
a ***Grace Notes*** course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study
by Warren Doud

Lesson 405: **Acts 26:1-18**

ACTS

ACTS405 - Acts 26:1-18

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ACTS 26:1-18**ACTS 26:1. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul,***

After Festus had made the above speech to him, and to all present, and had introduced the affair of Paul, who now stood before them: *thou art permitted to speak for thyself*; which a prisoner might not do, until he had leave; and this leave was granted by Festus the Roman governor, who was properly the judge, and not Agrippa, though the permission might be by both; and so the Arabic and Ethiopic versions read, “we have ordered”, or “permitted thee”, etc. *Then Paul stretched forth the hand*; as orators used to do, when they were about to speak; or else to require silence; or it may be to show the freedom of his mind, and how ready he was to embrace the opportunity of pleading his own cause; being conscious to himself of his innocence, and relying on the ingenuity and integrity of his judge; and especially of the king, before whom he stood: *and answered for himself*; or made an apology, or spoke in vindication of himself, in order to remove the charges brought against him.

ACTS 26:2. *I think myself happy, King*

Agrippa, This was an handsome and artificial way of introducing his defense, and of gaining the affection and attention of the king, and yet was not a mere compliment; for it had been his unhappiness hitherto, that his case was not understood; neither Lysias the chief captain, nor the governors Felix and Festus, knew anything of the rites and customs of the Jews, and could not tell what to make of the questions of their law, of which Paul was accused: but it was otherwise with Agrippa, he was master of them, and this the apostle looked upon as a circumstance in his own favour: *because I shall answer for myself this day before thee*; not before him as a judge, for Festus was judge, but in his presence; and he being versed in things of this kind, was capable of informing, counselling, directing,

and assisting the judge, in what was proper to be done; wherefore it was an advantage to the apostle to plead his own cause, and vindicate himself before such a person from the charges exhibited against him: *touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews*; such as violation of the law, profanation of the temple, contempt of the people of the Jews and their customs, and of blasphemy, and sedition; all which he was able to clear himself from, and doubted not but he should do it to the entire satisfaction of the king.

ACTS 26:3. *Especially, because I know thee to be expert in all customs,*

Rites and ceremonies of the Jews, whether enjoined by the law of Moses, or by the elders, fathers, and wise men: *and questions which are among the Jews*; concerning angels, spirits, and the resurrection of the dead; which were moved and agitated between the Sadducees and Pharisees; and a multitude of others, which were disputed between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, of which their Misna and Talmud are full, and with these Agrippa was well acquainted; and to their rites and customs he conformed, of which we have some instances recorded in their writings: when they went with their firstfruits to Jerusalem, “a pipe sounded before them till they came to the mountain of the house, and when they came to the mountain of the house (the temple), even King Agrippa carried the basket upon his shoulder, and went in till he came to the court.” So concerning the reading of the law by a king, they give this following account: “a king stands and takes (the book of the law), and reads sitting; King Agrippa stood and took it, and read standing, and the wise men praised him; and when he came to that passage, (Deuteronomy 17:15) “Thou mayest not set a stranger over thee”, his eyes flowed with tears; they said unto him, fear not, Agrippa, thou art our brother.” Some of their writers say, this was a piece of flattery in them: they

also elsewhere commend him for his modesty and humility ; “according to the tradition of the doctors, when persons attending a funeral met a bride (with her retinue), the former gave way, and both to a king of Israel, when they met him; but they say concerning King Agrippa, that he met a bride, and gave way, and they praised him.” And whereas it was forbidden to eat on the eve of the passover, before the Minchah, though ever so little, that they might eat the unleavened bread with appetite ; it is observed, that even King Agrippa, who was used to eat at the ninth hour, that day did not eat till it was dark : so that from hence it appears, that King Agrippa was famous for his exact knowledge and observance of the customs and manners of the Jews, and which was well known, and was by the apostle: *wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently*; since he was charged with a breach of the laws and customs of the Jews; and his defence would proceed upon things which Agrippa was not altogether ignorant of.

ACTS 26:4. *My manner of life, from my youth.* That is, his conduct and deportment, his behaviour among men, from the time that he was capable of performing religious exercises, and of knowing the difference between one sect and another, and of being observed and taken notice of by men: *which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem*; for though he was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, he was very early brought, or sent by his parents to Jerusalem, where he had his education under Gamaliel; so that the first part of his life was spent in Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judea, and among the Jews there; the more learned and knowing part of them, Gamaliel’s pupils, and the wise men and their disciples: and his course of life must be well known to them, as he says, *this know all the Jews*; that had any knowledge of him, and conversation with him.

ACTS 26:5. *Which knew me from the beginning.* From his youth, from his first coming to Jerusalem: *if they would testify*; what they know, and speak out the truth of things, they must say, *that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee*; there were three sects of religion among the Jews, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes; the first of these was the most exact, and came nearest to the truth of doctrine, and was the strictest as to outward holiness of life and conversation, and of this sect the apostle was; and according to it he lived, and that in such a manner, as not to be charged with any notorious crime; and indeed in his own, and very likely in the opinion of others, he was then blameless. (See Gill on “Matthew 3:7”). (Essenes: A Jewish sect, who, according to the description of Josephus, combine the ascetic virtues of the Pythagoreans and the Stoics with a spiritual knowledge of the divine law. It seems probable that the same name signifies “seer”, or “the silent, the mysterious”. As a sect the Essenes were distinguished by an aspiration after the ideal purity rather than by any special code of doctrines. There were isolated communities of the Essenes, which were regulated by strict rules, and analogous to those of the monastic institutions of a later date. All things were held in common, without distinction of property; and special provision was made for the relief of the poor. Self-denial, temperance and labour — especially agricultural — were the marks of the outward life of the Essenes; purity and divine communication the objects of aspiration. Slavery, war and commerce were alike forbidden. Their best known settlements were on the north west shore of the Dead Sea. J.B. Smith one volume Bible Dictionary.)

ACTS 26:6. *And now I stand, and am judged.* Before the Roman governor, and in the presence of Agrippa: *for the hope of the*

promise made of God unto our fathers; either for the hope of righteousness, life, and salvation, by the Messiah; who was promised to the Jewish fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and others; (see Genesis 22:18, 49:10) or for the hope of the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life; of which there are various testimonies in the writings of the Old Testament, committed to the people of the Jews. (Job 19:26,27, Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2) and others; and both these senses may be very well joined together, for it was for asserting that the promised Messiah was come, and that Jesus of Nazareth was he; that he was risen from the dead, and that all the dead will be raised by him; and that life and righteousness, salvation, and everlasting glory and happiness, are only by him; for asserting these things, I say, the apostle was now a prisoner, and stood at the bar of a Roman judge, being accused by the Jews.

