

Chapter 3.03 Hebrews and Jews 3: The Time of Jesus

This chapter continues the previous chapters, focusing on the time around Jesus. It has three major sections: ideas, groups, and social and economic relations.

Additional Ideas around the Time of Jesus.

In theory, all of Jewish culture rests on the Tanakh by itself but in practice additional ideas entered Jewish culture from their neighbors or developed on their own in Jewish culture. These ideas influenced the situation at the time of Jesus. Here I elaborate on some ideas from earlier chapters in the book. The Jews got some of these ideas from various groups that were in Babylon while the Jews were there. To describe which group might have introduced what ideas is too complicated and not clear. These ideas later spread among all Jews because the returning Jews had high prestige, wealth, and power.

The “Bad Tendency” and Original Sin.

I assume readers know about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Eve and Adam erred in eating fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and God punished them all their lives. Their children inherited the punishment, so now everybody has to work for a living and women have to bear children with pain. But that is not the same as the ideas of a fallen world and of original sin as developed by Augustine and by some later Christians.

In the Jewish view, people are not born wholly corrupted and wholly bad. Once upon a time some people, Adam and Eve, made a mistake, and ruined what they had then, so that now we all have to make do with the leftovers. Adam and Eve caused some bad and evil to be mixed in with what been all good. Now everybody has to think in terms of good, bad, evil, holiness, and purity. That is all. That does not make all of us all bad. Accept the past mistake and get on with life.

In Jewish thinking, people have both a tendency towards good and a tendency towards bad. All people are tempted by bad and sometimes everybody gives in. The large majority of people can learn to control their own bad tendency. We all sometimes need the help of other people and of social institutions to control our own bad tendency. Some people are more tempted, easily led astray, and find it hard to return once led astray. Really bad people, or people that have fallen into really bad habits, have to be avoided and controlled. Not everybody is like that by nature so that we all have to be beaten into acting good. People are not utterly fallen.

The world is not as good as Eden was, but it is still good on the whole. It might be fallen from the paradise it once was but it is not wholly fallen. It is not so that all things in the world have a hidden twist to make them turn out bad. Some things really are as they seem and do turn out good. I do not know a consistent theory of why some things turn out well while other things do not, and of God's role.

Over their history, toward the time of Jesus, as the Jews found themselves often under the power of a non-Jewish group, the outlook of some Jews did change toward the idea of a necessarily fallen and bad

world. Some Jews began to think of this world as radically distinct from heaven and from what this world should be. They began to see this world as hopelessly fallen. They thought that some groups really did have enduring inborn bad will, usually non-Jews but sometimes corrupt Jews. The Essenes apparently thought this of the Sadducees (see below). Gradually more Jews thought that “material world” necessarily meant “fallen world” and this material world was necessarily a fallen and hopeless world. I think most Jews in general did not feel this world was irretrievably bad and fallen, and did not connect the sin of Adam and Eve with the bad situation of Jews under Rome and with the bad situations of this world in general; but at least some Jews did. This new worldview affected Christianity.

Satan.

The idea of Satan developed through Jewish history, partly as a literary device to tell dramatic stories, partly due to influence from neighbors, and partly from the need to explain evil.

The Tanakh does have a serpent that tempted Adam and Eve but it does not have Satan as we know him. The serpent in the Tanakh was not Satan as we think of him now and probably was not Satan at all. It is not clear what the serpent symbolized. The relation between the serpent and Satan is not clear. The relation between God and the serpent is not clear. The term “Satan” comes from the Hebrew “Set” which might be related to the Egyptian “Seth” or to similar words in other Semitic languages. In Egypt, Seth was the enemy of the hero deities Isis, Osiris, and Horus. Among Hebrews, Set was not originally an enemy in that way. “Set” meant merely an “adversary” such as in a court case or with whom one argues. In America now, it would mean “opposing counsel”. Set was an angel who talked over situations with God and who offered various opinions for debate, in particular contrary opinions. God might have used Set sometimes as an instrument to carry out decisions. Set might not originally have been one particular angel but instead the term might have been used to describe any angel used in this role.

Gradually Set (Satan) became one personality, then an angel with the power to tempt apart from any assignments from God, then a force of mischief, and then a force of evil. Steps in the transition can be found in the book of Job. Gradually Set came to have more power over this world. As people saw this world as fallen and as necessarily non-heaven, this world became the domain of Set while Heaven became the domain of God. Dualism set in. By the time of Jesus, Set had become what we call the Devil: an evil angel that controls the material world, and that uses wealth, power, and sex to control people here. The conquerors of the Jews were instruments of Set (even if they were also instruments of God at a further remove). The Romans were simply Set’s tools. To follow God was necessarily to oppose Set. To follow Set or any worldly non-Jewish power such as Rome was necessarily to oppose God. To tolerate Set or any worldly non-Jewish power such as Rome was to collaborate and therefore necessarily to oppose God. For God and Israel to return, Set must be defeated, so the Romans and other tools of Set also must be defeated. Set could be fought through becoming holy and pure and like God, and thereby showing God that we are worthy of his aid; or Set could be fought through direct military confrontation; or both. Any individual person or ethnic group that was too successful was suspected of being in league with Set and his puppets unless the group could clearly show that they were pure and holy. Even successful Jews were suspect. Anybody who collaborated with Set’s tools was suspect, even Jews who helped in good government. As far as I know, by the time of Jesus, there was still no clear idea of what the Devil wanted or why the Devil did what he did. From the Rolling Stones: “What’s puzzlin’ you is the nature of my game”. We can still see this overall worldview in Christian and Muslim

fundamentalism. This vision of Set, his puppets, Set's opponents, and all the relations to God, does not appear in the Tanakh. It all came later.

George Lucas might have taken the name "Sith" from the terms "Set" or "Seth" but I do not know how to confirm or deny this speculation.

Continued Exile.

By the time of Jesus, the Jews had long returned from exile in Babylon and had re-constituted the kingdom of Israel. Even so, many Jews during the time of Roman domination felt that exile had not really ended. Business was left unfinished. Israel was still in spiritual and political exile even if not in obvious physical exile. Israel would only fully return from spiritual and political exile under these conditions: a Davidic king returned, the kingdom was re-established, the temple rebuilt, a Levite priesthood performed the rites, in particular the priesthood offered animal sacrifices to God, God was in the temple, and God ruled Israel by giving instructions through the Davidic king and the Levite priests. Jews felt lost in the then-modern world of the Roman Empire. They wanted to return to the idyllic world in which God ruled through his viceroys the king and the priests. To return, they had to conquer the conquerors, including both Satan and the Romans. This worldview still is found among fundamentalists of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

New Sacrifice.

