

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The Word and Work



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

MAY, 2001

Those Not-So-Silent

"400 Silent Years"

Where is God when Enemies Overrun Us?

* * *

What good resulted from the captivity in Babylon?

* * *

The vastly-outmanned general who kept winning

* * *

Prophecies fulfilled in astounding ways

* * *

Do Sadducees and Herodians still exist?

* * *

Where did all those rules come from?

* * *

The Most Important Pages This Month May Be
139-142

Church Offering English Classes

By Gregg Powers

Volunteers are teaching free English as a second language classes at Locust Street Church of Christ, 110 W. Locust St.

For the past 19 months, the group, under the direction of Jose Martinez, has taught the classes on Monday and Thursday nights at 7 to area Spanish-speaking immigrants.

"The church saw the need for Spanish-speaking people to learn English when we got involved in ministering to them and helping them," Martinez, a student at Emmanuel School of Religion, said "We found out a lot of people were taking advantage of them because they did not speak English. They were working for less than minimum wage. They couldn't find a place to live. They would have difficulty even trying to find a doctor. They couldn't even read a newspaper or call 911 to tell anyone if they had a problem."

Martinez, a native of the Dominican Republic, knows what it is like to be a stranger in a foreign land.

"When my wife and I came to this country we didn't know any English," he said, "It was hard because we were living in New York City. The church felt called to minister in this way, and since we had experience teaching and learning English in this way we started the program."

Starting with 10 volunteers, many of whom attend Milligan College, and six students, the program has now grown to 19 regular students.

Martinez said the vision of the program is to equip each student with practical language skills so they can be a part of the community and enjoy a better way of life.

"The program is designed to teach the students how to speak the language," Martinez said. "Some of them don't know how to write."

The courses are offered at four different skill levels.

A children's program is also provided. Most of the children already attend school and speak English, so their program is designed to teach them about God.

(Continued on Back Cover)

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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Introduction to this Month's Subject

Alex V. Wilson

Guess what? You can understand the Bible without reading this issue of W&W! And of course you can also know the Lord without reading it. *B-u-t*, by knowing the facts presented this month, you will understand the New Testament scriptures better than if you don't know them. Your grasp of the four gospels will be firmer, your insights into our Lord's life and ministry will increase, and you will probably find answers to some questions that puzzle you. Here is how New Testament scholar N. T. Wright recently put it, with only slight exaggeration,

There is an innate laziness which affects us all: the sense of "d'you mean I've got to learn all that stuff about first-century Judaism just to get the simple gospel message?" Answer: Yes. If God chose to become a first-century Jew, you might have thought finding out about first-century Jews would be something a believer in God would want to do!

Well, to understand the first century A.D., we must understand some things about the last centuries B.C. And that is our purpose this month. I have enjoyed and benefitted from the in-depth study involved. My prayer is that you too will gain from it. Among various helpful reference-books, I am indebted most to J. Sidlow Baxter's *Explore the Book* (Zondervan, 1960). More recent books have been used to update the information, but his book has been valuable and enriching.

The "400 Silent Years" between Malachi and Matthew--

People and Events Between the Testaments

Alex V. Wilson

Between the time of Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet, and the coming of Jesus -- What Happened? Lots of important things: Several empires ruled the Jews. A number of OT predictions were fulfilled--especially those by Daniel. Alexander the Great developed a special relation with the Jews. Judea again became "the land between the hammer & the anvil." A foreign king defiled the Lord's temple. Jewish guerilla bands defeated armies which outnumbered them five or six to one, and won independence. The Romans took over Judea--and for a special reason most Jews hated them from the very first. "Herod the Great" and his clan rose to power. In addition, synagogues grew in number and importance. Jewish religion became increasingly legalistic, and added more and more rules to their tradi-

tions or "oral law." Various sects and parties arose--the Sadducees, Pharisees, Herodians and Zealots. Jews lived in many places all around the ancient world. Jewish authors produced various kinds of literature-- the "apocryphal" books and others.

As we study these developments in greater depth, we will get a better grasp of New Testament people, events, customs and beliefs.



Between the last book of the Old Testament (Malachi) and the first book of the New Testament (Matthew), about 400 years went by. During that time the Lord did not send any prophets, nor were any books of our Bible written. These centuries are often called the inter-testamental period (between the Testaments), or "the 400 silent years." But though the Lord may have been silent, He was not inactive. First we will study external matters, then internal ones.

EXTERNAL Developments and Influences

Much of the history of the Jews involved their being conquered by the more powerful kingdoms and empires around them. The Lord forewarned them that if they rejected Him, they would be conquered. They did and they were. Judah, the southern kingdom, was conquered by a series of two Asian and then two European empires--the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, & Romans.

When Malachi wrote the last Old Testament book, the Jews were under the rule of the Persian emperors. In general, the Persians were far more humane to the peoples they ruled over than the Babylonians had been. At that time, around 400 B.C., the Persians were roughly half-way through their time of supremacy. [A time-line with dates appears on page 136.]

Then came the Greeks, and the Hellenistic empire established by Alexander the Great. The prophet Daniel, who lived 200 years before the Greek period, had written about 10 amazing predictions about that era of history. He compared that kingdom to a leopard with 4 wings, symbols of great speed. The leopard had 4 heads, representing 4 rulers (7:6). Chapter 8 gives a longer, detailed prophecy of how the 1st king of the Greek empire would smash the Persians, but then fall "at the height of his power." 4 kingdoms would replace him but "not have the same power" (8:5-8, 20-22). From 1 of those 4 kingdoms a treacherous, strong & destructive ruler would arise (23-25). He would even oppose God, and stop the Jews' daily sacrifices to Him, and defile their temple with an "abomination" or idol, resulting in desolation or devastation (8:11; 11:31; 12:11).

Here is how those prophecies began to be fulfilled: When King Philip of Macedonia died, his son who succeeded him was 20 years old. He went on to become one of the most influential men in world history, and thus is known as **Alexander the Great**. In his short reign of 12 years (335- 323 B.C.) he revolutionized the world. After uniting the Greeks in his support, he quickly won two great battles that crushed the Persian emperor Darius--*as Daniel foretold*. Alexander thus made himself the number one ruler in the world of that day. After that he rapidly conquered Egypt, and then moved northeast to the city of Tyre. He destroyed that powerful city after a siege of several months. This was a final fulfillment of a Biblical prediction found in *Ezekiel 26:3-5*, for his army "scraped away the rubble" of the original city of Tyre and "made her a bare rock....a place to spread fishnets."

Alexander then advanced south toward Jerusalem, demanding its surrender. As he neared the city, Jaddua the high priest, with a train of priests in their official robes, went out to meet him and beg for mercy. Some say that Alexander had previously seen this event in a dream (though historical evidence for that claim seems quite weak). However that may be, the high priest read to him the prophecies of Daniel regarding his exploits. Alexander spared the city, offered sacrifices to Yahweh the Lord God of Judah, and showed the Jews many favors. (This is recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus in his book *Antiquities*, XI, viii, 5)

From that day onward the Jews became favorites of his. He employed them in his army, and gave them equal rights with the Greeks as first citizens of Alexandria and other cities that he founded. As a result, many Jews became strongly favorable toward "Hellenism," the Greek culture spread worldwide by means of Alexander's conquests. (In the decades that followed, this led to a struggle between those Jews who wished to adopt Hellenistic beliefs and practices, and those who felt that such an attitude violated God's commands.)

Alexander then headed east, conquering all before him till at last in India his army refused to go any farther. Later, at the age of 32 he suddenly died from malaria. His four top generals fought among themselves to succeed him, but in the end they divided up his vast territories. (Remember Daniel's predictions about four lesser kings succeeding the great king who would fall when at the height of his power?)

The Fiendish Persecutor

Judea, because of its position at the crossroads of the earth, became the land "between the hammer and the anvil." This had often occurred during OT times, as the Syrians, Assyrians or Babylonians to the north would march southward to fight the Egyptians -- or vice

versa. Now Judea again became embroiled in struggles--this time between two of the four branches of Alexander's empire. To its southwest, the Ptolemy dynasty ruled Egypt. (Queen Cleopatra was in later years one of that family's most famous members.) To Judea's north, the Seleucid dynasty ruled Syria. For the first 120 years or so, the Jews were under Egypt --whose kings usually treated them well.

But as time passed, the rulers of Syria --the Seleucid dynasty--grew in power. The land of Judea increasingly became the battle ground between them and the Ptolemies, and by 204 B.C. the Syrians became dominant. The fortunes of the Jews changed dramatically as a result of this. Antiochus IV was the eighth & cruelest of the Seleucid kings, ruling from about 174-164 B.C. He had an extremely high opinion of himself, taking the title *Epiphanes*, which meant "revelation of God." Many of the people of his kingdom had a different name for him however -- they called him *epimanes*, "the madman."