ACTS 26:7. *Unto which promise*, Of the Messiah, and salvation by him; and of the resurrection of the dead and eternal glory, as following upon it: *our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night hope to come*; and enjoy the Messiah, and all blessings along with him; and the happy state of the resurrection and eternal life: the people of Israel were distinguished into twelve tribes, according to the names of the twelve patriarchs, the sons of Jacob; and though ten of the tribes had been carried captive, and had not returned as tribes, yet there were many of the several tribes, who either were left in the land, or returned along with the two tribes, and were mixed with them: and this way of speaking here used by Paul, and also by James, (James 1:1) is justified by Jewish writers: the Misnic doctors say, “the twelve tribes bring twelve heifers, and for idolatry they bring twelve heifers and twelve goats:” compare with this (Ezra 6:17, 8:35), yea, they say “twelve tribes” are called, “a

congregation”, eleven tribes are not called a congregation.” This suggests a reason of the apostle’s use of this phrase, for he here represents the Israelites as a worshipping assembly, serving God continually, night and day, as they were by their representatives, the priests and stationary men in the temple; and that with intensesness, ardour, and fervency, as the word rendered “instantly” signifies being in a longing and earnest expectation of the coming of the Messiah, and of his world to come, and of the resurrection of the dead, and a future state of happiness. *For which hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews*: for preaching that the Messiah, the twelve tribes hope for, is already come and that there is salvation in him, and in no other, and that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both just and unjust; and that there is another world and state after this, in which men will be happy and miserable; and these were the charges and accusations, or the sum of what were exhibited against him.

ACTS 26:8. *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you*, You Heathens and Sadducees; for the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was thought an incredible doctrine by the Heathens in general, and therefore was laughed at by the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers at Athens, when preached by the apostle there; and by a particular sect among the Jews, the Sadducees; and the apostle may be thought either to address himself to Festus, the Roman governor, and to the chief captains, who were present, and, being Heathens, disbelieved this doctrine; or else to King Agrippa, who might be a Sadducee, and to such of the Sadducees as were in court, and expostulate with them, why it should be looked upon as a thing by no means to be credited, *that God should raise the dead*; which may be understood both of the particular resurrection of Christ from the dead, which was not believed, neither by the

Romans nor by the Jews, and neither by Pharisees nor Sadducees; or of the general resurrection of the dead, which was judged from the nature of things to be impracticable, and impossible by the latter, as well as by the Heathens: but since God is omniscient and omnipotent, and just and true, knows where every particle of a dead body lies, and can gather all together, and inspire with life; which he can as easily do, as to form all things out of nothing, as he did; and his justice and veracity seem to require, that the same bodies which have been partners with their souls in sinning, or in sufferings should share with them in woe or in happiness; it can neither be absurd, unreasonable, nor incredible, to suppose that God will raise them from the dead.

ACTS 28:9. *I verily thought with myself,* This seems to be a correction of himself, why he should wonder at their ignorance and unbelief, particularly with respect to Jesus being the Messiah, and his resurrection from the dead, and expostulate with them about it; when this was once his own case, it was the real sentiments of his mind, what in his conscience he believed to be right and just; namely, *that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth;* to him himself, to his religion, to his Gospel, and ordinances, and people; by blaspheming his name, by denying him to be the Messiah, by condemning his religion as heresy, by disputing against his doctrines, and manner of worship, and by persecuting his followers.

ACTS 26:10. *Which thing I also did in Jerusalem,* The metropolis of Judea, where he had had his education, and was well known; here he consented to the death of Stephen, and held the clothes of the witnesses while they stoned him; and here he haled men and women out of their houses, and committed them to prison, and made havoc of the church of Christ, and destroyed the faith,

and those that professed it, as much as in him lay. *And many of the saints I shut up in prison;* at Jerusalem; (see Acts 8:3). *having received authority from the chief priests;* to take them up, and imprison them. *And when they were put to death;* for it seems there were more than Stephen put to death, though we have no account of them: *I gave my voice against them;* not that he sat in council, or was a member of the Jewish sanhedrim, and voted for the execution of the Christians, but he was pleased with the sentence they passed, and approved of it; or he joined the zealots, who, without any form of law, seized on the Christians, and put them to death wherever they found them; and this he assented to, and encouraged: some render the words, "I carried the sentence"; as the Vulgate Latin version; that is, the sentence of condemnation, which the Jewish sanhedrim passed upon the disciples and followers of Christ: this Saul took, and carried, it may be, both to the Roman governor, to be signed by him, and to the officers to put it in execution; so industrious and forward was he in persecuting the saints.

ACTS 26:11. *And I punished them oft in every synagogue,* In Jerusalem, where there were many; (see Gill on "Acts 24:12"); by beating and scourging them there, as the manner was; (see Matthew 10:17). *and compelled them to blaspheme;* the Lord Jesus Christ, both to deny him to be the Messiah, and to call him accursed; as the Jews and Heathens obliged some professors of Christianity to do, who were only nominal ones, and had not grace and strength to stand against their threatenings, and to endure their persecutions: *and being exceeding mad against them;* full of malice, envy, and hatred: *I persecuted them even to strange cities;* particularly Damascus; and of his journey thither, he gives an account in the following verse; or through the violence of his

persecution he obliged them to fly to strange cities, where they were foreigners and strangers; though he himself might not follow them there, since we do not read of his going anywhere but to Damascus; whereas they that were scattered by the persecution, in which he was concerned, travelled as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch, (Acts 9:19). The phrase may be rendered, “even to cities without”; i.e. without the land of Israel: frequent mention is made in Jewish writings of such and such cities being, “without the land”.

ACTS 26:12. *Whereupon as I went to Damascus,* Being intent, upon the above said things, to punish the saints, compel them to blaspheme, imprison them, and even put them to death on account of these things; upon this errand and business he went to Damascus, the chief city of Syria, where he knew there were many that believed in Christ, who had removed from Jerusalem thither, on account of the persecution, or were settled there before: ***with authority and commission from the chief priests;*** the Jewish sanhedrim, to bring those of them at Damascus bound to Jerusalem, in order to be punished, as in (Acts 9:2, 22:5) and which the Ethiopic version adds here.

ACTS 26:13. *At midday, O king,* So in (Acts 12:6). This circumstance is omitted in (Acts 9:3). King Agrippa is called upon by the apostle, to excite his attention to what he was about to relate, it being very wonderful, and of great importance. ***I saw in the way;*** that is, to Damascus, when near the city; ***a light from heaven;*** which descended from thence: ***above the brightness of the sun;*** it was a greater light than that, or otherwise it could not have been discerned at noon, or have had the effect it had upon Saul, and his company. This account of the greatness of the light, is not in the other places where this narrative is given: ***shining round about me:*** so in (Acts 9:3,

12:6) ***and them which journeyed with me;*** this is not mentioned in the other accounts.

ACTS 26:14. *And when we were all fallen to the earth,* Saul, and the men that were with him, for fear of the divine Majesty, who by this extraordinary light was thought to be present: the other narratives only relate Saul’s falling to the earth; how this is to be reconciled to their standing speechless, in (Acts 9:7), (see Gill on “Acts 9:7”). ***I heard a voice speaking unto me,*** etc. (see Gill on “Acts 10:4”). (see Gill on “Acts 10:5”).

ACTS 26:15. *And I said, who art thou, Lord? and he said,* Or “the Lord said”, as the Alexandrian copy, the Vulgate Latin, and Syriac versions read, ***I am Jesus whom thou persecutest;*** the Syriac and Ethiopic versions read, “Jesus of Nazareth”; (see Gill on “Acts 9:5”).