Modern people have trouble understanding ritual sacrifice, in particular animal sacrifice. In the Classical world of Jesus, it was common. Nearly all peoples killed animals for their gods. The Jews killed thousands of animals a year in the temple in Jerusalem. We need to put aside our modern feelings and to just accept this idea for now. Both social scientists and the people that perform sacrifices offer many accounts of sacrifice, which we do not need to go into here. We only need two ideas: (A) sacrifice as atonement, and (B) suffering as sacrifice.

Christianity familiarized the idea of sacrifice as atonement through the idea of a "scapegoat", a goat that is driven off carrying the sins of the community. Through one animal taking the sins of the people, all people are made clean, pure, and holy. Jesus was the scapegoat of the world. We need to keep this idea in mind but I will not make much of it in this book.

Everybody understands the idea of giving up something valuable now to get something better later. In modern life, we invest. Jews had the same idea but in terms of collective suffering now so as to get even greater blessing later. Collective suffering was seen as a new kind of sacrifice. Jews sacrificed themselves rather than an animal, and they did so not usually by dying but by suffering the indignity and hardship of foreign rule. Jews assumed that such hardship was punishment, and that the punishment was deserved for sins. If the Jews "took it like a man" now, faced up to punishment, endured it, figured out what they had done wrong, remained true to God, and corrected their bad behavior, then God would reward them with greater prosperity and happiness later. When the suffering had lasted long enough and had been severe enough, the exile would be over, Israel would return, and God would return to Israel. This kind of sacrifice was usually collective, of the whole nation for the whole nation. Sometimes it was personal: a person sacrifices him-herself and the immediate family, as in the book of Job. It was not

usually of one person or a small group for the nation, although it could be that way in the case of military-political activists and martyrs.

Later Christians merged the idea of a scapegoat with the idea of suffering as a sacrifice by saying that Jesus took on the suffering of the world so as to end the sins and guilt of the world, and to lead the world back to God. Jesus was the martyr for the world. I do not agree with this interpretation, and this interpretation also does not figure much here. Usually Christians think of this kind of sacrifice as personal: Jesus for the world. Sometimes they also think of it as collective: When Christians suffer persecution, the world will benefit.

Dualism and Gnosticism.

The Tanakh has its share of good and bad guys, good and bad situations, and moral ambiguity. Yet the Tanakh does not divide the world up neatly into good and bad that oppose each other. There is no rebellious Satan or any angels who take his side in a battle with God. The world is not divided into Light and Darkness. There is no dualism between matter and spirit. Matter is not entirely bad while spirit is entirely good. There is no mutual interdependence between divided poles of good and evil. The world will not end in a dramatic final battle between good and evil. The world is not completely divided into friends and enemies. There are no secret agents of good and evil prowling this world to protect it or to subvert it. All that came later.

Although elements of Gnosticism had been around in Israel at least since the return from Babylon, Gnosticism did not develop as a distinct religious alternative until about the time of Jesus or a little after. Elements of dualism and Gnosticism influenced Jewish ideas about history and the end of the world. Gnosticism had become a powerful religious force by about 100 CE and continued to grow in power during the first few centuries that the Christian church developed.

Apocalypse and Eschatology.

By the time of the Romans, a large minority of Jews had become deeply pessimistic. They despaired of returning to freedom and prosperity within this world. Instead, they waited for God to overturn this world and to start a new world in which all Jews would be free, have their own nation, and Jews would dominate the new world. They turned to apocalypse (revealing hidden truths) and eschatology (the end or transformation of this world). Apocalyptic writers flourished in the century before Jesus and the century after. Jewish rabbis and Christian clerics did not accept most of the writings as authoritative but the writings still influenced the people, such as the book of Enoch. They were much like the "end time" books of our age.

Pessimistic Jewish writers "mined" the Tanakh for any passages that might be interpreted as a sign. They interpreted the prophets, proverbs, and wisdom writing in ways that were not obvious to a casual reader and that seem odd to me. Later Christian writers adopted some of these unusual positions and elaborated them.

Some people that resisted Rome thought their actions would help to end this world and to bring the next better world. Some rebels justified their brigandage in this way, as some do now.

Political agitation, including violence, often goes together with eschatological visions. For this reason, the Romans were highly suspicious of change-of-the-world prophets, and often dealt with them harshly including crucifixion.

Some Jews thought they could induce God to end this world and to bring the next better world by being pure enough and holy enough. They adhered strictly to the Law. They wanted other Jews to do the same because they thought God would not act unless enough Jews were holy enough and pure enough. Some groups that stressed holiness and purity gave up on getting the majority of Jews to be holy enough and pure enough, so they tried to get their own group to be holy enough and pure enough in the hope that their achievement would be enough to get God to transform this world. Some of these groups separated from normal Jewish society.

Life After Death, and Resurrection.

The Tanakh says little about life after death. It allows for the possibility but does not offer details. The original Hebrew emphasis was on morality in this life and on the quality of this life rather than on an afterlife. Most Jews I have known keep that orientation. I do not know official modern Jewish thinking on this topic. The Tanakh did have people rise from the dead, and it has a story in which God makes people out of bones, but the idea of life after death was not a strong motivator in the Tanakh.

By the time of Jesus, many Jews had come to expect both a life after death and a resurrection. Most Jewish ideas then about life after death were fuzzy except that it was somehow better than this life. Some particular groups had more definite ideas but it is not worth going into that here. Some Jews specifically denied the ideas of a life after death and of a resurrection but I will get into that later.

Resurrection is not always the same as life after death because resurrection implies a physical body, either the reconstitution of the old physical body in a better form or going into a new better physical body. People that already died would be resurrected into a new physical body. People that were alive at the time of resurrection would have their body transformed into the new better physical body.

Some Jews had come to expect a resurrection. Some Jews expected both a resurrection and a life after death. The ideas of resurrection, life after death, and the transformation of the world often were mixed. Some Jews thought resurrection would occur before the transformation of the world and would be a sign of the transformation. Some thought it would be a part of the transformation of the world and the setting up of the next world. Some thought only Jews would be resurrected, or even only people of their particular Jewish sect. Some thought there might be a general resurrection that included even good non-Jews. Some thought the new bodies would be pretty much like the present bodies while other versions varied on a continuum from improved physical bodies to purely spiritual non-physical bodies.