Antiochus proved to be a fiendish enemy of Jewish ways. He made extreme efforts to get all the Jews to adopt Hellenistic (Greek) culture. To accomplish this goal he knew he must destroy their worship of Yahweh, since they believed He was the only true God & they must obey His laws. The king executed 1000s of Jews because they would not worship images of the Greek gods. Praying to Yahweh the Lord God of Israel, and observing the Sabbath as a day of rest also were made capital offenses. If a mother circumcised her infant, according to Jewish law, she and the baby both were killed. Antiochus also had many many scrolls of the Old Testament burned. The Syrians' atrocities and the martyrdoms of countless Jews are recorded in the apocryphal books of Maccabees: 1 Macc. chapters 1-6, & 2 Macc. 5:11-10:9. (We will learn more about these books later.)

But the New Testament also refers to them. Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on faith. It gives a partial listing of God's "Hall of Fame," describing various OT heroes who either achieved great victories or endured great sufferings by trust in the Lord. For example, verses 33-34 obviously refer to Daniel in the den of lions and then his three friends in the fiery furnace: Some of God's followers "shut the mouths of lions," while others "quenched the fury of the flames." But in verse 35b there appears a puzzling statement. "Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection." Who is that about, and when did it happen? We find the answer in 2 Maccabees 7:1-41.

This passage records how Antiochus set up a test to discern which Jews were complying with his demand to follow Hellenistic ways. They would be stopped and required to eat pork, which of course violated the OT dietary law. The demand was clear-cut. Prove your loy-

alty to my government by eating pork, and you will live. Refuse to eat it, and you prove your disloyalty; thus you will be executed as a traitor. So we read this gory but stirring story of faith:

Seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "We are ready to die rather than transgress the law of our fathers."

The king fell into a rage, and gave orders that pans and caldrons be heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, "The Lord God is watching over us."

After that gruesome ordeal, the second eldest son was asked, "Will you eat the pork rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" How would you feel in such a case? How tempting the offer of release and freedom, in change for just breaking one little law of the Lord!

"No," came his answer. "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws." As a result, he was tortured to death just like the first brother.

The third brother also refused to be released. He even stretched out his hands to the torturers, saying, "I got these from Heaven, and because of laws I disdain them, and from Him I hope to get them back again." He was similarly slaughtered.

Then the fourth made his refusal, with the words, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by Him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!" In that one day all seven brothers gave their lives, and at the end the mother also. This surely is what Heb. 11:35 points back to when it says, "Others, refusing to accept freedom, died under torture in order to be raised to a better life." As the hymnwriter says, *O God, to us may grace be given to follow in their train.* Lord, supply us with such faith and courage, that we too may stand for You in whatever test, big or small, we face from day to day. Because Christ lives, we can face tomorrow!

FREE AT LAST--FOR AWHILE!

The greatest outrage directed against the Lord by Antiochus Epiphanes occurred in 168 B.C. when he entered the Most Holy Place in God's temple in Jerusalem, erected an altar to the pagan god Zeus, and sacrificed a pig on it. (*Remember Daniel's prophecy* about a ruler who would defile the temple with an idol?) That 3-fold desecration triggered a fierce & successful revolt led by a priestly family which became known as the Maccabees. Their greatest leader was Judas Maccabeus. ("Maccabeus" was a title of honor they gave him. It means *the hammer*: he hammered his foes. His entire clan became known as the Maccabees.) With an army usually numbering about 10,000 he repeatedly defeated Syrian armies of up to 50,000 and 60,000. Though he was later killed in battle, the Jews were able to drive out the Syrians. They also purified and rededicated the temple. That achievement is still celebrated by Jews today at their annual Festival of Hanukkah. The period of Jewish independence lasted from around 142 to 63 B.C. during which the land was ruled by leaders descended from the brothers of Judas Maccabeus.

[Important points to notice in passing: (1)Antiochus was a *pre-fill* or foreshadowing of some of Daniel's prophecies. That is, while he partially fulfilled the passages, the world-ruling Antichrist or "Beast" of the endtimes will *full-fill* them. Notice that Dan.9:27, 11:31, & 12:11 refer to an "abomination that causes desolation"--the setting up of an idol which would result in devastation. This clearly refers to the image of Zeus which Antiochus set up in the temple of the Lord in 168 B.C. Yet in Matt.24:15 Christ predicted a *yet-future* "abomination that causes desolation." The final "man of lawlessness" will carry out His prophecy: 2 Thes. 2:3-4, 9-10; Rev.13:11-15.

(2)Also notice that the Greek/Hellenistic era of supremacy over Judea (including the time of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids too) ended nearly 150 years before the coming of Jesus. Yet the Greeks made a very long-lasting contribution to the Church and the spread of the gospel of Christ: **The New Testament writings were written and circulated in the Greek language, which was still the most widely-used language in the world even during the time of the Roman Empire.]**

Rome Takes Over

About 80 years after the Jews gained their independence, a civil war broke out in Judea. It was led by two brothers descended from the Maccabees. It was only the latest of many inter-family conflicts among the Jewish leaders during this era. The Roman general Pompey used this war as an excuse to interfere in Judea's affairs. After a siege of 3 months, he took the city of Jerusalem in the name of Rome. He even entered the Most Holy Place in the temple, thereby alienating all the godly Jews against the Romans from the very start.

Rome remained in control of Judea from 63 B.C. onward. As a Roman province, its people had to pay taxes to Rome; the Jewish “publicans” who helped collect taxes for the hated foreign rulers were considered scum by the rest of the Jews. (Matthew and Zaccheus were both publicans.) The Romans stripped the clan of the Maccabees of their political power, though they allowed them to retain the office of high priest. (By this time the family of the Maccabees were called Hasmoneans, after an influential ancestor.)

About 40 B.C. **Augustus Caesar made a man named Herod the puppet-king of Judea.** He was not a Jew but an Edomite. To gain favor with the Jews, he married Mariamne, a descendent of the Maccabees. He also began a building program which greatly enhanced the splendor of Jerusalem. As part of that program, he **enlarged and beautified the 2nd temple** in a building program that lasted over 45 years! It had been built in 516 B.C. but had remained not nearly so splendid as the 1st temple, built by Solomon.

But that was only part of what was done by Herod--called “the Great.” To exterminate all possible rivals to his throne, he put to death three of his wife’s brothers, plus her mother, and Mariamne herself, and the two sons she had borne to him! Herod the Great was king when Jesus was born and we know what he did to the baby boys of Bethlehem! Such a slaughter was nothing unusual for a monster like Herod. In following years a number of his family-members also became rulers, and are mentioned in the New Testament. One of his sons, Herod Antipas, put John the Baptizer to death.

Yet during the reign of the atrocious Herod the Great, there came to this planet the Prince of Peace--the King both greater and humbler than all others. And life has never been the same, thank God.

Review of the Empires mentioned above: (Opinions differ regarding some dates.)

I. The Persian Period of Domination of the Jews, 536-332 B.C.

II. The Period of Greek Supremacy (332-166 B.C.)

A. Alexander the Great’s Favor toward the Jews, 332-323 B.C.

B. The Egyptian Period of Control of Judea (the Ptolemies), 323-198 B.C.

C. The Syrian Period of Oppressing the Jews (the Seleucids), 198-166 B.C.

III. The Maccabean Period of Fighting & Independence, 166-63 B.C.

IV. The Roman Period of Control of Judea, 63-4 BC (Jesus’ birth). The Roman empire continued on for a long period, until 476 A.D.

GOOD and BAD RESULTS of the Earlier Captivity in Babylon

To understand the period "between the Testaments" (approx. 400-4 B.C.), we need to know some of the events that preceded it. Before the Jews were carried off as captives to Babylon in 586 B.C., they seemed to have an incurable addiction to idolatry. Just after their exodus from Egypt, they gave honor to a golden calf. Once in the land of Canaan, they began worshipping various Baals and Asherah--the fertility gods and goddesses. Such worship regularly included sexual immorality; having sexual relations with the priestess was an act of religious devotion and a prayer for good crops! They prostrated themselves before images of the Phoenician love-goddess Ashtaroth, the Ammonite god Milcom, and the Moabite god Chemosh. One of the worst gods they worshipped was Molech. To him and to Baal they sometimes burned their sons and daughters in the fire as offerings (Jer.7:31; 19:5).

After the 10 tribes broke away from Judah, their king Jeroboam set up two golden calves to which the majority of the people gave homage for as long as that kingdom lasted (about 200 years). The southern kingdom, Judah, often turned to idolatry too, even setting up images of false gods in the temple of the Lord Himself! Jeremiah was provoked to cry out, "You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to...that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem" (7:30; 11:13).