ACTS 26:16. *But rise and stand upon thy feet,* This, and what follows in this and the two next verses, are not in any of the former accounts; and these words are used not only because Saul was fallen to the earth, and are an encouragement to rise up, and stand corporeally, but to take heart, and be of good cheer; for though he had acted so vile and cruel a part by Christ, and his people, yet he had designs of grace, and good will to him; and this appearance was not for his destruction, but for his honour, comfort, and usefulness: ***for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose;*** not to take vengeance for past offences, but for the ends hereafter mentioned: and this appearance of Christ was real, corporeal, and personal, and not imaginary, or merely visionary and intellectual; and it was to this sight of Christ he more than once refers, partly in proof of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, and partly to demonstrate the truth of his apostleship, (1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8). ***to make thee a minister and a witness, both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto***

thee; so that he was an apostle, not of men, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, as he himself says, (Galatians 1:1). He was a minister, not of man's making, but of Christ's; and they are the only true ministers of the Gospel, who are made by Christ, who have their mission and commission, their qualifications, gifts, and abilities, their doctrine, work, and wages from him: and the apostle's work, as a minister, was to be a witness; it was to testify what he had seen of Christ corporeally; and what knowledge of his person, office, and grace was now communicated to him by the spirit of wisdom and revelation; and what should hereafter be made known to him, either mediately by Ananias, or immediately by Christ and his Spirit; for the apostle had after appearances, visions, and revelations; (see Acts 22:17,18, 23:11, 2 Corinthians 12:1-4,7).

ACTS 26:17. *Delivering thee from the people,* That is, the people of the Jews, as they are distinguished from the Gentiles; and so the Syriac version, and two of Beza's copies, and two of Stephens's, read; for the Lord knew, that as soon as ever Saul was converted and professed his name, and preached his Gospel, the people of the Jews would immediately become his implacable enemies, and seek to destroy him; wherefore he promises him before hand deliverance, and security from them: ***and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee;*** to both Jews and Gentiles; to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles; which method the apostle observed, and which course he steered, until the Jews put away the Gospel from them; and then he turned to the Gentiles, to whom he chiefly preached, as their apostle, and was saved from many dangers among them, as is here promised.

ACTS 26:18. *To open their eyes,* The eyes of their understanding, which were shut, and darkened, and blind: one copy reads, "the eyes of the blind"; and the Ethiopic version renders

it, "the eyes of their heart"; and to have them opened, is to have them enlightened, to see their lost state and condition by nature, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the plague of their own hearts, the impurity of nature, the impotence of man to that which is spiritually good, the imperfection of obedience, and the insufficiency of a man's righteousness to justify him before God; and to see where help is laid, and where salvation is; to behold Christ as the only able, willing, complete, and suitable Saviour; to see that there is life and righteousness, peace, pardon, grace, and glory in him; and to have an insight into the doctrines of the Gospel, and a glimpse of the invisible things of another world. Now though this is all the work of the Spirit, by whom only the eyes of the understanding are enlightened; yet this is ascribed to the apostle, not as the efficient cause, but as the instrument and means through preaching of the Gospel, which the Spirit of God would, and did make use of: ***and to turn them from darkness to light;*** or "that they might be turned", as the Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions render it: by "darkness" is meant, the darkness of nature, the darkness of sin, of ignorance, and unbelief, in which all men by nature are; who are in the dark about, and are ignorant of God, and the perfections of his nature; and about sin, and the evil there is in it, and that comes by it; and the way of peace, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; and the work of the spirit in regeneration and sanctification upon the heart; and about the Scriptures of truth, and the doctrines of the Gospel, and what will be their state and portion in another world; they do not know where they are, what they are, nor where they are going: and in the effectual calling this darkness is in a great measure removed, and they are turned to light; to God, who is light itself, and to Christ, the light of the world, and to the light of the word, and to a participation of the light of grace here, in which they see light, and behold the above

things, and of the light of glory hereafter. This is a phrase used by the Jews, at the time of the passover, when they praise the Lord, and give thanks unto him for the wonders he wrought for their fathers and for them, as that he had brought them out of bondage to liberty, and from sorrow to joy, and , “from darkness to a great light” . Conversion is the end of the Gospel ministry, and illumination is necessary to it; yea, it lies in a turn from darkness to light, as is here expressed: and this conversion is not a mere external one, or a reformation of manners; this is indeed sometimes called a conversion, and is a man’s turning from the evil of his ways, from a vicious life and conversation, to a sober way of living, and is often brought about through the ministry of the word; but then this may be where true conversion is not, and where there is no special illumination of the Spirit, nor any true spiritual light; and there may be a turning again to the former course of life; besides, this external conversion, when it is right and genuine, is the fruit and effect of inward conversion, or true grace, and is at most but the evidence of it: nor is it a conversion to a doctrine in a professional way; men may be converted in this sense, and remain wicked; they may have the form, but not the power of godliness; know the doctrine and profess it, and yet be strangers to the experience of it: nor does it design a restoration after backslidings; which sometimes goes by the name of conversion, such as was Peter’s after his fall; but the first work of conversion is here meant, which is internal, and is a turn of the hearts of men; and is not the work of man, but of God, who has the hearts of all in his hands, and can turn them as he pleases; and is what man is passive in, he does not turn himself, but is turned by the Lord; though ministers may be, and are instruments in it. It follows, *and from the power of Satan unto God*: this power of Satan regards not his power over the rest of the devils, whose prince

and head he is; hence he is called the prince of devils, and the prince of the power of the air; but his power over the world of men, which he has by usurpation, and therefore is called the prince of the world; but not his power over the bodies of men, by possessing them, inflicting diseases, and death itself upon them, nor over their estates; all which is only by permission of God, whenever he exercises it; but over the souls of men, in whom he rules as in his own kingdom: he is the strong man armed, and the hearts of men are his palaces, which are guarded with devils and unclean lusts; when all the goods are kept in peace by him, there is no concern about sin, no inquiry after salvation, no dread of the curses of the law, nor fear of hell and damnation, but all in the utmost security: and he not only dwells in the hearts of unregenerate persons, but he works effectually there; by stirring up their corruptions, putting ill things into their minds, and instigating them against true spiritual and powerful religion, and the professors of it: he has power over the minds of them that believe not, to blind them, by keeping them in blindness, and increasing it; which he does by diverting their minds from hearing the Gospel; and whilst hearing it, by filling them with enmity against it. Moreover, they are led by him as captives at his will; they are in his power, as the bird is in the snare of the fowler, and as a prisoner in the hands of a jailer; and are entirely at his beck and command, and do his lusts, and obey his will: and this also may have a particular respect to the power and authority which he exercised over the Heathens, before the Gospel came among them; Satan usurped a power over the Gentile world, and took upon him to be the god of it; and for many hundred of years was worshipped in their idols; and he held them fast bound unto him in the fetters of ignorance, superstition, and idolatry; but now the Gospel was sent among them to free them from this power and tyranny of his; and it was

made effectual to the turning of multitudes of them from him, and subjection to him, which is done in the effectual calling of every person; not that Satan then has no more power over them to tempt and distress them, but not to rule over them, and lead them about at pleasure, and much less to devour and destroy them: and then also are they turned to God, to have true knowledge of him, and an hearty desire after him, which they had not before; and to a love of him, whose hearts before were enmity to him; and to believe in him, and trust in him as the God of providence, and of grace; and to have communion with him; and to be subject to his government, and yield a cheerful obedience to him, both externally and internally. *That they may receive forgiveness of sins*: as an act of God's free grace, through the blood of Christ, which was shed for it; and which free and full forgiveness of sins is published in the Gospel, that whoever believes in Christ, may by faith receive it. This is what every enlightened soul sees it needs, and is desirous of; it is the first thing it wants, and asks at the hands of God; and nothing can be more suitable to its case, and welcome to it; and this is the good news which is declared in the ministry of the Gospel: and it is had in a way of receiving; for it is not purchased with money, nor procured by the merits of men; but is a gift of God, which is received by the hand of faith into the conscience of the enlightened sinner; the consequences of which are peace, joy, and comfort. *And inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in one*: by the "inheritance" is meant, either something enjoyed now, as God himself, who is the portion of his people, and the lot of their inheritance; or a part and interest in Christ, who is that good part and portion, and which shall never be taken away; and the blessings of grace in him, which, besides forgiveness of sins, are peace with God, a justifying righteousness, and adopting grace: or rather eternal glory and happiness hereafter is here

