

Part 3 Hebrews, Jews, and Christians

Chapter 3.00 Introduction

This part of the book appears only online as of early 2012.

This part of the book is “Bible studies”. It gives only as much as is needed to prepare you for reading the Bible yourself and for reading commentary on the Bible. It does not offer new interpretations, and it does not pick out the definitive interpretation from among interpretations. I give you the background, basics, and a few major interpretations, and then I guess about which is the best interpretation.

Most people turn green at the phrase “read the Bible for yourself”. It is not really hard reading, but it can be boring. Even so, if you want to feel easier with your religious feelings, sooner or later you have to read much of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and all the New Testament. You can skip a lot of the genealogies and really boring stuff. What remains is not that long or that hard and often it is really fun.

Holding the Tanakh in your hand is like looking at a forest from a helicopter. At first the Tanakh seems like one continuous undifferentiated canopy of green archaic language. Then you realize it only looks all the same because it is a big place with a lot of variations and a lot of resident species that interact. It is a busy interesting place with conflict, heroism, sex, war, intrigue, magic, and drama. Eventually, like a field biologist, you have to get down into the forest and meet the characters individually.

Looking at the New Testament is like gazing at wispy clouds on a slightly windy day. There is enough so that you can see just about whatever you want but not enough to see anything for sure. Different people see different things in the same patch of sky. It never sticks around long enough for you and your friends to agree for sure, “Oh, that is a whale”. You can agree for a while, but soon enough the whale has become a rabbit or a deer or the rings of Saturn. Usually people see what they want to see. Often they see an idealized version of themselves.

The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) offers an outstanding translation of the Tanakh. You can find the JPS on the Internet. Oxford University Press does the actual publishing. The JPS translation comes in several “packages” at various prices. Get a version with commentary and notes. I have the Jewish Study Bible. A good easy way to get the basics of Jewish history is a children’s Bible. The JPS offers an illustrated Torah (first five books of the Tanakh) by Michal Meron that is excellent for the family. “The Illustrated Hebrew Bible: 75 Stories”, by Ellen Frankel, tells you most of what you need in simple terms and with some great art borrowed from modern masters. Many Christian groups offer versions of the Old Testament for children but there are so many I cannot recommend anything. You can find them in thrift stores cheaply. If you have read and enjoyed the Torah, go to the Prophets and other Writings in the Tanakh. Many chapters, such as “Jonah”, are usually short, simple, and not laden with historical details. Some of it is beautiful poetry.

You can use whatever translation of the New Testament you have. The “King James” Version (Standard Version) is beautiful and is a pretty accurate translation of the text on which it is based; but it was based on a flawed Greek text and so is not fully reliable. Many people find the dated language hard to read but I like it. The Revised Standard Version (New King James Version) is better. I try to use it as my source of quotes when I can because most people have access to it now. I prefer the New English Bible but it is not widely available. Recent versions such as the New International seem fine to me, but I am not an expert. The New Testament is only about 200 pages long. If you are reading only to understand, and not to win an argument, you can read the entire New Testament in a few hours spread over one week.

More has been written about the few pages of the New Testament than on any other single topic. The section in the library with New Testament commentary is the largest section of non-fiction in the library. It is discouraging. The bibliography at the end of this book gives some tips on what to read.

If you have not read the Bible before, then you are in a bit of a bind. Ideally, you should read the whole Bible a couple of times, then read commentary, then go back and read the whole Bible again, and then read more commentary, and then read parts of the Bible again when you need to know something in more detail. Yet nobody reads back-and-forth like that but divinity students and some really devout people. Do what you can.

The next three chapters in this part of the book are on the Hebrews, especially as the story of the Hebrews is relevant to Jesus. The remaining chapters are on Jesus and the New Testament.

Chapter 3.01 Hebrews and Jews 1: Basics

This chapter and the next two, three in all, give background information about Judaism. They focus on what is relevant to Jesus. Even if you skip these three chapters, read this section.

Jews are a group within Hebrews, who are a group within Semites. Semites includes people that speak a language related to Hebrew such as Egyptians, Syrians, Lebanese, and Arabs. The old nation of Israel was for the Hebrews. Jews were one Hebrew group within the old nation of Israel. Jews eventually took over Israel and took over Hebrew identity so that nearly all Hebrews came to be called "Jews". Sometimes I use the term "Hebrew" to refer to the Hebrew people before Jews dominated.

Christianity developed in part by caricaturizing Judaism and opposing itself to a distorted picture of Judaism. Jews were the bad guys while Christians were the good guys. Christians attributed bad features to Jews so that Christians could be the opposite of Jews in those features and could be all good, like one child calling another "dirty and smelly" so that he-she can be clean and fragrant by contrast. This tactic is common in ethnic-religious relations generally and not found just with Christians and Jews. Non-Jews too often misunderstand Jews and use bad ideas about Jews as an excuse to hurt Jews. We have to keep the record straight so as not to repeat past faults and so as to end present mistakes.

The biased portrait of Jews goes like this: Jews murdered Jesus and so Jews are collectively responsible for his murder even now. Jewish religion is overly legalistic, and many Jewish laws are arbitrary without any obvious value for protecting people or society, such as laws against eating pork and shellfish. There are some good laws within Judaism. But Jewish legalism takes away the benefit of good laws and it makes people feel they are constantly at fault. Judaism uses layers of external mechanistic legalism to smother any life-giving interior spirit. Christianity arose to advance the true interior life-giving spirit of God's wishes without being subverted by external mechanistic legalism. Legalistic Judaism is like machines, like death; spiritual Christianity is like organisms, like life.

All this is wrong. Actual practicing Judaism is not more legalistic than most religions in state societies such as Lutheranism in Germany or Roman Catholicism in France and it is not more legalistic than the case law tradition in America. It is not more arbitrary. Christianity did not arise primarily to correct faults found only in Judaism. Christianity did arise out of Judaism and does have some contrasts with Judaism. But the contrasts are not "across the board" and are not only with Judaism. Christianity owes Judaism much. It is wrong and bad to see Judaism as spiritless, mechanistic, external, and all in error while seeing Christianity as spiritual, full of life, internal, and all correct.

Like all religious and ethnic groups, Jews show prejudice too. But they have seldom held the power and seldom done the damage. Even if some Jews sometimes are prejudiced against some Christians, their prejudice is no excuse for Christians to hurt them or for anybody to hurt them. We can be honest, objective, fair, and kind without falling into over-compensation, liberal guilt, or guilt over the Holocaust, and without giving blanket endorsement to Israel and to everything Jewish.

The task is to see how Jesus was unique and universal without falling into bigotry, without painting Jews in dark colors so that Jesus stands out as a white speck. We need to do this not by biasing the evidence but through seeing Jesus' uniqueness and universality as truths that emerge from the evidence. Because Jesus was a Jew, this task is harder. If we wish to do justice to his Jewish identity then we risk losing his uniqueness and universality. If we make Jesus stand out among Jews and make him universal, then we risk painting Jews in false colors that make him stand out. It would be easier to make Jesus distinct if I believed that he is God because that alone makes him distinct and universal. Since I do not believe Jesus is God but I do believe that his teachings are important, I have to see how his teachings were Jewish, not Jewish, and more-than-Jewish. Beginning in the 1930s, scholars have intensively investigated how Jesus was a Jew of his times and how he might have been distinct from Jews of his times. Anything I say is only derived from their great work. I list some of the work in the readings for this part of the book.

Liberal Christian scholars that do not believe Jesus was God, or do not think it is key, are in the same boat that I am: they have to make Jesus special and universal without insulting Jews. Since about 1980, they have responded by getting around the question of his Jewish identity. They have seen the intentions, mostly-is, and all-about of Jesus in a mostly-is that has little to do with his Jewish identity: a Cynic philosopher, Indian guru, magician, revolutionary, peasant politician, or end-of-the-world weirdo. Liberal Christian scholars are not put-off by his Jewish roots. They enjoy the idea that Jesus was a Jew. But they do not find his specialness and universality there and they do not always know what to make of his Jewish identity.

Oddly enough, some conservative and orthodox Christian scholars that believe Jesus was God have actually explored Jesus' Jewish identity thoroughly. Jesus' Jewish identity is no threat as long as they can believe that his "all about" is his identity as God. They have come to like the idea that Jesus was a Jew. They even see Jesus as a kind of "super Jew" who embodies the best of Jewish identity, discards aspects of Jewish identity that do not fit with Christian orthodoxy, adds to Judaism, and transforms Judaism for the better. I do not know if this new attitude makes up for two millennia of orthodox Christians maligning Jews and overlooking the fact that Jesus was a Jew but I learned a lot from reading their material about Jesus and Judaism.

Of course, Jewish scholars cannot accept the idea that Jesus was God. Jewish scholars who tackle the question of Jesus tend to see Jesus as an exemplary Jew but not as a super Jew. They do not see him as qualitatively special or as beyond the limits of Judaism but as a good extension of tendencies that were already in Judaism. Some Jewish scholars seem to accept the idea that Jesus is a prophet. They seem to like the idea that concepts within Judaism lend themselves well to being universal. They vary on what they do with the Kingdom of God. I often agree with them, and sometimes I do find it hard to see Jesus as absolutely unique. I repeat that it might not be necessary to see him as absolutely unique as long as we can see the value of his ideals.

Historical Synopsis.

Judaism did not start out as it is now. It had at least four distinct currents contribute to it and it went through half-a-dozen distinct phases. I do not think it makes sense to say all this was one religion. I think the major phases within Judaism are about as distinct from each other as Judaism was distinct from the

religion of Egypt. Many Jews would disagree with me. They see Judaism as a single attitude toward a single God even if it is expressed differently in different historical conditions, and you should keep their attitude in mind. It does not matter much for this book as long as you get a sense of what contributed to Judaism. If each current was distinct and each was limited to one historical period then the story would be easy to tell but contributions were not distinct and the influence of one trend often extended across periods. Still you can get a sense of the identity in each period and of the overall development to modern Judaism.

According to legend, all Semites began with the man Abraham. God told Abraham to go west from Ur in Babylonia. Abraham eventually settled in what would become southern Israel or northern Arabia. Abraham had Isaac, the son that God told Abraham to sacrifice but that God later spared. Abraham had other children, who became ancestors of other Semitic groups. Isaac had Jacob, who added "Israel" to his name so that eventually Hebrews came to be called Israelites. Jacob had twelve sons, who were ancestors to the twelve tribes of the Hebrews. Jacob's most famous son was Joseph, who went to Egypt and became an assistant to Pharaoh, and thereby began the Hebrew residence in Egypt. The residence in Egypt ended with a mass exodus into Palestine under the leadership of Moses.

From legend, now we move to fuzzy facts. At least some of the ancestors of the Hebrews lived in Palestine and northern Arabia as herders and maybe traders. Egypt had a group of crafts people and merchants that might have been another contributor to the Hebrew grouping. Some of the mobile traders and herders in northern Arabia and southern Palestine might have been related to the people in Egypt. The name "Hebrew" might come from an Egyptian term for the crafts people, merchants, traders, or herders. At first, any or all of these people might have been as much an occupational group as a single ethnic group, and they might have been made of several loosely related ethnic groups. Later, they seem to fuse into one ethnic group. The Hebrews probably were related to other Semitic groups found in northern Arabia, Palestine, the area of modern Lebanon, and perhaps in Syria and western Babylon (Iraq).

After 2000 BCE (4000 years ago), the Hebrews overran what is now Palestine. At the time, they called it "Canaan". It is not accurate to say they invaded because they were probably always already there along with other groups. Eventually the Hebrews became the most numerous and dominant group. Immigrants from Egypt, perhaps other Hebrews, might have helped the Hebrews in Palestine overcome the other residents. Immigrants from Egypt might have induced the conflict by putting population pressure and economic pressure on the area. The influence from Egypt might have generated myths about an exodus. In tradition, Moses led the movement out of Egypt and through the desert, and then Joshua conquered Palestine.

Early Politics.

Now we come to better facts. While they were mobile, the Hebrews had only mild social hierarchy and no formal permanent political institutions. They did have a hereditary priesthood and some hereditary leadership. As they conquered Palestine, they settled down into agriculture, and developed what anthropologists call "chiefdoms" in which a single family or group of families has hereditary rule over areas of land and the people living on the land. The Bible calls these leaders the "judges", which is a good description of their role. Scottish "lairds" or English "lords" were similar. As in Scotland, eventually

a few Hebrew families gained more power, developed the office of king, and supplied the hereditary kings. They did this partly in response to developed chiefdoms and states around them. See the movie "Brave Heart". The first king was traditionally Saul, who came to power around 1050 BCE. David succeeded Saul. David flourished about 1000 BCE.

The early history of Israel is typical for tribes, chiefdoms, and nascent states. The chief religious literature of Israel, the Tanakh (the Old Testament), also is not unusual for groups going through that kind of development. We see similar development and ideas among the Sumerians and Babylonians, Indians, and Chinese. The Tanakh often is a rationale to excuse conflict between Israel and her neighbors. The Tanakh excuses Israel dominating neighbors, taking their land and women, and even murdering them. It excuses the development of class differences in wealth and power within Israel. The Tanakh excuses priests and the aristocracy taking land and people. It provides a rationale for a near theocracy. It is a classic example of religion in the service of power and privilege. Yet the Tanakh also fights abuses and strives for social justice. The Tanakh also is an instrument of good and it sometimes contradicts the stereotype of religion as mere ideology.

Israel was located in a multiple crossroads, and so in a position either to become wealthy and important or to be used. Egypt lay to the southwest. Babylon and Syria were to the east. Further east were Persia and Media (together now Iran). To the immediate north was Lebanon with its wooded hills, fertile small valleys, and skilled sea-going traders. Even further north was Anatolia (Turkey) with its huge fertile plains and Hittite empire. The sea was on the west.

Israel reached the height of its power during the Davidic line, which began with Kings David and Solomon around 1000 BCE. The territories on which Israelites lived never extended much beyond the boundaries of modern Israel including the Gaza strip, the Golan Heights, and the "Occupied Territories" but traditional Israel did sometimes exert commercial control over a wider area.

North, South, and Temple.

Solomon built the first temple to God in Jerusalem. It is called "the first temple". That temple became the focus of Israel's identity, Jewish nationality, and Jewish religion, and has remained so in idea ever since. It is more important to Jews than structures like Notre Dame in France, the Kremlin in Russia, or the Imperial compound in China, are to their people. Americans have nothing like the temple as a focus of our identity. Later successor temples carried on the same role. The idea of a temple carried on the same role even when there was no physical building. Priests conducted regular ceremonies at the temple so as to maintain Israel's close relation with its God. Ideally, every Israelite should go to the temple three times a year for specific religious festivals, especially at Passover to celebrate the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. In practical reality, most Israelites were happy to go to the temple a few times in their lives, during which pilgrimages they were awed.

Israel had always been divided in two, a north and south, because of differences in political organization and religious ideas. The south consisted of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin while the north consisted of the other ten tribes. The southerners were well organized and centralized, including a hierarchic priesthood centered on the temple in Jerusalem, and with a powerful king. Jerusalem was located on Mount Zion, and so was the original "shining city on a hill". The northerners were decentralized and more

egalitarian, with ceremonies at various centers, but especially at Mount Gerazim, which was a rival to Mount Zion and the temple in Jerusalem. Northerners did not recognize Mount Zion as the one dominant religious mountain but insisted that several mountains and cities in the north had equal claim to religious salience. Their priests had no clearly superior hereditary leaders. They did not have a powerful king. The parts of the Bible written by southerners disparagingly call the northern ritual centers “the high places”, assert that northerners were idolatrous, and assert that ceremonies at the high places of the north are blasphemous rituals to other gods. The southern area came to be called “Judea” or “Judah” after its dominant tribe. The term “Israel” ideally refers collectively to the Hebrews and to their homeland but its use in practice can be confusing. Sometimes the north alone was called “Israel”, and that might have been its original meaning. Sometimes both areas together were called “Israel”, and that came to be its widely understood meaning. Modern Israelis think of Israel as the two areas together. The north and south were united politically, but not culturally, under Saul, the king who preceded David, probably around 1050 BCE. The south dominated the north politically and militarily. After the north disappeared as a separate entity after about 722 BCE (see below), the term “Israel” applied to the south and especially to its dominant tribe of Judah. Because Judah dominated, all Hebrews and all Israelites came to be called “Jews”. The term “Jew” superseded the term “Israel” except in ideals, at least until the establishment of the modern nation of Israel. The ideal of an Israel that includes the north continued on in Jewish culture and politics, even with all Israelites, and later all Israelis, called “Jews”.

Neighbors Pick Israel Apart.

Under Rehoboam, the grandson of David, the kingdoms formally split politically in 922 BCE. Israel's neighbors saw their chance to divide and conquer, and so went after Israel in the North. The first invaders were the Assyrians in 722 - 721 BCE, who engulfed the northern kingdom but spared the southern kingdom. The Tanakh says the Assyrians took the ten northern tribes and the tribes never fully returned. Although the Assyrians did take people, most of the remaining population was still Hebrew. It was not non-Hebrew as southerners sometimes assert and as some Christians seem to think. The north lost its separate tribal identities but reconstituted with regional identities. The area of the northern kingdom became Samaria and Galilee. After that, the area of the north is not often called “Israel” anymore, and so the term “Israel” comes to mean “Judah” or “all the Hebrews that once were in the dual kingdoms but now look to Judah”. The term “Jew” came to mean “Israelite” and came to include both the southerners and the northerners that remained.

The idea that the northern ten tribes were taken away but are still somehow “out there” became important in later Jewish thinking. Eventually after all of Israel, even the Jews of the south, were scattered out of the homeland, after about 200 CE (AD), the idea that Jews were “out there” but waiting to return fueled Jewish imagination and politics. Israel the nation could only be fully recovered when all twelve tribes, including the lost ten, were fully recovered and when the entire territory was fully recovered. The restoration of all twelve tribes is a sign that collective Israel is once again right with God. It is a goal about which Jews dreamed and toward which Jews worked. It is a sign that the world is changing and that God will restore Israel to be pre-eminent among nations again and to lead nations. Keep this in mind for later chapters on Jesus.

Restoration Yet Continued Division.

In 587 BCE, the Babylonians defeated the Syrians; defeated the Israelite southern kingdom; destroyed the first temple; and took crafts people, scribes, priests, and other skilled Israelites to Babylon. This is the famous "Babylonian Captivity" about which reggae artists sing so well. It seemed Israel was doomed. Then suddenly the Persians defeated Babylon, and in 538 BCE allowed the Jews in Babylon to return. Two centuries later, in a process that culminated in a great battle, Alexander the Great of Macedonia (Greece) defeated the Persians in 333 BCE. His successors took control of the Persian territories including Israel, took some land in Israel, and built cities in Israel, but did not really occupy it. In a process completed under Mark Antony (Anthony) around 33 BCE, the Romans defeated the Greeks and took over the Alexandrian empire.