The idea of the resurrection became a political issue because some Jews linked the idea of a resurrection with the idea of Jewish restoration and the downfall of foreign power, especially the downfall of Rome. I do not think some Jews thought dead Jews would come back en masse to form an “unholy” army to defeat the Romans, as in the army of the dead in The Return of the King or the sown dragon’s teeth in Jason and the Argonauts. Probably the resurrection was a sign of the transformation that would restore

Jewish power and end Roman power. The resurrection became a symbol of the rise of Israel and the Jews, and elimination of foreign power. People that wanted to believe in the restoration of Israel also believed in the resurrection as a symbol of the restoration. People that denied any resurrection did so as a way to say “focus on this life now and do not waste your life on dreams of a political restoration”. People advertised their general political affiliation by their ideas on the resurrection much as people do now on issues such as abortion or gay marriage.

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection but that did not necessarily make them political-military activists. Rather, Pharisees believed in the restoration of Israel and were willing to work for it in their own ways. In contrast, the Sadducees denied the resurrection. They valued the situation as it stood now, and they did not want to disturb their situation too much by overt military-political action. Some Sadducees might still have worked through political-military means in the background. Groups that did not believe in the resurrection suspected groups that did believe of being secret freedom fighters and/or bandits. Groups that did believe in the resurrection suspected groups that did not believe of not loving Israel enough and of aiding the Romans. This is an example of how political and religious ideas get linked.

Oral Tradition.

Written texts are never enough to govern all aspects of daily life and to settle all arguments, especially when life changes. The Jews developed a large body of oral traditions to interpret the Law and augment it. Groups varied in the content of their oral traditions and varied in the emphasis they put on oral tradition versus written Law. The Pharisees valued the oral tradition while the Sadducees pretty much dismissed it (see below).

Messiah.

Eschatological speculation began after the return from Babylon and reached a peak before the Romans destroyed Israel. Even in the early days of eschatological speculation, before Jesus, the idea arose that a Messiah would come to re-establish the traditional kingdom of Israel. The Messiah would be from the line of Davidic kings. Over time, the Messiah became more like a Babylonian or Roman emperor who would control the world with Israel as the core nation, much as Rome was the core nation of the Roman Empire. The Messiah was both a sign of the end and an instrument of the change.

Christian commentators often write as if the idea of a messiah was widespread among the Jews of Jesus' time, as if every Jew understood the same thing by the idea, and Jews had exactly the same idea then that the Christian commentator had later. To the extent I understand, the idea was not widespread among Jews of Jesus' time, it was not at all well known among northerners such as Jesus, it did not mean the same thing to everybody, and it did not mean what later Christians took it to mean even a few years after Jesus died. It was not a well-developed idea then. It developed more after Jesus than before him, especially by Christians rather than by Jews, who used it to support their interpretations of Jesus. Around the time of Jesus, to hail a person as “messiah” probably would have confused people as much as stimulated them to follow. This does not mean the idea has no merit and that Jesus was not the prophesied messiah, it only means that the idea probably did not work in real life then as it was portrayed in the New Testament. Later, Muslims called the messiah the “ma'ud dib”. People claiming to be the

ma'ud dib sometimes caused unrest, for which see "Khartoum" with Charlton Heston and Lawrence Olivier, or read the Dune books by Frank Herbert.

Some people believed in an evil anti-Messiah. An anti-Messiah was in Jewish thought even before the antichrist was in Christian thought but was not very developed and his relation to God and Satan was not clear. For many Jews, the Roman Emperor was the anti-Messiah, especially bad emperors such as Caligula.

"Son of Man".

Jesus used the term "son of man" to refer to himself, as in "the son of man has no place to lay his head". It is not clear what all Jesus meant when he did this. In Jesus' time, the term was not a title and it was not a common phrase. Other people of the time that were recorded in books did not speak like this, and common people likely did not speak like this in the way recorded in the New Testament. Mainstream Christian writers have taken "Son of Man" as a title that indicates Jesus' dual nature as both God and human while other Christian writers disagree. I also do not think it was a title, did not mean Jesus was God, and did not mean Jesus claimed to be the exalted messiah. I think the term is a red herring. But the herring is still flopping on the deck, so it is worth taking some time here on the term.

Christian writers say the term comes from the Book of Daniel, Chapter 7, the only place it occurs in the Tanakh (something like the idea can be found in places in the book of Ezekiel). In Daniel, the "son of man" was a mysterious person that was to come on the clouds about the time God restores Israel. He did not necessarily come down from heaven on the clouds; he might even have arisen out of the water on the clouds; he just appeared on the clouds. If anything, the "son of man" is like "Ba'al the storm rider" from other Semitic myths about divine figures, although Christian and Jewish writers likely would not like that connection. It is not clear if the "son of man" was an agent in the defeat of Israel's enemies, like Michael defeating Satan in some apocalypse, or was an agent in Israel's restoration like the priests returning from Babylon, or if the "son of man" was going to administer the new Israel like the returned king, or all three, or what. It is not clear if the "son of man" is a human or an angel, and what his relation to God might be either way. It is not clear what the "son of man" might be if he is not just a human or just an angel. It is not clear that the "son of man" is also the son of God or God, but very likely not. It is not clear if the "son of man" is also the messiah, but very likely not. The "son of man" and the messiah were probably two different figures that only later got put together in Christian lore. There is little evidence that Jews used the term "Son of Man" around the time of Jesus, would have recognized it as a title, or would have given it any specific content that would have helped them to recognize Jesus' use as claim to a title.

Some Jews used the term in ordinary speech without supernatural overtones. "Son of man" could mean something like "son of Adam" and in that way could also mean "any person" or "any person including especially me". It could also mean something like "every mother's son" or "working stiff". In that case, it meant a group of people and it included the speaker too because he was part of the group of people. It was an indirect way of saying "I" or "me" as exemplar of a larger group. Usually the group was under duress. For example, when Jesus said, "the son of man has no place to lay his head", I could paraphrase him as saying, "a poor working stiff has no place to lay his head after a hard day's work, and that includes especially me". In speaking thus, he means both working people and me. In this way, the phrase sometimes meant "I" but it was not a common way of saying "I" or "me". I think Jesus did use

“son of man” as a roundabout or flowery way to say “I”, to emphasize his feeling of being distinct and all that happens to a distinct person. In that case, “the son of man has no place to lay his head”, meant “poor hard-working prophets from the people are always misunderstood, find no kindred spirits, and usually can’t even find a decent place to sleep for the night”. The phrase did not mean anything special other than that, and it was not a title. I think most of Jesus’ uses in the New Testament are of these “lonely me” or “this group-and-me” uses and do not indicate he applied it as a title to himself or that he was referring to Daniel.