designed, which is called an "inheritance" or "lot", in allusion to the land of Canaan, which was distributed by lot; not that heaven is a casual thing; but it signifies that every Israelite indeed will have their share and portion in it. There are many things which show an agreement between heaven, and the land of Canaan; that was a goodly land, and ready prepared for the Israelites; and so heaven is the better country, and the city and kingdom God has prepared for his people from the foundation of the world: a wilderness was passed through first, and many battles fought before it was possessed; the people of God pass through the wilderness of this world, and fight the good fight of faith, and then enter into rest: the Israelites were introduced into it, not by Moses, but by Joshua; and saints get to heaven, not by the works of the law, but by Christ the Saviour, another Jesus or Joshua: and lastly, Canaan was a place of rest; and so is heaven. Moreover, it may be so called, in allusion to inheritances among men, though it vastly exceeds all earthly ones, being incorruptible, undefiled, which fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens; yet it bears some likeness to them; it is what is bequeathed to the children of God by their heavenly Father, and comes to them through the death of Christ the testator, and is for ever: it is neither purchased nor acquired, but is freely given; belongs only to the children of God, and is their Father's free gift unto them, and is only enjoyed by such who are "sanctified"; and it lies among them, and will be jointly and equally possessed by them. The heirs of salvation are said to be sanctified in different senses; they are sanctified by God the Father in eternal election, being separated from others, and chosen through sanctification to it; and they are sanctified "in" and "by" the Lord Jesus Christ: they are sanctified in him representatively, he being the covenant head of his people, has all grace, and so all holiness in him for them, which is perfect and

complete; and this is the source of all that holiness that is in them, and which they have communicated to them by virtue of their union to him; and also they are sanctified “in” him through the imputation of the holiness of his human nature to them, which is a branch of their justification before God; and they are sanctified by him meritoriously, or by his blood, through which their sins are expiated, and fully atoned for; and so in this sense they are sanctified by it: and they are sanctified internally by the Spirit of God, who in regeneration produces principles of grace and holiness in them, which were not there before; man was originally possessed of a perfect moral holiness, but through sin is become an unholy creature; and in the same state and condition are the children of God by nature, as others, and need the sanctifying influences of the divine Spirit to make them meet for the undefiled inheritance: and this inheritance these sanctified ones receive by faith now, as they do the forgiveness of their sins; that is, they now receive by faith the promise of the inheritance, and the earnest and pledge of it, and their right unto it, and claim upon it: for the phrase, *by faith that is in me*, is not to be connected with the word “sanctified”, but with the word “receive”, in the preceding clause; and has respect to both benefits, which it receives from Christ, the object of it here expressed; for it is not any faith, but faith which is in Christ, by which these blessings of grace are received and enjoyed: and the whole of this shows the great ends and usefulness of the Gospel ministry.

Jewish Theological Writings

This article is an outline introduction to the major lines of Jewish theological literature. You should also study these other topics:

Wikipedia has excellent articles on most of the concepts listed here and is an excellent resource for further study.¹

Basic listing of Jewish literature

1. Torah
2. Targums
3. Talmud
4. Mishnah
5. Gemara
6. Midrash
7. Halakhah
8. Haggadah
9. Septuagint
10. Aquila's Greek Version
11. Apocrypha
12. Pseudepigrapha
13. Philo's Canons

The Torah

The **Torah** is the name given to the canon of Hebrew scriptures. Originally, the word “torah” referred to the first five books, the Pentateuch. Later, the Pharisees and Rabbis expanded the definition to include the poetical and prophetic books of the Old Testament.

The Jewish scholars also recognized an Oral Torah, which was made up of general applications of general principles. Both the written and oral Torahs were considered to have been given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

The Targums

The **Targums** were explanations of the Hebrew, translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew in the Chaldean language, for Jews who no longer understood Hebrew. The word means “explanation” or “interpretation”. A combination of Chaldean and Hebrew languages became the Aramaic language.

Many Jews of the Babylonian captivity had adopted the Aramaic language, both in the areas of captivity and in Jerusalem itself. The

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org>

Jewish worship also had shifted from temple-centered worship to several other things:

- Study of the Law in common
- Chanting of Psalms, and united prayers

The common language used in worship was usually Aramaic.

The three basic Targums of the Old Testament are:

1. The Targum on the Pentateuch, known as the Targum of Onkelos, about 70 AD
2. The Targum on the Prophets, the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel, a student of the school of Hillel, first half of the 1st century AD.
3. The Targum on the Writings, or Hagiographa; includes Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Chronicles, Esther

The oral Targums date back as far as 444 BC, with written Targums being produced from the 1st to the 10th centuries AD.

Nehemiah 8:8 describes how the Targums were communicated. It was a three-fold process:

1. they read “distinctly”, they read the Law in Hebrew
2. they gave the “sense”, they translated the Hebrew into Aramaic
3. they caused them to understand the reading; that is, they interpreted in Aramaic the meaning of the translation.

The Talmud (see below) gives extensive and explicit rules for interpreting the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. There is always a question, of course, of how carefully individual teachers follow the rules. Here is a sample of the rules of interpretation:

The Law was read by the reader, verse by verse, and each verse was followed by translation into Aramaic and interpretation.

In prophetic books, three verses were read before interpretation.

The reader had to keep his eyes on the text without looking up. The one giving the translation and interpretation had to do so *without* looking at the text. This was done to make very clear the difference between the

actual words of the text and the interpretation given in Aramaic.

At first, it was forbidden to write the Targums.

The Talmud

The word “Talmud” means “teaching” or “doctrine”.

The Talmud is a Jewish work which contains the civil and religious laws not found in the Pentateuch, with commentaries and illustrations of these laws. It represents the learning, teaching, opinions, and decisions of Jewish teachers over a period of about 800 years, from 300 BC to 500 AD.

The Talmud has two parts: (1) The Mishnah, or oral law, and (2) the Gemara, the commentaries and illustrations.

TOPIC: ORIGINS OF THE TALMUD

Mishnah

The Mishnah was begun by Hillel in the years before the birth of Christ; it was called the Second Law. It’s chain of succession was supposed to be from Moses to Joshua, from Joshua to the elders, from the elders to the prophets, from the prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue, and from them to their successors in the 2nd century AD.

The Mishnah was divided into six sections, each dealing with broad subject matter.

1. Seeds
2. Feasts
3. Women
4. Damages
5. Sacred Things
6. Purifications

TOPICS: ORGANIZATION OF THE TALMUD; STRUCTURE OF THE TALMUD

The Gemara

The Gemara is the part of the Talmud which contains the notes, commentaries, explanations, and illustrations of the Mishnah, along with much other information. It was written in Aramaic and completed about 500 AD. The Babylonian Gemara contains about 6000 pages.

Midrash

The Midrash is a less formal explanation and exposition of the Old Testament, from and doctrinal and homiletical point of view. The name means "investigation and interpretation". It is written in both Hebrew and Aramaic.

The Midrash differs from the Targums in that it is not a translation, but a commentary. And it differs from the Talmud in that it deals only with the written Law. There are two parts of the Midrash, the Halakhah and the Haggadah.