When the Jews returned from Babylon, they built the "second temple". This temple became even more the focus of Jewish religion and identity than had the first temple under Solomon because there was not a strong office of king to share the burden of Jewish unity and identity; the temple alone carried Jewish unity and identity.

After Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom, the two kingdoms did not reunite again until recently under modern Israel. Gradually after Assyria, the two areas became even more culturally, politically, and linguistically distinct. When southerners returned from Babylon, they held themselves apart as a superior elite. The returning southerners took control of the country and of Jewish identity. They imposed their ideas of religion, government, and culture, including ideas that they had picked up in Babylon. Their way of life created the basis for the modern Jewish way of life. After the elites from Babylon returned, all Hebrews and Israelites became Jews and have stayed Jews since. The returning elites looked down on the common people that had remained even in the south and especially they looked down on all Hebrews in the north. The people from the north might have connections to old Israel but the people of the south no longer thought of them as Israelites. To some extent, the returning elites also looked down on all farmers and herders, whom they called "people of the land" ("am ha'aretz"). Northerners began to speak a language called "Aramaic" that was related to the language of western Syria and was the common commercial language in the Middle East of the time. Eventually Aramaic even displaced Hebrew in the south.

People of the south looked at people of the north as idolaters who did not really know God and who did not worship God properly, much as Muslims, Christians, and Jews look down on each other or as urban and rural American Christians look down on each other. The southern view was wrong. Northerners began to look to the temple in Jerusalem much as southerners did. They did not look to it quite as did southerners, and especially they did not accept the southern priesthood in the same way; but they recognized the same God and only that God. Northerners were just as Hebrew even if not just as Jewish. Differences in northern and southern belief were more a question of attitude and stress than of content. Also keep this in mind for later chapters on Jesus because Jesus was a northerner.

Guiding Myth of Restoration.

That Israel could be re-born after it seemed annihilated under the Assyrians and Babylonians was as important as the return of the ten tribes. The Israelites interpreted the situation thus: God wanted a close relation with Israel. When Israel behaved badly, God used foreign powers to punish Israel. If Israel repented and returned to God, God would restore Israel to unity and to greatness, even on the brink of

extinction. As long as some Israelites worked with him, God would restore and improve any damaged relation. God could even make new Israelites of stones or bones. Israel would someday become the leader of the world and a light to all nations as the representative of God. Israelites had to keep strict observance of the relation with God. Israelites looked for signs that God was again “on the move” for them and that Israel would be fully restored. Every time the Jews are “down”, they recall this scenario. Every time they are down and something happens to give them hope, they remember God and his promise, and they anticipate another rising up and return. This is how some of them saw the idea of a messiah in later centuries, for which see later chapters. Keep this in mind for later chapters on Jesus too. Do not make fun of dreams of restoration. Nearly all nations that have once been great have dreams of restoration. Living in Alabama, the idea that “the South will rise again” is no idle slogan; Southern Americans took President George W. Bush as a sign of God’s favor on the South. England, France, Italy, Greece, Persia, Egypt, Iraq, China, and India all dream this way. Chinese policy has been fueled by this dream at least since about 1970.

More Foreign Domination and Culture Shock.

After the Greeks conquered much of the Middle East, most people began to adopt Greek language and Greek customs as a way of having a language and practice in common. At first this process went well, but some Greek customs and some Jewish customs did not mix. Greeks made fun of Jewish men because Jewish men were circumcised. Greeks considered circumcision as genital mutilation, the way Americans used to think of garish tattoos and piercings. Greeks never understood Jewish monotheism and the Jewish refusal to acknowledge any other gods. Jews thought Greeks were idolatrous and sexually lax. Jews wanted to keep their ethnic and religious identity. They maintained dietary rules and purity rules that kept them from some social activities with Greeks, such as dining. Pork (not beef or lamb) was the staple meat of most of Europe and Asia, but Jews would not eat it, and so could not eat with most non-Jews. Greeks ate food that had first been ceremonially offered to one of their gods, much as Americans “say grace” before a meal, but Jews could not eat any food like that either. Greeks did not understand why not. The Greeks took some land from the Jews to give to Greek military leaders and politicians. Taking the land dispossessed some Jews and thereby put population pressure on the Jews that kept their land.

Israel was part of an area ruled by the Greek dynasty called the Seleucids. The Seleucids tried to push the Jews into Greek practice. Part of the push included trying to establish worship of foreign gods in the temple at Jerusalem. The Jews label the king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Mithridates) as the worst offender because in 167 BCE he tried to set up an altar to Zeus in the temple. He might not be as bad as portrayed, but, in any case, the Jews revolted. A rural priest, a Hasmonean, named Mattathias, began the open revolt against Antiochus IV after Mattathias killed a Jew who had tried to offer a sacrifice to an idol at the temple. He and his five sons fled to the wilderness where they led a guerilla war. The eldest son, Judah, soon took over after his father died. Judah was also called “Maccabee”, which might mean, “hammer”. Later the family was called “the Maccabees” and their dynasty is often called “the Maccabees” although it is more properly called the “Hasmonean” dynasty. They rededicated the temple in 165 BCE, an event commemorated in the festival of Hannukah. They effectively won in 160 BCE when the rest of the Seleucid empire agreed to grant them religious freedom and a fair degree of political freedom. The Maccabees reintroduced some Jewish leadership, and gained control of temple worship and the

priesthood. Jews still use the phrase “Hebrew Hammer” to describe a strong Jew, sometimes with typical Jewish irony; see the very funny film of that name.

According to a legend, which is probably based in history, during the revolt, a woman and her seven sons all preferred to die rather than surrender to the Seleucids. Their actions inspired other Jews to victory. Normally Jews tended to see deliberate martyrdom as a sin, as suicide, which is prohibited under the Law, and is denying the sanctity of life. But Jews at that time reinterpreted the action of this woman and her sons not as suicide but as a sacrifice to God for the greater good. A small group of good people, or a good individual, can offer themselves as a sacrifice to cleanse the sins of other people and thus restore a good relation with God. These were new ideas in Jewish thought, and became popular during the Hasmonean and Herodian dynasties. Jews looked to some exemplary Jews among them to follow the example in fighting corrupt Jewish leadership or the Romans. Later Christians adopted this group of martyrs as prefiguring Jesus and as establishing the ideas that somebody can die for the good of the people, to expiate the sins of the people, and to restore a good relation with God. They saw Jesus in the same tradition, as the person who did this first for Jews and then for everybody.

About 150 BCE, the Hasmoneans destroyed the northern central temple on Mount Gerazim. They did to the northerners what they did not want others to do to them. In doing so, they permanently sealed the animosity between northerners and southerners. From then on, in effect, only Jews were Israelites, and all Israelites were Jews.

The Hasmoneans fought among themselves. Hasmonean rule ended in 37 BCE when Herod, the First, the Great, of Idumea, south of Judea, came to power and then allied with Rome. Herod astutely foresaw the rise of the Romans and allied with Roman leaders as they came to power. Herod kept the Romans from asserting direct rule. The Romans ruled through the Jewish leaders. Jews retained autonomy of religion and of most politics. Jewish leaders paid taxes to the Romans, allowed Romans access to the land, and supported some Roman military actions. The Romans did not occupy Israel through a large military presence. Mostly the Roman administrators and soldiers stayed in modern towns near the ocean. The Romans did take some Jewish land for estates as the Greeks had done. The Romans did not collect taxes directly. The Roman occupation of Israel was less intrusive than the American occupation of Iraq after 2003.

Herod the First rebuilt the second temple into one of the greatest structures and compounds in history anywhere. Herod died in 4 BCE. Herod’s temple is what Jesus saw as the temple. Herod was probably the king when Jesus was born. When he died, his sons split his kingdom.

His sons were kings when John the Baptist was active and when Jesus died. His sons were called “Herod” too and so the casual reader has to pay attention to which Herod is meant.

Away from centers of political unrest, the Romans brought peace, prosperity, and contentment. Contrary to popular opinion now, Roman soldiers did not walk the streets looking for ways to debase and harass Jews. Many regions of Israel did not even see a Roman soldier for months at a time. Galilee had few Roman soldiers. In many ways, and for a long time, Roman rule was better than anything that had gone before, including much Jewish self-rule. Proponents of law-and-order in modern American would likely be on the side of the Romans.

Usually Roman taxes were not high by prevailing standards. Jewish leaders under Rome were not particularly bad by world standards then, and sometimes were good leaders by those standards. Except for court intrigues and acute paranoia toward the end of his life, even Herod the Great was generally quite a good leader. But the leaders could not make the Jews and Romans get along. Sometimes both Roman and Jewish leaders repressed the Jews. Sometimes both Roman and Jewish leaders called for heavy taxes to support military actions and building projects. In areas of political unrest and heavy taxes, the people were unhappy.

Roman customs and religion were similar to Greek ones, so Romans also had trouble with the Jews. To the Romans, the Jews were not devout ethical believers in one supreme God but were anti-social atheists. Their "one god" was merely a cover for not accepting divine grace in general. Their ethical rules were not about good morals but about finding a way to maintain a divide between themselves and others. Romans never fully understood Jewish monotheism or desire for ethnic identity. The Romans did learn to leave the temple and priesthood alone, and did learn not to interfere in festivals except in case of disorder. The Romans kept the peace strictly. The Jews agitated sometimes, and the Romans punished them harshly as a group when they did, much as the Israelis do now to the Palestinians. Beginning in 66 CE, Jews rebelled, the Romans had had enough, and so the Romans waged harsh war against the Jews. In 70 CE, the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the second temple. The destruction of the temple devastated Jews because Jews had expected God to intervene for them and because the temple represented the relation between God and Jews. The destruction of the temple seemed to mean that God had abandoned the Jews and had severed the relation, the "Covenant". The Romans did not try to kill off the Jews in Israel, but many Jews fled then just as after 1948 Palestinians fled when Jews invaded Palestine. Where before the Romans had required only token observance of religious ceremonies that were designed to support the state, after 70 CE the Romans required fuller Roman style civic worship and they forbade circumcision. The new policy would be like requiring everybody in the United States to eat a ritual meal of pork at Christmas in a church, requiring everybody to burn incense to the President, and forbidding men to wear pants. The laws made it hard to be a Jew. These new Roman laws set the pattern for later persecutions. In 130 CE, the Jews revolted again. This time, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and forced all the Jews out of the city. That completed the destruction of Israel and the dispersion of the Jews.

After the Romans ravaged Israel and the Jews dispersed, the people of the north merged with their non-Jewish neighbors and eventually disappeared as an ethnic group. The people of the south, especially under the Pharisees (see next chapter), eventually became what modern people think of as Jews with the system of rabbis (teachers) and synagogues.

Jesus lived while Rome dominated Israel, northerners were still part of greater Hebrew identity, and yet southerners looked down on people of the north. Jesus died before the Romans destroyed the second temple in 70 CE. To better understand his world, we need to look at the development of Jewish religion. Before that, we need to look more at some general human religious ideas.

Monotheism, Covenant, and Ethics.

Jewish religion has features that distinguish it from other major religions. Although other major religions have some version of these features, the Jews stress these features and so we need to understand them. We cannot understand them just by looking at how the features survived into Christianity but have to see them in their Jewish setting. I do not discuss these features as they appear in other religions such as Egyptian religion, Babylonian religion, or Islam, or discuss how the Jewish version differs from the version in other religions. Jewish religion took a long time in the making, was hard to achieve, and hard to maintain. Jews become nervous when non-Jews point out that Jewish religion did not spring full blown and isolated from Jews but emerged out of ideas, beliefs, myths, and practices that Jews held in common with their neighbors and had borrowed from their neighbors. The story of the creation of Jewish religion is truly fascinating, and sheds much light on Jewish religion, but it is too much for here. Please see the suggested readings.

Monotheism.

Philosophers perfected the idea of monotheism in which there is only one god, and that god is all-knowing, all-powerful, all good, and only good. But common people do not listen to philosophers. The Jews rightfully have the credit for pioneering monotheism as a religion for a group of ordinary non-philosophers and have the credit for spreading that religion around the world.

In theory, ever since Moses, Hebrews (including Jews) believed in monotheism. In practice, monotheism even among Hebrews was not consistent until at least after the Assyrian invasion. Until then, Hebrews held various ideas in which one God dominated but was not necessarily alone and was not necessarily all-powerful, all-knowing, or all good and only good. Until then, individual Hebrews varied in their beliefs so that not everybody was a monotheist. It is not useful to go into various beliefs and groupings. Modern Jews vary in how closely they hold ideal traditional Jewish monotheism but I think most of them adhere quite closely or else they believe in a modern version of a single God that has been influenced by philosophy. Some modern Jews are atheists. Very few Jews converted to other religions until recently when some Jews converted to Buddhism. Jews consider orthodox Christianity with the Trinity as not truly monotheistic.

Some people over-stress how unique the Hebrew idea of monotheism is, so it is useful to point out that the first Hebrews shared their basic religious ideas, myths, and practices with their Semitic neighbors and that originally the Hebrews believed in a group of gods, collectively called the "Elohim", or "the gods", or "the children of god". At first, Hebrews accepted that other peoples had other Gods; they only insisted that their God was more powerful than other gods.

They did not think their God was all-powerful or all-knowing. Philosophical speculation about God did not come up. Thus the first Hebrews were not ideally monotheistic. Over time, the original small group of gods got narrowed down, God gradually came to be more powerful and more knowing, and the gods of other peoples came to be considered false - all for reasons that are not clear.

Before and after the narrowing down to one God, Hebrews have always used two names for God that point to different personalities: "Yahweh" and "El". Yahweh and El were two different gods originally but by the time Hebrews began to write about them, by the time of the earliest before about 1300 BCE, they already had begun to merge, so I call them "godly persons" rather than distinct gods.

“El” means something like “God” while “Yahweh” might mean something like “I am what (really) is” or “I am that I am”. Scholars dispute over the exact meaning of “Yahweh”. Yahweh originally might have been a storm and military god much like Zeus, Odin, Thor, or Indra. “Elohim” is the plural of “El” although it was not always used like a plural. In the beginning, El might not have been a single god alone but the leader in a council of gods. El began with a wife and probably at least one son. Some angelic figures from the Tanakh, and even the Holy Spirit, might have come from the idea of a group of gods under one leader. “Elohim” originally likely meant both group and leader, then came to mean primarily the leader, and then only the leader. Yahweh was tied more with the south while El was tied more with the north. The Tanakh duplicates many stories, such as the Creation, because it preserves a story from the perspective of each deity and from the perspectives of the north and south. Names for people, angels, and places that have “el” in them, such as “Micha-el” and “Beth-el”, derive from the “El” title. Some names have the “Yah” or “Ja(h)” root in them such as “Johannes” or “John”. The name “Elijah” means something like, “My God (El) is Yahweh”. It is fun to look up these names to see what roots they come from and what they mean. The term “El” might be related to the Arab word “Allah” and the Semitic word “Baal”. I do not know what modern Jews make of the distinction between El and Yahweh. Out of respect, Hebrews since about the time of the judges have referred to God only by roundabout terms, such as “lord” (“adonai” or “mara(na)”), “the blessed one”, or “heaven”. This practice can make it hard to sort out the precise identity of God and precise ideas about God in Hebrew-Jewish history. The phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” in the New Testament, particularly in Mathew, is a polite way of saying “Kingdom of God”.

In addition to Yahweh or El, Jews recognize a force that emanates from God by which God acts, called the “breath” of God, or the Holy Spirit. It is not clear how this force relates to God and how important this force is for modern Jews. Jews sometimes feel the presence of God, as in worship; they refer to the presence as the “Shekinah”. The proper response to the Shekinah is awe.

I do not know the official Jewish theological formulas that precisely relate El, Elohim, Yahweh, the Spirit, and the Shekinah. Regardless of any fuzzy edges or the fact of more-than-one term, most Jews since the return from Babylon have been quite strictly monotheistic by world standards. I take the terms “Yahweh”, “El”, “Elohim”, “God”, “Allah” and the “Holy Spirit” all to refer to the same thing; and I take the term “Shekinah” to refer to the presence of that one thing. When I say “God” I do not mean just “El” but mean all the referents to the Hebrew-Jewish-Christian-Muslim supreme and only deity.

Covenant and Law.

God made a deal with the Hebrews. If the Hebrews recognized him as the one and only God, and kept the Law that he gave them, then he would help them out as a nation. God chose the Hebrews as his special people. This deal is called “the Covenant”. The Covenant refers to the relation between God and the collective people the Hebrews, the Hebrew nation.

The original sign of the collective Covenant is the Law that God gave to the Hebrews. The Law is not a physical thing such as the tablets but is a set of ideas for right living. Eventually the Law came to imply some institutions too, such as the festival cycle of the Jews, the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, purity, and customs. The best example of the Law is the Ten Commandments. I do not often refer to

other points of the Law when talking about the Law in Jewish life because I am ignorant about most other points of the Law.

The first physical signs of the Covenant were the tablets of the Commandments and the Arc in which the tablets were kept, made famous by Indiana Jones movies. The tablets resided in the temple until the Babylonians looted the first temple. Then they were lost. After the temple was rebuilt, the temple itself became the most important physical sign of the collective relation to God. After the second temple was destroyed, any copy of the Torah could be a physical sign of the Covenant but old Torah scrolls are the most revered such signs.

In men, the definitive personal sign of belonging to the nation of the Covenant is circumcision ("cutting round away") of the foreskin of the penis. The Egyptians practiced circumcision, well before the first Biblical writings, so some scholars assume Hebrews got it from Egyptians. I am not sure why Egyptians practiced it.

For all Hebrews (Jews) keeping the customs and festivals is a physical sign of keeping the Law, the Covenant, and a relation with God. It is a behavior sign that is roughly equivalent to the bodily sign of circumcision and the material sign of a Torah and the temple.

Although the Covenant pertains to a relation between God and the Hebrews as a nation collectively, in some cases, God also helps individual people, particularly people that he asks to do tasks, such as Abraham, Moses, and David. Probably not anybody can make a personal deal with God but I do not know the rules. God does not call just anybody, and God does not bless just anybody.

It is not always clear what God does for his chosen people. Often he tells them when they are doing right or wrong. He corrects them and makes them better. At first, God helped the Hebrews leave Egypt, get a land for themselves, set up a priesthood, and set up leaders. He sometimes helped them in wars with their neighbors. I think most Jews think that God helps them to maintain their identity and their relation to God even outside of Israel, and even when they do not have access to the traditional temple and ceremonies. I think most Jews think God helps them to maintain their festivals and customs and identity. I think some Jews think God helps protect them against hostile groups, and helps preserve physical signs of the Covenant such as scrolls of the Torah. I think some Jews think God helped establish the modern state of Israel.