The epistles were written sooner after the death of Jesus than the gospels, and the term “son of man” does not appear in the epistles (as far as I can tell). So it is not likely that Jesus used “son of man” as a title in any way that the people closest to him remembered. Probably the use of the term in the New Testament to resemble a title is an artifact of translation that Christian writers later picked up and made too much of by linking it to Daniel, apocalypse, and eschatology.

Kingdom of God.

As there are several versions of the apocalypse, there are several versions of what happens afterwards. In most versions, the transformation of the world restores Israel, and a Messianic Davidic king rules Israel, but the king does not rule entirely alone or entirely in his own right. The king rules as viceroy of God. The end of this world, and the restoration of Israel, also establishes a Kingdom of God. The idea of a Kingdom of God became shorthand for the rising of Israel, the restoration of justice, and the restoration of all good things.

Even the idea of a restored Israel under God comes in versions. Politically, it could mean the defeat of the Romans and other foreign powers only within Israel, so that Israel would be free but the rest of the world would be on its own. It could mean that Israel would defeat all foreign powers and take over their empires. Or Israel could defeat all foreign powers and foreigners would accept the rule of God in some way but not necessarily under the political rule of Israel, usually under the moral rule of Israel.

The role of God varied even within the restored Israel. Some Jews felt that God would rule Israel directly from the rebuilt temple. Even during Roman times, Jews felt that God was present in the temple but they also felt that God did not always speak to the priests or the people and not everybody could feel his presence. After the Messiah had restored Israel, God would clearly be present and would clearly communicate his wishes, probably through a purified and efficient priesthood. Other Jews felt that God would guide the king and the priests, but not necessarily that he would speak from the temple or be present in the temple in the same way that foreigners thought their gods were present in their temples. For example, prophets might return to speak for God to king, priests, and people.

In any case, the Kingdom of God would be completely just and fair. The poor would have enough to eat, and might have enough land to sustain them. People that did not have land would be able to find jobs. Widows and orphans would not have to worry. Taxes would not be excessive, and would be collected from people in a fair way, such as by ability to pay. The rich would not be able to avoid taxes or avoid public labor. People that had a lawsuit would not have to bribe the judge.

Witnesses would all tell the truth. Everybody would get a fair hearing. The state would not take any land or goods without just compensation. Police and other officials would not bully the people. Police and other officials would act quickly against robbers and gangsters. In times of hardship, the state would be able to do something to alleviate suffering. The modern world still shares many of these longings.

In the Kingdom of God, Israel would have relations with foreigners but again there were variations. Some Jews felt that roles would reverse and that Israel would be like a new Rome or a new Babylon dominating the subjugated foreigners. Other Jews did not worry much about other peoples and felt that Israel would forever retain complete independence.

The most appealing idea to me is that Israel would “serve as a light to the nations” (from Chapter 11 of the prophet Isaiah). God would reside in the temple, and Israel could speak for God to the other nations. Non-Jews would no longer be really foreigners because they would accept the Jewish God and seek a relation to him similar to what Jews had. Non-Jews would not only submit to Israel but would eagerly learn from Israel about God and about the right way to live. Jews would teach other nations about God and morality. Many of these ideas came from the prophets. Jews sometimes described the Kingdom of God as like the Roman Empire but with God as the Emperor, Jews as the Romans, and the Law taking the place of force.

John the Baptist and Jesus seem to have kept the idea of a Kingdom of God, the importance of Jews in the Kingdom, the role of the Law, and the real but lesser role of non-Jews, but they seem to have changed the nature of the Kingdom by allowing many people access and by diminishing the role of the temple and priests. Neither John nor Jesus saw the Kingdom primarily in political terms.

Major Groups in Jewish Society Around the Time of Jesus.

Priests.

It helps to start with the historical background of the priesthood. The Jewish priesthood has at least seven roots that I know of. I do not know the definitive relations among the roots.

(1) When Moses came out of Egypt to the area of Palestine, he met a native priest named “Melchizedek”. The God of Melchizedek is the same God that had called Moses and so is the same as Yahweh or El. Melchizedek gave his daughter to Moses as wife. Melchizedek represents the native priesthood of the land, a priesthood that is somehow in touch with God directly. This scenario is important because later Christians claimed to derive their nearness to God directly from native priests like Melchizedek, thereby bypassing the need for ratification through Jewish lines, through the hierarchical Christian bishops and priests, or even through apostolic succession.

(2) and (3) All official priests should come from the tribe of Levi; they are “Levites”. Moses and Aaron were Levites. Even so, separate groups of Levite priests claim their charter in descent from (2) Moses and his brother (3) Aaron. Sometimes these distinct Mosaic and Aaronite priests were active around the temple and in court, and sometimes were active at local shrines and among the people. They were often rivals, and disputed each other’s legitimacy. I think Mosaic priests were more active in the north and Aaronite priests were more active in the south.

(4) The temple had its own particular groups of priests, including the high priest, all of whom might have ancestry from Melchizedek, Moses, or Aaron. The offices are supposed to be hereditary, so that successors are the sons, nephews, or grandsons of office holders.

(5) When Solomon was King around 1000 B.C.E., he took the line of high priests away from the families that had it then and he invested the offices in Zadok and in Zadok's family.

(6) When the Maccabees (Hasmoneans) took over the temple in 165 B.C.E., they suppressed the line of Zadok and instituted their own line of high priests. Some Jews never accepted the legitimacy of that line, and yearned to re-establish the line of Zadok.

(7) Local areas had men who carried out ceremonies including circumcision and sacrifices. I think the term for them is "cohen", which became a last (family) name among Jews. When the Romans finally destroyed Israel, the Jews of the South came to dominate all Jews and give their identity to Jews in general. Aaronite priests dominated in the South. Thus, I think, in theory, a cohen is from the line of Aaron, and so a cohen is an Aaronite priest and a Levite. However, I am not sure if all cohen trace their descent to Aaron or wish to do so. I am not sure if all cohen at the time of Jesus would have thought of themselves as Aaronite. I think they all thought of themselves as Levites. The term is also spelled "coen", "cohn", "caen", "caan", etc. The Jewish term is related to similar Semitic terms that indicate a similar office among other Semitic groups, such as "cahen". I do not know what this linguistic and cultural similarity implies for Aaronic descent.