Halakhah

The Halakhah is the collection of all Jewish Law, including the biblical law (the 613 commandments) and later Talmudic and rabbinic law, as well as customs and traditions.

The Halakhah confines itself to the Pentateuch and gives explanation and additions to the Law and ritual. It also covers cases which the Law does not cover; and it gives decisions of Rabbis on controversial subjects.

Halakhah guides not only religious practices and beliefs, but numerous aspects of day-to-day life. Halakhah is often translated as "Jewish Law", although a more literal translation might be "the path" or "the way of walking". The word derives from the Hebrew root that means to go or to walk.

Haggadah

The Haggadah covers the entire Old Testament and includes the historical, prophetic, and poetical sections. It is popular, and covers history, tradition, stories, legends, parables, allegories, beliefs, customs. Much of the writing is fanciful, some of it is good.

The Haggadah was used mostly between 100 BC and 300 AD

Septuagint – What is it?²

Septuagint (sometimes abbreviated LXX) is the name given to the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures. The Septuagint has its origin

² [published on the Septuagint web site: <http://www.septuagint.com>]

in Alexandria, Egypt and was translated between 300-200 BC. Widely used among Hellenistic Jews, this Greek translation was produced because many Jews spread throughout the empire were beginning to lose their Hebrew language. The process of translating the Hebrew to Greek also gave many non-Jews a glimpse into Judaism. According to an ancient document called the *Letter of Aristeas*, it is believed that 70 to 72 Jewish scholars were commissioned during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus to carry out the task of translation. The term "Septuagint" means seventy in Latin, and the text is so named to the credit of these 70 scholars.

Septuagint – Influence on Christianity

The Septuagint was also a source of the Old Testament for early Christians during the first few centuries AD. Many early Christians spoke and read Greek, thus they relied on the Septuagint translation for most of their understanding of the Old Testament. The New Testament writers also relied heavily on the Septuagint, as a majority of Old Testament quotes cited in the New Testament are quoted directly from the Septuagint (others are quoted from the Hebrew texts). Greek church fathers are also known to have quoted from the Septuagint. Even today, the Eastern Orthodox Church relies on the Septuagint for its Old Testament teachings. Some modern Bible translations also use the Septuagint along side Hebrew manuscripts as their source text.

What Does the Septuagint Contain

The Septuagint contains the standard 39 books of the Old Testament canon, as well as certain apocryphal books. The term "Apocrypha" was coined by the fifth-century biblical scholar, Jerome, and generally refers to the set of ancient Jewish writings written during the period between the last book in the Jewish scriptures, Malachi, and the arrival of Jesus Christ. The apocryphal books include Judith, Tobit, Baruch, Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus), the Wisdom of Solomon, First and Second Maccabees, the two Books of Esdras, additions

to the Book of Esther, additions to the Book of Daniel, and the Prayer of Manasseh.

The Apocryphal books were included in the Septuagint for historical and religious purposes, but are not recognized by Protestant Christians or Orthodox Jews as canonical (inspired by God). Most reformed teachers will point out that the New Testament writers never quoted from the Apocryphal books, and that the Apocrypha was never considered part of the canonical Jewish scripture. However, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches include the Apocrypha in their Bible (except for the books of Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh).

Septuagint - Is it a Reliable Translation?

Since the Septuagint is a translation, scholars speculate if it accurately reflects the Hebrew scriptures of the 2nd century BC. A close examination of the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text (the early Hebrew text of the Old Testament) show slight variations. Were these errors in translation, or are the Septuagint and Masoretic Text based on slightly different Hebrew manuscripts? The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has helped to shed light on this question. Discovered in the Qumran region near the Dead Sea beginning in 1947, these scrolls are dated to as early as 200 BC and contain parts of every book in the Old Testament except Esther. Comparisons of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint show that where there are differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, approximately 95% of those differences are shared between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic text, while only 5% of those differences are shared between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint. Does this mean that the Septuagint is unreliable and that our Old Testament is wrought with contradictory sources? No. It is imperative to note that these “variations” are extremely minor (i.e., grammatical errors, spelling differences or missing words) and do not affect the meaning of sentences and paragraphs. (An exception is the book of Jeremiah, in which the actual passages are arranged differently.) None of the differences, however, come close to affecting any area of

teaching or doctrine. The majority of the Septuagint, Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls are remarkably similar and have dispelled unfounded theories that the Biblical text has been corrupted by time and conspiracy. Furthermore, these variations do not call into question the infallibility of God in preserving His word. Although the original documents are inerrant, translators and scribes are human beings and are thus prone to making slight errors in translation and copying (Hebrew scribal rules attest to how exacting scribes were). Even then, the Bible has redundancy built into its text, and anything significant is told more than once. If grammatical mistakes were introduced that makes a point unclear, it would be clarified in several other places in scripture.

Septuagint - Dramatic Evidence for the Credibility of Messianic Prophecy

The Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls establish a very dramatic piece of evidence for Christianity – that the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah unquestionably predated the time that Jesus Christ walked the earth. All theories of 1st Century AD conspiracies and prophecy manipulation go out the door when we realize that prophetic scripture like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 were fixed in written form at least 100 years before Christ, and probably many more. Again, despite time, persecution, and the incredibly minor instances of scribal mistakes, the Septuagint is just another example of how the Biblical text has remained faithful in its message and theme. The Holy Bible is truly a divinely inspired and preserved letter from God that is deserving of our time and attention.

Jewish Literature

Brief Outline of Ancient Jewish Theological Literature

from Sketches of Jewish Social Life by Alfred Edersheim, 1876

The arrangements of the synagogue, as hitherto described, combined in a remarkable manner fixedness of order with liberty of the individual. Alike the seasons and the time of public

services, their order, the prayers to be offered, and the portions of the law to be read were fixed. On the other hand, between the eighteen "benedictions" said on ordinary days, and the seven repeated on the Sabbaths, free prayer might be inserted; the selection from the prophets, with which the public reading concluded--the "Haphtarah" (from "patar," to "conclude")--seems to have been originally left to individual choice; while the determination who was to read, or to conduct the prayers, or to address the people, was in the hands of the "rulers of the synagogue" (Acts 13:15). The latter, who were probably also the members of the local Sanhedrin, had naturally charge of the conduct of public worship, as well as of the government and discipline of the synagogues. They were men learned in the law and of good repute, whom the popular voice designated, but who were regularly set apart by "the laying on of hands," or the "Semichah," which was done by at least three, who had themselves received ordination, upon which the candidate had the formal title of Rabbi bestowed on him, and was declared qualified to administer the law (Sanh. 13 b). The Divine Majesty was supposed to be in the midst of each Sanhedrin, on account of which even that consisting of only three members might be designated as "Elohim." Perhaps this may have been said in explanation and application of Psalm 82:6: "I have said, Ye are Elohim; and all of you children of the Most High."

