

**THE COUNCIL OF MY NATION
AN ARTICULATION OF JUDAISM**

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PREFACE

The purpose of this work is to help you understand and appreciate the belief system known as Judaism. When Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, there were many belief systems that held sway in the Western world. There were also numerous variants of Christianity that had taken root amongst the population of the Mediterranean basin. All of this changed with the rise of the Roman Church. From the time the Roman Bishops took hold of the reins of power, they saw it as their holy duty to obliterate every dissenting voice. They were quite successful. By the early Middle-Ages, the European identified himself as a Christian - with the exception of the Jew.

This should not be seen as a reflection on a lack of effort or desire on the part of the Church. There is nothing the Church wanted more than the conversion of the Jew, and there is no area into which the Church poured more energy than they did in their mission to reach the Jew. All of the might of European Christendom was brought to bear in the Church's effort to eradicate Judaism - without success. Judaism is still here. The same Judaism which predates Christianity is as vital as ever - to the utter consternation of Christendom.

For the Jew who walks in the footsteps of Abraham, the miracle of Judaism's survival can only be attributed to the power of God's promise. God told us that His spirit is amongst us (Haggai 2:5), and that it will never depart (Isaiah 59:21). God promised that He will be our sanctuary in this bitter exile (Ezekiel 11:16), and that His Sabbath will stand as an eternal testimony to the sanctification that He continuously grants His people (Exodus 31:13). There was never a question to the Jew. The Jew had confidence that all of the powers on earth cannot destroy the truth, and that God's word will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8).

For many years the Church has tried to ignore the miraculous survival of Judaism. The holocaust has made this difficult. If any phenomenon contained the power to crush a people it must have been the hell unleashed by Hitler's Nazis. Yet the Jews are still here. The persecuted nation has walked through the fire and lives on to build and to thrive. The wondrous survival of the Jewish people has caused many in Christendom to reevaluate their theology in relation to the Jewish people. It is no longer in vogue to believe what the Church has been teaching for 2000 years - namely; that the Jews are no longer the chosen people of God. Although they have not completely sorted out all of the theological ramifications of this truth, many Christians now acknowledge that the Jewish people are still chosen of God.

Yet by and large, the Church still fails to recognize that it is not only the physical people who survived - a spiritual entity survived. The belief system of Judaism lives on. The founders of Christianity poured invective and ridicule upon Judaism - to the degree that the word "Pharisee" - became a byword for hypocrisy and corruption. The Church fathers perpetuated this attitude and disseminated this venom to the masses. Through the vehicle of the Church the air of Europe became saturated with hatred not only for the Jew - but with a particular animosity towards the belief system that is Judaism. This attitude still lives on in Christendom. The Church cannot concede that the survival of Pharisee Judaism is the work of God. Christendom cannot admit that the preservation of the Jewish belief system is an expression of God's covenant with Abraham Isaac and Jacob.

The purpose of this work is to help you understand this belief system. We hope that our words will help you see through the lies that Christendom has heaped upon Judaism.

The following is written in the form of a letter to a Jew who subscribes to Christianity. As a Jew who follows Judaism, I attempt to persuade my brother to join me in serving God the way our ancestors did before us.

INTRODUCTION

Dear Chanan

Brother! Let us return, Father is waiting for us.

Please allow me to elaborate.

Brother? Yes, we are brothers. It was with our father, Abraham, that the Creator of all made an everlasting covenant. Your genes and my genes were there on the altar when Isaac was offered to God. When people want to make reference to the One Creator of all, they use our father's name and they say - the God of Israel. When the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt we were there together, and had God not intervened, we would both still be there. We share the glorious memory of God manifesting His might with the greatest miracles in the history of mankind, all for our sake and the sake of our ancestors. Both you and I are repositories for the record of the revelation at Sinai - the revelation which stands out in its uniqueness as the only claim for a national revelation. The greatest prophet that ever lived, the trustworthy one of God's household, taught us for forty years while we lived under God's embrace. During that time God showed us His love with the clouds of glory, the manna, and the well of Miriam. His presence was manifest in the midst of our nation in the Tabernacle and then in the Jerusalem temple. Then the dark times came, but God's love did not waver. His love was manifest in the courage He poured into our hearts that gave us the strength to overcome the Greeks, to outlive the mighty Roman empire, and to survive the most torturous persecutions. This is our heritage, and as brothers, we share this glorious inheritance.

But now we walk different paths. We are both convinced that the paths we respectively walk are the true continuity of our great history. But only one of us can be in the right. Our paths are mutually exclusive. Indeed there are some similarities that our divergent paths share, but these parallels are only superficial. At the very root, our paths are polar opposites. We both believe in the truth of the Jewish Bible, but the contexts from within which we each read the Bible are so disparate that we might as well be reading two different books. We both believe in an afterlife, but our understanding of the afterlife, and our conception of the road to the afterlife, are so different, that the path that leads to your heaven goes to my hell. We both believe in the coming of the Messiah, but our respective visions of the messianic era have very little in common. We both accept that the purpose of life is developing a relationship with God, but the word God means one thing for me and something else for you.

The fact that as brothers we still walk different paths disturbs both of us. Perhaps you've been more diligent than I have been in expressing your pain in a concrete way. Together with the members of your community, you are involved in an ongoing energetic effort to persuade the members of my community to join your path. As difficult as it is for my community to appreciate your efforts in this regard, I could acknowledge that many of you are motivated by a love for your fellow Jews.

By now you have probably come to realize that as a community we are far from convinced. All of your methods of persuasion, be they quotations from scripture or personal testimonies, have failed to convince us to join you in your faith. Perhaps you are beginning to believe the myth propounded by some members of your community which claims that the Jewish people are stricken by a spiritual blindness - and it is this supernatural defect which prevents the members of my community from appreciating the power of your arguments.

If my community has not been as diligent as yours in reaching out to our brothers, please see in this letter a step towards rectifying that imbalance. Please read my words as you would want me to read yours - as an expression of my concern for your welfare. Before I get into the details of my presentation I would like to ask you to step back and consider the following. Both you and I accept the dictum that we only do unto others as we would have done unto ourselves. When you present your arguments to members of my community in an effort to persuade them to abandon their path in favor of yours - in essence you are asking them to go through an extremely difficult process. You are asking them to seriously consider the possibility that much of what they hold precious and holy - is downright wrong. You are asking them to draw the courage to look at themselves in the mirror and say - I've been wrong all these years. If you ask this of us, please be willing to do the same yourself.

My ultimate goal with this letter is to convince you to join my path in faith. Still, I would not consider this letter written in vain if you are not fully persuaded. If I succeed in helping you to see why I can't join you in your faith, I will celebrate that minor victory. The myth of the spiritual blindness of the loyal Jew stands as an ugly mark in the history of mankind. If my words contribute to the debunking of this myth, then my labor will have not been fruitless.

One note on semantics before we embark. I will be calling the belief system of my community "Judaism" and the members of my faith "Jews". I will be calling your faith "Christianity" and her adherents "Christians". I am not trying to deny the Jewishness of anyone born of a Jewish mother. Neither am I attempting to rouse your ire by refusing to call you a "Messianic Jew". It is just that with a letter as complex as this, I make this one sacrifice to simplicity for the sake of clarity.

PART 1 SCRIPTURE

Introduction - The differences between Judaism and Christianity

I know that you read the Jewish scriptures on a regular basis. You find encouragement and support for your faith in the words of the Jewish prophets. You express amazement that Jews read these same words and are not convinced to join you in your Christian faith. You have presented those passages which you see as central to the substance of scripture and you were shocked to learn that the Jewish people didn't see what you saw in those passages.

It may surprise you even further if you were to know the truth. Not only do the Jewish people not see their scriptures as supportive of Christianity, but they cannot figure out how Christians can read the scriptures and fail to be convinced of the truth of Judaism.

Before we get into the question as to which of us is reading scripture correctly, and before any of us assume that the other is stricken by a spiritual blindness, I would like to point out that we are each reading scripture in a different context and with different attitudes. The mind-sets through which we each look at the world, and the contexts within which we see scripture, will naturally affect our readings.

The fact is that neither of us believes that the Jewish scriptures stand alone as the complete and total directive of the Divine. For the Christian, it is the Jewish scripture together with the Christian scripture that can be considered the totality of the message, while for the Jew, it is the living legacy of the Jewish people, of which scripture is only a part, that stands as the complete message. The fact that we each see the Jewish scripture as part of a larger message seriously affects the way we read scripture and ultimately gives us conflicting conclusions.

One way of getting around this problem would be to open a discussion centered on this very issue. In other words, let us try to figure out what is the correct context for Jewish scripture. I hope to present my position on this issue further on in this letter.

For now I propose a different exercise to help us circumvent the issue of context. We can cast our discussion back in time, before the Christian scriptures were authored. At that point in time you can surely agree that the Jewish scriptures were not to be read in the context of the Christian scriptures. I for my part, for the sake of this discussion will try to read Jewish scripture as a Fundamentalist Christian would have me read it - as if it were the only and complete directive from God. According to the Christian, at that point in time this would have been the correct way to read scripture. From the standpoint of the

Jew, this would still be reading scripture out of context. Still, I believe that as long as we don't see the scripture in a Christian context, we will be that much closer to the truth. We will examine our theological differences in the light of the plain reading of the Jewish scriptures.

What are our theological differences? To put it simply, we can narrow it down to four major differences. There are the issues of idolatry, the Law of Moses, atonement, and Messiah. I think it is important that we define these differences before we go on. Our opposing perspectives gives each of us a different way of looking at each of these issues.

Idolatry.