Most of the priests were not allowed to own land directly or to earn their living off the land directly. The original priests of Melchizedek might have owned land but I do not know how many were left in Israel or how big a role they played. In theory, all priests were supported by a tax of ten percent of the earnings of all Jews. In practice, who paid the tax and how much he-she paid varied. In addition to the original tax to support the general priesthood, Jews had to pay specific taxes for upkeep of the temple and upkeep of the high priests, and had to pay for offerings. They also often paid for the services of local cohen for particular acts such as a circumcision; some cohen adjusted the fees by ability to pay. Thus in theory Jews had to pay four priestly taxes.

All priests should carry out the Law where they live and should be able to teach the Law to everybody there. This is part of their identity and part of what they were paid for. The local priests (cohen) were the major teachers of the Law in the small towns and villages.

Aristocracy.

Even though the power of the Israelite aristocracy had diminished under various conquerors, it had not gone away. Whether or not Israel had a true king under the Romans is a matter of debate but it did have central rulers that governed the whole country or parts of the country. The soldiers and police of the key Jewish rulers were the primary instruments of everyday official power. When ordinary Jews faced ruling power, usually it had a Jewish face rather than a Roman face. The aristocracy owned land. They got their wealth from their land, from taxes, and from controlling commerce. They knew not to stifle farming or commerce, and sometimes they tried to aid farming and commerce, especially commerce

under the Romans. Herod the Great helped build a large port that clearly increased Jewish prosperity. The rulers in Jerusalem worked with the high priests. Since the Maccabees, the rulers in Jerusalem usually appointed the high priest but they could not appoint just anybody they wished. They had to pay attention to the family background and affiliations of a candidate. The aristocracy used their own large military force to control the people, and sometimes to wage war among themselves or with neighbors. If the conflict threatened Roman rule or Roman taxes, the Romans suppressed it and then punished the instigators. The Romans borrowed the local military force when they had to augment their own forces or when the Romans had a claim on the local aristocracy for help in Roman campaigns.

Sadducees.

The Sadducees were the party that developed around the high priests and the aristocracy. They supported the aristocracy that developed from the Maccabees, and they supported the priests that the Maccabees had established. Many of them were high-ranking priests, and the high priests mostly came from Sadducee families. They were “the rich and powerful”. They saw religion in terms of the temple in Jerusalem and the rituals there, much as officials in an established church now look toward ceremonies at a large central cathedral. The Sadducees were not much concerned with local religion or people, and they were not usually hostile to them. They were only hostile if local people threatened them. They opposed belief in resurrection. They believed that life was about living now, God would provide for his people in this life, and wealth in this life was a sign of God’s approval. They were much then as many wealthy Christians are now. They felt that belief in resurrection was a distraction from affairs of this world. They were suspicious of people that believed in resurrection because those people were active against Rome and against them. The Sadducees denied the importance of any oral tradition and instead emphasized the Torah and the explicit written laws of the kingship and priesthood, just as many Christians now insist on only the Bible and deny the authority of the Church. After Rome destroyed the temple and overran Palestine, after 66 C.E. (A.D.), the Sadducees disappeared. Compared with our times, Sadducees are like the established churches, churches whose members are fairly successful, and the “high” churches. They are like people who use church to maintain business and political relations, and who consider power carefully.

Pharisees.

The term “Pharisee” probably comes from “pharashim” or “purishim”, or “purim” which all are about the same here and all mean roughly “the set apart people”, from “pharash” (“pur”) and “-im”. “Pharash” means “set apart”. Scholars dispute the precise implications of “set apart” here but it probably means “the self-set-apart and therefore the more pure and holy”. The term “pharash” or “pur” is not cognate with English “pure” but with “set apart”, although the end result is like English “pure” in this case. The ending “-im” is a plural that means, “the people that are like this”, as in “Hasidim” below. I think the “-im” ending in Hebrew got changed to an “-ee” ending in Greek, so “pharashim” first became “pharashees” and then “Pharisees”. “Purim” can be a Jewish family name but I do not know if it is related to this meaning.

The Pharisees first appeared at around the time of the Maccabees, when they were politically active and perhaps militarily active. I am not sure of their social roots then. They might have derived from the Hasidim (see below). They tried to influence succession to the priesthood and to aristocratic offices but

mostly they failed. They tried to influence the aristocracy through advice. Sometimes they succeeded but not well enough to keep them in power.

After their failures in politics, they progressively retreated from the political and military arenas to focus more on purity-and-holiness. I think, at first when they began to concentrate on purity-and-holiness, they thought they could induce God to restore Israel if they were pure enough, God would look to them as an example of what Israel could be if it were restored, and so would restore Israel.

After the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 CE (AD), the Pharisees focused on the purity-and-holiness of the individual and small local groups, and on influencing people around them who would listen. This is when they came into their own and began to lead Israel. This is when they became the core of later rabbinic Judaism. It might not make sense to speak of one single Pharisee group until after 70 CE when various people of this general mindset united to lead their people; but the term "the Pharisees" has become established, so I follow it.

In the interval between the Maccabees and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, including the time of Jesus, it is not clear how much the Pharisees stressed collective political-military action versus collective purity, and how much they stressed the collective purity of the Jewish nation versus the purity of the individual or of small local groups. We do not know the emphases in the thinking of the Pharisees at the time of Jesus, so we do not know what Jesus might have encountered. Also, at the time of Jesus, the Pharisees still lived largely in Judah and Jerusalem, so few Pharisees lived in Galilee to encounter Jesus despite the fact that the New Testament seems to indicate they were there. Jesus did go to Jerusalem several times, so it is possible that the New Testament stories refer to meetings with Pharisees during those trips. More likely, most stories conflicts in the New Testament about conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees are really about conflicts between Christians and Pharisees after Jesus died, using him as a protagonist to represent later Christians.

At the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were all city people. I do not know what occupations the Pharisees came from generally but I do not think they came from the urban poor or from occupations with high risk and low return. I do not think most were rich. I think some were moderate business people (merchants) and skilled crafts people. Paul (Saul) said he was originally a Pharisee. He was a skilled leather worker (and perhaps tentmaker), which at the time implied the ability to oversee others and to run a shop. This is also the same urban, social, and economic group from which most of the early Christians came, so competition between Christians and Pharisees for members might have been intense.

I do not know what the Pharisees thought about the temple in theory. They did mistrust the aristocracy and the Sadducees, but they also upheld the Law and they actively participated in temple activities. They were active in synagogues and in rituals in towns outside Jerusalem. They were teachers (rabbis). One of the greatest was Gamaliel. Some founded schools. Some of the most famous from around the time of Jesus were Shammai and Hillel. If you can, read about them.