The special qualifications for the office of Sanhedrist, mentioned in Rabbinical writings, are such as to remind us of the directions of St. Paul to Timothy (1 Tim 3:1-10). A member of the Sanhedrin must be wise, modest, God-fearing, truthful, not greedy of filthy lucre, given to hospitality, kindly, not a gambler, nor a usurer, nor one who traded in the produce of Sabbatical years, nor yet one who indulged in unlawful games (Sanh. iii. 3). They were called "Sekenim," "elders" (Luke 7:3), "Memunim," "rulers" (Mark 5:22), "Parnasin," "feeders, overseers, shepherds of the flock" (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), and "Manhigei," "guides" (Heb

13:7). They were under the presidency and supreme rule of an "Archisynagogos," or "Rosh-ha-Cheneseth," "head of the synagogue" (Yom. vii. 1; Sot. vii. 7), who sometimes seems to have even exercised sole authority. The designation occurs frequently in the New Testament (Matt 9:18; Mark 5:35,36,38; Luke 8:41,49, 13:14; Acts 18:8,17). The inferior functions in the synagogue devolved on the "chassan," or "minister" (Luke 4:20). In course of time, however, the "chassanim" combined with their original duties the office of schoolmaster; and at present they lead both the singing and the devotions of the synagogue. This duty originally devolved not on any fixed person, but whoever was chosen might for the time being act as "Sheliach Zibbur," or "legate of the congregation." Most modern writers have imagined, that the expression "angel of the Church," in the epistles to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, was used in allusion to this ancient arrangement of the synagogue. But the fact that the "Sheliach Zibbur" represented not an office but a function, renders this view untenable. Besides, in that case, the corresponding Greek expression would rather have been "apostle" than "angel of the Church." Possibly, however, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews may refer to it, when he designates the Lord Jesus "the Apostle and High-Priest of our profession" (Heb 3:1). Besides these functionaries, we also read of "Gabaei Zedakah," or collectors of charity, to whom the Talmud (B. Bathra, 8 b) by a jeu de mots * applies the promise that they "shall be as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan 12:3), since they lead many to "righteousness."

* Zedakah means righteousness, but is also used for "charity."

Alms were collected at regular times every week, either in money or in victuals. At least two were employed in collecting, and three in distributing charity, so as to avoid the suspicion of dishonesty or partiality. These collectors of charity, who required to be "men of good repute, and faithful," are thought by many to have been the model for the institution of the

Diaconate in the early Church. But the analogy scarcely holds good; nor, indeed, were such collectors employed in every synagogue.

In describing the conduct of public worship in the synagogues, reference was made to the "meturgeman," who translated into the vernacular dialect what was read out of the Hebrew Scriptures, and also to the "darshan," who expounded the Scriptures or else the traditional law in an address, delivered after the reading of the "Haphtarah," or section from the prophets. These two terms will have suggested names which often occur in writings on Jewish subjects, and may fitly lead to some remarks on Jewish theology at the time of our Lord. Now the work of the "meturgeman" * was perpetuated in the Targum, and that of the "darshan" in the Midrash.

* Hence also the term "dragoman."

Primarily the Targum, then, was intended as a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the vernacular Aramaean. Of course, such translations might be either literal, or else more or less paraphrastic. Every Targum would also naturally represent the special views of the translator, and be interesting as affording an insight into the ideas prevalent at the time, and the manner in which Scripture was understood. But some Targumim are much more paraphrastic than others, and indeed become a kind of commentary, showing us the popular theology of the time. Strictly speaking, we have really no Targum dating from the time of our Lord, nor even from the first century of our era. There can be no doubt, however, that such a Targum did exist, although it has been lost. Still, the Targumim preserved to us, although collated, and having received their present form at later periods, contain very much that dates from the Temple-period, and even before that. Mentioning them in the order of their comparative antiquity, we have the Targum of Onkelos, on the five books of Moses; the Targum of Jonathan, on the prophets (inclusive of Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel and of the Kings); the so-called (or pseudo) Jonathan on the Pentateuch; and the Jerusalem

Targum, which is but a fragment. Probably the latter two were intended to be supplemental to the Targum Onkelos. Late criticism has thrown doubt even on the existence of such a person as Onkelos. Whoever may have been the author, this Targum, in its present form, dates probably from the third, that of Jonathan on the prophets from the fourth century.

In some respects more interesting than the Targumim are the Midrashim, of which we possess three, dating probably, in their present form, from the first or second century of our era, but embodying many parts much older. These are--mentioning them again in the order of their antiquity--"Siphra" (the book), a commentary on Leviticus; "Siphri," a commentary on Numbers and Deuteronomy; and "Mechilta," a commentary on certain portions of Exodus. But we have even a monument more interesting than these, of the views of the ancient Pharisees, and of their Scriptural interpretations. Some of the fathers referred to a work called "Lesser Genesis," or the "Book of Jubilees." This had been lost to theological literature, till again discovered within the present century, although not in the original Hebrew, nor even in its first or Greek translation, but in an Ethiopic rendering from the latter. The work, which no doubt dates from the era of our Lord, covers the same ground as the first book of Moses, whence the name of "Lesser Genesis." It gives the Biblical narrative from the creation of the world to the institution of the Passover, in the spirit in which the Judaism of that period would view it. The legendary additions, the Rabbinical ideas expressed, the interpretations furnished, are just such as one would expect to find in such a work. One of the main objects of the writer seems to have been the chronology of the book of Genesis, which it is attempted to settle. All events are recorded according to Jubilee-periods of forty-nine years, whence the name "Book of Jubilees," given to the work. These "Jubilees" are again arranged into "weeks," each of seven years (a day for a year); and events are classified as having taken place in a certain

month of a certain year, of a certain "week" of years, of a certain "Jubilee"-period. Another tendency of the book, which, however, it has in common with all similar productions, is to trace up all later institutions to the patriarchal period. *

* Although the "Book of Jubilees" seems most likely of Pharisaic authorship, the views expressed in it are not always those of the Pharisees. Thus the resurrection is denied, although the immortality of the soul is maintained.

Besides these works, another class of theological literature has been preserved to us, around which of late much and most serious controversy has gathered. Most readers, of course, know about the Apocrypha; but these works are called the "pseudo-epigraphic writings." Their subject-matter may be described as mainly dealing with unfulfilled prophecy; and they are couched in language and figures borrowed, among others, from the book of Daniel. In fact, they read like attempts at imitating certain portions of that prophecy--only that their scope is sometimes wider. This class of literature is larger than those not acquainted with the period might have expected. Yet when remembering the troubles of the time, the feverish expectations of a coming deliverance, and the peculiar cast of mind and training of those who wrote them, they scarcely seem more numerous, nor perhaps even more extravagant, than a certain kind of prophetic literature, abundant among us not long ago, which the fear of Napoleon or other political events from time to time called forth. To that kind of production, they seem, at least to us, to bear an essential likeness--only that, unlike the Western, the Oriental expounder of unfulfilled prophecy assumes rather the language of the prophet than that of the commentator, and clothes his views in mystic emblematic language. In general, this kind of literature may be arranged into Greek and Hebrew--according as the writers were either Egyptian (Hellenistic) or Palestinian Jews. Considerable difficulty exists as to the

precise date of some of these writings--whether previous or subsequent to the time of Christ. These difficulties are, of course, increased when it is sought to fix the precise period when each of them was composed. Still, late historical investigations have led to much accord on general points. Without referring to the use which opponents of Christianity have of late attempted to make of these books, it may be safely asserted that their proper study and interpretation will yet be made very helpful, not only in casting light upon the period, but in showing the essential difference between the teaching of the men of that age and that of the New Testament. For each branch and department of sacred study, the more carefully, diligently, and impartially it is pursued, affords only fresh testimony to that truth which is most certainly, and on the best and surest grounds, believed among us.