Sometimes individual Jews that are successful in business, a profession, or family life, feel God has blessed them. Whether these people feel they deserve the blessing according to the Law, or in addition to the Law, depends on the individual. Whether they think this kind of blessing is part of the Covenant, I do not know. I think officially this kind of blessing should not be seen as part of the Covenant but can be accepted as a gift from God. Most successful Jews seem about as humble or as proud as other successful people I have met. I do not know any definitive theological analysis based on the Covenant or Law of why God would bless particular people. I am not sure if Jews in general would take worldly success as a sign of God's blessing them personally as Max Weber said Protestants did, but I think at least some Jews take it that way because it seems only human nature to do so.

Acknowledging another God, or worshipping a person, is a sign of abandoning the Covenant. It is idolatry. It signals that a person is not a Hebrew or is not a Hebrew any longer. Because Hebrews do not wish to inadvertently worship another god or a person, Hebrews had to be careful about participating in civic rituals that focused around a god, such as the festivals of Athena or paying respect to the Roman Emperor; and had to be careful about participating in the festivals of other ethnic groups such as New Year. Deliberately breaking the Law also signals that a person is not a Hebrew (Jew) or is not a Hebrew any more. The Law has provisions for accidentally breaking it.

Relation.

The people of Israel have a relationship with God. They can talk to him. He sometimes talks back. They have permission to feel that he helps them collectively and personally. They can complain to him, and he might do something about it. This is true not just of priests, prophets, or kings but even of individual common people if they are in good standing with the Law and with God. God does not necessarily bless individuals as he does the nation but he does guide individuals. This is the sense of a relation with God that came into Christianity. It is probably not good to see this relation as a personal covenant but I do not know Jewish thinking on the topic.

Ethics and Monotheism.

The Law is not so much about particular points but about the right way to live. The Law is not so much about how far you can walk from your house on the Sabbath as that the Sabbath gives people, animals, and the land a needed rest. The Hebrews and Jews were clear about deep understanding of the Law as goodness and ethics. Much of what God wants the Hebrews to do is ethical and good. God wants Jews to do the right things, to do morally good things. God, goodness, and rightness all go together.

The link of God to morality in Hebrew thought is important because the link is not as clear in other religions. We take the link for granted because we have inherited the Hebrew way of looking. Gods in other religions are not usually morally horrible but often they are not morally consistent and sometimes they do bad things. Religions with more than one god often have at least one god that is a troublemaker such as Loki in Norse Mythology or Kali Durga in Hindu mythology. People that imitate the gods do not always act well because they sometimes imitate a troublemaking god. It is not conceivable to a Hebrew that God would not be good or would not want good. When atheists say ethics and morality are intrinsic to human life, and say people can be moral without God, they unknowingly echo the Hebrew idea that morality and the core of existence intrinsically go together.

The idea that God is good seems to go along with the idea that God is one. It is possible to have many gods and for them all to be good, or for them all to show various aspects of goodness, but this system is hard to keep up. To some extent, the Greeks did this with gods that had good personalities with distinctive good traits, such as Apollo and Athena. To some extent, the Hindus do this with gods that have a good personality and distinctive good traits, such as the various incarnations of Vishnu like Krishna. But if you really want your god to be consistently good, then your god usually is one god and only one god.

I do not know how Jews deal with the fact that God did encourage their ancestors to do bad things, even bad things such as genocide that the Jews now feel deeply as wrong. I do not think this problem makes Jews any more hypocritical or less ethical than any other people.

Great Gifts.

Perhaps the greatest gift of the Hebrews to modern life are the associated ideas that there is one God, that God has a relation with people (the Covenant), and that God and good go together so that God wants us to be good. I cannot stress the value of these ideas enough by adding more words.

Students of religion say that the Hebrews (and Jews) developed the ideas of “covenantal monotheism” or “monotheist ethics” or “covenantal ethics”. They put the three major gifts together in pairs depending on which relation they see as key in general or to a specific situation. Students of religion do not always refer to the philosophical use of these ideas but sometimes refer to the specific way the Hebrews used the ideas in their history, such as the historical development of the idea of the Covenant. Still, the importance of the ideas is not any less. We will see that Jesus’ teaching depends on the ideas.

Legal Particularity.

It is true that some particular points of the Law do not have any obvious practical purpose, some points came from the past, some points seem odd to people that came afterwards, and some points just seem odd such as the prohibition against eating shellfish. Still, the particular points of the Law are important because Jews think they are part of the right way to live. The connection between the particular points of the Law and the spirit of the Law might not always be evident but often the connection can be found. For instance, restrictions against work on the Sabbath seem annoying when somebody has to get something done but they also cultivate the right attitudes and they keep people from rationalizing the Law and thus eroding the main spirit of the Law. Usually particular points are not hard to keep, so, even if somebody now cannot see the relation between a particular point and the spirit of the Law, it is not a great hardship to keep the particular point. It was not hard to avoid shellfish in the hills of Israel. It was harder to avoid pork but not too hard if a family also kept sheep and goats. Unless it was abused, legal detail was not seen as a stumbling block to the spirit of the Law but was considered an aid. People could usually tell when somebody was abusing the details of the law and would not go along with such abuse.

As with many modern non-Jews, I try to understand the spirit of the Law while not worrying about most of its particular precepts such as the prohibition on shellfish. I do not look down on people who do follow the Law as long as they do not look down on me too much. I find following the Law admirable. I respect modern Jews who try to follow the spirit of the Law without worrying too much about points that no longer make sense or that inhibit life too much. I do not think a Jew who sometimes eats ham does great and irreparable harm to the Law as long as he-she understands the spirit of the Law and works to keep that. The Law, in all points, has a long tradition and a continued meaning for Jews. I do not see how respecting that diminishes me.

The Jewish Law has about 613 main points with sub-points of interpretation. Surprisingly to many people, the Jewish law is not particularly detailed and rigorous by modern standards. Every town in the United States has far more laws and ordinances than the Jewish Law. Most Americans now know as

many laws and ordinances as most Jews knew points of the Law in the time of Jesus. The Roman Catholic laws are more extensive than Jewish Law, and probably the same is true for the rules of Episcopalians, Orthodox churches, Lutherans, and the Churches of Christ. A mere glance at United States tax laws is enough to show which is vastly heavier in pounds and on the soul, and the tax laws are only one book out of many in the American legal system. The Jews had lawyers but not like Americans do now. We should not let puzzlement over a few laws such as about bathing and about not eating pork mislead us into missing the basic foundations of the Jewish Law in doing the will of God, in promoting right living, and promoting abundant living. Keep in mind that Jews could summarize the entire Law in the two main points of "love God" and "love your neighbor".

Prosperity and Holiness.

A nation that accepts God and the Law should also prosper. There is a link between God, accepting the Law, and prosperity. God blesses obedient Israel. This link still survives in Jewish thought and Christian thought. It is not always clear what prosperity means but usually it means being wealthy and having large healthy families. It can mean being politically free and not being under the dominance of other nations. It can mean having citizens that are respectful, kind, and that uphold the Law. It can mean widespread social justice. To some people, it means being a powerful nation and controlling other nations.

Nations that uphold the Law are more prosperous. Nations that are prosperous usually have an easier time to uphold the Law (unless their prosperity leads them into indulgence and into breaking the Law). Regardless of specifics about the nature of prosperity, upholding the Law and prosperity reinforce each other.

Nations can try to achieve prosperity by trying to be more holy and pure. If they are holy and pure, they can expect God to reward them with prosperity. It is not clear if this possibility exists for nations other than the Jews but Christians certainly have acted as if this relation did exist for them too.

It is not clear if there is a link between God, the Law, and prosperity for individual people. Jews know quite well that a particular person can be good but not prosper in the usual ways. They know that bad people can prosper. Like many of us, Jews hope that bad people cannot get away with flaunting God and the Law forever and hope that God rewards good people somehow.

For Jews, being holy and pure means upholding the Law. If Jews wish to have God's blessing and prosper, they need to uphold the Law. The more they uphold the Law, the more they will prosper. The idea that greater strictness in the Law means greater prosperity can be abused to result in extreme legalism, but, again that happens only in certain situations with certain people, and most Jews have been able to see through this trap in the long run.

Collective Punishment for Transgression.

The flip side of prosperity is punishment. At least since the time when Hebrews originally overran Palestine, and strongly since the Assyrian invasion, Jews have interpreted national problems as punishment from God. During the wars in Palestine, defeat was a sign that the Hebrews had done something wrong and that God was no longer on their side. The Assyrian invasion was a sign that Jews

had not been strict in upholding the Law and especially that Jews had worshiped other gods. Jews turned to other gods because Jewish men had married non-Jewish women who turned them astray. The pattern is: Jews do something to anger God, so God uses plagues, famines, and outsiders as a way to punish the Jews and to restore the Jews to right behavior. Usually the crime is inattentiveness to worship of Yahweh, in particular laxity in observing the Law and in performing the rites and ceremonies, and laxity in letting people worship idols and other Gods. Sometimes the crime is laxity in social justice, as when good people and officials allow the rich to take advantage of the poor or when officials take advantage of the poor. The cure is greater attentiveness to the Law and to worship of Yahweh, or greater diligence in social justice.

Jews understand that not all problems are the result of bad behavior but there is no clear line between problems that are God's way to correct behavior versus problems that arise from other causes. This is one reason why God sends prophets, to warn the Jews, to explain the problems, to explain what needs to be done to avoid punishment, to describe what punishments will likely befall in case the Jews do not amend behavior, and to point to better ways of life.

The fact that punishment falls collectively raises questions. Jews expect good people to remain even among a nation that has gone wrong. They understand that any collective punishment is likely to fall on the good as well as the bad and that the good do not deserve to be punished in this way. This is the major theme in the story from the book of Exodus in which Abraham bargains with God over how many good people have to remain in Sodom and Gomorrah before God will refrain from destroying those cities. It takes only a few good people among thousands to keep punishment away. If there were no good people remaining to interpret events then bad people would not know they were being punished, why they were being punished, or what to do about it. Jews hope that God rewards good people for their endurance with prosperity later when the nation returns to God and returns to prosperity.

Even now, nations other than Israel think of national events in these terms. Even non-Jews and non-Christians ask what people did wrong when a tsunami happens, and ask how God could allow that to happen to the good people that live among the bad. The Chinese felt that Heaven would punish and reward the nation for bad behavior and good behavior, and I think some modern Chinese still think like this. There is still no good answer.

Christians assume that they have inherited this part of the relation with God, so they tend to interpret prosperity in terms of diligence in Christian morality and bad times as the result of lax morality. This is why Pat Robertson can threaten Pennsylvania when a town does not teach Creationism.

The fact that laxity in the Law leads to punishment can also reinforce overly strict adherence to the Law and can lead to neurotic behavior. It is a mistake similar to "I do not have a girlfriend because I am not a truly good person. If I am only good enough, everybody will like me, and I will succeed in my job, romantic life, and social life". I doubt that the Jewish Law leads to this mindset much more than do rules and ideas in most other religions or societies.

Looking Down on Others.

Nearly all ethnic groups see their own group as superior, purer, holier, nearer to god, and more ethical than other groups. They see other groups as ranging from slightly inferior to generally depraved. How widely people see the gulf, and what people do on the basis of this ethno-centric view, depends on the groups and the situation. In some situations, ethnic pride coupled with looking down on other groups helps your group to maintain identity and keep its people alive. In some situations, it excuses exploitation of other groups. Even after decades of work to improve ethnic relations in the United States, many Whites still look down on Blacks, and many Blacks still look down on Whites. Yes, minority and oppressed groups are about as prejudiced as the dominant or powerful groups but do not have the chance to express prejudice in the same way. Ethnic pride and disdain for other ethnic groups excuses terrorism.

So it should come as no surprise that Jews looked down on non-Jews and non-Jews looked down on Jews. Jews saw non-Jews as dirtier, less pure, less holy, and not able to have a relation with God. Non-Jews saw Jews as having the same faults, and, in addition, as a threat to the social and religious order because Jews would not participate in the simple ceremonies of normal civic life such as burning incense for the welfare of the Emperor. Non-Jews tended to blame the Jews for a plague or natural disaster such as an earthquake because the gods were angry at the impiety of the Jews. Even now in the United States, fundamentalist Christians blame secularists for natural disasters, as when non-Christians refuse to honor Christmas and later we have a bad hurricane or the stock market crashes. When Jews and non-Jews lived together without conflict over material resources, power, and mates, sometimes they could overcome ethnic bias to learn the best features of each other's culture, religion, and history; but that story is too much for here.

Now we come to a touchy point. When the Tanakh said, "love thy neighbor", it did not originally mean, "love everybody of all ethnic groups and religions". A neighbor was a fellow Hebrew. A non-Hebrew was not originally a neighbor. Non-neighbors could be exploited, including taking their land and enslaving them. When the Tanakh prohibited getting interest on loans it did not prohibit getting interest from any loan to anybody but only on loans by a Hebrew to a Hebrew. A Hebrew could loan money at interest to a non-Hebrew. As time went by, the interpretation and the actual practice differed from the early parochial ideal. Jews began to charge interest to other Jews as well as to non-Jews. Jews began to see non-Jewish neighbors as humans, and began to extend common Jewish courtesy to them as well. They allowed non-Jews to glean from fields. They helped a non-Jewish widow or orphan. Several books of the prophets deal exactly with this kind of extension and they offer praise to non-Jews. I do not know how much kindness really did extend across ethnic boundaries but the fact that it did extend at least a bit is important. Christians, non-Jews, and critics of religion, today point to the narrow idea of neighbor in the early Tanakh as evidence that the Jews were especially ethnocentric and that all religion is a moral cover for selfish behavior. Neither idea is correct. The Jews could be quite ethnocentric sometimes but in daily practice they were likely not much more ethnocentric than most groups. Religion can justify ethnocentrism and other bad behavior but bad behavior usually does not need much religious justification. Religion does not often cause bad behavior but religion does serve as the justification for bad behavior too often.

Whether or not Jesus deliberately overcame Jewish ethnocentrism is a matter of debate, which debate itself is usually an indication of ethnocentrism or of religious bias among the debaters. What Jesus actually achieved does not matter as long as we see the need to overcome ethnocentrism and we know how to do it. I say more about this problem later in the book.

Transcending Legalistic Selection.

This subsection repeats points made in an earlier chapter on practical reasons why we cannot follow ideals. Every once in a while on the Internet, a list circulates of practices that are in the Bible but that people do not follow anymore, including:

-Men can divorce their wives at will but women cannot divorce their husbands -A man can have more than one wife

-People may own, buy, and sell slaves

-People can become slaves through debt

-Parents may sell their children into slavery

-You may try to buy a child

-Prostitution is not illegal

-Every seven years, debts are forgiven and land reverts to its original owners

-We may attack our national neighbors, taking their land, and taking them as slaves

-We should kill an animal and burn parts of it as an offering to God

-We may kill and burn only perfect animals

-If a neighbor kills and burns blemished animals, we must stone him to death

-Only if sacrifice accompanies prayers can prayers be effective

-We should stone to death all male homosexuals

-We should stone to death all adulterers

-We should stone to death all people that do not keep the Sabbath strictly

-All men must be circumcised or they are not neighbors

-We owe the priests 10% of our income for their upkeep

-Priests may not own land or work land

-Priests may come only from the tribe of Levi

-We may not collect interest from a neighbor, ever

-We may not eat pork or shellfish, including we may not eat shrimp or lobster

That is enough to show that nobody follows these rules to the letter, and many rules were abandoned entirely. Not even strict Jews and Muslims follow these rules to the letter. We abandon, select, emphasize, de-emphasize, and interpret.

Jews and Muslims developed guidelines about which rules have to be followed, to what extent, the exceptions, and what to do in case of confusion. The spirit of the guidelines is something apart from the Laws. The spirit of the guidelines may be a logical extension of some Laws, such as the idea of loving our neighbor, but the spirit of the guidelines cannot be just the Laws or we would not need selection or interpretation. I have no trouble with the idea that we use principles other than the Laws to select from the Laws and to interpret the Laws but some people do have trouble with this idea. Because the Tanakh and New Testament are not entirely self-consistent, and are sometimes are self-contradictory, we cannot avoid selection and interpretation.

Christians have an added problem because they want both to keep the Law and to jettison the Law. They want to have their cake and eat it too. Officially, Christians say Jesus made the Law obsolete, and that his teachings take precedence over any specific points of the Law. Christians took this position early in their history when they wished to attract converts from outside Judaism, and knew that some laws would keep away non-Jewish people, such as the laws requiring circumcision of men or against eating pork. Yet many Christians quickly invoke old laws when they wish to condemn something they do not like, such as homosexuality. They do not invoke all the laws, or do not invoke all the laws equally. They do not require burnt offerings and they do not stone their fellows for working on the Sabbath. They do not forbid the collecting of interest. They invoke and emphasize the laws that support their social-political-economic outlook. They select and interpret for reasons outside the Law.

This is why we need to be explicit about all the ideas that go into our religious viewpoint. Thinking about which laws we accept, reject, or modify is a good way to examine ourselves to see what we really think and why. If we find contradictions within ourselves, we need to think about how we can hold those contradictions, why we might want to hold them, and what would happen if we abandoned them. We need to think about our central stance, our key guidelines, or the core spirit we use, when we select, reject, modify, and interpret laws. What are we really about? Can we see our core principles as consistent with particular points of the law, such as the ideal of loving our neighbor? Can we see our core principles as a good extension of particular points of the law, such as extending the idea of "neighbor" to include people outside our religion, race, nation, class, or gender? Why are we strict about some things? Do we support a social, economic, or political agenda? Are we suppressing the poor?

If we use principles from outside the Law to select from the Law and to interpret it, then why bother with the Law at all? Why not just revert to the principles as basic, derive specific behaviors from basic principles, and dispense with the Law? In effect, this is what most people do, usually implicitly, including fundamentalists who believe they follow the Law and only the Law. Modern atheists do this explicitly, for which I give them credit. I can think of several reasons to keep the Law in mind. Many principles that we

use developed from the Hebrew Law, and so it helps to keep the Law as a reference for the source of our basic principles. People usually do not think up principles on their own but learn them from other people. When learning, it helps to see more than one set of principles and to think about which to adopt. We can use both the Hebrew Law and Greek philosophy. The Law makes a good reference set of beginning principles that can guide us in our adoption of all principles. The Law has coherence to it even if it has some silly points. We can learn about coherence from it. We can use not only the Law of the Hebrews as a touchstone but we can use the laws of other peoples, such as the Hindus or Chinese. When we accept the value of one set of laws, such as from the Hebrews, but do not get “hung up” on that set, it is easier to put in perspective the laws from other nations and to see the relation between the laws of all nations and the deeper principles we seek. If we discard the Hebrew Laws, then it is hard to say why we should pay any attention to the laws of any other peoples. If we discard all traditional law, it is hard to say why we should pay attention to our supposed basic philosophical principles either. We need to start with some set of laws, and the Hebrew Law is a good place.