The Jewish people identify Christianity's devotion to a certain person, as idolatrous. This assertion is harsh on Christian ears. Christians consider themselves monotheists and they see their devotion as worship of the One God of Israel. Because of their preconceived notions it is difficult for Christians to appreciate the serious nature of this matter. In order to help you see things in a different light, I will ask you to consider the following question; - If the devotion that Christians apply to their savior were to be directed at another man - would that be idolatry? Do you not realize that if the Christian savior is not what his devotees claim him to be then he is "another man"?

With an appreciation for the seriousness of the issue, we can define the question. Do the Jewish scriptures advocate devotion to a man? Does it allow this devotion? Or does it prohibit this devotion in the strongest terms?

The Law of Moses.

This one is tricky, because of the divergence of opinion amongst Jewish Christians on this subject. Many Jewish Christians consider themselves "free" from the Law of Moses, they believe that it no longer applies on a practical level. Others accept the binding nature of the Law of Moses, but accept only those laws explicitly written in the Five Books. Others yet accept the full body of the Law of Moses as defined by the living legacy of the Jewish nation. The basis for this position is the recognition that the Christian savior himself believed this way and that he lead his life accordingly.

The Jewish contention with each of these positions can be stated in the following terms. To the first group - We believe that the law of Moses is eternal in nature and is binding upon all of the Jewish people in all generations. To the second group - We believe that the living legacy of the Jewish people is the only context from within which to approach observance of the Law. As for the third group, at first glance it would seem that we are in total agreement, but this is not so. Although the third group accepts that the living legacy of the Jewish nation is the only true context for the Law, they differ with us over some key issues. They do not accept the Jewish definition of the law of idolatry.

We will have to examine the Jewish scripture as it relates to each of these issues. Does the Jewish scripture acknowledge that the living legacy of the nation is the repository for the law - specifically the law of idolatry? Is the law of Moses binding upon every generation of Jews? What do the Jewish scriptures teach us in these areas?

Atonement.

Here too, Christians differ in their approach. All Christians agree that no atonement can be achieved without devotion to their savior. The divergence relates to the role of repentance in the atonement process. Some are of the opinion that no action on man's part can play a role in the atonement process, thus repentance is believed to be a result of atonement and not a cause for atonement. Others accept that repentance is a necessary prerequisite for atonement, but that devotion to the Christian savior is necessary to complete the process. The Jewish position is that repentance is the key component in the atonement process. When man repents, God forgives. We will search the Jewish scriptures for guidance on this matter.

Messiah.

Christians view the Jewish rejection of the Christian Messiah as the most significant issue dividing the Christian and the Jew. The fact is though that the difference runs much deeper. Our respective understandings of the very concept of Messiah stand poles apart from each other. Aside from the technical issues, such as the difference of opinion about the virgin birth (Christians believe that the Messiah must be born from a virgin while the Jews believe that the Messiah must have a human father from the line of David,) there are some deep theological issues such as the questions of divinity and atonement. Christians believe that the Messiah must be divine, while the Jews believe that he is human. Christians believe that there is no atonement without devotion to the Messiah, while Jews believe that devotion to the Messiah has no bearing on the atonement process. (These two issues - divinity and atonement - are subsumed in the previous categories.)

Still, the list of differences does not end here. The entire thrust of the Christian concept of Messiah runs counter to the Jewish understanding of this same matter. Christians believe that a new election is achieved through devotion to the Messiah. This means that just as the Jews were elected by God on account of their fathers, Christians are elected by God on account of faith in their Messiah. Some Christians believe that this election supersedes the election of the Jewish people - in other words the Jewish people are no longer God's elect. Others believe that these elections are parallel to each other and that there are two elect people, the Jews, and those devoted to the Christian Messiah. The Jewish people accept no such election. They see this claim to election as the antithesis of the entire thrust of God's Messianic promise. The hope and yearning for the Messianic age is very different in the heart of the Jew than the hope that goes by the same name in the heart of the Christian. One yearns for the ingathering of the scattered of the Jewish people, a

rebuilt temple, observance of the Law of Moses, and worldwide worship of the God of Israel, while the Christian looks forward to the vindication of the devotees of his Messiah to the shame of the Jewish people, he looks forward to a world in which the only recognized method of atonement is devotion to the same man. Many Christians are also looking forward to the ultimate nullification of the Law of Moses.

Finally, we have the issue of unfulfilled Messianic prophecy. So much of the prophecies concerning the Messiah have not been fulfilled. Can we accept the Christian explanation of the second coming of the Messiah? Is there scriptural justification for this doctrine? Can one claim the title "Messiah" and demand the honor contained in that title without having fulfilled all of the Messianic prophecies? We must examine the Jewish scriptures with each of these positions in mind. We must ask ourselves, on which side of this debate would the prophets of scripture have found themselves?

With the opposing views relating to these issues in mind we can begin our search of the Jewish scriptures. Which position does the Jewish scripture support, is it the Christian position or the Jewish one? Before we begin, I would like to make an important point. If our search turns out inconclusive (- I don't expect this to happen, but just in case -), then I will consider it a modest victory for the Jewish position. Firstly, at least the myth of the supernatural Jewish blindness will have been successfully debunked. If the Jewish scriptures are inconclusive, then no supernatural explanations are necessary to explain the Jewish non-acceptance of Christianity. Of far greater magnitude though, is the issue of idolatry. If one has the slightest doubt about the theology of the divinity of the Christian Messiah, then there is no moral justification to commit oneself in worship. The risk is far too great. If you are mistaken, then your worship is the greatest rebellion against God imaginable!

From the standpoint of the Jew, the first issue to be addressed would be the issue of idolatry. It is over this issue that countless Jews went to their deaths rather than direct their worship towards the Christian Messiah. The Jewish perception of God does not allow for the worship of a man, and the Law of Moses as understood by the Jew has God demand that we be willing to give our lives before committing idolatry.

From the Christian standpoint, the key issues would be atonement and Messiah. The Christian contends that without atonement then you are dead in your sins and cut off from before God. All of God's promises cannot apply to one who is not freed from sin.

Perhaps scripture can guide us on this issue. What does God recommend? That we be preoccupied with our search for atonement, or that we focus on obedience?

I think that scripture is abundantly clear on this matter and it comes down very strongly on the side of obedience. Not only does scripture stress obedience time and time again (Genesis 26:5, Exodus 15:26, Deuteronomy 11:13, 15:5, 26:17, 28:1,2,13, 30:10 Jeremiah 11:4 Psalms 81:14, Ecclesiastes 12:13 - just some of many references), but scripture actually tells us that obedience is more important than the blood offerings. Now from the Christian standpoint blood offerings ought to be the most critical component in one's relationship with God because it is the only process that embodies the concept of a life for a life. But scripture seems to disagree. 1Samuel 15:22, Jeremiah 7:21-23, and Psalm 40:7-9 clearly tell us that God wants us to be focused on obedience before we focus on blood offerings. This is not to say that blood offerings are insignificant and meaningless. God wouldn't spend so much time talking about them if they wouldn't be important. But scripture is teaching us that they are only important within the framework of obedience.

When it comes to the issue of idolatry, scripture spares no words in telling us how God wants us to avoid it. God's anger towards idolatry is expressed countless times in scripture in the strongest terms and in the most central settings. Here are a sampling of references Exodus 20:2-6,19,20, 23:13,24,32-33, 34:11-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-10, 6:14,15, 7:1-6,25,26, 8:19,20, 11:16,17,26-28, 12:1-4,29-31, 13:2-19, 17:2-7, 27:15, 29:17-26, 30:17,18, 31:16-21, 32:15-21, Judges 2:1-23, 1Kings 11:4-11, 14:9,10, 12:18-40, 2Kings 17:7-23, 21:2-15, Isaiah 2:8-22, 40:17-26, 44:6-23, 46:1-13, Jeremiah 1:16, 3:1-13, 7:17-20, 10:1-16, 11:9-17. I think that by now you can see that the Jewish concern to avoid idolatry is deeply rooted in scripture.

I IDOLATRY

Introduction

So how does scripture expect us to identify an idol? Christians will be quick to bring up verses which seem to indicate plurality within God, or passages which seem to indicate that God seems to take on a specific form. We will get to these passages soon, but we will not begin with these passages. For not one of these passages was written with the explicit purpose of defining the law of idolatry. None of these passages begin by telling us that they are about to describe who it is that we are to worship. Wherever scripture directly addresses the issue of idolatry and who it is that we are to worship, the message is unmistakably clear. Deuteronomy 4:9-20 directly addresses the issue of idolatry. Moses reminds the Jewish people that they saw no form at the Sinai revelation. And it is on this basis that they are not to worship anything else but the God that they were taught to worship at Sinai. The Ten Commandments open with the words "I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage, you shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:2,3, Deuteronomy 5:6,7.) Anyone aside from the One

who took us out of Egypt is “another god”. When scripture exhorts us to punish idolaters or people who attempt to persuade us to worship idols, the idol is identified with the terms “that which neither you nor your fathers have known”, or “that which I have not commanded” (Deuteronomy 13:7, 17:3.) The Jewish people are expected to know God, and to have been instructed by God guiding them in their worship. A god that the Jewish people never heard about from their fathers is “another god”. This was the direct purpose of the Sinai revelation as stated in Exodus 20:19,20 and Deuteronomy 4:35 - that the Jewish people know God and by process of elimination, know who is not God. When God encourages the Jewish people to worship Him, He identifies Himself as the One who took you out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 6:12,13) or simply “your God” (Deuteronomy 10:12-20, 11:13,22, 26:16-19, 30:20 Joshua 22:5, 23:8) implying the God we know and are familiar with. None of these verses leave any room for worship of a man whom our fathers never met. These verses are both direct and commanding. None of the verses that are presented to support the Christian position are directly addressing the issue of the identity of the One we are to worship, and none of them are commanding us to worship anything. On the basis of these direct commandments, we must firmly reject any theology which seems to contradict these passages. Obedience to God’s command demands it.