The term "set apart" does not mean they withdrew from normal life or interaction with common people but means only that they strove to keep away from sin and from anything that might reduce their purity and holiness. They strove for the purity that was only expected of temple priests and was not expected of common people. Because everyday life was necessarily polluting, they cleaned themselves often,

perhaps daily. For example, the Pharisees took regular ritual baths with full immersion, washed their hands before meals, and washed their clothes often, all for purity. The common people could do none of this, and so were usually impure, and so could pollute Pharisees and undo all the careful work. Some Pharisees did keep away from normal life and everyday people because everyday life and normal people were almost inevitably polluting. I think some later ideas of Christian cleanliness, that later made their way into the West, might have come from the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were self-appointed and self-taught experts in the written Law and the oral traditions of the Law. They gave advice and they taught. They supplied at least some of the local clerks, lawyers, and Jewish officials. I do not know if they got most of their income from advising and teaching or from other sources.

The Pharisees were somewhat like strict Christians and Muslims of our time who focus on their own church and their own people, hold themselves as better than others, keep aloof from others, conduct business with other people but do not interact much otherwise, and feel vaguely ill at ease with other people.

Even so, many common Jewish people looked up to the Pharisees as an ideal. Many common people accepted the teaching of the Pharisees on the Law, and accepted their leadership in local synagogue activities and ritual activities.

In contrast to the Sadducees, they stressed the resurrection, although most of them did not stress it to the point of neglecting affairs on this earth. It is not clear if their stress of the resurrection also implied anti-Roman activity but I think that is not likely. Their version of the resurrection probably aimed at an idealized Israel that would lead the world politically, militarily, and morally, but which would come into being primarily through the intervention of God.

They had as little to do with the Romans and with Roman officials as they could, but it was not possible to avoid contact altogether.

They seemed to have looked down on the common people, in particular farmers and small crafts people; but this point is not clear and might not have been distinctive of all the Pharisees. Most urbanites look down on farmers and small crafts people. Nearly all the Jews that earned their living in some way other than by farming or small crafts looked down on farmers and small crafts people.

After Rome overran Israel, the Pharisees became the basis for Jewish identity, religious continuity, ethnic continuity, and economic survival. Pharisaic Judaism is the basis for modern Rabbinic Judaism. Christian churches owe some of their structure, coherence, and ideas to the Pharisees.

The Sadducees were somewhat like the established Roman Catholics at the time of the early Reformation and the Pharisees were somewhat like early Protestants. Luther's dislike for peasants and his obsession with the Law reminds me of the Pharisees. The reliance on technique of the Pharisees reminds me of early Methodists. The analogy fails in that the Pharisees stressed the oral Law while the Sadducees stress the written Law yet Protestants stressed the written Law and disparaged tradition.

The Sadducees and Pharisees opposed each other more than they cooperated. They would not have cooperated to oppose a wandering minor preacher like Jesus on points of Law. They would only have cooperated to dispose of Jesus if he were a public danger. Christians that lump together all Jewish groups as opponents of Jesus, and see Pharisees-Sadducees-Scribes as bad while early Christians were good, should keep this in mind. The New Testament is misleading in this regard.

Christians look at the Sadducees and Pharisees as forces of evil opposed to Christians as the force of good. They demonize Sadducees and Pharisees as a way to extol themselves. This is wrong. Both Sadducees and Pharisees were fairly reasonable groups given their time and place, who expressed reasonable if divergent points of view, and did a lot of good from their particular positions. Most Christian churches, including small churches, are like Sadducees and Pharisees. Small churches are like Pharisees. Sadducees, Pharisees, and Christian churches are the kind of people and organizations you expect in states. All are more concerned with the welfare of their organization than anything else even if many do much good as well. Certainly within a hundred years of Jesus, most Christian churches resembled more the Sadducees and Pharisees than any activist groups during the time of Jesus, and that is still so. If modern Christians wish to see good in their churches then they have to see the good in Sadducees and Pharisees and have to quit living in the false polemics of the time after Jesus died.

Hasidim, and Other Prophets and Holy People.

I tend to see a Hasid person somewhat romantically. "Hasid" is an adjective meaning "pious". A "Hasid" person of Jesus' time had great religious piety. The "Hasidim" are "the people that are 'Hasid'" or "the people that are associated with a Hasid person or practice". The Hasidim were sometimes like a political party but usually were more like a community movement. They originated at the time of the Maccabees but were distinct from the Pharisees. They were quietist and they taught by example. They were gentle. Some were charismatic. They prayed and fasted a lot, and some performed miracles. They were not well organized. They remind me of hippies and folkies. Jesus was like a Hasid, but more outgoing and active. Most social groups have people like the Hasid; the personality type and the ideas are not limited to Jews. Sometimes societies recognize the Hasid among them as a distinct type while sometimes not. Sometimes societies revere the Hasid among them while sometimes not. The Hasidim of Jesus' time should not be confused with the Hasidim of Poland from the late middle ages onwards although they share much in common. Those Polish Hasidim are the ancestors of the modern Hasidim. There are many good Hasidim but I cannot relate their life stories here. The Hasidim show that, in the time of Jesus, it was not unusual to hear a person ask the Jews to return to God and to piety, and to see a person lead by example, including healing and miracles.

Zealots.

The Pharisees and Hasidim were not violent but some other Jews were. Their goal was Jewish independence and the restoration of Israel. Some violent groups were well organized. They assassinated Jewish leaders and tried to assassinate Romans. The general term for these groups is "Zealots". They were much like the violent groups of some Palestinians and some Jews now. The aristocracy, Sadducees, and temple priests all opposed them in public but might have given them support in private. The attitude of the Pharisees is unclear but I do not think the Pharisees supported them. The Romans

suppressed them viciously as the Israelis do now with militant Palestinians and as Americans do with Al Qaeda.

Essenes.

The Pharisees and Hasidim were unusual, and they rejected everyday normal Jewish society, but they were still a part of Jewish society and they still hoped to reform it from within. The Essenes gave up entirely on mainstream Jewish society and lived apart. They denied the validity of the Maccabean priesthood and the Maccabean state. They wanted to return to the priesthood of Zadok. They said they were in the direct line of Zadok priests. They maintained a large compound by the Dead Sea away from other centers of Judaism. They dressed differently and had their own versions of Jewish rites. They were strict and very pure. They were apocalyptic and eschatological, and believed in the general resurrection of the dead. They made themselves as holy as possible in hope of getting God to end this world and to restore the rightful Jewish world. They were like the Branch Davidians of our time in America. I do not say more about them here but the reader should know about them because they were important and some other writers dwell on them.