Chapter 3.02 Hebrews and Jews 2: Prophets

This chapter gives extracts from the prophets to show what they were like, to show their concern with social justice, and to stress that the Tanakh was more than just religious propaganda validating the power of the military and the priests and validating the right of Jews to dominate neighbors. Social justice was an integral part of God.

For legal reasons, these extracts are not taken from any current translation of the Tanakh. They are paraphrases that I made up out of several different translations. If any particular copyright holder thinks I have taken too much from his-her version, please contact me; likely I will retract this version from the Internet and redo it. Please consult your favorite translation of the Tanakh to make sure that I have not strayed too far.

Contrary to popular misunderstanding, a prophet was not a fortuneteller. Prophets were analysts of their socio-political-economic-religious situations. They were commentators on their times. They sought to guide politicians, soldiers, priests, and common people toward a better way of life more in tune with God's will. They sought to avoid the wrath of God. Sometimes to achieve their ends, they anticipated the future much as pundits on TV do today: "If you do not heed I what say, and do not heed God's will through my words, then a terrible disaster will befall you. If you do not repent, then Assyria will smite you and the Chinese will out-produce America. If you do heed me, then you will be saved and prosperity will return. If you heed me and do God's will by worshiping only in the temple of Jerusalem according to the correct rites, voting for the right party, using the right drugs, having the right sex, and watching the right movies, then the Babylonians and Romans will go away, the Pakistanis will become truly helpful, we will defeat Al Quaida, the stock market will climb, everybody will get a job, we will out produce China, and all ethnic groups will get along." I think most of the Biblical prophets were more astute and better people than most modern pundits.

Some prophets, or people that claimed to be prophets, did make predictions much like a fortuneteller. Some prophets made predictions designed to please the rich and powerful, such as predicting a military victory in the face of overwhelming odds. This was not so with the best prophets, what the Jews back then, and we today, would call "true" prophets.

Prophets had two major criticisms of current affairs. First, the people were not diligent enough in worshiping God. In particular, the people might worship other gods such as when men married a non-Jewish wife they might worship her gods in the house setting. Today, a Jew or a Christian might marry a Hindu woman and worship Vishnu at home with her and the children. Or a Hindu man might marry a Christian woman and go to church with her and the children.

Second, social injustice prevailed while state officials, the priesthood, the rich, and even the common people did nothing about it. The prophets were strong advocates of social justice. The prophets were strong critics of the rich and powerful. They could not see how to have correct worship of God without social justice. They took seriously the twin commands to love God and to love your neighbor.

My selections here from the prophets are not representative. They reflect my concerns, in particular social justice and individual responsibility. To get a better idea of the prophets, read them. I list the total chapter and verse before a quotation. I do not mark chapter and verse within a passage. Sometimes I provide a little background before giving the words of the prophet; my background selections do not begin with an asterisk (*). Excerpts begin and end with an asterisk (*). Usually the asterisk means the prophet is speaking directly and not quoting anybody right now. Double quotation marks (") within a passage can surround speech, usually the speech of God or of the prophet. Single quotation marks (') indicate a quotation within a speech; usually the prophet cites God or cites somebody else's words. Who speaks usually is clear from the passage. Sometimes it is not possible to clearly distinguish the voice of God from the voice of the prophet but I do not untangle them here. Three little dots (...) mark elisions, places where I left out words. My interject comments are in square brackets [].

SECOND SAMUEL 11.26 to 12.14: David, Uriah, Bathsheba, and Nathan.

Saul was the former king of Israel and Judah. David used to be his soldier, but Saul came to dislike David and wished to kill him. God rescued David from Saul and made David king in Saul's place. Nathan was the chief prophet of Israel. David had a skilled and faithful soldier named Uriah. Uriah's wife was Bathsheba. David and Bathsheba had an affair. To get free access to Bathsheba, David sent Uriah to the front lines to die. It was murder by proxy. At the end, God kills an innocent child so as to punish David and Bathsheba; I do not like this method of punishment. The line "You are that man!" is one of the most famous lines in the Tanakh and perhaps in all of literature. God is angry both because David disobeyed his commands (about honoring the roles of husband and wife) and because David did something intrinsically wrong.

* When Bathsheba heard that Uriah was dead, she mourned for him. After the official time of mourning was over, David brought her to his palace. She became a wife and bore him a son.

But Yahweh was angry at David's conduct, and so Yahweh sent Nathan to David. Nathan told David a story: "Once two men lived nearby, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had large flocks of sheep and herds of cattle but the poor man had only one little female ewe lamb [with which he hoped to start his own herd]. The poor man tended the lamb, and it grew up with his children. The lamb used to share the man's piece of bread, drink water from his cup, and sleep on his chest. It was like a daughter to him. One day the rich man had to entertain a guest but was too stingy to use any of his own sheep, so he illegally seized the poor man's lamb and had it grilled for the guest's meal." [Not only did the rich man take the poor man's only property, he took the poor man's love and his future].

David was furious. He said to Nathan, "As Yahweh lives, the rich man deserves to die. He showed no pity. He will pay four times the cost of the lamb." Nathan said straight to King David, "You are that man! Through me, Yahweh the God of Israel says: 'I rescued you from Saul the former king who wanted to kill you, and I made you king of Israel instead. I gave you Saul's house and wives. I gave you Israel and Judah. If that were not enough, I would have given you twice as much. Yet you were not satisfied but took what was not rightfully yours, and destroyed an innocent loyal man to do it [Uriah]. Why did you openly break God's command and did what makes him angry? You killed Uriah the Hittite, and you took Bathsheba his wife as your wife. Because of that, you will live always in fear of the sword and violence. I will bring disaster to you from within your own family. I will give your wives to another man right in front

of you, and he will have sex with them here in your palace. You acted secretly but I will do this openly for you to see and for all Israel to see in broad daylight.”

David said to Nathan, “My God! I am guilty before you.” Nathan replied to David, “[Because you accept responsibility and repent, and because God used to love you] God has partially forgiven you. You will not die. But because you insulted God by your acts, the first child born to you and Bathsheba will die.” *

EZEKIEL 18: 1 - 23. Personal Responsibility.

Ezekiel lived during the “Babylonian Captivity” when many people of Judea and Israel were taken to Babylon. He had an intense imagination. His writing comes close to apocalyptic before the apocalyptic style became common after the Roman dominion.

Ezekiel made a clear move away from collective guilt, punishment, and reward toward assessing action according to individuals only. In agrarian and pastoral society, whole families or whole groups had to be responsible for the actions of their members. Children had to pay the debts of their parents. Israel had suffered and had been taken to Babylon because, in the past, the ancestors in Israel had not followed the Law well enough. The Jews in Babylon wondered if they could be forgiven and return to Israel if they followed the Law, despite what their elders had done. Ezekiel assured them they could be forgiven and that they would be judged on their own merits. Although the idea of individual responsibility originally applied to Jews in Babylon, I think we can safely generalize it to all individuals everywhere. Many ideas from the prophets originally applied only to the Jews but were correctly extended to everybody, including the idea of “love your neighbor”. The term “eaten on the mountains” means to have eaten the meat sacrificed to variants of El or Yahweh on the “high places” of the north, and thus to have committed idolatry in the eyes of the southern priests of Judea.

* I felt God say to me: “What do you mean using within Israel this proverb: ‘Parents eat sour grapes yet their children’s teeth rot?’ I am the living God of life. This proverb will no longer be spoken among Israelites. All lives are mine to dispose of. I look over the life of the parent and the lives of the children. Only the person who sins will suffer. If a man is righteous and does what is just and right, if he does not eat on the mountains, raise his eyes to the idols that beset Israel, does not have sex with another man’s wife, does not have sex with a menstruating woman, has not wronged anyone, has returned the collateral for a loan, has not stolen anything or defrauded anyone, has given bread to the hungry and clothing to the poor, has not done anything wrong and has carried out true justice for all people, has acted honestly, has followed my laws and rules, then he is righteous. This kind of man will live fully.” That is what God said to me. ... God continues: “If a man has obeyed my rules and laws, he will not die for the wrong of his parents but will live his own life. Be clear that the father personally, because he defrauded, robbed his brother [fellow man], and bullied his kin, the father did die for that. But now you ask, ‘Why isn’t the son guilty too? Why shouldn’t the son be punished too?’ Because the son did what is right and just, and carefully kept all my laws. That is why. The son will live. The sinner alone will die. A child will not share a parent’s guilt or be punished for a parent’s crime. The goodness of a righteous person will go to him alone, and the evil of a bad person will go to him alone. If a bad person repents of all his sins, keeps my laws, and does right, then he will live. He will not die. None of his sins will be held against him. Because he repented and acted rightly, he will live. Do I really want a bad person to die right away? No. I would rather a wicked person repent and live.” *

AMOS 5, much of the chapter. Social Justice.

The “gate” was the place in town where people went to seek public justice. It would be the county court in traditional America or England. Prominent people of the community kept court at the gate, and were expected to judge cases impartially there. If a person could not find justice on a personal level, the person would go to the gate. Poor people, widows, and orphans went to the gate because they had little other recourse. Anyone who could not find justice at the gate could only appeal to God. The warning to people that have built fine houses but will not be able to live in them now is particularly suited to the housing crisis of 2008 and after in America.

* Listen you who pervert justice into bitter white powders

And stomp on righteousness!

Seek God.

Who made the stars and the star people?

Who blossoms dawn through the darkness

And folds the flower of daylight into night?

Who lifts the vapor out of the ocean

So that it will fall back as rain on the earth?

His name is Yahweh!

He overthrows London, Moscow, Peking, and Washington

So that world powers crumble into humble beggars.

Connivers hate plain justice at the gate

And despise an obvious just case.

Be sure of this:

Because you unfairly tax the poor,

Because you pass a sales tax on food [and clothing],

Even though you have built your Mc-mansion of stone,

You will not live in it.

You may travel to chic vineyards

But your guts will curdle on their wine.

Through me God sees your budding selfish crimes,

Sees how uncountable are your sins.

You are enemies of simple righteous people,

You take bribes in devious ways,

You subvert the simple justice at the gate of common sense,

You make more desperate the needy.

Alas in such a world and evil time

A prudent man shuts up to save his own skin.

Seek good and not evil

So you might live

And so that God, the commander of the armies of life,

Might really guide you.

Hate evil while loving good,

And give true simple justice to the weepers at the gate.
Maybe then God, the commander of the armies of life,
Will embrace again the remaining children of Joseph. ...

I detest and avoid your festivals,
Your patriotic upsurges and days of commitment and remembrance.
Your churches, congresses, and prayer meetings do not move me.
You might offer me burnt offerings, meal offerings,
Or any sacrifice;
I refuse them all.
I ignore your gifts of fatted cattle and public devotion.
Spare me the hymns and fancy speeches.
[Spare me your TV evangelists and mega-churches.]
I cannot stand your grand chorales
Or your religious pop songs.
Instead let justice pour out into small glasses like cool water,
And let righteousness be an unfailing cool stream to quench thirst. *

JONAH 3 and 4. Extending God's Domain.

The book of Jonah is short. Most Christians know Jonah because he was carried inside a large fish for three days, which Christians take to be a sign of Jesus lying dead for three days before being resurrected. I think that is the least important part of Jonah and it is not a "pre-figuration" of Jesus at all. Jonah was a Jew. The Assyrians had just conquered Israel and destroyed the northern kingdom. Nineveh was their capital. God told Jonah to go preach in Nineveh. Jonah refused because, as a Jew, he hated all Assyrians. To keep God's grace from Assyrians was the greatest punishment Jonah could inflict on them, and to give them God's grace was the greatest reward. Jonah did not want to help Assyria. God forced Jonah to go to Assyria by punishing Jonah with the fish. Finally Jonah went, and what happened is as below. Jonah's story is a powerful statement of generalizing God beyond any immediate chosen people, or beyond any people who think they are the new chosen people such as some Christians in America; and a powerful statement of repentance and forgiveness.

* Growing impatient, Yahweh said to Jonah for a second time: "Go right now to the world capital Nineveh (Washington, Peking, Moscow, Paris, or London), stand on street corners, and tell them what I have told you. So reluctantly Jonah went to Nineveh out of obedience to God's command..."

After walking a day, Jonah set up in Nineveh and began to declare, "In only forty days, God will overthrow Nineveh". Amazingly, the people of Nineveh believed Jonah. In repentance, they declared a fast, and everybody put on sackcloth. The king too believed and joined the mourning, even taking off his robes and sprinkling ashes on himself. He sent criers throughout Nineveh saying: "The king declares that neither man nor beast will eat or drink. Animals will not graze or water. Men and beasts will put on sackcloth. People will pray loudly to God. Everyone must repent and quit doing evil and injustice. Maybe God will change his mind and relent. He might not punish us so that we might not all die."

God saw what they did, how they changed their hearts, and how they quit doing evil and injustice. God lifted the punishment and spared them.

Jonah was disappointed and angry at God. He prayed to Yahweh, saying, "O, Yahweh! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in Israel? That is why I ran away first to Tarshish and would not go to Nineveh. For I know that you are a compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, full of kindness, quick to lift punishment when people repent in their hearts. Please, Yahweh, kill me, for I would rather die than live to see the enemies of my people become good themselves, receive your grace, and have a relation with you." Yahweh replied, "Are you really so unhappy that my goodness might come to a people other than yours?" *

God continued to educate Jonah and Israel but I do not relate the lessons here. Please read the short book of Jonah to see for yourself.

ISAIAH. More Social Justice.

Isaiah is probably the most influential prophet and the best-known prophet. As with other books of the Bible (including books in both the Tanakh and New Testament), the book of Isaiah was written by more than one person, in this case at least two people, and probably at least three. I do not go into whether this multiple authorship is a kind of "lying" and I do not go into implications for what is to count as the inspired word of God. People can select from Isaiah to support many points, some conflicting. I select to support the ideas that God wanted social justice, and that God would not accept any standard worship unless Israel had first achieved minimum standards of social justice. Doing the will of God through social justice is more important than correct worship. These topics are relevant to Jesus and to the modern world. The "mount" is where Jerusalem sits. The "house" is the temple and all that it symbolizes. The mount is called "Zion", which term also means Jerusalem, Israel, or the Hebrews. Isaiah addresses Israel as if it were Sodom and Gomorrah, that is, a bad and rebellious place; he does not literally mean Sodom and Gomorrah. Many images and phrases from Isaiah have become part of common speech without people knowing where they come from, much as with images and phrases from Shakespeare. I did these passages on Monday 29 September 2008, just as Congress approved the bailout for the financial crisis that was caused by government mismanagement and by the greed of financiers and house-buyers. The much shorter book of Micah also condemns greed and social injustice.

Isaiah 1: 10 - 23.

* Hear the word of Yahweh,
You leaders of Sodom.
Hear God's teaching,
You common folk of Gomorrah.
Yahweh says,
"Do you think I need all your sacrifices and outward piety?
I am sick up to here with burnt offerings of rams,
The suet of fatted animals,
And the blood of bulls.
I can't stand your lambs and billy goats.

Who asked you to present your face to me?
Sully my courtyards no more.
Your gifts are useless to me and to you.
Your incense stinks.
Your new moon and Sabbath festivals are
So much clang and clatter to me.
Pomp, ceremonies, and obligatory Congressional sessions that perpetrate official thievery,
Sicken me.
I can't stand them or you anymore.
When you raise your hands to me
I turn away my face.
If you prayed for a week straight,
I would not listen.
Instead, destroy your evil instruments
In my sight, Stop doing evil,
Learn to do good,
Devote yourselves to justice,
Aid the needy and the victims,
Support orphans, widows, [children, and the homeless]. “
God invited the Israelites,
“Come, let us understand each other”.
“Even if your sins are red as blood,
I can turn them white as snow.
Even if they are as red as dyed wool,
I can turn them back to natural fleece.
If you agree and act sincerely,
You will eat from all the goodness of the earth.
But if you refuse and disobey,
Violence will eat you inside and outside”.
Those were the words of Yahweh.

“Jerusalem (Washington) has become like a cheap whore
Where once she was like a faithful wife
Full of judicious advice,
A city where once lived good wise people
But is now the hideout of murderers.
Your shiny cars, shiny houses, and new streets
Now are covered with rust, slime, and dust.
Your wine is cut with water.
Your leaders are gangsters
Who cover up for thieves,
Every one with a hand out for more
And greedy for something under the table.
They never bring aid to the orphan
And the widow's cry never tingles their deaf ears. *

Isaiah 2: 2 - 4 .

* Someday and for ever after,
The mountain of Yahweh's temple
Will stand above all other mountains [nations]
And above all other hills.
All nations and peoples
Will look on it with joy.
The many various peoples will say:
"Come together to the house of the God of Jacob
Where he will teach us how to live
And we will follow as he teaches."
Teaching will come from Zion,
A message from Yahweh out of Jerusalem.
He will judge disputes among the nations.
They will re-forge their spears into electronic games.
No more will one nation aim a gun at another's heart.
War will be forgotten forever.*

Isaiah 56: 6 - 8.

* Some foreigners
Believe in Yahweh,
Tend to his ceremonies,
[Observe his Laws as they can],
Serve him openly,
Keep the Sabbath openly and do not conduct normal business on the Sabbath,
And seek constantly a tight relation with him through his Covenant.
"I will lead them to my sacred mountain,
And let them join us in the joy of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices [Their donations of service and wealth]
Will be welcome on My alter.
People around the world will call My temple a house of prayer for all ethnicities [and religions]."

So spoke Yahweh.

"As many as the leaders of Israel gather back the dispersed people of Israel,
As many or more will I add to what they gather." *

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.

Chapter 3.04 Christian Variations 1: Classical to Protestant

This chapter and the next describe some stances within Christianity. For the chapters on Jesus later, you can get by without these chapters, but, if you meet terms there that you do not know, you might have to return here. This chapter goes from the classical statement of standard orthodox Christianity through Protestantism. The United States has 30,000 Christian divisions. I am not interested in some differences that people find important, such as whether or not to baptize children. I am interested in how the magic of Jesus-as-God-coming-dying-resurrecting-returning took over from the moral teachings of Jesus as the basis for a Christian life. The next part of the book looks at the Bible and at early Christian history. The term “teachings” includes teachings, sayings, parables, the implications of Jesus’ actions, and his program for the Kingdom of God.

From Jesus to Nicea. Christian beliefs were standardized at a council in 325 CE (AD) (see below). A lot happened between Jesus’ death and the Council. For now, I skip over what happened in between to jump directly to orthodoxy. I cover Jesus’ life and the events after his death in the next part of the book.