The scriptural passages brought forth by the Christian to justify their theology fall under several categories. There are verses which seem to point to an “incarnation” of God, in other words God seems to appear as an angel or as a man. There are verses which speak of God in a plural manner implying plurality within God. And there are verses which speak of God in anthropomorphic terms, describing God’s actions in human terminology. Finally there are passages which attribute divine names to the Messiah seemingly indicating that the Messiah is more than a mere human.

Before we get into the body of the discussion please allow me to share some feelings here. My brother, I ask you to step back and realize what it is that we are discussing. After everything is said and done Christianity is pointing to a man, and calling him “God”. Whichever way you philosophize about it - that is the message of Christianity. Does this need to be discussed? Is this discussion not the height of insolence towards God? Did God take us out of Egypt and grant us the revelation at Sinai so that we can have such a discussion? It is only my love for you as a brother, as a fellow child of Abraham Isaac and Jacob, God’s beloved, that induces me to go through this painful discussion.

A. Divine Names

Let us begin the discussion with those passages that attribute divine names to the Messiah. Perhaps the most prominent of these is found in Jeremiah 23:6 where the Messiah is called “the Lord is our righteousness”. What can be more clear? There is no question that this passage is talking of the Messianic figure that is the redeemer of Israel, and God calls him by His own holy name! Amazing! But let us take pause. Is the passage indicating that we ought to worship this man? Is the passage telling us that this man

shares God's divine nature? No, not directly. Yet the Christian would argue that with a name like this "the Lord is our righteousness", how can the Messiah be less than divine? The Jew would argue that the name tells us nothing about the essential nature of the Messiah, it only helps us understand God's deeds that will be performed in his days and through him. So who is right? Is it the Christian or the Jew?

If this was the only passage in scripture, if we were to find this scrap of Jeremiah on an ancient parchment as the only surviving remnant of literature from the long forgotten civilization of the Jews. If I were to know nothing of the Jews and their scripture but this one line from Jeremiah, I would perhaps be inclined to side with the Christian. It would seem plausible that the author of this one passage believed in a divine Messiah. But I would be dead wrong. Just a few chapters further on in the same book (33:16) we find that God gives the very same name to the city of Jerusalem! Hold on there! Is Jerusalem divine? Should we worship Jerusalem? Perhaps we should nominate the city of Jerusalem as a fourth member in the Christian trinity? It is clear that the Jewish interpretation of the passage is the interpretation vindicated here. The fact that God gives someone a name with divine implications does not make the person or object divine. It only tells us of the deeds God will perform through that individual or through that object.

We find several other objects to whom no-one ever attributed divinity designated with divine names. Genesis 33:20, 35:7, Exodus 17:15, and Judges 6:24 all have various altars being given divine names. Just as we have learned from Jeremiah 33:16, Ezekiel (48:35) also entitles Jerusalem with a divine name. The names of many people throughout scripture are "divine names". Tzurishadai of Numbers 1:6 translates as "my rock, God", Joshua is "the Lord's salvation" and Hezekiah is "the might of the Lord". These names were never understood to be implying the divinity of these people. They reflect the deeds that God manifested through these people or the deeds that were hoped to be manifested through these people, but these people remain human beings and no worship is to be directed to them. The same would apply to the passage in Isaiah 9:5 where the young Hezekiah is designated with a list of names. These names tell us nothing about the nature of the man Hezekiah, they only tell us about the miracles God performed through him and in his times.

B. The Angel of the Lord

Let us move on now to those passages in which God seems to be interchangeable with an angel. In chapter 18 of Genesis three men appear to Abraham. It turns out that two of these men were actually angels (Genesis 19:1). But who was the third one? According to some Jewish commentators (Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra), the third man was actually an angel who is called by God's name. It is this third angel whom Abraham was speaking to and addressing as "Lord". The Christians argue that this proves that God can take on the form of an angel and even the form of a human, for did this angel not eat and drink with Abraham under the tree? The Jew would point out that this angel was not worshiped and that there is no commandment that we worship this angel. When God appears to the

prophets He often sends an angel to represent Him for the purpose of passing on His message to the prophet. The angel speaks the words of God, and the prophet addresses God by speaking to the angel - but the angel is not God. How can we know whose interpretation is correct? Is the angel God incarnate and deserving of worship as the Christian would have it? Or is the angel only passing on God's words but is an entity distinct and separate from God as the Jew would have it?

Fortunately we have some other passages in scripture which could help us sort things out. Exodus 23:20 has God telling Moses that He will send an angel before the Jewish people. God commands Moses to hearken to the voice of this angel. Here is the direct quote (Exodus 23:22 -) "But rather you shall hearken to his voice and do all that I speak". In other words God wants Moses to obey the command of the angel because it is God's words that the angel speaks, but the angel is clearly an entity separate from God. Similarly in Numbers chapter 22 we find an angel speaking God's words, yet the angel is an entity distinct from God. In verse 35 of that chapter the angel tells Bileam "but the word which I speak that you shall speak", yet in chapter 23 verse 5 it is God who puts the words in Bileam's mouth. Again, the angel is the one who speaks God's words and scripture refers to it as "God speaking". The very designation "mal'ach" (generally translated as "angel") literally means "messenger", highlighting the fact that the angel is an entity subservient to God charged with a mission - but is not an entity who is to be seen as co-equal with God. In fact we find that human messengers of God (also referred to by the term "mal'ach - angel" Haggai 1:13) speaking God's words. In the book of Deuteronomy we find Moses speaking God's words without any introductory phrases, he just slips from speaking God's words in the third person to speaking God's words in the first person - (Deuteronomy 11:15). No-one attributes divinity to Moses, yet in capacity of messenger to the Lord he speaks for God. God uses messengers, both human and angelic through whom He brings His word to this physical world - but there is no indication that any worship is to be directed to these messengers. These messengers are clearly distinct from God, and as such, are not deserving of worship.

C. Plural Terminology

Another category of verses that Christians quote in an attempt to justify their theology are those passages in which God is spoken of in plural terminology. This category can be further classified into three subdivisions. There are verses in which a plural term is used to describe an action of God or even to describe God Himself. Then there are passages in which God speaks about Himself in a manner which seems to indicate plurality within God. And finally, there are passages which refer to God by several names, which Christians see as an indication of plurality.

An example for the first category of an indication of plurality within God, and perhaps the best known of this type of proof-text, is the verse in Genesis 1:26 where God says "let us make man in our image". (There are actually two points that must be analyzed in this one verse. There is the issue of plural terminology, and then there is the issue of

anthropomorphism - the verse seems to be indicating that God has an image. Presently we will address the plurality issue. We hope to address the issue of anthropomorphism separately.) The Christian argues that this is a clear proof to the concept of plurality within the larger concept of God. Why else would God talk of an action that He plans to do in the plural. The Jewish position is that God is talking to His heavenly court. Christians ridicule this interpretation. Why would God have to discuss things with the angels? Doesn't Isaiah tell us "with whom did He (God) take counsel?" (Isaiah 40:14). God doesn't need to discuss things with His servants! I must admit that these sound like good objections. But let us note that these objections are not textual. The text itself reads perfectly fine according to the Jewish interpretation. The objections to this interpretation are theological in nature and based on the larger context of scripture. In other words the Christian is telling us that God never meant this line in scripture to be read outside of the larger context of theological truths that were taught by God. This is the basis for the Jewish position. God revealed Himself to the Jewish people at Sinai, and that revelation is the context within which they read scripture. This is the context that God Himself provided for scripture - the revelation at Sinai came before scripture was presented to the Jewish people. And it is this larger context which prevents the Jew from accepting the Christian interpretation.

The fact is that scripture clearly describes God as operating through the counsel of a heavenly court. 1Kings 22:19 has God sitting on His throne and the host of the heavens are standing to His right and to His left. God asks of them "who will go and persuade Ahab to go to Ramot Gilead?" After a discussion on the matter, a certain spirit volunteered for the task, and God asks the spirit "how are you planning to do this?" The spirit responds by describing his plan, whereupon God agrees, and the spirit goes forth.

Does God need the counsel of the angels to accomplish His objectives? Certainly not! Does God need a spirit to help Him devise a plan of action? Again, no! But that is how the scripture describes the way God operates. This is either a metaphor, helping us understand the severity of the judgment about to befall Ahab, or this is telling us about certain spiritual forces, who are but creations of God, and are the methods through whom God chooses to operate.

In the book of Isaiah (6:8) we also find God sitting on His throne surrounded by the heavenly host. In that passage God also asks "who will go for us?", implying a discussion with the angels that surround His throne. There is no reason to believe that the passage in Genesis is not putting forth the same imagery.

Another category of scriptural quotations that seem to ascribe plurality to God are those which speak of God Himself in plural terminology. The verse in Joshua 24:19 is an example of this manner of speaking. Joshua describes God as holy, but the Hebrew word

that Joshua uses for holy is in the plural format as if it were applying to more than one entity.

This should be nothing new to one who reads the scriptures in the original Hebrew. When speaking of single human beings, scripture also uses plural terminology. Genesis 39:20 refers to Potiphar as “the masters of Joseph”. This is not an isolated irregularity. The same chapter in Genesis repeats the plural phraseology in verses 2,3,7, and 8. The same usage of plural wording in reference to specific people can be found in Exodus 21:4,6,29,32, in 1Kings 22:17, and in Isaiah 19:4. In other words, the fact that scripture uses plural terminology to describe an individual does not turn him into a trinity.