BUT, during the Babylonian captivity they were *cured* of idolatry once and for all! Babylon itself was a hotbed of idolatry, so you might think they would go from bad to worse. But not so. Instead they were freed from their addiction. J. Sidlow Baxter asks, **What was it which so completely converted this entire nation?** Then he answers the question:

It was the miracle of prophecy being fulfilled before their very eyes...In the writings of their prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the very happenings that were now upon them had been clearly foretold. The destruction of Jerusalem, the exile of Judea's sons and daughters in Babylon, the subsequent sudden overthrowing of Babylon itself, the brilliant conquests of Cyrus the Persian who overthrew Babylon, the ensuing edict of Cyrus for the restoring of the temple at Jerusalem--these were all foretold 200 years in advance, along with Jeremiah's more recent and even more specific prophecies concerning the 70-year period assigned by God to Babylon for the scourging of Judah (see Isa.43:14, 44:28, 45:1-7, 46:1-11, 47:1-11, 48:3-7 & 14-15, Jer.25:8-14, 29:10-14 and chapters 50-51).

The exiled Jews, with wondering eyes, saw it all happening exactly as foretold by the Lord through His prophets! There was absolutely no

denying it all...The Jewish historian Josephus as good as tells us that the emperor Cyrus was himself converted through the marvel of it. And, in addition to this, God had put a wonderful witness to Himself in the very court at Babylon. After the emperor himself, the most renowned figure of the era was the man **Daniel**. Through him, this far-famed Jew, this man of uncompromising loyalty to the Lord, such miracles of Divine wisdom and power had been wrought as had outclassed all that the magic of Babylon could do. Daniel was indeed a wonderful monument to the reality and supremacy of the Lord...Once and for all the Jews were cured of their idolatry. [*Explore the Book*, Vol. V, pp.30-31]

While we are looking back (before the 400 silent years began), consider the plight of the **Jewish ex-captives when they returned from Babylonia to Judea in 536 B.C.** They had no independence (for they were under Persian rule), no king of their own, no capital city (except rubble), no temple (for the first 20 years), and no walls to protect their city (for the first 90+ years)!

What *did* they have? Their *Holy Scriptures!* More than ever before, they became convinced that those writings were the Word of God. In their scriptures they had His prophecies and predictions. And those which He had already fulfilled stood as evidence that the rest too would come to pass. So they looked for the Messiah to come, the great king that prophets had foretold. Now they realized that their God, Yahweh the Lord, was indeed the only real God. And they were His one-and-only people, who should be holy and obedient to Him always.

But there were still problems. Those attitudes of faith were not deeply formed among them all at once, but grew gradually. As Baxter observes, (p.33)

To translate these lofty concepts into actual operation, in forming and running a new society, proved to be beset with difficulties. One of these, of course, was the unhalting process by which people die and others grow up in their place. Many of the 50,000 who returned were elderly (Ezra 3:12). Their return to the land only preceded their demise by a few years. The children who grew up could not perhaps feel quite the same vividness of emotion about the restoration, and there was much to discourage even the stoutest heart among them.

So the Lord sent prophets and reformers like Haggai and Zechariah, and later Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra especially deepened the Jews' knowledge of God's Law, and reverence for it. Due to his influence they became more and more the people of the Book, God's Word. In fact, as time passed their proper respect for it became an extreme superstition, and their privileges as God's people led to pride, as we shall see.

Also, while their conversion from idolatry was wonderful, many went too far in the opposite direction. Before the captivity most Jews had been conformists, copying the heathen nations in their worship of

false gods. During and after the 400 silent years, many Jews became extreme separatists--proudly looking down on all Gentiles and having nothing to do with them. (Have these attitudes ever been seen in church history too? Or in our lives?)

The Rise of Synagogues and Study of God's Word

Not once in the Old Testament do we read of **synagogues**. But when the New Testament opens, they are everywhere, not only in Judea and Galilee but the whole Mediterranean world. Any town or village where seven Jewish men lived could form a synagogue--and most of them did. What explains their origin and growth? They began while the Jews were in Babylon. They had no temple and thus no chance to carry out their animal sacrifices and other rituals such as the yearly Day of Atonement. If they were to keep learning and applying God's Word, they would have to meet together on a regular basis to read and explain it. And that's what they did. **The emphasis was on Bible study.** Even the Jews who returned from Babylon continued establishing synagogues throughout their homeland. Though the Lord had not specifically commanded it, they knew it was important. Even after the temple was rebuilt, the synagogues remained the center of the Jewish communities.

As time passed, the meetings and organization became more systematized. They would meet every Sabbath day. The leaders, chosen by the congregation, were called elders or rulers. Their assistants were called deacons, meaning servants; one of their duties was to distribute funds to the needy. Members were disciplined if they committed serious sins. The right to instruct the people was not confined to someone who had been especially ordained. The elders might invite any man they considered suitable to speak, or someone might volunteer to do so. Acts 13:15 describes a typical meeting: "After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to [Paul and Barnabas] saying, 'Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.'" It is obvious that the early church imitated many of these practices.

The Growth of Legalism and the "Oral Law" Traditions

[Preview of this Important Section: Self-dependence and self-righteousness. How many rules are there? What exactly does each rule mean? Why rules were added to cover every possible situation. Some of those rulings contradicted God's Word. Emphasizing externals more than internals: missing the spirit of things. Traditionalism: the passing of time adds weight to rules: "We've always done it this way, so it must be right."]

Of course the Jews' emphasis on Bible study was very important. But various developments occurred among them which nullified the benefits they should have received. Many Jews, though not all, devel-

oped a spirit of legalism or self-righteousness. Instead of humbly trusting in God's mercy, they felt that they earned His forgiveness by their goodness. Jesus told of a smug Pharisee who prayed, "God, I thank you I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers-- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get" (Luke 18:11-12).

Of course if you think your relationship to God depends on how good you are, you want to know how high a gradepoint average He requires to pass His exam! So the Jewish scribes examined God's Law in the O.T. and concluded that there were 248 positive commandments and 365 negative prohibitions. Now all they had to do was learn those 613 rules and keep them!

But that attitude raised another question. What does each law mean, exactly? What if they misunderstood some law and thus broke it? For example, the Law said "you shall not do any work" on the Sabbath day. But--what is "work"? George Ladd illustrates the legalist's problem:

As I come home from worship on the Sabbath I see a dead leaf on a rose bush beside my walk. I pick off the dead leaf. Have I worked? Probably not. Then I see a dead twig and I break off the twig. Have I yet engaged in work? Then I see another branch which I cannot break off, so I take my pocket-knife and cut it off. Have I broken the Sabbath? There is still another branch as big as my thumb, too large for my knife, so I get my clippers and snip it off.

Have I worked yet? The final step is to prune all my roses. (*The Gospel of the Kingdom*)

Of course we *should* want to please the Lord in all areas of life. We *should* seek to understand and obey His commands--because He has saved us by His mercy.

I would not work my soul to save, For that my Lord has done;
But I would work like any slave Because I love God's Son.

But the self-righteous legalist feels he must have exact rules for every situation, so he can obey them and make sure of his salvation--and also enforce them on other people! He is not satisfied to emphasize the general principles God has revealed--justice, mercy, and humility. No, he feels he must add rule after rule to clarify his duty, because he thinks his salvation depends on it.

So those Jews who became legalistic asked questions like this: I keep chickens, and of course they lay eggs on the Sabbath as well as other days. Is it o-k to eat the eggs they lay on the Sabbath? The scribes (teachers of the law) debated this matter and reached a conclusion. If you keep the chickens mainly to get the eggs they produce, then when they lay them "work" is involved. That is their job! To eat such eggs

would break the Sabbath. But if you keep chickens for some other purpose -- to eat them or sell them -- and they just happen to lay eggs on the Sabbath, no work is involved and such eggs may be eaten.

Such picky questions were no laughing matter to the legalists. Jesus strongly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees, "Woe to you...you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices [as offerings to the Lord]. But you neglect the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former...*You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel*" (Matt.23:23-24).

So, in order to interpret and apply God's good commands, they added lots of opinions and regulations. And some of their regulations contradicted God's law! Jesus told them, "Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother'....But you say that if a man says to [them]: 'Whatever help you might otherwise receive from me is a gift devoted to God,' then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother....You do many things like that" (Mark 7:10-13).

Legalists bear a heavy burden, for they have no assurance of salvation. They fear they might lose it any day by committing a serious sin. To reduce its threat, they tend to emphasize external obedience more than the spirit of the commands. It is so much easier just to go through the motions than to obey from the heart. Such externalism often leads folks to do good deeds for bad reasons and with wrong attitudes.

So the Jewish teachers of God's law (and many people since then too) not only added rules, and became very picky about keeping them, but often externalized them. They became engrossed with deeds and details far more than the motives of the doer. Our Lord denounced the Pharisees for this very thing, saying they were "full of greed and self-indulgence. Woe to you.... You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones....On the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matt.23:25-28).