Some scholars believe that Jesus, John the Baptist, and Paul were all Essenes or had trained with the Essenes. I doubt that Jesus and John were Essenes or trained with them. Paul might have stayed with them. I do not make anything of this theory in this book.

John the Baptist.

John was a prophet who peaked at the time Jesus was just starting out, around 25-32 CE (AD). At first, the movement around John was much larger than the movement around Jesus. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, killed John in about 29-32 CE. (John was killed a year or two before Jesus.) John's followers kept on after his death. John still has tens of thousands of followers in the Near East, known as Mandaeans. John was the teacher and the predecessor of Jesus. For more on John, see Part Four on Jesus.

Israel's Society in Jesus' Time.

Regardless of how well the ideas of a social thinker apply outside his-her time, all ideas about society and morality are rooted in the time, place, and society of particular people. Jesus is no exception. I believe Jesus' morality does transcend his situation but it is still a good idea to have some idea of his society. This issue is touchy for me because, as an anthropologist, I think some recent writers have gotten the ideas wrong about agrarian society in the time and place of Jesus. They are not too far wrong, and I will not correct them here, but in the future we might have to revise their ideas a bit.

Town and Country.

Society in the time of Jesus was predominantly rural but it was not like modern American farms or like idealized farms of Europe in the 1800s and 1900s. Cities then were not like cities now, and the relation between cities and the country was not like it is now. The situation then was a lot more like it is in the

Third World or Fourth World (“developing world”) now. If the reader has traveled outside the developed world, he-she should use that experience as a point of reference.

Probably 80 percent to 90 percent of the people lived in the countryside. Most of the farms were small, usually just big enough to just barely support an extended family of two or three generations. Siblings did not live together unless they were lucky enough to own land nearby. Probably about half the rural people owned land but likely not too many more than that. Perhaps half the rural population had no land but had to make a living anyway. When the Greeks and Romans took land, they displaced some farmers and increased population problems.

Taxes.

People paid about 30% to 60% of their total income in taxes. In theory, Jews had to pay 10% of their income to the temple, and 10% more to support local priests and other religious-political functionaries. Then they had to pay taxes to Jewish aristocracy and to the Romans. The total is already up to 40%. Some people paid less because they were too poor or because they had suffered a recent hardship. Tax collectors might reduce taxes in case of hardship. This total tax burden is about the same as for people in the United States now, and it seems to be the upper limit under most state societies. The Romans and the Jewish aristocracy did not usually collect taxes directly. Instead, they contracted it out. The people called “tax collectors” in the New Testament were not government officials but were private people that agreed to pay a certain amount to the Romans or to the Jewish aristocracy “up front” so as to get the authority to collect as much as they could. They kept whatever they collected in excess of whatever they had agreed to pay to the Romans or the Jewish aristocracy. These people could be decent or could be harsh. We should keep this example in mind when a modern zealot pushes for privatization of all government activities.

Social Classes.

Society tended to divide out into fairly rigid classes with little movement between classes and little intermarriage between high, middle, and low. The classes are somewhat familiar from “sword and sorcery” literature or from reading about Medieval Europe: aristocracy, including upper level priests; politicians outside the aristocracy, including the politicians in the local towns; soldiers; well-to-do merchants; farmers that owned enough land to raise a family and to buffer against a bad year; local religious people; skilled craftspeople; daily workers; unskilled craftspeople; widows, orphans, and the other lowest poor. There was little middle class as know it. The class of comfortable merchants and comfortable farmers was not large while the percentage of workers and the poor was much larger than we would tolerate today. People debate about which class Jesus fit into. He probably came from the class of skilled craftspeople. Probably he was poor but not of the lowest poor.

Patrons and Clients.

Even more than in America, people got along, or got ahead, because of who they knew. People could not be secure without some patronage for protection, for economic help in case of bad times, and for political help in case a person had to go to court or had to deal with state officials. People could not do any of this on their own. An Oregonian would be disgusted at the idea of not being able to stand on his-

her own and of having to go to “connections” for many normal activities of life. A patron at one level was a client at another level, and vice versa. People at one class level sought a person of a higher class level as their connection. Workers looked to their boss as their connection. Merchants looked to priests, soldiers, or local politicians. The poor looked to anybody that would help but often the poor could find no help. People without a connection were about like animals without an owner. People that wished to act as patrons had to have their own patrons above them and they had to look out for people beneath them.

Patrons did things for clients but also clients had to do things in return. The poor client of a rich landowner might be used as a thug to terrorize moderate landowners into sharing water or allowing the goats of the rich to graze on their land. A rich merchant in the city might use a poor craftsman as a thug to terrorize lesser merchants or crafts people into paying protection or into limiting their business. We all know about this kind of activity from cowboy movies and gangster movies.

People had to pick their patrons and clients, and had to apportion their efforts, so as to get the most out of their patrons and their clients. A patron that could do favors but never did do favors was not really a patron. A patron that did so many favors that he ran out of “juice” with his superiors also was not a patron. A client that could not see ways to please his-her boss was not useful. In the play “Julius Caesar”, Caesar laments that one of his henchmen did not just on his own kill Caesar’s rival Pompey but instead wanted overt permission from Caesar to do it.

This is the system that Americans overcame in order to have political freedom and real justice. We do not want to rely on connections to get things done or to be able to get justice in the courts. We do not want to be at the mercy of “our betters” when we want to worship, run a business, speak our minds, or get justice in the courts. We do not want to fear gangsters. This kind of system is oppressive, and I feel sorry for people that have to live under it, as does most of the world. It is a noble ideal to seek freedom from this kind of system. But Americans fool themselves if they think they have full freedom from this kind of system and if they think they do not use connections. As an Oregonian, especially living abroad and dealing with various State Departments, this idea has been hard on me.

Religion and Patronage.

Religion can work like the patronage system. People that have to worry about a living and have to work with their hands not only have less power, they also feel less pure and holy. People that have more leisure and power also can be sure they are ritually pure and publicly holy. To get pure and more holy, people have to work through priests. Depending on priests does not have to be like depending on rich people, politicians, and gangsters. Part of the spirit of the Law is its independence from too many offices and its promise of a direct relation to God without too much mediation. Anybody that keeps the Law can be “right with God”. But often feeling good religiously does depend on connections. Part of Protestant rebellion against Roman Catholicism was because the Roman Catholic hierarchy interposed between the individual worshiper and God. Jews felt this same problem when they realized God lived in the temple in Jerusalem and the average Jew needed a priest to feel really clean, pure, and holy. Jews felt this problem when urban Pharisees claimed to know more about the Law than average Jews and claimed to tell average people when they were pure or impure, just as later Protestant preachers manage the “righteousness status” of congregations despite Protestant objections to Roman Catholic priests.