Yet another type of passage quoted in support of the Christian notion that sees God as a plurality are those which have God speaking of himself in the third person. An example would be Hosea 1:7 where God tells us that He will save the Jewish people through the Lord their God. Christians argue that one entity within the godhead will be using another entity to render salvation for the Jewish people - plurality within the godhead! The problem with this interpretation is that we find human beings speaking the same way. Genesis 4:23 and 24 has Lamech speaking to his wives while referring to himself in the third person. David commands his servants (2Samuel 20:6, 1Kings 1:33) to take the slaves of their master - a reference to himself. Numbers 24:3 and 4 has Bileam describing himself in the third person. This is obviously a common usage of the Hebrew language and no indication of plurality within the nature of the speaker.

D. Anthropomorphisms

Christians sometimes quote passages in scripture that speak of God in anthropomorphic terms. These passages may refer to God's hands or feet, they may talk of God going down or up, in short these passages speak of God in a way that in a literal sense, would only be applicable to humans. Take the verse in Zechariah 14:4 which tells us that “His (God's) feet shall stand that day on the Mount of Olives”. Christians understand this verse as a reference to physical feet of a human god. The Jewish understanding is that these words are a metaphor describing God's actions. The point of the verse is that God will cause a direct impact on the Mount of Olives in a manner that will be unmistakably attributed to Him and to Him alone. So whose interpretation is correct?

The vast majority of anthropomorphisms used by scripture can in no way be interpreted literally. The outstretched arm of the exodus (Exodus 6:6, Deuteronomy 4:34, 5:15, 26:8, 2Kings 17:36), the heavens as God's throne (Isaiah 66:1, Psalms 11:4, 103:19), the eyes of God (Deuteronomy 11:12, Amos 9:8, Zechariah 4:10, Ps. 34:16, Proverbs 5:21, 15:3, 22:12) are just some of the expressions scripture uses to describe God's actions - and cannot be understood as a description of His being.

Furthermore, scripture uses the same figures of speech to describe the actions of entities other than God. Isaiah 55:12 has the trees “clapping their hands”, while Psalm 98:8 attributes the same action to the rivers. 2Samuel 12:11 speaks of the “eyes of the sun”, while Jeremiah 30:18 describes a palace “sitting”.

In the language of scripture both human actions and the limbs of the human body represent various concepts. The outstretched arm denotes a manifestation of strength, while the luminous face represents favor. The human body as a whole, together with the full range of human activity stand for a complete conceptual image. This image encompasses the entire spectrum of interaction that is possible between the Creator and His creations. This is not a coincidence. The passage in Genesis is telling us that this is the mold in which man was formed. God formed man in the image of the conceptual totality of His own interaction with His creations. Thus whenever scripture describes an action of God, it finds a metaphor from this conceptual human image. The image projected by the animals does not encompass the full range of activities possible between God and His creations. Thus it is only man that is created in the image of God.

E. An Exalted King and an Exalted Nation

I recently discovered another missionary presentation which encourages worship of a human. This missionary work pointed to all the references in scripture which describe devotion to the Davidic kings. Psalm 89:28 is quoted where the Davidic king is “most high”. Psalm 72:11 has people bowing to the Davidic king. 1Chronicles 29:20 has the people bowing to God and to the Davidic king, while Jeremiah 30:9 has the people serving God and the Davidic king. The nations are called upon to praise the Davidic king (Psalm 45:18). What more could scripture say to encourage worship of the Messiah?

When examined in context, it becomes clear that these verses are talking about earthly kings. Psalm 89:28 and 1Chronicles 29:20 are referring to David himself. Psalm 45 talks of a king whose children will take the place of his fathers - not a pre-existing divine being who never got married. It is clear that the obeisance spoken of in these verses, is of the type offered to a human king and not worship of the divine.

Furthermore, we find these same terminologies, and much more directed at the Jewish people. Deuteronomy 26:19, and 28:1 refers to the Jewish nation as “most high”. Genesis 27:29, Isaiah 45:14, 49:23, 60:14, have the nations bowing to the Jews. Genesis 25:23, 27:29, Isaiah 60:10,12, Daniel 7:27 all have different terms of service directed towards the Jewish people. Isaiah 45:14 has the nations praying to the Jews. Deuteronomy 28:10, Psalm 105:38, and Esther 9:2 has the nations fearing and revering the Jews. 2Chronicles 31:8 has a blessing directed at God together with the Jewish people. 2Chronicles 35:3 has the priests serving God and the Jewish people. 2Samuel 7:22,23, and 1Chronicles 17:20,21, has the Jewish people being praised together with God. The specific words of praise directed at the Jewish people in Deuteronomy 33:29 are nowhere else to be found

except in praise of God (Exodus 15:11, Psalm 35:10, 71:19, 89:9). This does not mean that the Jewish people are divine. What we can clearly learn from these verses is that the usage of these terms does not tell us anything about the divinity of the entity at whom they are directed.

F. Traditional Sources

Yet another missionary tactic employed in their effort to promote their theology is the usage of traditional Jewish sources. There are statements and phrases to be found in the mystical writings of the Jewish people which can be misconstrued to be read as support for Christian theology. There is no real reason to respond to these misquotations. Firstly, since most Christians claim to recognize no authority beyond scripture so a quotation from a non-scriptural source is of no consequence. Secondly and more importantly is the fact that these quotations are being wrenched out of context. We know the beliefs of the authors of these works, and their disciples are here with us today. All of these men were loyal to the God of Israel. They all accepted the Sinai revelation as the defining experience that directs our worship of God. These people would have chosen death before attributing divinity to a human being. To quote the words of these loyal Jews in an attempt to justify Christianity's theology, is the height of insolence.

G. Conclusion

In summation we can state that the underlying theme of all scripture is that God is God and that everyone and everything else are but His creations. The most important line in the universe is the one that stands between Creator and created. The foundation of our relationship with God is recognition of this truth. Every sentence in scripture is written with the purpose of bringing this truth home to us. By attributing divinity to a created being, Christianity has denied the essential distinction between created and Creator. By turning the worship of men towards a created being, Christianity has compromised the significance of man's absolute subservience towards the Creator of all. In doing so, Christianity has taken a stance against God and against His holy Word.

II

THE LAW AND THE CHOSENNESS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Introduction

Let us now move on to the subject of the Law. Here too, God spares no words in emphasizing the centrality of the Law in our relationship with Him. Abraham was chosen because of his obedience to God's voice (Genesis 26:5). The chosen-ness of Israel centers on our obedience to the commandments (Deuteronomy 26:18). Obedience to the Law is equated with life (Deuteronomy 30:30), with good and righteousness (Deuteronomy 6:24), and with eternal reward (Psalm 103:17,18). Obedience to the Law leads to humility (Deuteronomy 18:19,20) and to holiness (Numbers 15:40). God explicitly tells us that obedience is better than blood offerings (1Samuel 15:22). These are but a sampling of the

passages which stress the significance of obedience to God's Law. There can be no question that an understanding the issue of the Law is of primary importance.

The Jew recognizes that the commandments of God as expressed in the Torah are eternal (Psalm 119:144). The Jew sees in each of the commandments a God-given opportunity to express faith in God, to express faith in God's word, and to acknowledge God's total sovereignty over every aspect of life (Psalm 119:91). Every commandment is a gift of holiness from the divine source of all holiness (Leviticus 20:26). Studying the intricacies of the commandments brings one into contact with God's own wisdom (Psalm 19:8). Through the study of God's Law, the Jew attempts to bring the deepest facets of his nature in line with God's holy will (Psalm 119:9). The Jew sees the Law as the path that God created to enable the Jewish nation to partake of His goodness (Psalm 119:93).

To the Jew, the Law of Moses goes beyond what one would pick up from a superficial reading of the Five Books. The Five Books of Moses contain the basis of the Law, but the fullness of the Law is only revealed in the living Jewish nation. In a community of Jews who live the Law, the primary contact one has with the Law is through living practice. As one participates in the practices of the nation one comes to recognize and to know the spirit of each Law (Exodus 12:26, 27, 13:14). Through involvement in the practical discussions surrounding the Law, one comes to know the details of the Law which would otherwise remain a mystery. Within the society loyal to the God of Israel, one comes to identify a contiguous line of living teachers who embody the spirit of the Law. As one observes the Law in synchrony with the nation, his life becomes a national expression of faith in addition to a personal demonstration of faith. Every individual's obedience to the Law in the context of the living nation forms a link in the chain of Eternal Israel's loyalty to God.

The tradition teaches us, that when God spoke to Moses, two types of teachings were imparted. There were the commandments themselves, and there was the understanding that God granted Moses concerning each of the commandments. The commandments are the words that were subsequently written in the Five Books of Moses. The explication of the commandments was taught to the people and was not recorded in a written format. These two types of knowledge - the commandments and their definitions are more commonly referred to as the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. These appellations seem to imply that the Oral Law is simply a continuation or an addition to the Written Law. But this is not so. The role of the Oral Law is categorically different than the role of the Five Books. The relationship between the Five Books and the Oral Law is like the relationship between the written word and a picture. The Five Books tells us the name of every commandment, the Oral Law presents the picture that goes with each name.

The understanding that Moses was granted concerning each of the commandments was much broader than a few bits of static information. Moses was given an apprehension of

the spirit of each law. He was taught how each particular law would be observed practically, and the role it played in the overall scope of the commandments. The Oral Law brought each of the laws to life in Moses' mind and heart. Each of the laws on its own, and the completeness of the Law in general stand as complete personalities who guide the Jew in his relationship with God (Psalm 119:24).

A. The Role of the Nation

The role of the nation in relation to the Law is complex and multifaceted. It is the role of the nation to preserve the Law and her spirit for future generations. It is the role of the nation to recognize the judges, the people who embody the spirit of the Law. The nation with her leaders must apply the Law to daily life. By living the Law the nation renders the Law a living entity. As significant as all of these responsibilities are, the nation still plays a more foundational role. All of these imperatives are subsumed and included in the most basic responsibility of the nation.