A clear example of this was when Jesus was put on trial before Pilate. The high priest and other religious leaders had already been plotting for some time to have Jesus executed (Matt. 12:14; 26:3-4). They had made up their minds to do so despite His righteousness and the miracles He performed to back up His claims to be from God. They were going to murder this perfectly innocent person, in whom they could find no fault though they kept "looking for false evidence"! (Matt.26:59; Mk.14:55-59.) Yet despite their wicked hearts and actions, we read that "to avoid ceremonial uncleanness" (which would result from entering a

Gentile residence), they “did not enter the palace” of Pilate; for “they wanted to be able to eat the Passover”! (Jn. 18:28.) Outwardly they were keeping their rules and rituals, and seemed very holy, while their hearts were running over with the most perverse evils!

It was mentioned above that in order to apply God’s commands, the scribes added lots of regulations. There accumulated around the Old Testament scripture, especially the Law that God gave through Moses, a great mass of interpretations, extensions and adaptations to supplement it. Some were necessary to guide the people when they had no temple. For example, how should they observe the Day of Atonement when there was no Most Holy Place for the high priest to enter with the blood of the sacrifice? Etc. Some of the precepts were wise and helpful, but others were ridiculous. The ruling we saw earlier, about eating eggs laid on the Sabbath, is just one out of literally 1000s of examples. (Another sample: For a woman to look in the mirror on the Sabbath would violate the 4th commandment. For she might see a gray hair and pull it out--which would be work.) As time went by, these rulings were passed down from father to son. They became known as “the Oral Law,” or the Mishnah. They were widely accepted and even taught in the synagogues along with the O.T. writings. (This would be like a preacher today devoting 3/4 of his sermon to commenting on Bible commentaries rather than on the Bible itself.)

The passing of time seemed to add sanctity to the Oral Law. Thus its ideas became traditions highly revered by the scribes and obeyed by the people. The attitude of traditionalism became widespread: “Of course these practices are right: we’ve always done it this way.” (Have you ever heard that before?) In Mark 7:3-4 we read, “The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders... And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.” We saw how they sometimes squirmed out of their duties (such as to honor parents) by using tradition. So Jesus reprimanded them, “You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition” (Mt. 15: 6). When He contradicted their traditional Oral Law, as He did (Mt. 15: 1-9; 23:16-18,23) He went

against the whole weight of scholarly opinion, devout conviction, and public sentiment. Moreover we can well understand that when, in the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord six times (see Matt. 5) used the formula “Ye have heard that it was *said*... but *I* say unto you...” He was not putting His “I say unto you” over against the Old Testament Scriptures (as some modern critics have tried to make out) but against maxims of this *oral* or traditional law. His customary way of referring to the Scriptures themselves was, “It is *written*.” (Baxter, *Explore the Book*, Vol. V, p.35.)

LATER DEVELOPMENTS of the “ORAL LAW”

For generations the oral law was still handed down orally, as it had been in Jesus' time. But gradually various parts of it were committed to writing. And about 200 A.D., Rabbi Judah Hanasi compiled it into the core of *the Talmud*, a collection of “Jewish civil and religious laws and ethical lore.” Afterwards more commentaries by various rabbis on the oral laws were also added. Thus in our day the Talmud “is a literature rather than a book, and is made up of 63 books, which are usually printed in 18 [large] volumes,” according to *The World Book Encyclopedia*. It contains not only laws and rulings on legal cases, but history, myths, poetry, wise sayings and fantastic superstitions. It remains to this day the revered guidebook to Jewish manners, customs, beliefs and teachings. In our time conservative Jews would regard it as authoritative, while liberal and secular Jews would regard it as merely interesting.

Here are a few samples of its contents: From a section on *Biblical history* we read, “Enoch did not mix with the people, but lived alone as a hermit for many years And Enoch reigned over the human race for 353 years.” Again, “And it came to pass after Enoch had ascended to heaven that the people appointed Methusaleh, his son, king over them.” Note that these are nothing but speculations or legends. Ancient rabbis claimed God revealed these matters to Moses in addition to the commandments He told him to write down. Moses told them to Joshua and the elders, etc. Thus, as we saw, they revered the oral as well as the written law. Even now Orthodox Jews take this viewpoint [Roman Catholics take a very similar view, putting their “traditions handed down orally by the Apostles” on an equality with the written Bible. Thus they justify many beliefs and practices which the Bible never mentions at all.]

From a section, *Teachings of the Rabbis*: One of the emperors said to Rabon Gamliel: “Your God is a thief, as it is written, ‘And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept. And He took a rib from Adam.’”

The Rabbi's daughter said, “Let me answer this aspersion. Last night robbers broke into my room, and stole therefrom a silver vessel: but they left a golden one in its stead.”

The emperor replied, “I wish that such thieves would come every night.”

Thus it was with Adam; God took a rib from him, but placed a woman instead of it.

From a section containing *Proverbs and Sayings of the Rabbis:* "Teach thy tongue to say, 'I do not know.'" "Attend no auctions if thou hast no money." "Man sees the mote in his neighbour's eye, but knows not of the beam in his own." "Do not to others what you would not have others do to you." [These latter two no doubt were borrowed from Jesus' words!] "When a liar speaks the truth he finds his punishment in the general disbelief." "The soldiers fight, and the kings are heroes." "How canst thou escape sin? Think of three things: whence thou comest, whither thou goest, and before whom thou must appear."

From a section on Civil and Criminal Law: "In cases of flagellation, the number of strokes was limited in the most extreme cases to thirty-nine." [This is a comment on Deut.25:1-3. When synagogues were later founded, such lashings were administered by their officials. In 2 Cor. 11:24 Paul says, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one." Probably he was punished in that way when he caused uproars in various synagogues by his preaching.]

Remember that the Talmud itself was not written down during the 400 silent years nor even during Christ's life on earth, but over a century later. Yet a number of its beliefs and rules were circulating and believed in those earlier eras in the form of Oral Law.

SCRIBES and SECTS

In the four gospels we often meet a class of men who are called by various names in our different Bible versions: "the scribes" (kjv, nasv); "lawyers" (neb; did they tell scribe-jokes back then?); "teachers of the law" (niv, tev); or "religion scholars" (the message). We will use the term *scribes* here due to its shortness! These men were professional experts in interpreting and applying the Old Testament scriptures, especially the Law given by God through Moses.

This group began to develop while the Jews were captives in Babylon. Before then, "a scribe" simply meant a writer, secretary or record-keeper. But following the captivity, "the scribes" came to mean a special class of **teachers and theologians**.

The aim of Judaism was to make every Jew personally responsible for keeping the whole Law. Therefore "a definite rule" had somehow to be extracted from the Law to cover practically every activity of daily life. This endeavour to make the Law such a detailed code created a complex problem. In some way or another the Law had to be made to speak even on circumstances to which it did not specifically apply. How to be faithful to God's covenant under such conditions came to be a serious difficulty, and it could only be overcome by the

continuous labors of a body of trained experts, who made the study of the Law the great business of their lives. [John Skinner]

Ezra, the godly leader and reformer of the Jews back around 450 B.C., was both a "priest" by birth and a "scribe" by profession (Neh.8:1-2). As a scribe he was "a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses," and "a man learned in matters concerning the commands...of the Lord" (Ezra 7: 6,11). He "had *devoted himself to the study and observance* of the Law of the Lord, and to *teaching* its decrees and laws in Israel" (v.10). What an ideal example--he *studied, obeyed and taught God's commands--all with devotion!* With him the office of scribe reached its highest peak. But gradually after him the scribes degenerated into quibbling debaters who often missed the inner spirit of the Law, as we saw earlier. They were the ones who added their interpretations and expansions of God's commands to the growing body of "traditions of the elders" or "oral law" which received more attention than God's Law in the Bible did. (Mk.7:3,5.)

Rival Sects or Parties among the Jews

1. **The Pharisees:** Believe it or not, they began as a "revival movement" among the Jews! Back when the Persians ruled Judea, they gave increasing *political* as well as religious authority to one man--the Jewish *high-priest*. As a result, men hungry for power coveted and fought for that position. Before long, high-priests were usually ambitious, secular, even violent men who were far more involved in political plots than in leading the people to worship God.

Due to such unspiritual conditions, a protest movement arose. Its goal was to promote **all-out obedience to the Law**. When Syria's monster-king, Antiochus Epiphanes, tried to stamp out the Jewish faith by force, a group of Jews called "the Pious [devout] Ones" resisted him. Many of them were so fanatical they allowed themselves to be slaughtered rather than lift a hand in self-defence on the Sabbath day. (When they joined Judas Maccabeus' army, he converted them from that view.) That movement of "Pious Ones" developed into the sect of the **Pharisees**, meaning "separatists." Most of them became very exclusive and snobbish toward the common people. (Compare Isa.65:5.) By Herod the Great's time the Pharisees numbered only about 6,000 men, yet their influence on the people was enormous. Most "of the people gave up trying altogether and were resigned to being helpless sinners. Yet they still admired the Pharisees as representing something which somehow ought to be, even though the Pharisees despised them" (Baxter, p.52).

