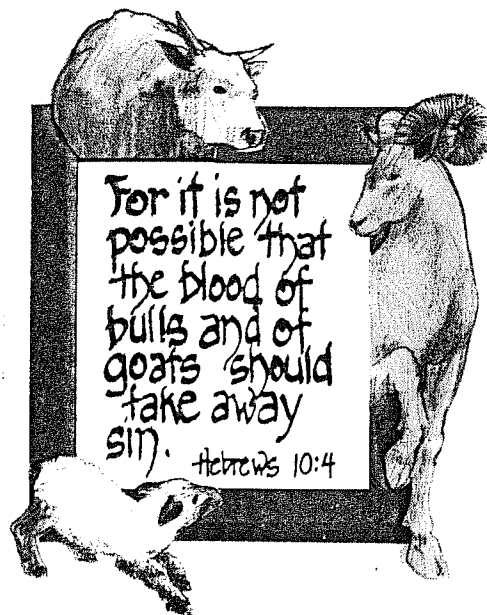
Investigating Jewish beliefs of yesterday and today has been an interesting but sad experience. In examining Judaism's theological history one sees the devil at work tirelessly over the centuries. He led a dispersed and captive people away from the truthful Word. He developed within a proud and argumentative people a spiritual elite who viewed themselves as God's instruments and spokesmen. He made a scholarly, intellectual and cosmopolitan people receptive to the destructive forces of foreign ideas. He shaped a logical and legalistic people into their own saviors with their own intricate system of "salvation." The devil

worked tirelessly over the centuries, and he succeeded in persuading the chosen people of God to abandon their birthright by closing deaf ears and blind eyes to the saving gospel promise.

Spokesmen for Judaism today see a decline in spiritual values among today's Jews, and as 20th-century Jeremiahs they warn of a possible impending tragedy. Rosenthal concludes,

It would be the final tragedy and most ironic failure if in this free land with its wide range of Jewish experiences, we were to somehow lose our interest in Judaism and the Jewish people. The Torah has been compared to a tree of life for those who cling to it. No matter what choice you make, no matter which Jewish option you select, it can be your tree of life--if only you will cling to it.⁵⁸

The far greater tragedy is that those who have rejected Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will not be able to eat from the tree of life in the heavenly Jerusalem. If we better understand Judaism's people, Judaism's beliefs and Judaism's doctrinal development, then perhaps we will have learned some important lessons, and this investigation will have had lasting merit. Since people who had the truth lost it, we need to remain dedicated guardians of the Word. Since people who have a heritage in part of the Word still lack an understanding of its true fulfillment, and therefore do not have a fulfilling, personal relationship with the Savior, the warmth and eagerness of our Gospel outreach should also be directed toward them as opportunities arise. Then we, who are true "B'nai Israel" by faith, may be given the blessed privilege of leading a small remnant of a lost people back to the Savior God.



ENDNOTES

- ¹These statistics are just my guess.
- ²Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer, What is a Jew? (New York: Collier Books, 1978), p 3.
- ³Ibid., pp 4,5
- ⁴Gilbert S. Rosenthal, The Many Faces of Judaism (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1978), p 151.
- ⁵Ibid., p 153.
- ⁶Ibid., p 154.
- ⁷Ibid., p 155.
- ⁸Ibid., p 155.
- ⁹Ibid., p 155.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p 155.
- ¹¹Kertzer, op. cit., p 213.
- ¹²Isidore Epstein, Judaism--A Historical Perspective (London: Cox & Wyman, Ltd., 1968), pp 12,13.
- ¹³Ibid., p 13.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p 59.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p 61.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p 29.
- ¹⁷Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p 78.
- ¹⁸Norman H. Snaith, The Jews From Cyrus to Herod (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p 86.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p 86.
- ²⁰Oscar Siegler, "The Four Silent Centuries--From Malachi to Matthew," delivered at the Winnebago Pastoral Conference, 1944. Available from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library, Mequon, pp 9,10.
- ²¹Charles Guignebert, The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus (New York: University Books, 1968), p 72.
- ²²Ibid., p 81.
- ²³Ibid., p 79.
- ²⁴Edersheim, op. cit., p 94.
- ²⁵Guignebert, op. cit., p 164.
- ²⁶Jacob Neusner, Between Time and Eternity--The Essentials of Judaism (Encino & Belmont, CA: Dickenson Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), p 33.
- ²⁷Epstein, op. cit., p 112.
- ²⁸Guignebert, op. cit., p 164.
- ²⁹Siegler, op. cit., p 7.
- ³⁰Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p 952.

- ³¹Guignebert, op. cit., pp 54, 56.
- ³²Guignebert, op. cit., pp 76-78.
- ³³Edersheim, op. cit., pp 23, 31.
- ³⁴Edersheim, op. cit., p 31.
- ³⁵Guignebert, op. cit., p 227.
- ³⁶Salo W. Baron and Joseph L. Blau, Eds., Judaism--Postbiblical and Talmudic Period (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1954), p 42.
- ³⁷Edersheim, op. cit., p 57.
- ³⁸Edersheim, op. cit., p 98.
- ³⁹Epstein, op. cit., p 123.
- ⁴⁰Edersheim, op. cit., p 11.
- ⁴¹Edersheim, op. cit., pp 11, 12.
- ⁴²Neusner, op. cit., p 48.
- ⁴³Baron, op. cit., p 186.
- ⁴⁴Kertzer, op. cit., p 9.
- ⁴⁵Baron, op. cit., p 194.
- ⁴⁶Guignebert, op. cit., p 77.
- ⁴⁷Neusner, op. cit., p 68.
- ⁴⁸Edersheim, op. cit., p 107.
- ⁴⁹Epstein, op. cit., p 130.
- ⁵⁰Epstein, op. cit., p 125.
- ⁵¹Edersheim, op. cit., p 103.
- ⁵²Epstein, op. cit., p 187.
- ⁵³Epstein, op. cit., p 186.
- ⁵⁴Erwin L. Lueker, ed., Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), p 433.
- ⁵⁵Epstein, op. cit., p 252.
- ⁵⁶Epstein, op. cit., p 291.
- ⁵⁷Epstein, op. cit., p 291.
- ⁵⁸Rosenthal, op. cit., p 157.

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in memoriam



James Carl Bassewitz was a member of the class of 1967. He was both a leader in all respects and a friend to everyone.

JAMES BASSEWITZ

Born February 2, 1949 in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Max Bassewitz, Jim resided in New London most of his life. He was an honor student and active in student government, serving on the student council two years and as class president in 1964.

An outstanding athlete he was a three year member of N Club, a member of the varsity baseball team -the most valuable player in 1966, and the basketball team, and the leading batter in the American Legion Baseball program in 1965 and 1966.