The most important role the nation performs in relation to the Law is the preservation of her own identity. After God, the most important entity of scripture is the entity called the nation of Israel. This entity spans the generations and its continuous existence is as essential as the fundamental laws of nature (Jeremiah 31:35, 33:25). When scripture speaks of eternal reward it speaks of those "of your nation that are found written in the book" (Daniel 12:1), or those "written for life in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 4:3). Conversely when the scriptures threaten eternal punishment it speaks of being "cut off from the midst of the nation" (Numbers 15:30), or "in the council of My nation they shall not be present, and in the writ of the house of Israel they shall not be written" (Ezekiel 13:9). [In the book of Ezra it becomes apparent that the leaders of the nation possess the prerogative of determining that a given individual be separated from the body of the nation (Ezra 9:8).] In the mind of the Divine Author of scripture, and in the mind of scripture's intended audience, the worst punishment for the Jew is the threat of being cut off from his nation.

Eternal Israel is God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22, Jeremiah 31:8). Of all creation God only desired the patriarchs (Deuteronomy 10:14,15), and the love He bears towards their children is eternal (Jeremiah 31:2). God's residence on earth was with Israel (1Kings 8:13), is with Israel (Ezekiel 11:16) and will forever be with Israel (Ezekiel 37:28). The entire focus of scripture is God's relationship with His covenant nation and the promise for the Messianic future is centered on Israel. The nation of Israel is God's sanctuary (Leviticus 20:3), and is compared to the apple of God's eye (Zechariah 2:12). God declares Israel to be His witnesses (Isaiah 43:10, 44:8) and He entrusted them with preservation of His Law (Psalm 78:5). Each of these points standing alone testifies to the pivotal role Israel plays in God's plan. Yet all of these points together still do not do justice in describing the centrality of Israel to the scriptural narrative.

We must realize that the activities of talking or writing are meaningless when they stand alone. The act of putting forth words only takes on meaning when there is a party on the receiving end to comprehend and absorb the words. The processes of speaking or writing are only complete when the listener or reader understands the message. A wise speaker or writer will focus on the end-result of his efforts - he will look to the comprehension of the recipient of his message. He will take into account the mind-set of his intended audience and their thought process and the effect these will have on the processing of his message, and his message will be crafted accordingly.

In the case of scripture we have the verdict of history. Many societies possessed the scriptures and the messages they comprehended were very different. Some societies who possessed the Jewish scriptures read them as a directive to despise the Jewish nation. Others read them as a directive to love the Jewish nation. Some communities see the deification of a human as the most important teaching of the scripture while others recognize that this act is prohibited in the plainest terms. Some see the scripture as an imperative to obey the Law of Moses, while others understand the scriptures as teaching that the Law of Moses is no longer relevant.

Each of these societies is reading scripture from within a different social context. The fact that some people consider the Christian scriptures to be just as authoritative as the Jewish scriptures will radically impact the way they read the Jewish scriptures. Any given society has its own definition of concepts such as God, holiness, covenant, and atonement, and these different definitions will necessarily shape that society's understanding of scripture. Every community will undoubtedly read scripture on its own terms.

Once one realizes how radically the mind-set of the reader affects the understanding of the book, one can recognize why the most important question one can ask concerning the scriptures is - "who is the Divine author's intended audience?" This may be a difficult question to ask, but it is not a difficult question to answer. Scripture is most explicit in telling us precisely who God's intended audience is. Deuteronomy 33:4 tells us that the Torah is an inheritance for the congregation of Jacob. Psalm 147:19,20 teaches us that the scriptures are presented to Israel, to the exclusion of any other national entity. In Deuteronomy 30:1,2 Moses addresses the entity of Eternal Israel in the singular "you". He speaks to the last generations with the same "you" that he addresses the people standing before him in the Plains of Moab. Identifying the entity of Eternal Israel is of supreme significance in the study of scripture, because it is to this entity, and to this entity alone that God is addressing His words.

We still have not fully presented the inseparability of Israel and scripture. Israel is not only the target audience of scripture - the end of scripture as it were. Israel is also the beginning of scripture. It would be wrong to read scripture as a book with a purpose of its

own that happens to be calibrated for a particular target audience. The original purpose of scripture is Israel. Aside from the countless passages which read as a personal conversation between God and His son, even the Law itself is presented as a factor of God's personal relationship with Israel (Leviticus 26:46). The Law is described as the terms of the covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 34:27). Israel's observance of the Law is her declaration that God is her personal God. The fact that the Law is presented to Israel is God's declaration that Israel is His personal nation (Deuteronomy 26:17,18). The relationship that God shares with His covenant nation precedes scripture, and scripture can only be read in the context of that relationship. The correlation of Israel and scripture is integral to the very essence of scripture. If not for Israel, scripture would not be here.

Scripture is a personal letter from God to Eternal Israel. One cannot read a personal letter addressed to someone else and apply it to himself. Neither can one claim an inheritance if their name is not mentioned in the will. Anyone aside from the intended recipient that reads the scriptures must first recognize that they are listening in to a deeply personal conversation before they can hope to understand scripture. Reading scripture without acknowledging the backdrop of Eternal Israel is an exercise in futility. An individual Jew reading scripture can only hear the intended message if he reads it as part of the eternal nation. He must read it together with the Jews that are alive today, and he must read it together with the Jews who walked before him. This does not mean that one must abandon his own individual understanding of scripture. After all, the nation is but a conglomeration of all of her individuals. But the individual's understanding is only meaningful when there is a clear recognition that this is part of the national endeavor to understand God's word.

So what is Eternal Israel? Who is Eternal Israel and how does she maintain her identity throughout the realms of time and space? Eternal Israel is the fusion of all of God's nation - from the Exodus until the end of time. The consciousness of standing before God as one with all the Jews who stood fast in their loyalty to God since Sinai. The national consciousness which feels the impact of the exodus as it reverberates through the hearts of the Jews who walked before. The striving to observe God's Law together with those who strove before us and will strive after us. The unified effort to understand God's Law and to make it part of our very beings. Recognizing our duty as an eternal community before God and the endeavor to discharge that duty. To the degree that the individual Jew participates in the national consciousness, to that same degree has the Jew transcended his own individuality to become part of Eternal Israel.

When one reads God's declaration "This nation I have formed for Myself" (Isaiah 43:21), one must recognize that "this nation" is an entity that includes living Jews of every generation. "The children of Israel shall guard the Sabbath" (Exodus 31:16) refers to an observance that continues to sanctify people that live in your own neighborhood. "The council of My nation" (Ezekiel 13:9) is a council that abides from the times of Moses until this very day. "You are My witnesses" (Isaiah 43:10,11) is God's declaration, not

only to Jews who lived long ago, but to Jews who are alive today. Those who read these words and understand them as a reference to a “new” Israel (i.e. the Christian Church) cannot hope to begin to comprehend scripture. The people who pay lip-service to the concept of the eternal chosen-ness of Israel, but eviscerate the concept of all meaning (i.e. - by believing that the Christian Church is the only witness that can be trusted) are not much nearer to the message of scripture. These can be compared to one who attempts to read a wedding invitation while denying the existence of the bride. Those who reject Israel’s unique standing as God’s firstborn son should not expect to appreciate the words of Israel’s Father.

1. Maintaining the identity of Eternal Israel

As God’s firstborn son, Israel is responsible for maintaining a unified national consciousness. A consciousness which joins the loyal community from the exodus until today. This task is not within human capability. It is God’s covenant that preserves His spirit in our midst (Isaiah 59:21). It is only because of God’s love for His son that He works through our activities to achieve His purpose. There are several activities of the nation through which God preserves our national identity. These are the national reading of scripture, the continuous living observance of the Law, and the ongoing national study of the Law. It is through these activities that the nation stands united as God’s son.

a) Through scripture

When an individual reads the scriptures as a member of the national entity, he reinforces the united consciousness of Eternal Israel. God’s searing words of rebuke absorbed as directed at myself and my people. The record of our national transgressions understood as our personal errors, as opposed to reading them as the faults of some “other” entity. The encouragement inherent in Moses’ blessing - “Fortunate are you, Oh Israel! Who is like you? (Deuteronomy 33:29)”. The love expressed in God’s tribute to His bride “You are entirely beautiful my beloved (Song of Songs 4:7)”. The assurance and the hope of God’s promise to His people “For the mountains may depart and the hills falter, but My kindness towards you shall never depart, nor My covenant of peace falter (Isaiah 54:10)”. All of these work together to shape our relationship with God as an eternal nation. Reading scripture with the conscious recognition that these are God’s words addressing me as a member of the national entity intensifies the consciousness that constitutes Eternal Israel.

b) Through observance of the Law

The observance of the Law plays a multifaceted role in the process of preserving Israel’s identity. There are the testimonial commandments. These preserve the events through which God originally formed our nation. The miracles of the exodus, the revelation at Sinai, and the wonders that God performed for us in the desert, were the hammer blows which God used to mold the psyche of the Jewish people. Observance of the Sabbath, the festivals and redemption of the firstborn are the activities through which God chose to perpetuate the impact of these foundational events. By participating in these observances

the individual Jew feels the force of the exodus by means of the very method that God formulated for the preservation of this event. By sharing in the national observances the Jew experiences the exodus as part of an eternal national entity.

Obedience to the commandments of God sanctifies our nation (Numbers 15:40). The striving to keep the commandments sets the loyal Jewish society apart from the general society. This forced the Jew to maintain his own counterculture in every country he found himself and in every age. The struggle to uphold the uniqueness of the Jewish community infused the Jewish spirit with strength and holiness. The national devotion to the Law generates a sense of brotherhood amongst Jews which knows no boundaries of time and space.