The Pharisees had **good points**. Some of them were sincere truth-seekers (for example, Nicodemus: see John 7:47-52 & 19:38-40). Unlike the Sadducees, they believed in angels and in resurrection. They also kept alive hope for Messiah's coming. Many of them -- not all --

became scribes by occupation as well as Pharisees by conviction. Hillel and Shammai were both Pharisees. They were the two most influential scribes since Ezra, and both were at their peak when Jesus was born. They founded rival schools of interpreting the Old Testament.

But the Pharisees' strength became their weakness. Because of their devotion to the Law, most of them fell into the traps that self-righteousness sets (mentioned earlier): pride; emphasizing externals more than the spirit of the Law; in their legalism adding many picky rules to cover every possible situation lest they lose their salvation; becoming more concerned with their oral traditions than with God's written word, and thus even contradicting His word by their rules; thus being hypocrites, pretending to keep the Law while breaking it in heart and by means of technicalities. Yet the Pharisees were the only party to survive the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., and they laid the foundations of Orthodox Judaism which continues to this day.

2. The Sadducees: We mentioned above how the high-priests became politically involved and very corrupt, causing the Pharisees to arise in protest against such worldly-mindedness. The Sadducees were those unspiritual men from whom the high-priests were chosen. (Acts 5:17.) At first they "seem to have been neither a religious sect nor a political party, but a social clique. Numerically they were a much smaller body than the Pharisees, and belonged for the most part to the wealthy and influential priestly families who formed the aristocracy of the Jewish nation." Their leaders were the "elders" who were members of the Jews' ruling council (their supreme court called the Sanhedrin).

"Their one ambition was to make themselves indispensable to the reigning prince [that is, the foreign rulers], so that they might conduct the government of the country according to their own views." They believed "that the law of God had no application to politics. If Israel was to be made great and prosperous it must be by well-filled treasuries, strong armies, skillful diplomacy, and all the resources of human statecraft." [John Skinner]

Their religious beliefs were as follows: They accepted the 5 books of Moses and thus the *written* law. But they rejected the *oral* law--the traditions which the scribes and Pharisees so highly treasured. They were **rationalists and skeptics**, who did not believe in the existence of angels, nor that the human spirit survived after death, nor in bodily resurrection. (Matt.22:23; Acts 23:8.) That is why they were **sad, you see!** The worldly mindedness of the Sadducees provoked the other-worldliness of the Pharisees. Thus they detested each other. And

yet both parties hated Jesus so much that they got together to plot His downfall! (Matt.16:1; Jn.11:47,57.)

Notice this fact: Not all the priests, but mainly their leaders, were Sadducees. A devout priest and his sons led the revolt by the Maccabees. John the Baptizer's father was a righteous priest. And after the church began, "a great number of priests became obedient to the faith," despite opposition by the leading priests (Acts 6:7; 4:1-6; 5:17-18).

3. The Herodians, even more than the Sadducees, were a political party, not a religious group. They supported the dynasty of Herod the Great. They probably reasoned that it made sense to support this Rome-backed dynasty, since it gave Judea the favor and protection of that mighty empire. And back when the Jews were independent, before the Romans came, their own leaders had for generations carried out constant plots and coups among themselves.

But to most Jews this party seemed not only unpatriotic but even treacherous. For Herod was not a Jew. While in power he had murdered all but two of the Sanhedrin (besides his own wife and her family)! He had built a temple honoring Augustus Caesar, and also instituted the deadly gladiator fights. And other members of his family were also corrupt and bloody.

Thus the Pharisees bitterly opposed the Herodians, until the two groups found a common foe in Jesus. Then they became allies who with tricky questions tried to lure Him into trouble with the leaders -- either of Rome or of the Jews (Mk.3:6; Matt.22:15-16; Lk.20:20). In that case the Herodians "sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so they might hand him over to...the governor."

4. The Zealots were zealously opposed to the Romans. They were the ultra-patriots, in fact terrorists, of their day. "Only Yahweh the Lord should receive loyalty and taxes from us, His people." So they hated anyone such as Herodians and publicans (tax-collectors) who collaborated with Caesar. Some Zealots carried daggers concealed under their robes, to assassinate a Herodian or publican if the opportunity arose. How amazing that Jesus called both "Matthew the tax collector" and "Simon the Zealot" to be His apostles! (Matt.10:3-4.) Don't you know they had some hot arguments even after their conversions to Christ (like today). Wouldn't you like to see their audience as Matthew and then Simon shared their testimonies of faith in open-air meetings?

The Zealots were widely known for fearlessness. The historian Josephus mentioned "the resolution they show when they undergo pain," and that they did not fear "any kinds of death."

Maybe Barabbas was a Zealot, for he "was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising" (Mk.15:7). Whatever, at various times the Zealots stirred up revolts. One, mentioned in Acts 5:37, occurred in 6 A.D. Their final one led to the siege and then destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and the mass suicide of the last Zealots occurred at Masada fortress in 73 A.D.

5. **The Essenes** are not mentioned in the Bible, but Josephus referred to them, and the "Dead Sea scrolls" discovered in 1947 focused much attention on them. They followed a monastic way of life and believed in a mystical kind of Judaism. They were far more separatist than the Pharisees. They believed they alone were the remnant of the true people of God. They stressed lawkeeping but "considered the temple priesthood corrupt and rejected much of the temple ritual and sacrificial system." They looked forward to the coming of two or maybe three Messiahs. A few scholars have tried to "assign membership in the sect" to both John the Baptist and Jesus, but such conjectures have "only a superficial, speculative base" (NIV Study Bible). Indeed Jesus' teaching and demonstrating that God is a shepherd who actively seeks lost and unworthy people (Lk. 15, etc.), is just the opposite of the Essenes and their "Teacher of Righteousness."

Josephus says they engaged only in farming, and shared all possessions in common, "so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who has nothing at all. There are about 4,000 men that live in this way, and neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants; as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives the handle to domestic quarrels."

He highly commended their conduct, writing that they "esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for.... Their course of life [is] better than that of other men," and they "addict themselves to virtue."

Yet their monastic communities did not serve as salt and light to their society, as Jesus calls us to do. Nor did they seek and save the lost by means of the Gospel. And their total ban on marriage was contrary to His will. Thus the Lord saw no need to even mention them in the Bible.

Question: Review, compare and contrast these 5 groups:

Herodians Sadducees Pharisees Essenes Zealots

THOSE JEWISH SECTS -- and TODAY

[This section is abridged from J. Sidlow Baxter's *Explore the Book*, and also expanded and *greatly* adapted by avw.]

It is remarkable how those long-ago Jewish sects resurrect themselves and appear in new clothes in each new age. Make no mistake: they still live today. They wear up-to-date apparel, speak in contemporary jargon and are busy within modern Christendom.

Our Lord was too social for the Essenes, and too gentle for the Zealots. He took no message to the former, and asked no help from the latter. But the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians were "on the spot" and in active opposition to Him all the time. Observe them carefully, for they are highly significant types. The Pharisees were the old-time ritualists. The Sadducees were the old-time rationalists. The Herodians were the old-time secularists.

The mark of the Pharisee--the ritualist--is that he is always **adding to**. He is not content with the written Word of God, and the plain truth of the Gospel. He must start adding his own ideas and ordinances, until religion and salvation are a highly complicated matter. This is just what the Pharisees did, until, with the weight of their accumulated ceremonies and observances, they made religion a burden too heavy for men to bear. The Sabbath became a crushing load of detailed duties that made it seem that man was made for it, not vice versa. Another writer puts it thus: "As the core of their religion died, the bark of the tree flourished. The simple laws of God were replaced by cumbersome human inventions which crushed down all spiritual liberty in the days of Christ (Matt 11:28; 23:4,23)."

On the other hand, the mark of the Sadducee -- the rationalist -- is that he is always **taking from**. He cannot accept the entire Bible, but must make drastic deletions. Everything must be put on trial at the court of human reason. This, that, and the other thing must be cut out to make faith reasonable. This was precisely the attitude of the Sadducee. He could not, or rather *would not*, believe either in angels or demons, or in the resurrection of the dead or in any other miracle.

As for the Herodian -- the secularist -- he cared neither for adding to nor taking from. He "**cared for none of these things**" (see Acts 18:17, kjv). The message of the Gospel was far from his concern. His prime consideration was *the life that now is*. What does it matter that a heathen Herod reigns on a throne made crimson with crime so long as material interests are furthered? While the ritualist Pharisee was busy *adding to* God's Word, and the rationalist Sadducee was skeptically

taking from God's Word, the secularist Herodian was heedlessly *passing by*.

Also In Our Times

We have these three groups with us today. The ritualists are the modern "high church" traditions -- Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and other highly ceremonial churches -- or any group of professing Christians who trust that they are right with God because they are so-o-o religious. They are not content with the Gospel and its good news of salvation by grace alone on God's part, and by faith alone on our part. They must start *adding* their sacraments, penances, robes, images and glittering ceremonies. Much *attention* is given to externals; much *dependence* is placed on externals. The Pharisees are with us still. (And some of them in modified forms are found in other places too -- like inside *our* buildings, or inside *our* skins.)