Classical Orthodoxy: the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed declares what orthodox Christians believe. It grew in a process starting in 325 CE (AD). It was pretty much completed by 381 CE (AD) in a Council at Nicea in what is now Turkey. The original was in Greek. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America translated it into English as below. When I went to church as a boy, every week the entire congregation recited the Nicene Creed in both Greek and English.

I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father through Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And He rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; And he will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets. In one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen.

The Creed was shaped by theological disputes that are not as intense now so it might not be apparent why all the clauses are there. In the phrase “Who for us men and for our salvation”, I think the Greek term translated “us men” (“tous anthropos”) is really gender neutral and includes both men and women. I translate it “we people” to yield “Who for we people and for our salvation”. “Catholic” does

not mean “Roman Catholic” but means “entire” or “whole” or “complete” and applies to all Christian churches that accept the Nicene Creed. Originally all Christian churches were catholic in this sense but not Roman Catholic. The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church use different versions of the Creed that emphasize different relations between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Different versions played a role in the separation between the Eastern and Western Churches. The details are not important here. I think most Protestant churches use the Roman Catholic version, or a modification, because the Roman Catholic version shows the influence of Augustine, and Protestant churches generally follow Augustine; but I did not check each church. Specific churches modified the Creed for their particular needs. For other versions in several languages, see Wikipedia. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 clarified the ideas from Nicea, in particular the divinity, humanity, and dual nature of Jesus. Those two councils defined orthodoxy for Christians from then up to the present. Chalcedon is now part of Istanbul, Turkey, but was then an outlier of Constantinople.

Key Ideas.

Notice some ideas the Creed asserts, sometimes through only a word or phrase:

Rather than Jesus’ teachings, the church stresses the special status of Jesus as God and stresses his special life events. The expected return of Jesus, the “Second Coming” is added to the special events of his history.

The Trinity

The preexistence of Jesus as God

The existence of Jesus as both divine and human

The fact that Jesus preexisted as God and then became human suggests the magic of his birth, especially suggests the virgin birth.

The crucifixion has magical efficacy. It is not clear what all the crucifixion does but it is generally taken that our sins are forgiven and we are saved.

The resurrection

The necessary return of Jesus

Jesus had some kind of physical body during his life and at resurrection

The importance of rituals such as baptism

The importance of a single verified Church (apostolic succession)

The distinction of the prophets from God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit so that Jesus was not merely a prophet but fully God

The main results of Jesus' activities are to produce a world divided between salvation and non-salvation, and to allow for salvation. The chief relevance to this world of Jesus' actions is to create the possibility of salvation. There is only salvation and non-salvation.

Salvation has to do only with Jesus coming, dying, being resurrected, and returning.

The Kingdom begins after Jesus returns and it is an entire world order like a state. It is a real kingdom in whatever kind of reality prevails after Jesus returns.

No intrinsic role for Mary or the saints

Implications of the Nicene Creed.

The resurrected Jesus was not a disembodied spirit or a re-animated corpse. He had a physical body that normal humans would recognize as a physical body, though his body was better than a regular body. Jesus' resurrection was the first in a mass resurrection and renewal of the world. Christians expect to be resurrected in quasi-physical bodies sometime after they die. If Jesus returns when they are still alive, then their bodies will be changed into the better physical bodies of the saved.

This idea was not as strange at the time of Jesus as it is to us now but it was not a common idea even then and it was not easily accepted. Non-Christians then did not think of being resurrected. If they did think of life after death, they would become a spirit without a physical body at all. The Christian idea of a real physical resurrection was part of what made Christianity unique and so hard for some people to accept. People that did accept Christianity had to leap from their old religious base; they had a "conversion experience". Not everybody then understood the physical resurrection in the same way as do modern theologians but it was still an odd idea.

Salvation is not a question of getting Jesus' teaching. You do not have to understand anything or to do anything other than accept Jesus of the Creed and accept the Church. No items of Jesus' teaching are in the Nicene Creed.

None of the teachings of Jesus, his program, or any behavior expected of a Christian in accord with the teachings or program, are mentioned in the Creed. Critics of orthodoxy sometimes say the Church is interested only in Jesus' death and resurrection while it is not interested in his life. The Creed allows the Church to select from Jesus' teaching what it wants to stress and to overlook what it wishes to ignore. Other statements of dogma recall Jesus' teachings but they might not have the status of the Nicene Creed.

Jesus' coming, dying, resurrection, and expected return were not intended to change this world but to allow for salvation out of this world. The new world of the Kingdom might be a new world entirely or it might be a transformation of this world but it is not just this world.

The Church controls the rituals and the content of faith. The Church controls access to salvation.

Salvation comes in two steps and only two steps: by Jesus' action as God and by accepting the Church. Salvation comes automatically to some people as a result of Jesus coming, dying, being resurrected, returning and by their accepting the Church.

Salvation is a magic result of Jesus' coming, dying, resurrection, and expected return. Theologians have spent much effort on explaining the magic, in particular how Jesus' death automatically caused original sins to be forgiven, other sins to be forgiven, and caused people to be saved. I do not think they have succeeded.

Part of the explanation for the magic of salvation through Jesus includes just exactly who Jesus was as messiah, his status, especially as messiah. If we can figure out how Jesus was special, then we can figure out why the magic works. Theologians have not figured this out either.

It is unclear if there is room for a relation with God or Jesus or the Holy Ghost apart from accepting the magic of Jesus' coming, dying, being resurrected, and expected return. If there is room, it is not clear what role a relation with Jesus, God, or the Holy Spirit might play in salvation, and what the character of the relation might be.

Because the Kingdom is not of this world, it is not a state of mind in this world, and it is not made out of a subgroup of people that follow Jesus' teachings about this world. It is apart from this world even if it comes from this world and even if the inhabitants are people with physical bodies. Of course, the Church is a subgroup of people in this world. It is in this world for now, although some theologians describe it as in both worlds. The situation with it is as if a branch of the Kingdom opened here first. The members of the Church Kingdom here are defined in that they believe in Jesus as God (coming, dying, resurrection, and return) and they believe in the authority of the Church.

But the Church is not necessarily any group that follows a particular teaching apart from this core. The Church is not intrinsically an agency to promote "do unto others", social club, socio-economic class, soup kitchen, victims' compensation agency, state agency, private agency, immigrants' legal agent, family values promoter, anti-abortion activist group, business booster, or rich person's club.

More Orthodoxy.

Within the above points there is room for interpretation and variation. Here are some additional points decided by the Church.

Like Jesus after his resurrection, the residents of the Kingdom are not just disembodied spirits although they are more spiritual than we are. The residents have real physical bodies. Their bodies are not subject to all the physical limitations of current bodies, and are somehow "improved", but they are still physical. (The West has wonderful ideas about body-ness and sensation that figure into ideas about what it means to be human rather than a computer or an angel; but I cannot go into it here. See "City of Angels" with Nicholas Cage and Meg Ryan, and the Star Trek TNG movie "First Contact" where Data kills the Borg Queen.)

Contrary to popular ideas, neither the Creed nor the Bible says Christians go to heaven when they die so as to “be with Jesus” forever as spirits. The Creed and Bible do not say what happens to people when they die. We only know we too will be resurrected at last. For the people that die before Jesus returns, neither the Creed nor the Bible says what happens to them after they die but before they are resurrected. There is a heaven but neither the Creed nor the Bible says what role it plays. The people that die before Jesus returns might reside in heaven temporarily or they might not.

To the extent that there is a Kingdom on this earth before the Second Coming of Jesus transforms this earth, that Kingdom is the Church.

The Church acts as representative of Jesus.

The Church has the right to decide who will go to the Kingdom and who will not, that is who will be saved and who will not. As representative of Jesus, the Church judges the living and the dead. There is no salvation outside the Church.

Bishops are the backbone of the Church. Other offices that have grown out of bishop, especially that are higher than bishop, such as Pope or Patriarch, are the major bones in the backbone.

The Church mediates any possible relation between people and God or Jesus. People cannot have a direct relation with God or Jesus apart from the Church.

Different churches have defined and explained relations with God and Jesus differently, and the experiences of their members have differed.

In theory, Jesus died for our sins and so we should be saved automatically unless we persist in bad sin. In practice, and by special delegation from Jesus through Peter, the Church actually decides whose sins are forgiven and what sins are forgiven. If salvation depends on having sins forgiven, then the Church decides on who is saved or damned.

It is not clear if Jesus died for everybody’s sins and saved everybody, or died only for believers, correct believers, members of the Church, or members of the Church who are also correct believers. Early Christians interpreted it various ways. The Church decided that people could only be saved through the Church, so it seems as if Jesus died only for Church members. I do not know if members also have to believe correctly or not, and how far they may deviate.

The Church developed many kinds of institutions for many kinds of temperaments and abilities, including lay monks and nuns, confirmed monks and nuns, ascetic monks and nuns, lay helpers of all kinds, married priests and celibate priests, bishops, higher level officers with various duties, and a powerful hierarchy. This complex of institutions was able to keep nearly all people within the Church for about 1500 years, and is still able to keep in nearly all people who are born in. The closest approximation outside of the Christian Church would be if Hinduism were formally institutionalized.

From the beginning, at least some Christians have been concerned with helping people beyond the usual social norms of helping. The Church usually provided institutional means for expressing this

desire, such as the means to help during widespread illness, to give to the poor, and to found orphanages, hospitals, and schools.

Officially the Church remained neutral in politics, and remained neutral between the rich and the poor.

The sources of authority for the Church are: the Bible, the traditions of the Church, and apostolic succession including the authority of the bishops and higher officers. It is not clear which of these three contributors has highest authority in all cases. In practice, the bishops and higher officers decide. The bishops and higher officers really do put a lot of emphasis on the Bible and on traditions, and the actual weight varies in particular cases. The Church tends to well-document and well think-out decisions.

My Bias.

I offer a warning before I talk about Roman Catholics and Protestants. I do not think any church properly represented Jesus or his teachings, even at the start of Christianity; so what I say here does not reflect any allegiance to any Church. I have not considered myself Greek Orthodox since I was about 13 years old although my early training still colors my view now. The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church split before Protestant churches split from Rome or each other. The Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church split mostly due to cultural differences between East and West, and for political reasons. To me, the Roman Catholic Church separated from the original Church in the first of a series of schisms of which the West seems to be prone. Later Protestant separations from Rome seem only a continuation of the Western tendency to schism begun by Rome. The first Protestant schism came about 150 years after the official separation of Rome and the East. Whether the line of schisms is for good or bad depends on your analysis.

Augustine.

Probably the greatest influence on all Church doctrine has been various interpretations of Paul. Interpretations of Paul have been more important even than the teachings of Jesus. I think Paul has been misinterpreted since shortly after he wrote in about 40-60 CE (AD). Probably the greatest single influence on Western church dogma has been Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 CE (AD)), especially as he used Paul. He was one of the smartest people in the history of the world, but I still reject his ideas. Before he was a Christian, he was Manichean dualist and in training to be a lawyer. I think he remained a dualist of good and evil, and a lawyer, after he became a Christian, and he strongly increased those tendencies in Western Christianity. His ideas:

Original Sin.

Christianity is about being saved or being damned. To explain why we are likely to be damned but can be saved, Augustine remade the idea of Original Sin. Due to Adam and Eve accepting the Forbidden Fruit from Satan, all people are now evil and the world is irretrievably fallen. We all inherit the taint of Original Sin, and the taint affects our personalities. All of us are born damned, and we naturally seek to do only evil. We are not just a mixture of good and bad, we are all evil. We cannot look for good within ourselves. We can only be saved by a power apart from ourselves. The evil of Adam and Eve spread from them to the entire world. The world might have started out good, but is good no longer. Even

animals and plants are more selfish, cunning, ruthless, poisonous, less useful, harder to tend, and more evil than when God originally made them.

As far as I can tell, the idea of original sin, especially the idea that original sin is passed on from Adam and Eve to all of us, is not in the Tanakh. The idea that the world is irretrievably fallen and overall evil also is not in the Tanakh. The Hebrews had ideas of an inherent human tendency to do bad and to resist good but that tendency was not the same as original sin or as the idea that we are all evil. I mentioned this topic before and I will say more on it later in the book.

Justification and Legalism.

Augustine had a typically Western legalistic interpretation of relations among God, Jesus, people, church, sin, and salvation. To be saved, we have to be justified. Jesus saves by justifying first. It is not entirely clear what "justification" is. Paul used the term "justification" but Augustine took over and modified the term far from Paul's original use. To me, it is as if each person is on trial both for original sin and for all the sins that he-she committed in life. God is both judge and sometimes prosecutor; Jesus is both defense lawyer and prosecutor; and the church is sometimes jury, defense lawyer, and prosecutor. To be saved means to be cleared of our crimes, including the crime of Original Sin, even if we did not personally commit the crime of Original Sin. We really do have crimes and we really have to be cleared of our crimes. We have to be justified to God. Jesus' coming, dying, resurrection, and expected return are a kind of legalistic courtroom dramatic ploy (rather like Matlock) to somehow counteract our guilt and to win us a "not guilty" verdict, or to win us a good plea bargain, even in the face of clear evidence against us. A legalistic view of life and religion does NOT come from the Jewish idea of the Law. As far as I can tell, it comes directly from European culture, and is thoroughly a part of American culture. America does not have the most lawyers per person in the world (by far) because of some inheritance from Judaism but because Americans and Europeans are litigious by culture.

Nobody can justify him-herself.

No actions can make up for original sin and the ongoing depravity of human nature. Nobody can change his character enough to make up for original sin, or even to make good preponderate over bad apart from original sin. On the basis of strict judgment alone, we are doomed.

Only Jesus or the church can justify us to save us.

Jesus already did it magically by coming, dying, being resurrected, and promising to return. The Church continues to have the power to bestow or withhold Jesus' gift.

Grace.

Nobody can even choose by his-her own free will to accept the justification and salvation offered by Jesus and the church. People can be justified and saved only if God softens their hearts through Grace. Salvation comes through God's grace. The Church can play a role in helping us achieve God's grace but it is not entirely clear what the role is. If the Church is necessary for God's grace, then, in effect, acceptance by the Church takes the place of God's grace.

Predestination.

People are predestined to be saved or damned even before they are born. People can freely choose to accept or reject God's grace but God already knows beforehand what choice they will make. The people that God chooses to be saved are called "the Elect". This idea is not very important in this book but it is so commonly known that I could not leave it out.

Church.

We participate in the justification offered by Jesus and the grace offered by God only through the church.

Filioque.

Augustine accepted the Filioque Clause of the Nicene Creed in which the Holy Spirit comes from Jesus and the Father, and so is subordinate to Jesus rather than co-equal with Jesus and the Father. Perhaps Augustine wished to stress the role of Jesus in justification, salvation, and this world.

The Roman Catholic Church Lightens Up.

Augustine was not nearly as influential in the East as in the West. The Roman Catholic Church accepted Augustine's ideas but also realized how severe they were, and realized they would dismay the average person. It modified his stand to allow people to feel better and to participate in a wide variety of church institutions. It allowed that actions can show intent, and so actions do play a role in justification and salvation. The most important actions are sacraments done under the auspices of the Church such as baptism.

In theory, we cannot know God's will and thus cannot know for sure if any person is justified and saved. In practice, the Roman Catholic Church can certify that a person is justified and saved. Any church member who believes correctly, practices sacraments such as confession, and participates in the institutions of the Church can feel fairly sure that he-she is justified and saved, and so need not fear much. The proprietary role that the Church takes in bestowing Jesus' gift and God's grace becomes not a threat but a way to more widely give the gifts and a way to give people reassurance.

Protestantism.

I think the two main reasons for the rise of Protestantism are:

(1) *The rise of nationalism.* The various folk within Europe no longer wished to be under the control of any power far away, religious or secular.

(2) *The rise of capitalism and of business people.* Business people felt in charge of their own fate, did not feel damned in the way taught by the Roman Catholic Church, wished to keep and use their riches, and did not wish to be under distant authority. The Roman Catholic Church did not keep up with the modern

world of the times and with the needs of its new people. The Roman Catholic Church did not keep up with the new forms of capitalism and the social groups that resulted.

The Roman Catholic Church had created institutions in the past to accommodate most forms of human nature and social life but it “missed the boat” in this case. I do not know if the oversight in this case is because some aspects of human nature and social life cannot be accommodated within Roman Catholicism or because of this particular historical situation. Roman Catholic officials might not have been “swift enough” in this case. In the Counter Reformation, Roman Catholic officials made up for many earlier oversights.

High school textbooks say that the Reformation began when Martin Luther objected to the general corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, and in particular to the sale of the alleviation of punishment for sins (“Indulgences”). That is a vast oversimplification, into which I do not go here. It is better not to think of it in these terms.

Protestantism was a complex movement with many kinds of participants: nobility that wished to maximize their power and to keep the tax revenues from their territories, large-scale town capitalists, small-scale town capitalists, and groups of small-scale artisans and merchants. Not all had the same motives, and not all got the same things by joining the new movement. Not all formed the same kinds of institutions (churches) to accommodate their desires. Instead of diversifying institutions within a single main home church and so keeping unity, Protestants tend to break into different churches each of which has its own kind of parishioner and its own character as a church. The various Protestant churches do have doctrinal differences, but, to me, it seems as if the doctrines are more the means of establishing and keeping boundaries and group identity than are items of theology that parishioners really understand and care about.

Established Protestant churches such as Lutherans and Episcopalians hardly differ from the Roman Catholic Church in rituals or in what the average member believes (regardless of official doctrine), so it is probably better to see those churches as having arisen and become strong because of the desire for regional autonomy. Even many more “extreme” Protestant churches got a lot of their impetus from regional autonomy, including Calvinist Reformed (Swiss and Dutch), Baptist (Eastern Germanic), Methodist (English), and Presbyterian (Scottish) churches.

Small churches, such as the associated “Churches of Christ”, can differ from Roman Catholic worship although they do not necessarily differ that much from some allowed special groups within the Roman Catholic Church. I think these small churches were primarily about similar people giving each other financial, political, medical, social, intellectual, legal, and other help. Having a small church, and using a particular theology in the small church, kept similar people together and excluded dissimilar others so that mutual help could do the most good and would not be wasted. I know from seeing for myself that is still how Protestantism recruits and keeps many people in the Third World. I do not deny that doctrine and practice can be important to these church members but we also have to keep in mind the greater social context.

The resulting mix of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is not much different than the diversity of Hinduism. If all Christian churches could be brought together in one comprehensive organization it would

be like institutionalized Hinduism. Protestantism is like to the Roman Catholic Church as Buddhism is to Hinduism, and for many of the same reasons.

Protestant Ideas.