Observance of the Law is a unique learning experience. Practicing the Law within the setting of a living community instills a perception into the spirit of the Law which is not available outside of this setting. The discipline of the Law shaped the Jewish mind and gave our nation its own distinctive perspective.

c) Through the living discussion

Another activity through which God preserves the unified national consciousness is the living discussion. Through participation in the ongoing living discussion, a discussion that spans the centuries and millennia, the individual Jew joins with the national consciousness of the eternal nation. When the Jewish people were centralized in the Land of Israel, this discussion touched the entire community in a pool of common thought. The throngs that gathered in Jerusalem during the three pilgrimages were hubs of interaction that impacted the nation. During the times of the Second Temple, the weight of the central communities of Babylon and Israel maintained the interconnectedness of the living discussion. In the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple, various circumstances forced Jews to wander far from the bastions of Torah scholarship. This situation necessitated the writing of a book which would unify the nation's thought process - not only throughout the communities scattered around the globe - but one that would also join the nation throughout the corridors of time. This book is the Talmud.

The Talmud is not written as a record of facts or as a chronicle of events. The Talmud is written in the format of a run-on discussion. An intricate and involved discussion, with questions and answers, proofs and counter-points, arguments and explanations. The Talmud is not a book that can be read as a leisurely diversion. Study of the Talmud demands complete involvement, and generates intense discussion. Since the writing of the Talmud, the Torah discussions of the Jewish nation centered on the Talmud. Through the study of Talmud the 21st century American Jew is joined with his brethren in Israel today, with the Jew who lived in 16th century Poland, in 13th century Spain, in 10th century France, in 5th century Iraq and in Israel of the 3rd century B.C.E. Although they are strewn throughout the realms of space and time, countless Jewish communities are

linked together to stand before God as one entity - Eternal Israel. This living discussion spanning the generations joins the elements that make up the body of Eternal Israel.

By maintaining the identity of Eternal Israel, the only true context of the Law is preserved. But the relationship does not end there. Just as the Law needs Israel to act as the living setting for its own vitality, Eternal Israel needs the Law for its own existence. It is only to the degree that the individual Jew bears the Law in his heart (Isaiah 51:7) that he is united with the eternal community. Israel is only eternal to the measure that she discharges her duty in relation to the Law.

2. Preservation of the Law

Israel's duty towards the Law includes the preservation of the Law, the application of the Law and the recognition of the true teachers of the Law. Each of these can be broken down into subcategories, and as it is with any living entity, each of its elements is interconnected with every other element.

Israel's charge to preserve the Law for future generations can be divided along the lines of static and living, or letter and spirit. There are static, unchanging units of information that must be passed on to future generations, and there is an understanding of the Law, a familiarity with the personality of the Law that our children must learn. As a witness to God, the Jew sees it as an imperative of the highest order to transmit to the next generation the Law that he received from the previous generation. The means that Israel applies to discharge her duty are the books of scripture, living observance, the power of the rabbinic institution, and the living discussion.

a) Through scripture

The Torah scroll (- the Five Books of Moses) plays a central role in the preservation of the Law. God Himself established the Five Books of Moses as a principal component in the process of preserving the Law. The basic core of every Law is recorded in the Five Books, and by utilizing the appropriate methods of interpretation, many of the details of the Law can be inferred from between the lines. By reading the Five Books as part of a living community, much of the spirit of the Law is perpetuated from generation to generation. It is the nation's duty to preserve the integrity of the Five Books and to inspire their children with the appropriate respect for the Five Books and for the role they play in the nation's destiny. The scholars and the judges of each generation must pass on the methods of interpretation that they received from their own teachers, so that their disciples can see into the soul of the scripture as their fathers did before them.

The remaining books of scripture (- the Prophets and the Writings), perform a minor role in the preservation of the letter of the Law, but God designated them to fortify the nation's grasp of the spirit of the Law. The historical narratives represent God's

relationship with the nation and with individuals. The criticism of the prophets help us understand the perfection that God demands of His beloved nation, while the reassurance and the hopeful prophecies inspire an appreciation for the holy beauty of the perfect Law. The yearnings of the Psalmist give voice to the heart of Israel and inspire future generations of Jews to discover the God of their fathers. Through the words of the prophets, the Jew preserved a sense of the national relationship with God, and an appreciation for the central role that the Law plays in that relationship.

As long as the nation resided in her own land and spoke the language of their fathers they saw no need for an official translation of scripture. This changed with the Babylonian exile. At that point in time the Aramaic language gained predominance amongst the people. With the introduction of this foreign language a gap was created between the masses and the scriptures. This presented a challenge to the nation's responsibility to preserve the Law. A solution to this problem was found in the Aramaic Targumim. These were authoritative translations of the scriptures that were read in public together with the Hebrew scriptures. Every translation will necessarily reflect some of the thought process of the translator. The Targumim actually take this one step further. The authors of the Targumim included much extra-scriptural material in their translations. Being that these were translations with wide popular usage, they reflect the mind-set of the nation in her approach to scripture. Not only did the Targumim serve to connect the people with scripture, they helped preserve the sense of reading scripture as a Jew - a member of Eternal Israel.

b) Through the living teaching process

Another means through which the nation discharges her duty to maintain the Law, is the instrument of the living teaching process. Every Jew is enjoined to study the Law and to teach it to his children. This process generates discussion. These discussions take place on many levels. A child may question his mother concerning the practical observance of the Law as it relates to his own life. Students will hear the Law from their teachers, and interact with their teacher as they try to understand the Law. After a day's work, the laborer and the merchant will gather in the synagogues and houses of study to immerse themselves in the intricacies of the Law. The scholars and the judges will debate the Law according to their own acumen and grasp of the Law. The teaching process and the living discussion preserve the broad measure of knowledge necessary for a nation to apply the Law to their daily lives.

When the nation was concentrated in the Land of Israel, this discussion remained a living process. The aggregate of scholarship united in one basic geographical region maintained the cohesiveness and the integrity of the process. This phenomenon held true even after the Babylonian exile. As long as the lines of communication were direct and open between the centers of scholarship, the discussion was adequately maintained in the hearts, the minds and on the mouths of the people. The later years of the Second Temple era and the period following the destruction were marked by political instability. These

circumstances forced the nation to disperse in fulfillment of God's remonstrance (Deuteronomy 28:64). Together with the fragmentation of Israel into scattered and isolated communities came the gradual break-down of central leadership. This situation necessitated the augmentation of the living discussion with the written word. The books of the Mishna and the Talmud were created to support the living process of teaching and interaction. These books helped the nation maintain the cohesiveness and the unity of the thought process. As time went on more books were written as contributions to the ongoing living discussion. Today, a rabbinical library will be filled with books, each one representing another scholar's share in the eternal conversation. Still, even after all of these books have been written, the teaching process is primarily a living system. The only way to develop Torah scholarship is through interaction with living teachers and peers.

c) Through Practical observance of the Law

The practical observance of the Law is yet another method which serves to perpetuate the Law in the minds of Eternal Israel. In the natural course of events the first contact a Jewish child will have with the Law is through the living observance of His parents. Long before the child can read, he develops a familiarity with the basic rudiments of the Law. As he matures, he will learn many of the fine details of the Law through his participation in the practical observance of a living community. Through the experience of the living observance, the Jew comes to recognize the personality of the Law in general, and the spirit of each individual commandment. In the mind of a community who lives the Law, the commandments stand as tangible entities of great influence (Psalm 119:24). The other means of preserving the Law, namely the scriptures and the living discussion are immeasurably enhanced by the living observance. Reading about the Law in scripture, or joining a living discussion about the Law without having experienced the Law firsthand, is the same as reading a book about food or joining a discussion about food without ever having tasted it. The activities of reading about the Law and discussing the Law, take on entirely different dimensions for someone who lives the Law.

d) Through the Rabbinic decree

The power of the Rabbinic decree was employed by the nation's leadership as part of the national effort to preserve the Law. In many situations, when the nation's spiritual sensors realized that the people were losing touch with the spirit of a given law they implemented a Rabbinic decree to reinforce the nation's hold on the Law. These decrees are psychological tools calculated to produce a specific effect in the minds of the people. The observance of the decrees in the context of a living society creates an atmosphere that enables the people to connect with the Law.

The three daily prayers stand as an illustration of the Rabbinic decree. God had enjoined the people to offer Him two lambs every day. The practical application of this commandment had the priests in the Temple acting on behalf of the nation at three specific points during the day (Numbers 28:4, Leviticus 6:2 [6:9 in the KJV]). If we look beyond the letter of the Law we see much more than the burning of two animals. We see

the nation as a whole standing as one entity before God. Israel is directed by God to stand before Him and express her subservience to Him and total dependence upon Him. This commandment brings Israel's special relationship with God into conscious focus, for it is in the Temple built by Israel and the offerings brought by Israel that God graciously accepts. The fact that the same offerings were repeated continuously since Sinai (Numbers 28:6), instilled in the nation a sense of standing before God together with their ancestors. These lofty concepts and many more are inherent in the daily offerings. When the spiritual leadership of the nation realized that many people are losing touch with these foundational impressions, they formulated the daily prayers. These prayers unite the Jewish people of all times in worship of God. By practicing this Rabbinic enactment the Jewish people preserved much of the holiness that was implicit in the daily offerings.