Food.

As everywhere in the world, food was not only fuel it but also symbolized status, security, success, and social relations. People ate with their families and ate with people like themselves.

When people ate with non-equals, people preserved relative status even in meals. People sometimes allowed their inferiors to eat with them or to serve them at meals. People were sometimes lucky enough to get invited to eat along with the retinue of a superior. To eat together meant to be together in some way. To offer food was to offer hospitality and protection. To avoid eating together meant lack of trust and lack of being together.

To eat freely together meant to be equal. To share food equally was not just to share fuel, it was to share life chances, information, cooperation, promises, and hopes. It meant, "You are one of us. We understand what you are going through. We promise to support you, just as you promise to support us".

Towns.

Towns were nice places only for the rich. For everybody else, towns were bad. People went there because they had no chance in the countryside. Towns did not have parks and nice public swimming pools even though they might have had public baths. People dumped garbage and human waste in the streets. Animals peed and defecated in the streets. Water was usually dirty, even if you had your own private well. Severe disease broke out almost every year and lasted for months. Soldiers usually lived in garrisons outside of town. Soldiers went into town to collect taxes or to suppress the people. Some large towns had small nice neighborhoods and temples with art but those were not available to the people. Towns dominated the countryside with blunt force when needed.

Separation of Men and Women.

In the pre-PC times of the Classic world, women and men lived largely different lives, and women were subordinate to men in all aspects of public life. Men and women were not equal. Inequality showed up in social connections, the Law, all kinds of behavior such as modesty, and in life chances. For example, men could divorce women but women could not divorce men except for gross public abuse. Women could not travel alone. Women had to be under the protection of a man. Many urban women of all classes and most well-to-do rural women lived within the walls of a house compound all their lives. Some women never traveled more than a kilometer from the place they were born.

Modern people often do not understand that this asymmetry was not mostly to oppress women but largely to protect them. Those were different times then, calling for a different way of life to be successful, as Lou Reed said of "Sweet Jane". Those were harsh times. In modern safe America, it is hard to understand, and harder to feel, what it means to be at risk personally. It is one thing to see it on TV in some bogus cop drama, and another to feel it for real when you walk out the front door. It is hard for American women to understand how ancient Jewish women at personal risk might welcome an unequal system that protected women and that allowed women some freedom to work out their lives within protected limits. I do not advocate a return to gender asymmetry. I only want modern people to give ancient people the benefit of the doubt, to assume that they were not stupid slaves to cultural ideas but adopted those ideas and lived with those ideas for practical reasons. Only a strong program that offered

women a great deal could get them to overcome the practical benefits of gender inequality. That was what Jesus offered.

Religious Transformations.

Christianity transformed Judaism, as we will see in the rest of the book. Christians see this transformation as more true to the idea of one God, and the idea of Yahweh, than the Rabbinic Judaism that developed around the time of Jesus; Jews definitely do not see it that way. I do not wish to dispute this question here. When thinking about this question, try to take the following into account.

Judaism itself had already go through several large qualitative phases, each of which required a major transformation: the religion of Semite neighbors that included both El and Yahweh and other divine forces too; the original religion of Abraham; the religion of Judges; the religion of the First Temple; the fusion of El and Yahweh; and the religion of Nathan and the Second Temple. From there, it transformed into the religion of Pharisees and Rabbis; and then, after about 500 CE, it transformed into the Rabbinic religion centered on the Talmud and Torah. The prophets lived mostly around the time of Judges and the First Temple but their ideas pervade nearly all the phases and are qualitatively distinct. Whether this was all one religion, I do not know. Jews argue that the spirit of the religion and the relation to God remained the same regardless of the external ways of expression.

Whether the teachings of Jesus represent a transformation of Judaism greater than any that went before, or represent a transformation that cannot lie within the spirit of Judaism, I do not know; but I doubt it. I think Jesus is part of the “mainline” of Judaism. Whether formal Christianity represents a transformation of Judaism greater than any that went before, or cannot lie within Judaism, I do not know; but I think so. I think formal Christianity is outside the mainline arc of Judaism, at least to a Jew. Formal Christianity is part of the mainline Jewish arc only when it adheres to the moral teachings of Jesus without stressing his divinity.

Even if Christianity is a bigger change than any other change in Judaism, that alone does not mean it is either false or true, any more than one phase in Judaism necessarily invalidates any other phase even though they do not appear the same in spirit. In effect, Jews declare modern Rabbinic Judaism that relies on the Talmud as true, and overlook qualitative differences between phases, when they accept the Talmud rather than try to return to the religion of Abraham. (In fact, some Jews do reject the religion based on the Talmud and, I think, try to return to a religion based more strictly on the Torah alone.) Because I am on the outside of Judaism looking in, if pressed, I could say which phase of Judaism I consider true best and which aspects of any phrase I consider true and best. Other than admiring the prophets, I do not offer any judgment of any phases of Judaism here, and would not if asked. I can evaluate the teachings of Jesus for truth and value, and not only whether they are a transformation of Judaism similar to prior transformations. I can evaluate formal Christianity in terms of truth and value, and not only whether they are a valid transformation of Judaism or Jesus. This book does give those judgments.

In any case, I let myself take the best of any phase or any teachings without worrying too much. That seems to me an integral part of Jesus' teachings too.

Writing of the Tanakh.

This section repeats prior material. The Tanakh was not written all at once. The first five books of the Tanakh were not written by Moses. The book is an amalgamation of various authors with various points of view. Some of the stories had no authors but were taken from folk stories or from general belief. Most writers were court scribes who used stories to justify their particular political situation and point of view. Besides the original writing, most of the Tanakh was edited several times, often severely, and often to change the point of view of a passage to suit the editor. It was assembled as a whole about the time of the Second Temple, perhaps 500 to 400 years before Jesus. Even then, the content varied somewhat. Books were added later as well, after the Tanakh was first compiled as a whole, such as Wisdom. The story of the Tanakh is too much to tell here so I refer the reader to suggested readings. The writing and assembling of the New Testament was just as much influenced by politics and points of view as the Tanakh. The reader has to judge if the obvious role of human self-interest in the creation of the Bible means that either book is less the word of God. I cannot take either the Tankah or New Testament literally but I can take them seriously.