On the other hand, the rationalist is the modern religious skeptic, the "broad" liberal who wants to include everything and everyone. He is far happier telling you what he *cannot* believe than declaring what he *does* believe. He is always *taking from*. He cannot believe Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Peter and Paul. No, his authorities are scientists like Darwin, Freud, B.F. Skinner, and Carl Sagan, plus "broad-minded" religious leaders like Bishop Spong, and the Dalai Lama, and even Robert Schuller. To the rationalist, much of Biblical history and doctrines are mythical and crude. Even Christ Himself was far from infallible. The supernatural must be eliminated until the only miracle left is the infallibility of modern scholarship! Yes, we have many Sadducees around today. They keep tearing down the Bible and those who believe and follow it.

As for today's secularist, he blends right in with the popular fads which might even include some New Age "spirituality" if it doesn't interfere with his lifestyle. Like the Herodians, he follows whatever beliefs, philosophies and activities seem to offer inner peace and outer prosperity. Who cares if millions of preborn babies are having their lives snuffed out, so long as the stock market is still riding high? Who cares if pornography has wrapped its slimy, addictive hands around your mind and body day and night -- how is that hurting anybody? Who cares if the casinos are making the poor even poorer, and increasing the rate of debt and divorce? -- just think of those gleaming new school buildings being put up with the income. Who cares if homosexual practices and techniques are being taught in some public elementary schools? -- that's o-k because you mustn't be intolerant. Who cares if gross ugliness, violence, occultism, obscenities and raunchy sex are being flaunted on TV during the children's hours -- and on the world-wide-web too? Who cares if most politicians' wallets are getting thicker and thicker? -- "we'd all probably do the same, if we

were in their shoes." Who cares if many Christians in Sudan are being kidnapped and sold into slavery, and others of them crucified? -- it's o-k because their government sells us some products we really need over here. After all, we mustn't hinder progress and prosperity.

In Jesus' day the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians were His main enemies. In our day, ritualists, rationalists and secularists are among the major opponents of Evangelicals -- those who trust the true Gospel. (The Gospel is the good-news of salvation through faith in the Son of God who died, is risen, and will come again.)

The ritualists nullify the Gospel by trusting their own religious activities. Jesus' death was not enough; we must supplement it with our goodness and our ceremonies. The rationalists deny not only the Gospel but most or all of the Bible. And the secularists say, "Whatever-- I'm gonna live for myself: I gotta be me."

So we should ask ritualists the question, "Do we really get right with God by His grace or our goodness?"

With rationalists some key questions are, "Is the Bible God's word, or only man's? And how can you ignore all the evidence that there is a personal God?"

With secularists one key question is, "Are there 10 Commandments or only 10 suggestions?" And another important-but-often-neglected one is, "Is the Lord's Day a holy day or just a holiday?"

Of course in our present age of 2000 and beyond, there are other schools of religious error too. Various forms of "post-modern, post-rational" mysticism abound. For example, there is the philosophy of total subjectivism which teaches there are no "real" absolutes either of truth or morality. Your "truth" or "right" may be okay for you but don't think it is true or right for others. And certainly don't try to impose it on everyone. Related to this is the "New Age Movement," a form of pantheism teaching god-is-everything-and-everything-is-god. Thus God minus the universe equals nothing. This has its roots in the Eastern religions, especially Hinduism. And there are the occultists, wrapped up in magic and even Satanism of differing kinds. And the *extreme* environmentalists, who not only care for but worship the Earth. And the *extreme* feminists, some of whom claim to be Christians but actually worship the goddess Sophia.

Yes, there are numerous errors by which Satan seeks to lure people away from the truth of the Good-News of Jesus Christ. But three of the most widespread ones are those which were common at the time He walked the earth -- ritualism, rationalism, and secularism.

THE DISPERSION

“For every Jew that came back to the old national home, a thousand remained in the land of their adoption.” Remember that only a small proportion of the Jewish captives in Babylon returned home to Judea when King Cyrus of Persia gave them the opportunity in 536 B.C. Hundreds of thousands remained in Babylon or moved elsewhere. And during the following centuries, including the 400 Silent Years with their warfare and unstable conditions, some of the Jews in Judea moved away. This scattering or “dispersion” of the people accelerated until one writer of that time could say that Jews filled “every land and sea.” Strabo the Greek geographer also wrote that the Jewish “people has already made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the...world which has not received this nation and in which it has not made its power felt.” During Jesus’ lifetime, in Egypt alone there were a million Jews.

This explains how on the day of Pentecost described in Acts 2, “there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing *Jews from every nation under heaven.*” That deliberate overstatement is explained in the following verses, where over ten different language groups are listed. Jews lived in all those places. This fact also clarifies such N.T. passages as Acts 6:1, “...the *Grecian Jews* among [the Christians] complained against those of the *Aramaic-speaking community*...” Another version (the Jerusalem Bible) translates it, “the *Hellenists* made a complaint against the *Hebrews.*” It then explains in a footnote that “Hellenists” were Jews from outside Palestine who had their own synagogues in Jerusalem, where the scriptures were read in Greek. The “Hebrews” were Palestinian Jews and in their synagogues the scriptures were read in Hebrew.

Also notice John 7:35, “Where does [Jesus] intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where *our people live scattered* among the Greeks...?” (niv; other versions say *our refugees* among the Greeks/ *the people who are dispersed.../ the Dispersion*... --jbp; jb; nasb). The Dispersion came to be the term used for the Jews who lived outside of Judea. In these lands the Jews were often unpopular and sometimes persecuted. Yet as time passed they were increasingly tolerated and even given special privileges. We read earlier of the favors shown them by Alexander the Great. In other places too “they alone might be exempted from ‘official’ sacrifices [to local gods or kings who were worshipped], and (since they would not march on the sabbath) from military service” (*The New Bible Dictionary*).

Results of the Dispersion: “Judaism strongly attracted many Gentiles. The simple but majestic worship of one God, the lofty ethics, the generally high standards of family life, brought many, including

people of [high society], to the synagogues” as proselytes to Judaism. “Thus we regularly find Gentiles in the synagogues during Paul’s missionary journeys (see Acts 13:42-44; 14:1; 17:4; 18:4).” Those passages show that many of the early converts to Jesus Christ were Gentiles who had already become worshippers of the God revealed in the O.T.

In this way the Dispersion prepared the way for the spread of the Christian faith. The synagogues which “stretched over the greater part of the known world were the stepping-stones of the early missionaries. Acts shows Paul, the self-confessed apostle to the *Gentiles*, regularly opening his evangelistic work by preaching in the *synagogues*” (*The New Bible Dictionary*).

Jewish Writings during “the 400 Silent Years”

After Malachi, the Lord did not send any prophets for four centuries. We are not told the reason why. Perhaps He had said enough, and in effect was notifying the Jews, “I’ve told you all I intend to tell you for awhile. You are not obeying what I’ve already revealed to you, so why should I send any more messengers at this time? It’s up to you to believe and obey what I already told you through the Law that I gave you and the prophets whom I sent.”

The Jews themselves recognized this absence of inspired prophets and writings. Notice three vital quotations from Jewish writings during those centuries: “And there was a great tribulation in Israel, such as was not *since the day that there was no prophet seen in Israel.*” “The Jews... consented that [Simon] should be their prince and high priest for ever, *till there should arise a faithful prophet.*” (1 Maccabees 9:27; 14:41.) “From Artaxerxes until our times everything has been recorded but has not been deemed worthy of like credit with what preceded, because *the exact succession of the prophets ceased.* But what faith we have placed in our own writings is evident by our conduct; for though so long a time has now passed, no one has dared to add anything to them, or to take anything from them, or to alter anything in them.” (*Contra Apion*, I, by Josephus—a renowned Jewish historian of the 1st century A.D.)

These facts show why the inter-testamental period (between the Old and New Testaments), is also referred to as “the 400 silent years” But though there were no prophets, there were plenty of authors. A number of writings were produced during this period. Though they do not *belong* in the Bible, they help us *understand* the Bible. We shall notice several kinds of literature which influenced the Jews before and during the lifetime of Jesus our Lord.

1) The Septuagint. Around 250 B.C., during the time when the Ptolemy dynasty ruled Egypt and controlled Judea, about 70 Jewish scribes began translating the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek, the most widely-used language in that time. (Compare English now.) We know this translation today as the Septuagint ("70"). It became widely used, especially among the Jews of the Dispersion, and made the Old Testament's teachings, moral standards and prophecies known in much of the ancient world. (This later helped the Christians when they preached that Jesus was the Messiah foretold in the O.T. When N.T. speakers or writers quoted from the O.T., they often used the Septuagint version.) The Septuagint contributed very greatly to prepare the world for the "fullness of time" when Messiah came.