It were, however, a mistake to suppose that the Rabbinical views, extravagant as they so often are, were propounded quite independently of Scripture. On the contrary, every traditional ordinance, every Rabbinical institution, nay, every legend and saying, is somehow foisted upon the text of the Old Testament. To explain this, even in the briefest manner, it is necessary to state that, in general, Jewish traditionalism is distinguished into the "Halakhah" and the "Haggadah." The "Halakhah" (from "halach," to "walk") indicates the settled legal determinations, which constituted the "oral law," or "Thorah shebeal peh." Nothing could here be altered, nor was any freedom left to the individual teacher, save that of explanation and illustration. The object of the "Halakhah" was to state in detail, and to apply to all possible cases, the principles laid down in the law of Moses; as also to surround it, as it were, with "a hedge," in order to render every unwitting transgression impossible. The "Halakhah" enjoyed not only the same authority with the law of Moses, but, as being explanatory, in some respects was even more highly esteemed. Indeed, strictly speaking, it was regarded as equally with the Pentateuch the revelation of God to Moses; only

the form or manner of revelation was regarded as different--the one being committed to writing, the other handed down by word of mouth. According to tradition, Moses explained the traditional law successively to Aaron, to his sons, to the seventy elders, and to the people--care being taken that each class heard it four times (Maimonides' Preface to Seraim, 1 a). The Talmud itself attempts to prove that the whole traditional law, as well as the writings of the prophets and the Hagiographa, had been communicated to Moses, by quoting Exodus 24:12: "I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them." "The 'tables of stone,'" argues Rabbi Levi (Ber. 5 1), "are the ten commandments; the 'law' is the written law (in the Pentateuch); the 'commandments' are the Mishnah; 'which I have written,' refers to the prophets and the Hagiographa; while the words, 'that thou mayest teach them,' point to the Gemara. From this we learn, that all this was given to Moses on Sinai."

If such was the "Halakhah," it is not so easy to define the limits of the "Haggadah." The term, which is derived from the verb "higgid," to "discuss," or "tell about," covers all that possessed not the authority of strict legal determinations. It was legend, or story, or moral, or exposition, or discussion, or application--in short, whatever the fancy or predilections of a teacher might choose to make it, so that he could somehow connect it either with Scripture or with a "Halakhah." For this purpose some definite rules were necessary to preserve, if not from extravagance, at least from utter absurdity. Originally there were four such canons for connecting the "Haggadah" with Scripture. Contracting, after the favorite manner of the Jews, the initial letters, these four canons were designated by the word "Pardes" (Paradise). They were--1. To ascertain the plain meaning of a passage (the "Peshat"); 2. To take the single letters of a word as an indication or hint ("Remes") of other words, or even of whole sentences; 3. The "Derush," or practical exposition of a passage; and 4. To find out the

"Sod" (mystery), or mystical meaning of a verse or word. These four canons were gradually enlarged into thirty-two rules, which gave free vent to every kind of fancifulness. Thus one of these rules--the "Gematria" (geometry, calculation)--allowed the interpreter to find out the numerical value of the letters in a word--the Hebrew letters, like the Roman, being also numerals--and to substitute for a word one or more which had the same numerical value. Thus, if in Numbers 12:1 we read that Moses was married to an "Ethiopian woman" (in the original, "Cushith"), Onkelos substitutes instead of this, by "gematria," the words, "of fair appearance"--the numerical value both of Cushith and of the words "of fair appearance" being equally 736. By this substitution the objectionable idea of Moses' marrying an Ethiopian was at the same time removed. Similarly, the Mishnah maintains that those who loved God were to inherit each 310 worlds, the numerical value of the word "substance" ("Yesh") in Proverbs 8:21 being 310. On the other hand, the canons for the deduction of a "Halakhah" from the text of Scripture were much more strict and logical. Seven such rules are ascribed to Hillel, which were afterwards enlarged to thirteen. *

* It would be beyond the scope of this volume to explain these "middoth," or "measurements," and to illustrate them by examples. Those who are interested in the matter are referred to the very full discussion on Rabbinical exegesis in my History of the Jewish Nation, pp. 570-580.

Little objection can be taken to them; but unfortunately their practical application was generally almost as fanciful, and certainly as erroneous, as in the case of the "Haggadah." Probably most readers would wish to know something more of those "traditions" to which our Lord so often referred in His teaching. We have here to distinguish, in the first place, between the Mishnah and the Gemara. The former was, so to speak, the text, the latter its extended commentary. At the same time, the Mishnah contains also a good deal of commentary, and much that is not either legal

determination or the discussion thereof; while the Gemara, on the other hand, also contains what we would call "text." The word Mishna (from the verb "shanah") means "repetition"--the term referring to the supposed repetition of the traditional law, which has been above described. The Gemara, as the very word shows, means "discussion," and embodies the discussions, opinions, and saying of the Rabbis upon, or a propos of, the Mishnah. Accordingly, the text of the Mishnah is always given in the pages of the Talmud, which reproduce those discussions thereon of the Jewish Theological parliament or academy, which constitute the Gemara. The authorities introduced in the Mishnah and the Gemara range from about the year 180 BC to 430 AD (in the Babylon Talmud). The Mishnah is, of course, the oldest work, and dates, in its present form and as a written compilation, from the close of the second century of our era. Its contents are chiefly "Halakhah," there being only one Tractate (Aboth) in which there is no "Halakhah" at all, and another (on the measurements of the Temple) in which it but very rarely occurs. Yet these two Tractates are of the greatest historical value and interest. On the other hand, there are thirteen whole Tractates in the Mishnah which have no "Haggadah" at all, and other twenty-two in which it is but of rare occurrence. Very much of the Mishnah must be looked upon as dating before, and especially from the time of Christ, and its importance for the elucidation of the New Testament is very great, though it requires to be most judiciously used. The Gemara, or book of discussions on the Mishnah, forms the two Talmuds--the Jerusalem and the Babylon Talmud. The former is so called because it is the product of the Palestinian academies; the latter is that of the Babylonian school. The completion of the Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud ("Talmud" = doctrine, lore) dates from the middle of the fourth, that of the Babylonian from the middle of the sixth century of our era. It need scarcely be said that the former is of much greater historical value than the latter. Neither of these two Gemaras, as we now

possess them, is quite complete--that is, there are Tractates in the Mishnah for which we have no Gemara, either in the Jerusalem or in the Babylon Talmud. Lastly, the Babylon Talmud is more than four times the size of that of Jerusalem. Obviously this is not the place for giving even the briefest outline of the contents of the Mishnah. *

* In Appendix 1 we give as a specimen a translation of one of the Mishnic Tractates; and in Appendix 2 translations of extracts from the Babylon Talmud.

Suffice it here to state that it consists of six books ("sedarim," "orders"), which are subdivided into Tractates ("Massichthoth"), and these again into chapters ("Perakim"), and single determinations or traditions ("Mishnaioth"). In quoting the Mishnah it is customary to mention not the Book (or "Seder") but the special Tractate, the Perek (or chapter), and the Mishnah. The names of these Tractates (not those of the books) give a sufficient idea of their contents, which cover every conceivable, and well-nigh every inconceivable case, with full discussions thereon. Altogether the Mishnah contains sixty-three Tractates, consisting of 525 chapters, and 4,187 "Mishnaioth."