Some key doctrines, practices, and beliefs of Protestant churches are as below. The Roman Catholic Church recognizes some points of criticism but denies it made any fatal errors. Protestants are not faultless and they do make some of the same errors. The reader has to decide. Much of Protestantism seems like a return to strict legalistic Augustinianism.

Degeneration of Rome and Return to Original Christianity.

Protestants believed that the Roman Catholic Church had become corrupt, and did not represent Jesus. The Roman Catholic Church had lost apostolic continuity and authority. Opinion varied as to when the break occurred but some modern Protestants say it happened when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire about 313 (the Edict of Milan only officially made religious tolerance policy but it also de facto made Christianity the official religion too). Protestants felt the Roman Catholic Church could not be cured but had to be abandoned. To cure their religious selves of Roman diseases, Protestants wished to return to the correct beliefs and institutions of the early Christian Church as evident in the Bible before Rome dominated. It is harder to specify these beliefs and institutions than you might think.

Scripture Alone ("sola scriptura").

The Roman Catholic Church founds its authority on the Bible, the traditions of the Church, and the decisions of Church officers. Protestants say they found their authority on the Bible only. For Protestants, all items of belief and all institutions have to be founded on passages of the Bible.

The Roman Catholic Church counter-argues that the Bible nowhere declares itself to be the only foundation for Church belief and practice. The sole authority of the Bible is not in any Biblical passage and thus it is not a Biblical doctrine. To say that the Bible is the sole authority is somewhat idolatrous. The earliest Christians used traditions and the opinions of officials as foundation for beliefs and practices from the beginning, as is evident in passages of the New Testament.

Faith Alone ("sola fide").

Only faith in God and Jesus can lead to salvation. Faith alone does not insure salvation (see below) but it is necessary to salvation. Nothing else can substitute for faith, including sacraments, church membership, or good works. There is nothing bad in those as such but they cannot substitute for faith, and to think they can is to make a fatal mistake.

Protestants argued in this way to insure the Roman Catholic Church could not gain control over people by specifying and controlling any acts aimed at salvation, such as confession, penance, praying for the dead, giving donations, etc. Protestants did not want the Roman Catholic Church to set up any institutions for control.

To solidify this position, Martin Luther wished to remove the letter of James from the New Testament because James states clearly that faith without works is not enough, works are to be done, and works are not to be despised.

In stressing faith over works, Protestants fell back on an old Western dichotomy between the inside and outside, with the inside better than the outside. This dichotomy goes along with other dichotomies such as between spirit and matter, intention and law, organic and machine, and person and institution. Although Protestants intend to stress the first pole of all those dichotomies, and believe that Roman Catholics have stressed the second pole of those dichotomies, we will see that Protestants ended up stressing the second poles about as much as Roman Catholics. Protestants ended up depending on institutions and outside appearances about as much as Roman Catholics. Religious reformers say that they seek the balance between these dichotomies but I have not seen too many that actually achieve it.

Grace Alone ("sola gracia").

Faith opens the door to salvation but only God can step through the door or only God can pull us through the door. Faith is necessary but not enough. Intellectual knowledge of God alone is not enough. Demons have faith in God in that they know he exists but they are damned because they reject God. Membership in a church is not enough because (at least some and perhaps all) members of the Roman Catholic Church are not saved. God decides to whom he will extend grace or to whom he will deny grace.

If faith alone could produce salvation, then we could compel God to save us by believing in him. We might be able to force God to save us by believing in Him even if we were not very good people or if we did bad things. Faith alone could make up for a bad will or could make up for original sin. Demons could compel God to save them just by believing in him. None of this is acceptable.

Thus no set of criteria that we could meet could possibly be enough for salvation because then we could compel God by meeting that set of criteria.

So nothing we can do can save us; but, if we have faith, and do not follow faith with bad behavior, then there is a good chance God will extend grace and will save us.

Again, this attitude helps to prevent any church from establishing ideas or institutions that can intervene between God and any person, and that can bolster the power of the church. This attitude eliminates any need for the church, although the church can still be useful.

Do not disparage this attitude. This attitude speaks to deep powerful feelings in most human beings. We all feel helpless sometimes. We all know that we need help sometimes. We all know that just to wish for help is not enough, and that just needing help alone is not enough. We all know that we have a lot of bad in us and that we are not deeply worthy even if we have a good side. Someone has to reach out to us. This Protestant attitude acknowledges these human realities and gives people hope in the face of these realities. If you have not felt something like this deeply at least sometime in your life then you have missed out on something truly human.

Christ Alone ("Solus Christus").

Since Jesus, the only way to God's grace is to accept Jesus' coming, dying, resurrection, and expected return. There is no other way to God or God's grace except Jesus.

We can and should establish a personal relation with Jesus by accepting who he is and what he did for us. This point sets up the idea of a personal relation with Jesus that is common among modern evangelicals.

In the early Church, this idea of salvation only through Jesus likely was aimed at Jews who did not accept the idea that Jesus was God. Since the rise of Protestantism, I think the primary target of the idea has been the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church cannot substitute for God or Jesus. We have to have a direct relation to Jesus-God.

Glory to God Alone ("Solo Deo Gloria").

Protestants felt that the respect people gave to the Roman Catholic Church, its officials, its institutions, Mary, and the saints, was a kind of idolatry. At the least, respect to humans or to institutions gets in the way of giving proper respect to God. Unless we focus on God alone, we can get diverted. To get diverted from God is to lose hope of grace and of salvation. So we should worship God alone. God includes Jesus.

Biblical Inerrancy.

If you base religion on the Bible alone, then the Bible had better be accurate, infallible, complete, self-explanatory, free of contradictions, without need of hard interpretation, and without possibility for conflicting opinions. Not all Protestants claim all this for the Bible but many do. They claim that any limitations, contradictions, or variant interpretations are the fault of misguided people, limited human intelligence, or bad intentions. If we only pay attention to the Bible, it will tell us all we need to know without confusion. The way to express these ideas is to call the Bible "the inspired Word of God". The Holy Spirit inspired the writers.

Of course, Protestants do conflict, the Bible is not internally consistent, and the Bible is not an accurate scientific portrayal of the world. Many Protestants just deny these simple facts in a kind of blind holding action.

If Protestants were to accept the limitations and true character of the Bible, then they could not use it alone as the basis for faith and institutions. They would have to allow the need for interpretation, traditions, and institutions. In other words, they would come over to the general Orthodox (including Roman Catholic) position, although they could still disagree on many specifics.

Of course, in actual practice, Protestants do offer different interpretations, and do appeal to tradition, authority, and institutions. That is why the United States has 30,000 different Protestant groups. Protestants keep their interpretations as much as possible within the bounds of the core Protestant ideas listed above, and they try to appeal only to accepted Protestant sources of tradition and authority such as

Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Lutheran Church, and the Reformed Church. Few Protestants accept an interpretation of the Bible other than that given by the church into which they were born or into which they converted.

Two casualties of this attitude are science in general and Darwinian evolution in particular. It is possible to offer a logically coherent alternative to science and to Darwin but it is not at all convincing to anybody with open eyes. It amazes me how much some Protestants twist the truth so as to fight science and to preserve the Bible in their own eyes. Roman Catholics did the same in their time as well. They are wrong, and they betray God's work in creating our intellect and our senses. The Roman Catholic Church now accepts most of modern science, including Darwinian evolution.

The Roman Catholic Church rightly points out that allowing anybody or any church to interpret the Bible inevitably calls forth a multitude of personal interpretations, invites schism, and makes ordinary people confused and open to bad ideas. Without central authority, the Church inevitably breaks apart, even when it has a single common central text of God's inspired Word. Protestants rightly respond back that accepting somebody else's interpretation is to give up personal integrity, makes ordinary people confused, makes ordinary people open to somebody else's bad ideas, and intrudes somebody or some church between a person and God. It substitutes grace from an institution for grace from God. The Roman Catholic Church rightly points out that most Protestants do accept the interpretation of somebody else, in their case the opinions of some people within their own particular Protestant church rather than the opinions of the Roman Catholic Church. Few people even read the Bible, even Protestants, let alone interpret it for themselves. The Roman Catholic Church points out that, if we begin to allow traditions, authorities, and institutions, then we have to go back to the earliest obvious ones, and that path very likely takes us back to the Church and to the Bible as understood by the pre-split Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

I say that all groups, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant, use standards to interpret the Bible other than the Bible; use authority, traditions, and institutions; and use standards in addition to authority, traditions, and institutions. They use additional standards even when they say they work only within a Biblical framework, or even when they say they use only the traditions, authorities, and institutions of their church or of the early church. Additional standards include ideas of fairness that prevail in their culture, any biases and prejudices that prevail in their culture, fear of power, desire to appease power, desire for power, and ideals of Western morality as in the great works of literature and philosophy. Because the Bible is not accurate, infallible, complete, self-explanatory, free of contradiction, easy to interpret, and free of possible conflicting interpretations, there is no logical way out of the dilemmas.

Direct Relation With God and Jesus.

Protestants emphasize a direct relation with God and Jesus unmediated by any large church. Some Protestant groups call this "having a personal relation with Jesus". Partly they do this out of inner feelings and partly they do this to minimize any possibility that the Roman Catholic Church can define the content of religion and so control worshippers. Protestants recruit (evangelize) by encouraging people to cultivate their own personal relation with Jesus.

I do not judge what people call a personal relation with Jesus. I made having a relation with God part of my beliefs, so I appreciate the importance of having a personal relation with Jesus.

I do point out that Protestants deny this relation can happen within the Roman Catholic Church but insist it can happen within their own Protestant church. In fact, the Protestants I have known who have a personal relation with Jesus seem to need to share this relation with other people of the same church and seem best able to express this relation within the context of church activity and church doctrine. They seem to need their church to have a personal relation with Jesus as much as Roman Catholics need the church to fulfill their religion. I have met Roman Catholics that seem to have a personal relation with Jesus and who see no problem in showing their personal relation with Jesus to other Roman Catholics or expressing their personal relation with Jesus through the activities of their church. I have seen Hindus who seem to have this kind of relation with some manifestation of Vishnu or Shiva. I have known Buddhists who have this kind of personal relation with “Lord Mother Kuan Im” (in Chinese, “Kwan Yim”), the high Goddess, a future Buddha. She is very like Mary Queen of Heaven. I have seen animists have personal relations with various spirits such as the spirit of a great tree, and these spirits are not demons to their devotees. For a while, many Americans had a real relationship with a personal animal spirit companion such as Eagle. Protestants need to think about why their relation with Jesus might be genuine and why the relation of other people with Jesus or with other deities might be false, and they need to think about the role of social context in the creation and shaping of this special relation with Jesus. All Christians need to think about why a personal relation with Jesus is different than the devotion to any personal deity such as found in some kinds of Hinduism (“bhakti”); but that is another topic.

Simplifications.

Protestants simplified many features of Christianity, partly to aid church members in cultivating a direct personal relation with God and Jesus. Protestants see simplification as a return to the early church that arose after Jesus died. The church and the institutions that remained after simplification became quite strong.

Most Protestant churches eliminated private confession, although some small churches reintroduced public confession.

Other sacraments were eliminated, leaving only baptism, marriage, sometimes Holy Communion (Eucharist or the Lord's Supper), and sometimes confirmation. The sacraments that did remain mostly have to do with the “family values” that are needed for success and with church solidarity.

Some churches reduced the clergy to deacons, presbyters, and a church leader such as a minister. Perhaps to stress distinctions from Rome, some churches avoid the words “priest” and “bishop”. Instead they use “minister”, “pastor”, “reverend”, “preacher”, etc. Often I cannot remember what to call a church official. Small churches and fewer clergy ideally lead to less hierarchy and to more equality between members, that is, to more social justice within the church but the actual practice varies by church.

Married Clergy. After Luther, many churches allowed the clergy to marry. In this too, they believed they were returning to the early church, and point out that Peter and other important early church leaders were married.

After Luke defeats the Emperor in "Star Wars", he institutes reforms to minimize the possibility that another Sith might arise. Among the reforms was allowing marriage for the Jedi. I think Luke had a family.

Ecstatic Practices.

Protestants are more likely to speak in tongues, lay on hands, and prophesy. I do not go into this topic here.

Unity of Church and State.

John Calvin was one of the most important founders of Protestantism in the 1600s. Calvin merged the government of Geneva, Switzerland with the Protestant church there (even if the union was not declared in law). Since then, many Protestants see the ideal state as a theocracy, where the church controls the state. In the 1600s, Protestants almost succeeded in setting up a theocracy in England. Several of the early American colonies were church states. Protestants work to build theocracies even though they blame the fall from early pure Christianity on the union of church and state under Constantine, and apparently they do not see the contradiction. Maybe they think they can do better. It seems as if they think of a unified church-and-state as a version of the Kingdom of God on earth, or as one real manifestation of the Kingdom of God, despite the fact that the Kingdom of God is not supposed to be of this world. This idea of a unified church-and-state is strong in American fundamentalism despite denials by fundamentalists. I disagree totally with the unification of church and state. I insist on separation of church and state.

Attitudes.

Where Roman Catholics emphasize rituals such as confirmation, Protestants emphasize attitudes and associated experiences such as having a personal relation with Jesus and being "born again". Attitudes are key in Protestantism, even among groups that seem to wish to suppress many normal human emotions.

The combination of stressing attitudes but suppressing emotions seems odd and hypocritical to people outside of Protestantism, and it can have odd effects on social relations and institutions. The combination of attitudes and emotional suppression is a common theme in a type of American literature as represented by that perennial high school classic, "The Scarlet Letter".

Protestant Inside and Outside.

This section describes a Protestant dilemma that Max Weber made famous in his explanation of the role of Protestantism in capitalism. This section shows how Protestants tend to return to the outside pole of the inside-outside dichotomy. Once people believe they are either saved or damned, they cannot rest

ignorant of God's judgment. People need to know if they have received God's grace or not. Officially in Protestantism, there can be no signs. Unofficially, Protestants use signs. The signs of God's grace are also the signs of success in the world such as wealth, power, prominence, a good business, an office such as town mayor, a good marriage, and a good family including what biologists call "reproductive success". If you have one or more of these traits, you are saved. Otherwise you are likely damned. Members of the community have to respect the saved and have to go along with the saved, that is, with the rich and powerful. In contrast, members of the community may disrespect and otherwise exploit the damned, that is, the poor and weak. Eventually it became hard to tell whether people wanted wealth and power because those were signs of God's grace or because those were good in themselves and gave a license to exploit. Religion became the way to validate worldly success, an ironic inversion of the original goal of Jesus and a return to what Protestants had disliked about Roman Catholicism. Protestants once again became the caricature of the Pharisees that Christianity had condemned in its early development. Christianity once again lapsed into contradiction.

As an anthropologist, I think the actual direction of causes was likely backwards from the story told above: successful people got the church to validate markers of success by taking over the ideology of justification and salvation. I cannot go into the question any more here. Much of the reaction against Christianity and religion in the modern West has to do exactly with this hypocrisy. It seems very hard to root out this hypocrisy. I think it is based in human nature.

Chapter 3.05 Christian Variations 2: Enlightenment to Now

This chapter continues describing major stances within Christianity. This chapter goes from the Enlightenment to Romanticism to the present.

Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment covered most of the 1700s. I do not say much about it in particular because my beliefs reflect Enlightenment ideas so you get the Enlightenment through the rest of the book. Some Enlightenment thinkers would insist I prove the existence of the supernatural, which I cannot do. Some Enlightenment thinkers, called "Deists", would accept God but think that God hardly interferes with the world after he made it. Albert Einstein thought a bit like a deist. Most founders of the United States were Enlightenment thinkers, such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

The opposition of Reason versus Emotion is old in the West but takes a different form in each historical period. With the Enlightenment, we see the opposition between Reason and Emotion that still prevails now – watch any episode of the classic Star Trek. This opposition is simplistic and misleading, but people do believe in it, and sometimes it is useful. The Enlightenment stressed objective reason (logic), science, experiment, and the natural world. It downplayed emotion and mere opinion without reasons. It required evidence. If we cannot find evidence for the supernatural world, then we should not take it seriously. At the same time, the Enlightenment highly valued morality. It did not wish to give up morality even though it relied on the natural world and would not rely on the spiritual world. It wished to ground morality in nature, human nature, and logic. It did pretty well but did not succeed entirely.

The Enlightenment began the point of view which analyses the Bible as a secular text than as the revealed word of God. Modern understanding of the Bible began in the Enlightenment. The studies clarified meanings in the Bible and helped some modern people to greater faith. Modern fundamentalists do not like some of the methods and results.

Some Enlightenment thinkers denied Jesus was God, and denied the magical aspects of Jesus' life such as the virgin birth, the miracles, and the resurrection. They wished to find as much historical truth about Jesus as possible so they could discard the magic and save what was best. Enlightenment thinkers stressed the moral teachings of Jesus and the need to really act on the basis of his teachings. They set up the modern idea of Jesus as primarily a teacher of universal moral truths.

I disagree with some Enlightenment thinkers in that I accept the existence of God and so I accept the existence of the supernatural. I agree with Enlightenment thinkers in that I downplay supernatural intrusion into the natural world except to teach morality and to show the need for positive action to promote the good.

Romanticism.

Events in the late 1800s and early 1900s forced people to see that a large portion of us, likely the large majority, were not guided primarily by Enlightenment style logic and could not work for the smooth

progress of humankind. The American Revolution gave hope to rational progress but the French Revolution and the wars that followed overturned the hope. Democracy did not end all social evils but instead brought a new set of evils. Idealized capitalism promised prosperity; and a large minority did benefit; but we also got crushing poverty, slums, vast wealth detached from human sympathy, the business cycle, and another expansion of the state as business and state grew closer. People acted not by using their energy rationally to build a better world but on other grounds. Whatever those other grounds were, we had to take them into account and try to harness them to build a somewhat better world – if even that reduced goal was possible.

Eventually Enlightenment logic came up against the limitations of logic itself. Enlightenment thinkers realized that logic alone cannot provide a basis for morality and cannot even get people to act on practical daily affairs. Recall the donkey stuck between two exactly equal piles of hay. The donkey starves because it has no rational basis for choice. People need emotion and commitment as well as logic: Go into battle decisively.

Romantic thinkers founded their world on emotion and commitment. Modern people are more children of Romanticism than of the Enlightenment. We inherited the Romantic stress on emotion and commitment, as in the Star Wars movies: “Trust your feelings”, that is, commit to your feelings. These are the other grounds that we have to take into account. The Enlightenment accepted emotion but tried to keep it under the control of reason. The Romantics subordinated logic to emotion. Logic was merely the servant by which emotion most effectively got whatever it wanted. Whatever emotion wanted was what it wanted; ultimately there could be no further account. The heart has its reasons which the head cannot know. Because people are all emotional beings, as one emotional being, we can sympathetically feel the desires of other emotional beings, but we cannot explain them further.