2) The Apocrypha. The word *Apocryphal* means "not authoritative; false, or at least doubtful." These were 14-15 books written by various Jewish authors during the 400 silent years. The Roman-Catholic Church accepts them as part of its Bible. But "they were never recognized by the Jews as part of the Hebrew Scriptures. They were never quoted by Jesus, nor anywhere in the N.T." (Halley). In the same way, Protestants do not consider them to be God's Word. We believe that parts of them are **inspiring**, but none of them are **inspired**! Some Protestant Bibles include them as a section separate from the O-T and N-T, because of their value as historical or devotional writings. But we do not recognize them as having divine authority like the 66 books in our Bible. Some of the stories told and insights contained in the Apocrypha are profitable, but they lack evidence of being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Let's further explain the preceding paragraph. Consider our present situation. We today may profit greatly from reading books by Max Lucado, C.S. Lewis or A.W. Tozer, but we would not dream of adding their writings to the Bible. They too are **inspiring in their effects but not divinely inspired in their origin** -- as their authors would be the first to admit. It was the same with the Apocrypha.

Here are brief descriptions of a few of **the O-T Apocrypha** (so called because there were also apocryphal books written during the N-T period), as given in *Halley's Bible Handbook*:

II Esdras (Esdras is the Greek form of Ezra): This highly symbolic book claims "to contain visions given to Ezra, dealing with God's government of the world, a coming new age, and the restoration of certain lost Scriptures."

Judith: This is a "historical romance of a rich, beautiful and devout Jewish widow who, in the days of the Babylonian invasion of

Judah,...went to the tent of the Babylonian general, and under guise of offering herself to him, cut off his head, and thus saved her city.”

Song of the Three Holy Children: “An unauthentic amplification of the book of Daniel, inserted after 3:23, purporting to give their prayer while in the fiery furnace, and their triumphal song of praise for deliverance.”

I Maccabees: “A historical work of great value on the Maccabean period, relating events of the Jews’ heroic struggle for liberty, 175-135 B.C.”

II Maccabees: This “supplements I Maccabees, but is inferior to it.” It has occasional historical inaccuracies. In our earlier lesson we quoted from this book when we told of the Jewish mother and her seven sons who were tortured and killed during the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes. We saw that the N-T refers to that incident (Heb.11:35b).

Ecclesiasticus: (Don’t confuse this with the Biblical book of *Ecclesiastes*.) This fascinating book is also called “The Wisdom of Jesus, the son of Sirach.” In form it resembles the OT book of *Proverbs*. It “gives rules for conduct in all details of civil, religious, and domestic life.” Here are a few of the thought-provoking sayings from this book:

Prosperity does not reveal your friends; adversity does not conceal your enemies.

When all goes well a man’s enemies are friendly, but in hard times even his friend will desert him.

Do not lift a weight too heavy for you, keeping company with a man greater and richer than yourself.

How can a jug be friends with a kettle? If they knock together, the one will be smashed.

A rich man does wrong, and adds insult to injury; a poor man is wronged, and must apologize into the bargain.

Handle pitch and it will make you dirty; keep company with an arrogant man and you will grow like him.

There is one who keeps silent because he has no answer, while another keeps silent because he knows when to speak.

The man who fears the Lord will have nothing else to fear, he will never be a coward, because his trust is in the Lord.

As beautiful as the sunrise in the Lord’s heaven is a good wife in a well-ordered home.

A good wife makes a happy husband; she doubles the length of his life.

A silent wife is a gift from the Lord; her restraint is more than money can buy.

A bad wife is a chafing yoke; controlling her is like clutching a scorpion.

I would sooner share a home with a lion or a snake than keep house with a spiteful wife.

In time of plenty remember the time of famine, --poverty and need in days of wealth.

Between dawn and dusk times may alter, all change comes quickly, when the Lord wills it.

A wise man is always on his guard; when sin is rife, he will beware of negligence.

3. Many books in the Apocrypha were **anonymous**; *their authors were unnamed and are now unknown*. (The Bible has some books like that as well, such as Esther and Kings.) But during the 400 silent years there were other Jewish writings which were **pseudonymous**. That means their authors *assumed the names of other people*. So they are called **The Pseudepigrapha**: *pseudo* means **false**; *epi-grapha* means **ascribed**. The writers used the name of some outstanding person, usually someone who lived long before. An example is the **Life of Adam and Eve**, an imaginative tale of their lives after they were exiled from Eden. In a second example, the **Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs**, each of the sons of Jacob (who lived over 1,000 years before this book was written) gives instructions to his descendants how to live. Again, there is the **Book of Enoch**, a composite work which claims to be written by the godly man who lived before the flood, and never died (Gen.5:23-24). We know it was actually written during the last two centuries B.C.

Obviously Adam, Enoch and the patriarchs did not write these books. Why then did the actual authors make such untrue claims? There are two or possibly three different reasons: **a)In some cases the author may have sought authority to back up his teachings**. "Not many people will pay attention to my views, because I'm a nobody. But if they think Adam, Enoch or Ephraim wrote these words, they'll really pay attention." Of course this is an attempt to *deceive*. [Some liberal theologians today believe that N-T books like 2nd Timothy were not written by Paul, but by someone claiming his authorship in order to gain support for the actual writer's ideas. But that would clearly be falsehood. And there is no strong basis for such a belief, either.]

b)In times of persecution, pseudonyms might be used to hide the author's identity for safety's sake. In such cases there is no intention to mislead. He knows the readers will realize it is a fake name. But he uses it so the government will not discover who he is.

c) As this type of literature became more common, it may be that people used these names, knowing that their readers would recognize they were merely fictional. In our time an author wrote historical novels entitled *Two from Galilee* and *Three from Galilee*. In them she speculated about the courtship of Joseph and Mary, and about the boyhood and young manhood of Jesus. In no way was she trying to deceive her readers, but merely trying to help them understand what 1st-century courtship and family life were like -- and to amaze us with the fact that God Himself entered into such circumstances.

We bring up this subject because of what seems to be a problem in the Bible. Jude 14-15 says, "...Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, 'Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'" In this passage Jude quotes not from the O-T but from the **Book of Enoch**, which we saw was not by Enoch at all, but someone using his name as a pseudonym! It seems Jude was fooled, and erred.

No, not necessarily so. There are other possibilities. a) Just maybe a true, short statement actually made by the real Enoch was handed down orally through the ages. Thousands of years later an unknown author decided to write warnings and rebukes such as he imagined Enoch would have spoken during his life. So in his book (which, again, might be compared to "historical fiction" written today) he incorporated that statement actually spoken by Enoch. In that case Jude quoted a genuine statement of the godly patriarch.

But there is an alternate possibility. Compare a preacher today illustrating his sermon by quoting from a speech by John F. Kennedy, or a novel by John Grisham, or even the comic strip "Peanuts"! Everyone would know that the preacher is just making a point. He does not necessarily endorse everything that JFK or Grisham or Charles Shultz have written, nor does he believe that a beagle plays shortstop! In the same way Jude may have quoted a truth from the **Book of Enoch** without believing the whole book's message or that Enoch was really its author.

In a somewhat similar way, the apostle Paul quoted from pagan philosophers several times in his sermons and epistles. We know that while he believed the particular statements he quoted, he did not agree with all that they wrote nor with their worship of false gods. (See Acts 17:28, 1 Cor. 15:33, & Titus 1:12; he quotes the Cretan poet Epimenides twice, also the Cilician poet Aratus, and the Greek poets Cleanthes and Menander.)

4. The Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1947 an Arab shepherd discovered some ancient scrolls in a cave located among the hills that overlook the Dead Sea. Scholars say those scrolls are “the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times. The documents and fragments of documents... included OT books, a few books of the Apocrypha, apocalyptic works [similar to the dramatic, symbolic style of the book of Revelation], pseudepigrapha (books that purport to be the work of ancient heroes of the faith), and a number of books peculiar to the sect” of the Essenes.

About 1/3 of the scrolls are from the OT. Psalms, Deuteronomy and Isaiah are the most numerous, including a complete, 24-foot-long scroll of Isaiah. These scrolls are 1,000 years older than any other OT manuscripts found till now. The very minimal changes between them and the more recent scrolls “demonstrate the care with which OT texts were copied,” and so provide powerful “evidence for the general reliability of those texts.” [–*NIV Study Bible*]

THE LORD OVERRULED HISTORY

1-3. The *Septuagint* (OT in the Greek language), plus the *Jewish Dispersion* with its *synagogues*, made known one God, His moral standards, and the promise of a coming Christ. 4. *Fulfilled prophecies* helped create faith in God’s Word. 5. There was a *widespread feeling of emptiness in other religions* and philosophies at that time. 6. *The Greek language* was known worldwide. 7-8. *Roman roads* made travel speedier than before, and *one vast empire* helped too--no need for passports! 9. Roman armies also made the *roads and seas safer* from bandits than formerly.