There is yet another branch of Jewish theology, which in some respects is the most interesting to the Christian student. There can be no doubt, that so early as the time of our Lord a series of doctrines and speculations prevailed which were kept secret from the multitude, and even from ordinary students, probably from fear of leading them into heresy. This class of study bears the general name of the "Kabbalah," and, as even the term (from "kabal," to "receive," or "hand down") implies, represents the spiritual traditions handed down from earliest times, although mixed up, in course of time, with many foreign and spurious elements. The "Kabbalah" grouped itself chiefly around the history of the creation, and the mystery of God's Presence and Kingdom in the world, as symbolised in the vision of the chariot and of the wheels (Eze 1). Much that is found in

Cabalistic writings approximates so closely to the higher truths of Christianity, that, despite the errors, superstitions, and follies that mingle with it, we cannot fail to recognize the continuance and the remains of those deeper facts of Divine revelation, which must have formed the substance of prophetic teaching under the Old Testament, and have been understood, or at least hoped for, by those who were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If now, at the close of these sketches of Jewish life, we ask ourselves, what might have been expected as to the relation between Christ and the men and the religion of His period, the answer will not be difficult. Assuredly, in one respect Christ could not have been a stranger to His period, or else His teaching would have found no response, and, indeed, have been wholly unintelligible to His contemporaries. Nor did He address them as strangers to the covenant, like the heathen. His was in every respect the continuation, the development, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Only, He removed the superincumbent load of traditionalism; He discarded the externalism, the formalism, and the work-righteousness, which had well-nigh obliterated the spiritual truths of the Old Testament, and substituted in their place the worship of the letter. The grand spiritual facts, which it embodied, He brought forward in all their brightness and meaning; the typical teaching of that dispensation He came to show forth and to fulfil; and its prophecies He accomplished, alike for Israel and the world. And so in Him all that was in the Old Testament--of truth, way, and life--became "Yea and Amen." Thus we can understand how, on the one hand, the Lord could avail Himself of every spiritual element around, and adopt the sayings, parables, ideas, and customs of that period--indeed, must have done so, in order to be a true man of the period,--and yet be so wholly not of that time as to be despised, rejected, and delivered up unto death by the blind guides of His blinded fellow-countrymen. Had He entirely discarded the period in which He lived, had He not availed Himself of all in it

that was true or might be useful, He would not have been of it--not the true man Christ Jesus. Had He followed it, identified Himself with its views and hopes, or headed its movements, He would not have been the Christ, the Son of the living God, the promised Deliverer from sin and guilt.

And so we can also perceive the reason of the essential enmity to Christ on the part of the Pharisees and Scribes. It was not that He was a new and a strange Teacher; it was, that He came as the Christ. Theirs was not an opposition of teaching to His; it was a contrariety of fundamental life-principles. "Light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light." Closely related as the two were, the Pharisaical Judaism of that and of the present period is at the opposite pole from the religion of Christ--alike as regards the need of man, the purposes of God's love, and the privileges of His children. There was one truth which, we are reluctantly obliged to admit, found, alas! scarcely any parallel in the teaching of Rabbinism: it was that of a suffering Messiah. Hints indeed there were, as certain passages in the prophecies of Isaiah could not be wholly ignored or misrepresented, even by Rabbinical ingenuity, just as the doctrine of vicarious suffering and substitution could not be eliminated from the practical teaching of the confession of sins over the sacrifices, when the worshipper day by day laid his hands upon, and transferred to them his guilt. Yet Judaism, except in the case of the few, saw not in all this that to which alone it could point as its real meaning: "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

And now, as century after century has passed, and the gladsome Gospel message has been carried from nation to nation, while Israel is still left in the darkness of its unbelief and the misery of its mistaken hope, we seem to realize with ever increasing force that "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." Yes: "unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the

government shall be upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:2,6). For assuredly, "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew." But "all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom 11:2,26). "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night" (Isa 21:11,12).

Origins of the Talmud

The Origins of the Talmud

The name "Talmud" means "teaching" or "study" and refers to the oral law which has been taught to the children of Israel since the time of Moses.

The name "written law" was given to the Old Testament, and "oral law" refers to all the teachings of the "sages" consisting of comments on the text of the Bible. It has always been the teacher's duty to explain and comment on the laws and ordinances until the people understood them thoroughly and knew them by heart. The descendants of Aaron, the priesthood, was commissioned to teach the Bible to the people. Although there are very few historical records to show us how this was accomplished from the days of Moses until the time of the Kingdom, it is apparent that the teaching ministry was unbroken during all those centuries.

Figurative interpretation of the Bible began in the days when the Great Assembly resolved to keep themselves distinct from the Samaritans, who adhered to the literal interpretation of the text. This study began to make progress from approximately the time of the Greek conquest of Judea, when the term "Great Assembly" was changed to the Greek "Sanhedrin." It spread into every college where prominent teachers were charged with leading congregations in instruction of the Law, of ordinances relating to things clean and unclean, to rights of property, and to crime.

All of the scholars who interpreted the Bible passages figuratively were called "Pharisees." The Pharisees interpretations began to be codified and

collected in the work that eventually became the Talmud.

At the time of Antiochus Epiphanes the high priesthood passed from the descendants of Zadok (David's high priest) to other families, and finally came into the possession of the Maccabees, who also were not descendants of the house of Zadok. These leaders began to differ from the Pharisees in the interpretation of the Torah (the Bible); and they began to explain the texts on the basis of oral tradition. They founded a distinct sect, called "Sadducees" (after Zadok). They disputed with the Pharisees and with their Talmud; and they persecuted the Pharisees to the utmost. Since the Maccabees were the nation's leaders and were men of power and wealth and held sway in Palestine, they joined with the Samaritans in an attempt to eradicate the trend toward figurative interpretation of the Bible.

Antiochus Epiphanes decreed that Pharisees who did not discontinue their studies would be executed; that circumcision was to be performed in a manner other than that prescribed by the Pharisees; that the Sabbath should not be observed according to the Pharisees' interpretations, etc. The obvious intention was to destroy the Talmud and anyone who adhered to it.

These persecutions against the Talmud usually ended in favor of the Sadducees until the time of Johanan the High Priest. Then, the Pharisees triumphed over their enemies and the oral law became the absorbing subject of the Sanhedrin. The Talmud began to be studied in all the colleges of Palestine, Egypt, and wherever Jews lived.

The Talmud of the Time of Christ

After the triumph of the Pharisees over the Sadducees, the Talmud developed rapidly. The numbers of scholars and followers of the Talmud increased quickly, and the colleges of Talmudic study developed steadily, until at the beginning of the Christian Era the schools of Hillel and Schammai had become important. Although there were still plenty of enemies arising, such as the Essenes and other sects who were opposed to particular doctrines, they did not have the power to hinder the progress of the Talmud or weaken its influence.

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People from all over the world, including many in high places, came to learn the doctrines and morality of the Talmud, which was already recognized as having a great moral contrast to the teachings of the priests of the heathen religions. Hillel the Elder received many of these people with enthusiasm. His grandson, Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, the teacher of Saul of Tarsus, continued the teaching of Hillel in the Talmudic school in Jerusalem.

The period of good fortune was only of short duration, however, as the time of the destruction of the Temple (70 AD) was near, and the victims of the sword (and of hunger) were many. Gamaliel the Elder was persecuted, and his son Simeon ben Gamaliel, was slain. In fact, if Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai had not risked his life to petition Vespasian to spare the Sanhedrin, who had been compelled during the Roman conquest of Jerusalem to move their college to Jamnia, there would have remained no vestige of the Talmud, since most of those who cherished it had passed away by the sword, by hunger, or by plague..

The study of the Talmud increased after the destruction of the Temple, but with great difficulty. There were continuous disputes with Sadducees and other sects, and undoubtedly with Christians.

Principal resources for this study are:

Rodkinson, Michael L, "The History of the Talmud", The Talmud Society, Boston, 1918.

Steinsaltz, Rabbi Adin, "The Essential Talmud", Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, NJ, 1992

Edersheim, Alfred, "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah"