All the ideas of the Romantic period appear in all other periods. There is not necessarily anything radically new. What differs is the entire assemblage of ideas, and the stress put on some ideas rather than others. Some ideas from the Romantic period were truly great. On the whole, though, Romanticism has been a disaster. Because modern life continues Romanticism, we continue the disaster, as in the polarization of American culture and politics after 1970. Jedi balance feelings and logic. Sith give over entirely to feelings; and we know what happens then. Feelings are only good as long as we can guarantee they are good feelings, and we cannot give that guarantee when feelings are entirely their own world. We have a lot of bad feelings; watch the science fiction classic “Forbidden Planet”.

I cannot evaluate the Romantic period. All I can do is list a few ways in which Romanticism affected Christianity. Romantic ideas are not all consistent, any more than they are in any other era. I will not point out inconsistencies. Modernism and post-modernism are manifestations of Romanticism. Existentialism could have escaped Romanticism but ultimately succumbed and became a version too. I do not treat them separately.

Ethnic Politics and the Spirit(s).

In Romanticism, distinct ethnic groups each had their own spirit and identity, as for example the Irish, Jews, Italians, Germans, or Jews. This idea can lead to good and bad results. It is good when it leads people to search for their historical roots and common identity, and struggle to be better. It is bad when it leads one group to feel superior, when it leads other groups to look down on one group such as Jews,

and when it leads to refusal to understand. Just as the heart has its own reasons, different spirits are not comparable. You cannot compare the Italian spirit to the German, and you cannot derive the German spirit from the Italian. You cannot even derive the Italian spirit from the ancestral Roman spirit. Eventually the idea of ethnic spirit bolstered nationalistic wars of the 1800s and 1900s, and contributed to the Jewish Holocaust. It still drives how we see conflict, as for example as in the Cold War between America and Russia.

The same idea applies to religions and to Christian sects. You have to feel from the inside what it is like to be, say, a Baptist or a Muslim. Unless you become, say, a Lutheran, you cannot know what it is like, and you cannot know the truth of being a Lutheran. You cannot compare Roman Catholics and Methodists. You cannot even talk about them in the same terms. You cannot compare points to see who might be more historically accurate or more spiritually correct. There is no compromise. There is no search for the greater truth of which each might have a partial vision. There is no chance that our group might just be wrong on some points. You have to belong to one sect or the other. If one sect feels as if another is intruding, then there is no choice but to compete until one sect or the other is eliminated. In these situations, almost always, eventually, groups begin to feel competitive, and then are locked in mortal combat. They feel as if there can be no mutual coexistence. Often groups get to the point where their own identity is tied up in having an adversary. They do not cohere on their own without an opponent. In America now, Christians feel as if Liberals in general are “waging war” on Christians, in particular on Christmas, while strong Liberals fear Christians all want a theocracy.

Truth Lies in Attitudes not Facts.

If the truth of religion cannot be proven in logic starting from the Bible, maybe it can be found in attitudes. From the Romantic point of view, the truth of the Resurrection is not in whether Jesus really walked around in a physical body after he died but in the attitudes that arise in people when they hear about Jesus being raised: what people believe, how they feel as a result, especially any commitment they feel, and what they do on the basis of belief and commitment. The same can be said of any event in Jesus' life such as the virgin birth and crucifixion. Truth lies in the attitudes that it generates. The same is so of any sacrament. The truth of baptism is not in some mysterious thing that God does but in the attitude we have as a result of being baptized. It does not matter if God creates the attitude during our baptism or we get the attitude as a result of some human propensity during rites. All that matters is attitude. It is better if scripture is literally true but not needed. It is better if Jesus really was resurrected in a physical body but not needed. It is better if God does something to us at baptism, but if we change our hearts according to the attitude that God wants then it does not matter. Any debate that causes us to worry about whether or not scripture is really true instead of allowing scripture to generate the correct attitude in us, blocks the spiritual truth. It is better to have attitudinal truth than literal truth, so, if needed, we can cover up the literal truth to preserve the attitudinal truth.

Truth, Power, Words, and Society.

The West has always been impressed by power, by the power of words in particular, and Romantic thinkers elevated language to about the same status as attitudes. The way we talk determines how we think, determines reality, and determines what people do. The way we talk determines attitudes and commitment. People learn words and thinking in society, so social life determines reality and behavior.

Words are just as able to move people as real facts such as the climate or wealth. If we want to control behavior we can control the words that people use. If we want to control words, we can look to society. We can develop a new attitude (“new attiiii-tuuu-ude”) and a new vocabulary, and plug into a support network. “Anti-abortion” is now called “pro-life” while “tolerate abortion because we have to” is now called “pro-choice”. Since 2001, all rich people are “job creators”.

The problem is that words are not reality. Reality exists apart from words even if we can only access it through words and even if we can only ever access it partly at any one time. We always learn language in some particular society but that does not mean society fully determines words or reality. If you do not act in accord with reality then a change in attitude or words does not help very much for very long. If you called bigotry against gays in the military “discrimination against queers” or called it “don’t ask, don’t tell”, the end result was just about as bad. If you thought giving money to rich people would create more jobs every time, you deserve what you got.

With Protestantism, the Bible became “the Word” in close to the modern sense, as something self-subsistent with a power in itself rather like magic incantations. The Bible did not need a church to interpret it or to manifest its power. (I think even few Jews have this attitude toward the Tanakh.) Romanticism validated that attitude, and made the Bible another tool in the differences between incompatible sects. It gave a rationale as to why the Bible might be magic.

To a large extent, to an outsider like me, wars between Christian sects are wars of words. Wars about translations of the Bible are a good example. The Bible had to be literal truth or else its power would have been merely the same as any magic spell. That the Bible is both literal truth and magically efficacious makes it unique. To keep its power and uniqueness, the Bible has to be rendered exactly as God rendered it. The sect that renders it correctly controls its power just as the magician who knows the correct version of a spell has its full power. Thus various sects have to claim to be the only ones to correctly understand and render the Bible correctly.

The Artist.

Under Romanticism, creation and novelty became the most powerful forces in the universe. The artist became the most powerful being in the universe. The artist is the human creator, the closest analog to the creative power of the universe. Rather than the aristocrat, the priest, the soldier, or the farmer, the artist became the ideal person, a position he-she holds to this day as evident from the veneration we give to musicians, movie stars, and TV stars. Coming in second is the “natural” person, as in “Mother Nature” or as in the “noble savage”, an image that holds even in the social sciences where the myth of the noble non-capitalist native still prevails. Both artist and nature can be combined into one, as with some rockers, country and western musicians, some actors, or White witches. Actors who promote nature do well. Some women can get a high rank because all women are supposed to have the potential to be both more natural and somewhat creative. The creative witch theme shows up on TV as with “Bewitched”, “Jeannie”, “Sabrina”, and “Charmed”.

Nations that have accepted Western Romanticism are famous for coming up with new art and technology. America is the outstanding example. This can be one of the good aspects of

Romanticism. At the least, it often gives those countries an economic advantage. With its art, America almost conquered the world.

There is true art and there is imitation (“posing”). Real artists are creative while imitators are merely clever. God is the original true artist. God creates through nature (even I share this point of view). The Devil might be clever, and, in his own way might be much more creative than any mere human, but, in the long run, the Devil is merely an imitator of God. All evil art is imitation. All imitators who attempt to pass off their work as real art are evil. All imitation is evil unless it is openly acknowledged as imitation and its original source properly respected. Thankfully, any imitator who accepts his-her limits and acknowledges that he-she merely imitates can be a successful honest minor artist. When the Devil creates a “human”, he merely imitates in some way a human that God already created through nature. The Jewish “Gollum” is an imitation. “Gollum” in Lord of the Rings was an artistic creation based on this idea, and quite effective. In Lord of the Rings again, Goblins (orcs) were devised by Morgoth out of elves and men as imitations of elves and men while trolls were imitations of Ents.

Since its formative early councils, Christianity has stressed that Jesus created the world, he did so as The Word, and he did so through The Word because he is also fully God. Romanticism strengthens this image of Jesus by recognizing again the fusion of creativity and words. See the opening of the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is probably the most important gospel in modern Christianity. Jesus’ creation of the world was true creation, and Jesus was the original true and greatest creator-artist.

What does Jesus create now? What makes him a true artist now? It depends on your view. Jesus continually re-creates the Church, the most important work on Earth. Jesus continually saves; a kind of great creation and re-creation. Jesus watches over us. Jesus inspires. Indirectly, but in an important way to artists, Jesus created the great religious art when he inspired the artists. I am sure Bach and Handel would be happy to give Jesus co-credit for their religious works. Jesus brings into being the most important attitudes and most important institutions of your sect. To a Conservative, Jesus created family values and he re-creates them every generation. To a Liberal, Jesus creates the great community of acceptance, love, and progress. To me, if we ever succeed at self-government and at taking care of the Earth, I am perfectly happy to give Jesus the credit for having created (with some help) the ideas and institutions that succeeded.

The Resurrection.

The Resurrection combines Jesus’ continued creativity with the emphasis on attitudes. The truth of the resurrection might not be in Jesus’ rising in a new physical body but in the changes that the idea of a resurrection made in human history and society. We do not know if Jesus really was resurrected into a physical body. Nobody since Jesus has been physically resurrected as expected. That does not matter because people, society, and history have been spiritually resurrected. They have been changed radically because now a lot of people believe in God, have hope, and listen to the Church. Jesus’ real resurrection is his new body in the lives of people, society, history, and the Church. That resurrection is real and powerful regardless of any trivial physical resurrection. To confirm that Jesus was never physically resurrected would not contradict the idea of a spiritual resurrection. We do not need a physical resurrection to confirm the idea of a spiritual resurrection, and focusing on the idea of a physical resurrection can confuse us about spiritual resurrection. Similar things can be said as to whether or not Jesus was born of a virgin, was God, died for our sins, and performed miracles. Whether or not Jesus’

death caused God to forgive our sins does not matter as much as that we think it did and we act accordingly en masse. The same is true of feeling the presence of the Lord or having a relation with God. What is important is how God (the Spirit) uses, as an artist uses marble, to express himself in the world, and how people use religion to impose their nature on the world.

This way of looking at the scriptures tries to reconcile orthodoxy and science by finding a truth that can be observed in human hearts and society. But it is also a way of having your spiritual cake and eating it too, and of avoiding questions about the truth of the scriptures and about the true intent, mostly-is, and all-about of Jesus.

It might seem as if I go along with Romanticism when I say the objective truth of the resurrection does not matter as much as our moral action. I hope I do not. I hold to objective standards of morality that would have been apparent to Enlightenment thinkers more than to Romantic thinkers or modern thinkers. Suppose you are on a train and discover it has caught fire (my thanks to the Lotus Sutra). It would not matter if the train is a freight train or passenger train, what color it is, who owns it, how fast it is going, how long it is, or even how the fire started. It matters only that everyone is safe. It only matters what we do. That is why I don't care about the Resurrection, not because I think the truth can be found in attitudes. I am not after only a change in attitude but also after fundamental moral principles, and I want to act according to those principles to do the most good in the real world. I do not want the "wow" experience of a new attitude from people so much as I want their determination to "do unto others" and to work rationally to build a better world. We can think about the other Romantic stuff later.

Other Religious Stances.

Romanticism reasserted Gnosticism, Dualism, Emanation, Wisdom, Culmination, underlying structure or underlying process, the importance of small details in a grand plan, and the importance of seemingly small characters. The best way to see these effects is to endure a great epic of the 1800s, such as Wagner's Ring cycle – if you can stand it. The Lord of the Rings is a 1900s version of similar ideas, including the importance of Frodo and Gollum. The Nutcracker ballet is milder version but still gets across most of the ideas and is more enjoyable. You can make a child happy if you go see her or him dance in it. As I was re-writing this chapter, the TV show "Once Upon a Time" was airing; it has every ingredient listed here. The story of the Spirit by the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel is the best example of modern Emanation, Gnosticism, Dualism, and the overcoming of Dualism, and it is not all that hard to read. Nearly all modern comic books are a celebration of Dualism and the importance of hidden truths. When comic books have an elaborate "back story", we usually see an example of Emanation in how good and evil came to be, how evil at first gradually took over, but how good will, finally, take over. If you don't read the comic books (I stopped in late adolescence) you can see the movies based on them. Graphic novels are similar and more tolerable by adults. Americans see history, and now see real current events, as the unfolding of good and evil, the battle of good and evil, with the gradual eventual victory of good.

"Culmination-ism" is the idea that unfolding history has reached a crisis in our time, our time will decide the outcome of the process of history, and we each might be able to play a small part in this great culmination. Our age is the age in which it is all decided; our age is the age to end all ages. The idea of culmination always goes along with Emanation. Again, Hegel is a clear version of both. Communism was a version. Capitalism has been developed by Republicans and Libertarians into this kind of a vision

to take over from the Communist version. It is the system to end all systems, the system to put it all right automatically. At least since World War 1, the “war to end all wars”, all large current events have been seen this way. Nearly all religious and philosophical movements style themselves as the movement to end all movements. I cannot count how many times I have heard “the end of the world is near”.

I can only mention a few ways that these ideas affected modern Christianity. As inspiring as he might be, Aslan (Jesus in disguise) of the Narnia books owes more to Romanticism than to the real Jesus. Aslan’s constant enemy is the White Witch, the false creator of stone statues and beguiling treats, or is another version of the ultimate evil from which she comes such as the fog. Aslan’s chief role is to fight evil. The same is true of the various “mostly-is” of Jesus in the Lord of the Rings: Frodo, Aragorn, Gandalf, Elrond, Treebeard, etc. Christians call “history” as “his story”. Jesus is the force of history as it unfolds and especially as it culminates in the great battle of good versus evil somewhere in our very own time. Jesus has a plan for all of us both in our daily lives and in the final showdown. We can all contribute a bit to the great victory. Because sects of Christianity are not mutually comprehensible, to know a sect is like having a secret knowledge that can only be conveyed by experience. But once you have this secret knowledge, it sets you free, and lets you merge into the unfolding of the great historical drama.

There are upsides to these ideas in Romanticism. We would not have nearly so much adventure without them, including some great adventure novels and movies. In “Waverley”, Walter Scott consciously has Romanticism taking over the adventure story, with good moments in which characters are rationally assessed and we see the scuffle between logic and attitude. The process is further along in “Kidnapped” by Robert Louis Stevenson. We would not have the modern detective story, born around 1840, for which Edgar Alan Poe usually gets credit. I prefer the detective story to straight Romantic epic because in it there is the dance of logic and emotion. A short funny wonderful satire of modern Romanticism, especially its narcissism, is “Pale Fire” by Vladimir Nabokov.

Modern and Post-Modern Relativism.

Romanticism is fun but also dangerous. We cannot stop the train once we get rolling on the Romanticism track. The eventual end is relativism. There are no objective standards for attitudes as there are with logic and facts. There is no intrinsic reason why helping a hungry child is any better than eating the child while there is still some meat left on its bones to ease our own hunger (see Swift’s “Modest Proposal”). There is no intrinsic reason why a new attitude, and the success that might go along with it, is any better than the old attitude, better than the old failure, better than being an office slave, or better than subjugation as a housewife with wine-pills-and-rock-n-roll to keep you in line. There is no reason why the Resurrection is a promise of God’s love rather than the gateway to an exclusive club for God’s pets. We can hope that contemplating the Resurrection leads believers to the proper attitude of awe and worship but there is no intrinsic reason it should. Any attitude to which it leads is a truth of the Resurrection. If the Resurrection makes believers into spoiled children, then that is also its real truth. If it leads people to become serial killers because they are setting their victims free to certain rebirth in heaven with Jesus, that makes sense as well. There are no standards, especially for morality. In the end, we can use scripture and logic to validate whatever we want for other reasons.

Obvious relativism is both an obvious powerful tool and obvious trap, so Christian sects want to have the cake of their own truth and deny the same cake to rivals. You have to join our sect to know the real truth

of our sect but even if you become a member of another sect you do not know the real truth of that sect, or any real truth, because that sect has no real truth; it has only delusion. We are true artists; they are false imitators. There is no objective standard by which to assert this, we just know it. Relativism leads to an odd mix of relativism and dogmatic anti-relativism.

Because of its clear statement of Jesus' intent, mostly-is, and all-about (Nicene Creed), it would seem as if the Church could guard against relativism about Jesus, but that is not entirely so. Normal people cannot feel satisfied with the official creed. They need in addition various mostly-is and even various all-about. I won't repeat them here. The point is that Romanticism gives normal people license to adopt various mostly-is and all-about.

To counter the relativism of "other sects", "our sect" adopts the position that they and their view are "nothing but". Somewhat counter to what we might expect, relativism leads to quite a bit of nothing but. Jesus was nothing but a zealot who got caught. He was nothing but an advanced hippie. He was nothing but a Cynic philosopher who was a Jew too. Jesus was nothing but a peasant reformer who did not understand real world politics. Jesus was nothing but a Jewish sage who got caught up in politics. Jesus was nothing but a moral teacher. Jesus was nothing but a prophet. Jesus was nothing but the one and only Son of the one and only God. Jesus was nothing but God incarnate. Christianity is nothing but the crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus is nothing but material instantiation of his father's will.

The "nothing but" of relativism allows us to explain away. If we can put a person in a social arena, socio-economic class, historical trend, or ideology, then we can explain away his-her ideas entirely in terms of setting. We do not have to decide about the truth of his-her ideas. If there is truth but we do not like it, we can say that the truth is "nothing but" a product of the arena. We can say, "That truth might be good for some people but it is not general truth and it is not good for us". For example, if some people do think that Jesus was resurrected but we do not, then it is true for them but not for us. We do not have to think about whether it is really true or not, only how it might be true for them but does not have to be true for us. If conservatives insist Jesus was resurrected, then fine; it is true for them but not for us. If Jesus said to take care of the poor, that is true for him then but not for us now. If liberals insist Jesus said we have to take care of the poor, then fine; it is true for them but not for us. If we think Jesus was not resurrected, we do not have to think about whether he really was or not, we can say what matters about the truth is how people think about it.

We can pick and choose among truths. If Jesus said we should help the poor but a TV evangelist tells us God really wants us to be rich, then we can decide that being rich is more important than helping the poor, and feel good about it.

What people think about truth is more important than truth. If we really do not like a truth, and can find ways to get around it, then our interpretation trumps the plain truth. Jesus said it is hard for rich people to get into heaven, but people want to be rich. Suppose we say that rich people are really stewards of God's bounty, allowing God's bounty to be used effectively to make everybody's life better off. If all rich people really are job creators, I wish they would actually do it. A rich person can get into heaven as long as he-she shares a little bit or as long as his-her greed leads to jobs. Then what we think to serve our own benefit takes over from the plain truth.