In all these ways, the Lord overruled history for His own purposes. He used people (even evil ones) and events (even tragic ones) to help fulfill His eternal plans of wisdom and grace. Praise His holy name!

Review Questions:

Between the time of Malachi, the last OT prophet, & the coming of Jesus -- What Happened? 1. What empires ruled the Jews, in what order? 2. What prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel were fulfilled? 3. How did Alexander the Great treat the Jews, and why? 4. “The land between the hammer and the anvil”--what does that mean? 5. What king defiled the temple, and how and why?

6. “The Jewish guerilla bands that defeated vast armies” -- explain. 7. Why did the Jews hate the Romans from the very first? 8. Herod the Great -- tell several things he did, both good and bad.

9. When and why did synagogues originate? 10. Describe the beliefs of the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Herodians? 11. Contrast the Zealots and the Essenes. 12. Of those 5 parties, which were secularists? ritualists? rationalists? 13. "Self-dependence and self-righteousness"--those attitudes describe which party(ies)? 14. Why do legalists consider it important to know how many rules there are, and exactly what they mean? 15. Why were many rules (some of them very picky) added to cover every possible situation? 16. Give examples either of how some of those rules contradicted God's Word, or else of how they over-emphasized externals and neglected internals -- missing the spirit of things. 17. What is the Talmud? Did Jesus ever read it? Was He familiar with any of its contents? Explain. What do present-day Jews think of it? 18. What are the "apocryphal" writings? Are they all good, all bad, or in between? 19. Does it bother you that the NT letter of Jude directly quotes a book falsely attributed to Enoch? Why or why not? 20. How do the Dead Sea scrolls support the accuracy of the OT writings? 21. What practical lessons have you learned from studying the 400 silent years?

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill

Music Week at Antioch with John Fulda is scheduled for the week of June 24-July 1. This will be the 12th glorious year for ages 14 - college. Campers learn to use their voice to praise God in a more excellent way. The last three days of camp is spent performing concerts in area churches. For information contact Lyle Baker at 355 Bark Branch Rd., Frankfort, KY 40601 or (502) 223-7056

Missions is defined as "the cross-cultural proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are unsaved, and in particular to those who have never heard the message of salvation. It is coupled with the responsibility to see that those who are saved are disciplined and involved in a Bible-believing fellowship of Christians so that continuing growth and commitment to Christ can be assured and encouraged." (From www.ntm@ntm.org)

LeCompte: revival with Bro. Paul Estes was held Friday, May 4, through Saturday, May 6. The purpose of this weekend revival was so that area churches could take advantage of the great fellowship of believers. Bro. Dillard Fontenot continues in this great work with the help of his loving wife and family. This church is known for "greeting one another with a holy hug."

Jennings: (Paul Estes) Personal evangelism is a must. In order for our congregation to grow, we must all work together, yes, but separately, also. Each of us knows someone who needs Christ as Savior. We must reclaim our young people who have strayed, and invite others each day to come and hear the Word of God. Select your "Timothy" and go to work winning him to the Lord. Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict, but do your part, too!

Bryantsville Indiana will be looking for a new minister after Ken Wilson moves to Indianapolis. If you're interested in supply preaching or coming on a part-time basis, contact Calvin Tincher at Bryantsville Church of Christ, R.R. 1 #1, Mitchell, In 47446. (812) 275-7798.

Mackville: Youth Rally with Sonny Childs June 18-20 at 10:00 each morning. And each night at 7:00 beginning June 17-20 will be our regular revival. (Frank Preston)

Waterford: revival July 15-19 nightly at 7:30 p.m. with evangelist Frank Preston. If you're in the area, stop by and join us in this evangelistic meeting. (Joe Stone)

Fall Revival at Mackville is being planned for the week of Sept. 17-23. Speakers will include: Louis Schuler, Ron Flora, Bennie Hill, Lyle Baker, Bud Ridgeway, and Dale Offutt.

Congratulations: "If you have been at the bottom of a deep, deep well or on a trip to Antarctica, you do not know that **Julius Hovan** was named **Gallatin Citizen of the Year!** What a wonderful honor for him and for our church." --Gallatin, TN church bulletin

Turkey Creek, La.: "Sonny Childs held a 4-day meeting here from April 19-22. We had 1 baptism and 21 responses for various other needs. From Jan. 1 until that meeting we had 4 who placed membership and 4 rededications." (Harry Coultas)

Central Louisiana Christian Fellowship will be Nov. 12-15 in Glenmora, Louisiana. The themes are "Claiming our Inheritance in Christ" (Ephesians) -- at the night meetings, and "Learning from the

Master Teacher" (Matt.5-7) -- during the day sessions.

Available for Fill-in Preaching Brent Heeke has moved back to Tell City, Ind., and is available for supply preaching. He is very interested in evangelism &/or youth ministry. Brent grew up in a godly family in the Tell City church. He also graduated from Harding U., minoring in Bible. You may reach him at 812: 547-6778.

Kentucky/Indiana Christian Fellowship is planned for August 6-9, 2001. Theme: "Signs of the Time." Stay tuned for details.

BOUND VOLUMES of WORD & WORK: The last year we made a bound volume available was in 1994, @ \$22. The cost of materials & labor had skyrocketed. When it went even higher in '95 we didn't order any. But now we've found a cheaper bookbinder. Perhaps (for he is still tentative) we can sell copies @ \$18. This contains 11 magazines but not the SS quarterly. And maybe (this too is uncertain at present) we can put 2 years together ('95-6, '97-8, '99-00) for a price lower than 2 volumes bound separately.

Some readers have full sets of bound volumes through '94. This bookbinder does good work, but can't guarantee how soon he can finish the work. (It's his sparetime hobby.) And he can't get the color (burgundy) used in previous years; he has black.

If you are either definitely or possibly interested in getting a volume(s), let us know, then we can firm up the details. Call Louise Wells, 502-775-8243, or Alex Wilson, 502-897-2831.

An Important Book for College Freshmen (& other students too):

Chris Chrisman goes to College, by James Sire, helps young people understand and refute common views they'll face in classrooms or bull sessions. "All religions boil down to the same thing." "That's true for you but it's not true for me." Etc. Using stories and down-to-earth language the author helps us think through complex issues. He is not at all simplistic (identifies 6 types of relativism, for instance), but has a knack of making things clear.

We have only 2 copies for sale, so hurry. 155 pages, paper-back, \$10.99 (+ tax for Ky residents). Word & Work, 2518 Portland Ave., Louisville KY 40212.

Ladies Inspiration Day. Over 120 ladies attended the LID at Cherry St. Church of Christ on April 28th. The speakers were excellent and the entire program was a mountain top experience. Truly God was at work in the planning and implementation of the day's program. The theme was "One Anothering" and the weather couldn't have been better. The Cherry St. ladies provided lunch, which was quite delicious, and did an excellent job of hosting the day. We thank God for the experience of being drawn out of everyday and into a joyful time spent with those who love the Lord. -- Sandra Naugle

Moto Nomura, April 29, 2001 We had all together 31 attending the morning services, the largest crowd we ever had in the Bethany Home. I saw ten automobiles parked outside.

This is something which Yoriko and myself were not able to think of sixteen years ago. And for the first eight years or so we were not able to invite folks openly to our services due to the tremendous pressures from the villagers around us. The Lord tells me always... "Moto, wait and see." This has been His war as He once had told Moses. (Ex. 14:13-14) Wait and see... and we have seen it today.

19 or 20 of the 31 partook of the Lord's Meal. Folks from various denominational backgrounds gathered together. 5 happened to be members of various Presbyterian churches, but they all say they prefer to be free and independent Christians ever since they came to our house church service / fellowship from time to time, and that is wonderful. They see the value and importance of just being free and independent Christians and Christians only. I wished both Thomas and Alexander Campbell were with us today!! And a couple of families are from more conservative non-Calvanistic church backgrounds. So, I felt Bro. Barton Stone would appreciate them. I should have named our home Cane Ridge Bethany Home!

Yoriko did a marvelous job in providing them with good meal as usual, while some women brought side dishes, too. In the afternoon two of us did a bit of visitations, too. We thank you for your prayer and support.

(Continued from Inside Front Cover)

“We do some crafts, singing, Bible stories, plays and things like that with the children,” Martinez said. “Sometimes we go outside and play or we just help them with whatever they need help with.”

And it is a welcome change for the children.

“One of the things many of the children say is, ‘My mother is in school while I’m having fun,’ ” Martinez said.

The goal of the whole program is not only to teach the students English, but also to show them more about God, the community and the culture of the area.

“We have taken the students and the children to the library so they can learn what is there and how to use the resources of the community,” Martinez said. “We try to help them with jobs as well.”

And the teachers are looking for help too.

“Right now we are looking for more volunteers who can share not only the language, but the local culture,” Martinez said. “Retired teachers who would like to donate their time on Monday and Thursday nights would be super.”

For more information about the classes, call Jose Martinez at 232-7900.

--Johnson City Press, Monday, May 7, 2001