Another prominent Rabbinic decree is the hand-washing enactment. The purity laws take up many chapters in the Law of Moses. On a practical level these laws affect certain groups of people in specific situations. These laws pertain to all who partake of the offerings or who enter the Temple precincts, those who eat the second tithe in Jerusalem, and to the priests whose bread is holy. The impact that the purity laws had on these people was tremendous. Once one underwent the purification process it was necessary for them to maintain a much heightened sense of alertness. Any contact with an individual or with an object, no matter how slight is liable to negate the status of purity (depending on the status of the person or object). These laws had a powerful disciplinary effect for they forced the people to keep a high level of mental and physical consciousness and alacrity. Observance of these laws instilled in the people the sense that every action, no matter how slight, is significant before God. On a spiritual level, these laws inspired an awareness that the activity of eating with the appropriate frame of mind is an act of devotion towards God. Eating with the recognition that one is sitting at God's table is an experience that is central to the Jew's relationship with God. The laws of purity guided the people in the realization that the food they eat is holy. All of the moral discipline and the spiritual benefits of the purity laws were encapsulated by the Rabbis, in a miniature format, in the hand-washing decree. For more than 2000 years now, the hand-washing decree served to keep the nation in touch with the spirit of the biblical purity laws.

3. The Application of the Law

Together, the books of scripture, the living teaching process, practical observance and the Rabbinic decree enabled the nation to discharge her duty in the preservation of the Law. In addition to preservation of the Law, the nation's duty towards the Law includes the practical application of the Law as well as identifying the leaders and teachers of the Law. The key tool the nation uses to discharge these duties is her sense of judgment and perception.

The application of the Law takes place on multiple levels. Every individual who strives to live the Law will have to make decisions concerning the Law on his own individual level. He may be faced with a choice between two positive activities, he may need to determine

the parameters of a specific law for his specific situation, or he might have to decide on the proper balance between justice and kindness in his relationship with another person. Let us step back a moment and define the enormous weight of such a judgment. A created being - a mere mortal, is trying to determine the will of his Creator. The man is asking himself - what is it precisely that God wants me to do or not do here and now. At first glance we are tempted to protest the audacity of the very thought. Who are you that you have the temerity to approach this realm? Then a sense of hopelessness sets in. How can a limited being make a decision about the will of the Creator of all? Is it at all possible? In such a situation one is tempted to address God directly and exclaim - Please tell me what You want me to do! There is no way I can figure this out on my own!

A prayerful entreaty to God is certainly the first step in the process of discovering God's will, but it is not the only step. Even during the times when our nation experienced prophecy on a regular basis, the prophet was not the arbitrator of the Law. God had already spoken through the Law, and He addresses all of Israel (Malachi 3:22). God's voice as it resonates through the Law stands on the plane of the prophecy of Moses - a plane of prophecy superior to that of any other prophet (Numbers 12:8, Deuteronomy 34:10). The Law of Moses legislates the role of the other prophets and it is clearly distinct from that of the priest and the judge. The voice of prophecy directs the people in their relationship with God, and brings the people specific commandments for certain particular situations. The priests and the judges are the arbitrators of the Law (Deuteronomy 17:9). Throughout scripture we see how the respective roles of the prophet and the judge remain distinct and separate (Leviticus 10:11, Deuteronomy 33:10, Malachi 2:6,7, Ezekiel 44:23, 1Chronicles 26:32, 2Chronicles 19:11). When the Jew is faced with a dilemma in relation to the Law he will not expect a new directive of God to guide him, for that expectation would constitute a rejection of the completeness of God's Law. Rather, the Jew will look into the perfect Law of God (Psalm 19:8) and hear the voice of God as it personally addresses him (119:102).

With the humble awareness of his own limitations and with the proper respect for the totality of God's Law, the Jew will search the Law for the answers to his questions. The first step after beseeching God for guidance and direction, would be to search the Law for a static statement which directly addresses the particular situation under question. This may be a verse in the Five Books of Moses, it may be a teaching of Moses as retained in the memory of the nation or in the books of Mishna or Talmud. The Jew may look into the national living discussion and find that the Jewish people have come to a consensus of understanding concerning the issue at hand. If the Jew finds that his particular situation has not been directly addressed in the static portion of the Law, he will turn his focus towards the discussion process and try to apply his understanding of the personality of the particular set of laws affecting his question. His knowledge of the letter of the static law, his grasp of Eternal Israel's national discussion pertaining to the Law, and his understanding of the spirit of the Law will all contribute to his ultimate decision. In the situation where the individual feels that his own grasp of the Law is inadequate to handle

the question at hand, he will refer his question to those he recognizes as possessing a mastery of the Law greater than his own.

This same process repeats itself on the level of the community. A specific community as a whole might be faced with two paths in their dedication to God as a community. The decision will be made according to the understanding of the Law that resides in the community. In situations where the community senses their inadequacy to deal with the situation, they will refer the question to those they recognize as possessing a mastery of the Law greater than their own. The same process can repeat itself on the level of the nation as a whole on an international scale, and it can apply to the nation as it stands in its eternal position before God.

This process is not always smooth and uniform. Since the process is a living process taking place amongst a living nation, disagreements will arise. One leader or perhaps a group of leaders may understand that the Law is to be applied one way in a given situation, while others may disagree. This is the nature of a living discussion. In the times when the nation possessed a universally recognized body of central leadership, this body would resolve the conflict (Deuteronomy 17:10). As the nation dispersed and the cohesiveness of the national discussion began to deteriorate, the authority of the central leadership went into decline. As the office of central leadership slowly disappeared, the nation could no longer resolve her disagreements so easily. Still, the living discussion continues. In the absence of a recognized body of central leadership the nation recognizes the prerogative of individual leaders or bodies of leadership to maintain their own opinions. As long as the discussion remains within the parameters of the universal living discussion, and as long as each opinion is rooted in that living discussion, every position is respected. As time moves on and the living discussion continues, the nation may come to a consensus over any of these disagreements. If the flow of the living discussion has more and more scholars taking one side of a given argument, the practice of the nation will eventually consolidate behind that view-point. In other situations the disagreement remains as part of the fabric of the nation, with one group of scholars holding to one position while another group maintains the other position. In these situations the nation recognizes the validity of both positions and the conflicting opinions live on in the eternal discussion of the nation.

When the nation exerted itself to the fullest in her attempt to determine from within the body of the Law, the nation can confidently stride forward and act upon the knowledge they acquired. It is not the role of the nation to discover the answer to every question. God recognizes our humanity and it is to us humans that He presented His holy Law. God holds us responsible to do and to follow “that which is revealed”, the details of the Law that are hidden belong to God and to God alone (Deuteronomy 29:28).

4. Identifying the Teachers of the Law

This brings us to the final function that Eternal Israel performs in relation to the Law, namely the identification of her leaders. The teachers of the Law serve as a crucial component in Israel's relationship with the Law. These leaders are the arbitrators of the Law, and their judgment enables the nation to apply the Law to living situations. These leaders guide Eternal Israel in dispensing her duty in the realm of preservation of the Law. It is these leaders who set forth the Rabbinic enactments that serve to perpetuate the Law. And it is these leaders who direct the ongoing living discussion, preserving the authenticity of the discussion so that the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob (Deuteronomy 33:4) is passed on the way it was received.

The first body of arbitrators of the law was established by Moses (Exodus 18:25, Deuteronomy 1:15). Since then, the nation always had people to whom they can turn with their questions relating to the Law. The leaders of each generation recognize their responsibility to provide guidance for the next generation. The imperative to educate students who can shoulder the mantle of leadership is a major element in the lives of Israel's leaders. The chain of leadership passes on from one generation to the next through the academies and study halls of Eternal Israel.

The system of choosing Israel's leaders is not a formalized process, it is a living process. Scripture informs us that even when Israel was enslaved in Egypt she possessed identifiable leaders (Exodus 3:16, 12:21). It is doubtful that as slaves under Pharaoh that the people had any formal election system. The straightforward reading of these passages implies that these leaders attained their position through a natural process. These were men who had earned the respect of their brethren and whom the society turned to for leadership. When Moses established a more formal system of leadership, he did not override the nation's natural system of leadership, instead Moses appointed men who were already acknowledged by the nation as her leaders (Numbers 11:16, Deuteronomy 1:13).

From the times of Moses until today the leadership of Israel is chosen by a spontaneous and natural process. Within the parameters of any given community which lives the Law, some people will necessarily stand as examples to their peers. As the nation participates in the ongoing living discussion, proficiency in the Law stands as a very valuable commodity. Eventually, some people will gain the confidence and respect of society as representatives of the spirit of the Law, and as experts in understanding the Law. This process occurs on many different tiers. Someone with little or no background in study of the Law, will be incapable of determining the precise caliber of his friend's Torah acumen, but he is certainly qualified to voice an opinion concerning his friend's character. People with more Torah knowledge will be able to offer a limited evaluation as to the quality of Torah knowledge of their peers. Those proficient in Torah knowledge will be capable of gauging the abilities of their contemporaries with greater exactitude. Each segment of the population looks to the appraisals of those more proficient than

themselves with much respect. The opinion of those who have already proven their mastery of the Law will certainly carry the most weight, but the nation will want to see for themselves.

As long as the nation remained in geographical proximity, and the living discussion was united and cohesive, certain individuals or groups of individuals were able to gain the collective respect of the nation as a whole. These men constituted the bodies of central leadership, and in these men resided the nation's collective authority. The natural process worked in synchrony with a formal ordination process through which the mantle of Torah leadership passed from one generation to the next. It is only with such universal authority that decisions could be made on behalf of Eternal Israel. The establishment of the national holidays of Channuka and Purim was only possible when the nation was collectively united under one body of spiritual leadership. Central leadership was a necessity for the institution of the Rabbinic decrees. And it is only a body of leadership empowered by the nation as a whole, who has the authority to accept a book into the corpus of Jewish scripture.