The only good way to defend against relativism is to be clear about your morality and ideas. State your morals and ideas. That way, we have clear and open ground for argument. In the real non-Romantic world, groups of reasonable people do not split into qualitatively distinct sects unable to communicate. People share enough morality so we can work to reach understandings and better mutual ends. If not, then at least we will know what we really are fighting about.

Moral Relativism, Ambiguity, Inversion, and Hypocrisy.

Probably the worst kind of relativism is moral relativism. Romanticism did not invent moral relativism but did give it a big boost. The basic issue is simple. We need moral rules but we cannot have a tiny rule for every tiny situation, and it is not always clear how to apply rules in all situations. We have to use judgment. Judgment opens the door to moral relativism. Sometimes the same rule varies in application according to people and situation. We understand when a poor person takes a few apples off a tree he-she does not own so as to feed his-her family. We do not understand when a rich person takes apples without permission from a neighbor's tree because he-she feels like it. We understand when a poor person traps a rabbit on a rich person's land for dinner (see "Robin Hood" with Errol Flynn). We do not understand when a rich person takes the last lamb of a poor person to make a feast for guests (from the history of King David). We understand the need for a modest home for a family but not the lust of some house buyers or the greed of banks that led them on. Most of us have a good enough sense of these situations as long as ideology and religion do not confuse us.

Romanticism, democracy, capitalism, and Protestantism cloud the issues. They give us expectations that were not met. With democracy and capitalism, we expect governments to seek equal justice between rich and poor, powerful and weak; but they fall short. The Protestant Church is supposed to be "of the people" and to have a more direct relation with God, and so is not supposed to favor the rich over the poor, or favor the powerful over the weak. A reformed Roman Catholic Church is supposed to be similar. But in fact both favor the rich and powerful and both support the institutions of the state that favor the rich and powerful.

When aristocratic institutions exploited the people there was no hypocrisy. When democratic institutions say they are "of the people" but continue to exploit, then there is hypocrisy. When the Church supports exploitation, there is an added layer of hypocrisy. People revolt against this in spirit. There is moral inversion. If we cannot find the good guys among the supposed good guys then maybe we can find them among the bad guys. So the bad guys are all really good guys and the good guys are all really bad guys.

People in past times certainly understood moral ambiguity but they did not think moral ambiguity symbolized how the world really works. Modern people often do. The best place to see moral ambiguity at work is detective novels, "films noir", and recent movies such as the Batman series. Rock-n-roll is full of it, often comically so without intending, as with the Bob Dylan song "Tangled Up in Blues". A character in a film or TV show cannot possibly be good unless he-she is also flawed just enough to prove he-she has just enough bad to be good. Only a cop with a drinking problem can be honest. The musician with a drug problem is really a modern creative archangel. Anybody in a nice suit is a demon.

When a prosecutor puts a 14-year old girl in jail for stealing a TV dinner while letting a corporate officer embezzle millions with no jail time, people get confused. When the Church says the prosecutor is right, people get more confused. People turn from the Church to movies, TV, novels, comics, and illustrated novels for guidance. Thankfully, I think we get pretty good guidance from art, at least from shows that are not intended primarily to exploit moral ambiguity. We get really good guidance from some shows that do exploit it a little, such as from "CSI" and the various incarnations of "Law and Order". We learn from them how to control moral ambiguity and how to draw the line between right and wrong. "Harry Potter" has it all: the wizard as artist, inversions, moral ambiguity, and good moral lessons about friendship, loyalty, honest, hard work, keeping to the rules, and breaking the rules.

Conservatism Continues.

Even before Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine, it aligned itself with conservative deference to official authority rather than with any social action that might undermine authority. We clearly see the trend in Paul's letters. Christianity has been conservative this way since shortly after Jesus died. Official Christianity emphasizes the divine status of Jesus so it can overlook his teachings and his program for a better world.

When capitalism first dominated society it shook up society, fracturing society along lines such as between peasants and lords or between lords and capitalists. It was not always clear which side Christians would take, and sometimes they did take the side of the peasants against the lords or the poor against the rich. Yet as society adjusted to capitalism, Christianity again became conservative. By the middle 1800s, capitalists had supplanted the old aristocracy as the primary source of political and economic power. Churches aligned with the new capitalist authorities and the governments that the new capitalists controlled. Some of the new Protestant churches were open in doing so, such as Luther and the Lutheran churches in Northern Europe and most of the churches in England. The churches of the revivals in the northern states of America (see below) openly supported the Republican Party. I think Baptists and Methodists aligned with slaveholders in the American South. Christianity continued side with the powerful and rich against the weak and poor.

Modern Life.

Despite all the potentials for badness, I like modern life. I like the painting and music, the houses, the parks, capitalism and business, pretentious academics, and pretentious rockers. Despite the disaster it has been, I like Romanticism and its modern incarnations. I like that people try to have wild youth but settle down into good citizens. I love that most of us are not afraid of diversity and we want different kinds of people to get along. I love that we see the value of nature, and want to steward it as best we can while still making a living. I like the politics, wrangling, and contention. I like that many different temperaments can get along. I love space sciences, physics, biology, math, and computers. I love that we have facts in our science and fantasy in our arts. I think God approves of most of modern life. If you need to feel that life is worthwhile, listen to American music throughout the century of the 1900s.

Usually a way of life is not the expression of one particular group in society but is a compromise between various groups in which most groups get along better in society than they would out of society. One group often dominates but rarely does one group so dominate that society is simply an expression of it.

Even among hunters and gatherers, women and men, young and old, artists and drudges, all had to get along and none got its way entirely. Priests and the military squabbled and cooperated in Egypt. Capitalists and workers do the same now. Modern society is a compromise in which a lot of groups get along so each does better in than out. This spiel is not an ad for PC diversity. This argument is a warning that when one group really dominates society, or tries, then we are in trouble, even in the modern world.

Modern life really is more seductive. There are many lost souls in modern life, as you can see in bars, malls, office buildings, factories, sports teams, churches, and universities. Seduction of your soul is bad enough but what really counts is reproductive seduction, being seduced away from successfully raising a family to carry on. When parents worry about seduction this is what they really worry about. If our only daughter Susie drinks a glass of wine everyday to wash down her Valium but still has two kids and does a decent job with them, she is tolerable. If our only daughter Susie never gets married and never has kids, makes a lot of money, and lives in a big apartment where she practices yoga happily, that is almost as bad as a crack whore. I don't go into Tommy the Slacker. It is fine to be a rock and roll star as long as you are not a rock and roll bimbo. Parents fear this kind of seduction, and are willing to use church, state, and schools to protect their children. Parents will squash ideals of freedom and democracy to make sure junior does not become a pot-head living in the basement playing video games. Parents use Jesus to condemn mini-skirts so that young Brittany does not have a baby before she has her degree.

We should not worry as much and we should not use religion and the state to make sure our children have families. Despite early experimentation, the large majority of modern young people do not lose their souls or their reproduction. Most young Americans still have families. I know it is hard for parents to be calm about the dangers when they only have one or two children, and, if one or both get lost then all is lost. But parents still need not to distort religion and society just to insulate Jack and Diane from modern life's little ditty. Life in other times and places was even harder, and people made it through that too. Even George W. Bush and his daughters eventually settled down to get along.

Some modern trends in Christianity (and other religions) are better understood if they are seen as a reaction against the seductions of modern life and Romanticism while still borrowing ideas from Romanticism.

Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Charismatics.

These groups share the same basic orthodox view the divinity of Jesus, and the magic of the incarnation, crucifixion, and the resurrection.

When I came back to the U.S. in 2000, I wanted to know about the differences between Christian churches. I asked a few people to explain to me how their church was doctrinally distinct. Almost nobody could do that. They would tell me how good people at their church were, how much love they had, how much God loved them, how inspiring their priest was, how much fun were church events such as picnics, and the good works they did. Some people might mumble something about baptism and some might even say other churches were wrong. But I never understood why these people had to split up into different churches.

I do not fully understand differences between fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic Christians. The distinction has to do less with doctrines than with the history of groups and the temperaments of members. I have read the founding documents of the groups but I do not think that is what matters. So, by "fundamentalism" here I mean all three groups unless I need to distinguish them.

I have to be careful because I tend to see fundamentalists as reactionaries who use religion to advance their agenda of security, family security, wealth, power, and keeping the poor in line. They are that but they are more than that, and I have to seek the more.

Roman Catholicism had internal fundamentalists even well before Protestantism. Usually the Roman Catholic Church found a place for them. Mel Gibson is a member of a group of Roman Catholics who are fundamentalists. The idea of fundamentalism seems intrinsic to Protestantism so, when Protestantism arose, it was inevitable that strong groups of fundamentalists would arise within the movement. There are Jewish and Moslem fundamentalists too.

Modern fundamentalism began before most people realize. It is the flip side to the Romantic reaction against the modern world. The two movements share much in common although they differ in their overt theology. Many people cannot get along in the world of science, reason, capitalism, and personal freedom. They seek greater institutional security and religious security than is offered them on the truly free market and in democracy. Along with the Enlightenment and Romanticism came religious revivals that stressed a return to an earlier simpler idealized Christianity based on the fundamentals of Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. Contrary to popular belief, during the time of the American Revolution, few Americans went to church. Maybe only 18% of Americans went to church regularly, similar to attendance in "godless" Europe now and in "godless" regions of America. Christian thinkers were not the main force behind the Revolution although Revolutionary thinkers did use Christian ideas. In the early 1800s, as America settled down and the market pervaded society, came a religious revival led mostly by Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists. It swept the South and Midwest, leading to the high rate of church attendance in those areas now. The lingering results of that revival are what people mistakenly think was the original religious condition of America. The revival was a social and attitude backlash against the confusion caused by political freedom, the rise of science, and the rise of the market; and it was a way for beginning small capitalists in America and England to protect themselves by banding into groups. It was one Christian version of Romanticism. Modern fundamentalists continue this movement.

Attitudes were an important part of this movement. This movement was not primarily about ideas. People understood doctrine. People did not need doctrine read to them. Instead, people held revivals. They swooned in tents. They found a personal relation with Jesus. People felt the love of God. They healed. Hundreds of people got baptized at a time. Women marched against demon rum. People fought slavery. They argued about which was the best path to God. That is why this revival movement is the Christian version of Romanticism.

Beginning in the 1920s, groups of Christians began to react against the theology that was taught in the major seminaries. I do not go into what that theology was, but it was either too relativist (a gift of "mainstream" Romanticism) or it was similar to what I outlined as my personal beliefs (Enlightenment rationalism). They also reacted against the lifestyle of the "jazz age". They thought that lifestyle was bad and would inevitably seduce their children into damnation, or worse, into bad reproduction. They stressed a return to Christian fundamentals, in particular the Nicene Creed and a literal reading of the

Bible. The fundamentalism of today comes directly out of groups from the 1920s. For Fundamentalist groups of today, the jazz age has become the rock-n-roll age and the age of "liberal Hollywood". The 1920s fundamentalists wanted the emotionality of Romanticism but they did not want the inevitable relativism. They had to find a way to ground their attitudes in something objective. For that, they used the Nicene Creed and the Bible.

At about the same time, for similar reasons, other Christians felt that they could have spiritual gifts and could feel a personal relation with God. "Spiritual gifts" includes speaking in tongues, exorcism, healing, and prophecy. The term "charismatic" comes from the Greek "charism", which is based on a metaphor and means "a gift". It is a gift from God of special powers. Some Christians felt God had promised spiritual gifts to all true Christians and that, as Christians, they were entitled to special gifts, rather like apprentice Jedi expect special powers that come from the Force. They felt that spiritual gifts connected them to the pure early church. They needed to replicate the pure early church now in order to fight off the degeneracy of modern times. They wanted to share these feelings with other similar people, and they wanted to encourage other people to find these feelings. They wanted to set up communities of people with spiritual gifts and who had a personal relation with Jesus. They stressed the feeling of a personal relation with God and Jesus by calling it being "born again". These are the basis for modern evangelicals and charismatic Christians.

Some small Christian churches stress fundamentals but insist that spiritual gifts ended with the apostolic age a few decades after Jesus. They do understand the idea of a personal relation with Jesus. Evangelical Christians "preach the good news". They want to lead other people to true Christianity as exemplified in the Nicene Creed and in the early church so that other people can share in the joy of God's love, so that people will act better, so that better acting people will form a better society, and so that a nation composed of true Christians can be a better nation.

Fundamentalists, evangelicals, and charismatic Christians share a lot. It is hard to be an evangelical without grounding your message in fundamentals. It is hard to be a fundamentalist without accepting the possibility of spiritual gifts, the idea of powerful feelings that go along with accepting Jesus as Lord, and without wishing to share the good news. It is hard to be a charismatic without believing in the literal word of God and his promise in the Bible, so it is hard to be a charismatic without being a fundamentalist. It is hard to be "born again" and have a personal relation with Jesus without appreciating the role of attitudes.

Some Necessary Stereotyping.

Fundamentalists believe in most of the Nicene Creed but they also adhere to aspects of popular religion and local common religion rather than only the Nicene Creed. They insist that Jesus is God. They are dualists. If a person believes that Jesus is God then that person will go to heaven to be with Jesus and with other believers forever. Especially they anticipate seeing family members in heaven. If a person does not believe all this, then that person will go to hell. They believe Jesus has ordained their social-political agenda, such as state support of the idealized nuclear family, no divorce, no abortion, no intoxication, and strict enforcement of laws. Anybody who does not support their social-political agenda is going to hell whether or not that person also believes in Jesus as God. Their social-political agenda is as important as their theology.

In theory, orthodoxy and fundamentalism do not have to come together with a typical conservative political view such as supporting business, the free market, and strong military action. They could go along with helping the poor and making peace. But in fact, fundamentalists are almost always politically and socially conservative. Fundamentalist Christians have continued the tradition of conservative Christianity

Fundamentalists want to merge church and state. They want to recreate their own group as Israel in the time of Solomon. They believe they are the modern chosen people of God, supplanting Jews and modern Israel. If they are Americans, they see America as the modern true Israel. If they are European or South America, they might see the West as the modern true Israel. Otherwise, they might see the Christian Church as the modern true Israel.

As with Israel in the past, fundamentalists expect God to punish the nation when it deviates from purity and holiness, and to reward the nation with prosperity if it is holy enough and pure enough. They do not heed the lesson of Abraham bargaining with God. They do not think the presence of only a small minority of righteous people is enough to keep God from punishing America. They think the large majority of the nation has to believe in God correctly as they do, and believe in their social-political agenda, to keep the entire nation under God's protection and direction.

They must carry God's word to all other people both privately and through the state. Not to carry God's word would be selfish and would betray God and our fellow human beings.

They expect opposition but they also expect to prevail.

They think the state cannot be neutral between ideologies and religions, and that one ideology or religion has to dominate. It has to be them or they will be destroyed. If they do not dominate, then another group will dominate, and that other group will seek to destroy them. A nation either has to run according to Biblical principles or it has to be run by Satan against God's people. They do not accept neutrality. As in ancient Israel, either we are all on the side of God or else God's instrument of wrath will destroy us for lack of faith.

They do not see modern society as arising from a compromise but as always being dominated by some power group. They proclaim allegiance to democracy but do not see that their view is not compatible with democracy. They think people who believe along Enlightenment lines as I do are not a different kind of believer but are foolish and are really secular. Many suspect people like me of being pawns of Satan.

They see the secular state as waging war on Christian institutions such as Christmas and on the nuclear heterosexual family. They cannot allow the state to support some limited inadequate set of common morals while they live both according to the common morals and according to their own stricter morality too. They cannot live and let live. When the state permits abortion, the fact that other people have abortions is not neutral, or is not only a sin by people who commit abortions, but is a direct assault on the families of good Christians. Any homosexual relations are not a private matter between consenting adults but are an assault on the families of Christians. They cannot tolerate behaviors that are not in line with their own morality even if they are not forced to participate in those behaviors. They cannot tolerate

homosexuality even if they are not forced to be homosexuals. They cannot accept that other people smoke marijuana even if they are not forced to do so.

There can be only one morality, it has to apply to everyone all the time, and the state has to enforce it. If the state permits any immorality, they are sure their children will not be able to resist the immorality and so their children must be seduced into evil and into bad reproduction. They need to control the state so as to stamp out immoral behavior and thus save their children from damnation and bad reproduction. They fear poor people as threats to their own jobs, family security, and reproduction. They use morality and state power as a weapon against the poor. They blame all poverty on the poor, and they seek to control the poor through vigorous laws against small crime, soft drugs, drunkenness, and prostitution.

They see themselves as champions of decency, the only champions of decency of the only conceivable decency, and they do not understand why other people do not see them the same way.

More Attitudes.

Despite the public stress on articles of faith, fundamentalists really seem to stress attitudes. They seek the same experiences as did revivalists of the 1800s. This is what I found when I began to ask people about their churches. Church life was about experiences and attitudes.

Fundamentalists wish to ground their attitudes in the objectivity of the Bible and in the reality of the incarnation, salvation by Jesus' sacrifice, and the resurrection. They want an objective validation for their attitudes. They seek the hidden fact that swings the court case in their direction and that reveals their opponents as the true criminals. In their stress on attitudes, their appeal to magic facts, and the demonizing of opponents, they are like Romantics and relativists even though they dislike the relativism that came along with Romanticism.

Something Extremely Admirable.

On the other hand, fundamentalists genuinely love life, as long as another style of life does not threaten theirs. Life is a gift from God. As with the early Christians, they do help the poor, the sick, and people in jail. They do it directly face-to-face, and not indirectly through taxes as do most Liberals. When they see a problem, they go out and work on it, they don't think of starting a government program to take care of the problem so they don't have to get their hands dirty. They oppose abortion not only as a way to keep down the poor but also because they really do value life and want to protect innocents. They do not want people to use drugs or alcohol, to gamble, or to engage in meaningless sex, because those activities debase life, degrade the integrity of the individual as taught by Jesus, and detract from the possibility of better success. They put themselves on the line. They give a lot to charity, and not to buy their way into heaven. I would guess that fundamentalist Christians give a much higher percentage of their income to charity than any other group. In all this, they truly imitate Jesus. They truly live in a version of the Kingdom. They show each other active love in a way that is hard to find from people in other groups. They respect the truth as much as they can. They try not to lie or steal. They are truly decent people in many ways. They even know how to have fun.

Political Correctness.

Although I agree with many of the policies of PC people, and find it easier to talk to them than to talk to fundamentalists, still, the feeling I get from PC people is much like the feeling I get from fundamentalists. Their stress on doctrine, and their willingness to use the state to make people do what they want people to do, is exactly like fundamentalists. Their stress on attitudes, words, and social determination is much like the fundamentalist stress even if particular attitudes, words, and societies are not the same.