As the nation dispersed, and the national living discussion fragmented into local circles of discussion, the power of the central leadership went into decline. The people still looked to a central body of leadership for the monthly and yearly decisions pertaining to the calendar, but that remained the only function of the central leadership. In fact, the last act of Eternal Israel's contiguous assembly of central leadership was the arrangement of a permanent calendar. Before the Byzantine persecutions stamped out the last vestige of the nation's high court, Hillel the Prince (not to be confused with Hillel the Elder, his ancestor), established the calendar we follow today.

The decline of the power of the central leadership was a slow process and did not move entirely downhill. Throughout the period of decline, the central leadership underwent two major peaks of resurgence. The brief respite from persecution that the nation experienced in the times of Rabbi Judah the Prince, and again in the times of Rav Ashi enabled the nation to reassert a measure of unified authority. During these two time periods (approximately 175 CE and 400 CE respectively) the leading scholars of each community were able to convene under the leadership of these two Torah giants. These conventions of scholars were recognized by the nation as incorporating the collective authority of Eternal Israel. With possession of this measure of power these two assemblies were able to ratify the Mishna and the Talmud as anchors and foundations for Eternal Israel's ongoing living discussion.

Since then, each community identified their own leaders. With the passage of time, the various communities interacted with each other and learned to appreciate the leaders of localities other than their own. In this way the nation was able to come to a consensus in the evaluation of national leaders. In the lifetime of Rashi the Jews in Iraq might not have

heard of him, and they certainly didn't know enough about him to properly appreciate his contribution to the living discussion. As Rashi's books spread, the collective Torah wisdom of the nation was able to come to a consensus in their evaluation of Rashi. The same living process repeats itself, and continues to repeat itself as the dispersed nation continuously calibrates her evaluation of various scholars and their written works. In this way, Eternal Israel continues to discharge her duty towards the Law by identifying the leaders who embody her spirit and who know her letter.

Just as God entrusted Israel with the task of identifying the arbitrators of the Law, so did He charge Israel with the duty of recognizing His prophets. The process of authenticating the verity of a prophet is legislated by the Law (Deuteronomy 13:2-6, 18:18-22). The nation, under the guidance of her arbitrators of the Law would be required to determine the legitimacy of any claim to prophecy. This process was far from smooth. More often than not, God appointed the prophet to deliver stinging words of rebuke. The harshest criticisms were frequently directed at the most powerful people in the society. There was a tremendous motivation to silence the prophet or to dispute his validity. In most cases the rulers of Israel absorbed the censure of the prophets without moving to silence them (1Samuel 3:18, 13:13,14, 15:24,28, 2Samuel 12:7-10, 1Kings 20:42, 21:27, 2Kings 20:17, Jeremiah 26:18,19, Haggai 1:12, 2Chronicles 12:5,6 19:2, 20:37). In some cases the rulers persecuted the prophets (1Kings 12:4, 18:4, Jeremiah 20:2, 26:21,22, 29:25, 36:26, 2Chronicles 16:10, 24:21). The general society of the nation was also upbraided by the prophets on a regular basis. In many cases the populace recognized the prophet's authority to administer the reproach (Judges. 2:1-5, 10:11-16, 1Samuel 12:19, Jeremiah 26:17, 38:11, 2Chronicles 28:9-5) while in other situations they actively opposed the prophet (Jeremiah 11:19, 18:18, 26:11, 38:4). The hostility towards the prophets was generally instigated by corrupt arbitrators of the Law, and by men who had falsely laid claim to prophecy (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:8-11,14:13, 23:13,14, 26:8, 27:14, 28:1-4, 29:8,9,21, Ezekiel 13:1-16, Amos 7:10-13). In the confusion generated by the heat of the immediate situation many elements in society fought the prophets tooth and nail. But as the dust settled and time went on, the voice of those loyal to God was eventually heard and embraced. The people were able to sort out the genuine prophets from the frauds and to distinguish between the corrupt leaders and those who truly represented God's Law. That is how we have scripture today.

Although we no longer have prophets to lead us we still have leaders who guide the nation in matters of the spirit. In many situations these men are the same leaders who arbitrate the Law, but in some situations the spiritual leaders did not make a particular mark as arbitrators of the Law. These leaders rebuked, encouraged, and provided guidance in our general relationship with God. As with the prophets before them, some of these teachers encountered opposition amongst various elements of the population. And as with the prophets before them, with the passage of time, the nation came to appreciate the greatness of these holy men.

5. Conclusion

Eternal Israel's duties in the preservation of the Law, the application of the Law and in identifying the authentic teachers of the Law are not within the capacity of mere humans. The persecutions that our nation suffered carried more than enough earthly power to obliterate us from the face of the planet. Our physical survival is nothing short of a miracle. How much more so is this true concerning the inheritance with which we were entrusted. The oppression that our nation endured could have easily destroyed every vestige of our heritage as it destroyed every form of Judaism that deviated from the national legacy. Without God's protecting hand, Sadducee Judaism, Essene Judaism, and Nazarene Judaism, didn't stand a chance. It is only by virtue of God's covenant, that His Law is still with us today (Deuteronomy 31:21, Isaiah 59:21, Ezekiel 11:16, Haggai 2:5). And it is only through our faith in God's promise that we can be confident that the Law we have is the Law He gave.

B. Christian Objections to the Structure of the Law

We have thus completed our summary of the structure of God's Law, and the nation's active role in bringing the Law to life. It is time we approached the Christian objections to the Law. Christianity is not uniform in its opposition to the Law. There are those who accept that the Law is relevant and applicable to the Jewish nation, but they make the artificial distinction between the "written law" - which they accept, and the "oral law" - which they reject. Others accept the complete Law but reject the one detail of the Law which classifies the deification of a human as idolatry. Yet others reject the entirety of the Law and argue that the Law of Moses is no longer incumbent upon the Jewish nation. Each of these groups presents its own set of arguments, and we aim to respond to the objections of each of these groups individually. Before we address those contentions that are unique to these specific Christian persuasions, we will focus on some general objections to the Law. These objections do not directly attack observance of the Law, instead these arguments challenge the Jewish emphasis on the Law, and the Jewish understanding of the structure of the Law.

We will begin by analyzing the Christian objections to the Jewish understanding of the structure of the Law. The differentiation between the role of the prophet and the role of the arbitrator of the Law is fundamental to the Jewish concept of the structure of the Law. Judaism sees the Law as a level of revelation that is superior to prophecy, thus prophecy falls under the purview of the Law and the revelation of prophecy cannot arbitrate in matters of Law. This axiom is firmly rooted in scripture. Scripture always refers our questions in matters of Law to the arbitrators of the Law, never to the prophets (Exodus 18:13-27, Leviticus 10:11, Deuteronomy 17:9, 33:10, Ezekiel 44:23, 1Chronicles 26:32, 2Chronicles 19:11). The prophet's role as delineated by scripture is to guide the people with his vision of the future, in contradistinction to the necromancers and sorcerers who guided the gentile nations in this realm (Deuteronomy 18:14,15). We also find that in matters of national interest, or even in matters of personal interest the people were guided by new revelation. This revelation could be the spirit that came to rest on the elders (Numbers 11:17), the revelation could come through the Urim Ve'Tumim (Numbers

27:21), or through the office of prophecy (2Kings 8:1, Jeremiah 42:3). But matters of the Law were referred to the arbitrators of the Law.

The question arises when we seem to find exceptions to this rule. On five separate occasions we find that Moses himself took a question relating to the Law back to God (Leviticus 24:12, Numbers 9:8, 15:34, 27:5, 36:5). If the Law itself is the complete revelation as it relates to arbitration of the Law as Judaism contends, Moses should have come to a decision without resorting to new prophetic revelation.

This argument rests on a misunderstanding of the power and authority of the Law. The Law draws its authority from the fact that it is the teaching of Moses. The reason that the Law holds jurisdiction over prophecy is only because the prophecy of Moses is superior to the prophecy of all subsequent prophets. Moses is the only prophet who had his credibility established by God on a national level (Exodus 19:9, Deuteronomy 34:10-12). Unless a prophet presents credentials that put him in the category of Moses (which has not nor will not happen), we will measure him against the words of Moses. No prophet has a right to alter the words of Moses, because it is Moses and only Moses who God designated as the “faithful one of His house” (Numbers 12:7) authorized to deliver the Law (Deuteronomy 33:4). Until the death of Moses, the Law was not completely delivered to Israel. Moses could still go back to God and ask for legislation, because Moses was the one commissioned by God to deliver His Law. It is only after the superior level of Moses’ prophecy was no longer available, that we cannot seek Law in new revelation. This concept is not applicable to Moses himself.

There seem to be two more exceptions to the principle which circumscribes the office of prophecy in matters directly relating to the arbitration of Law. One of these exceptions is a specific occurrence recorded in the book of Zechariah. The other is a more general exception where new revelation seems to regulate legislation related to the Temple. We will first turn our focus towards the episode mentioned in the book of Zechariah.

The people had been observing certain fast-days since the destruction of the First Temple (Esther 9:31). The Rabbinical institution of these fasts gave expression to the nation’s mourning and to her repentance in light of the calamities which befell the nation on those days. These observances had continued for 70 years. Now the Second Temple was being rebuilt. The people recognized that this was not the fullness of glory that they had been hoping for. The Second Temple’s beginnings were humble even when compared to the waning light of the First Temple in her last days (Haggai 2:2, Ezra 3:12). Most of the nation was still in Babylon, and the promised ingathering was yet to occur. And the nation was still in servitude to gentile kings (Ezra 8:9). The question came to the priests and to the prophets if the nation was still to observe these Rabbinic fasts in light of the progress made in the rebuilding of the Second Temple (Zechariah 7:3). The response to this legal question came through the agency of the prophecy of Zechariah. God

encouraged the people, assuring them that despite the modest nature of the Second Temple it represented a turning point in God's relationship with His beloved nation (Zechariah 8:11), thus it was no longer appropriate to observe the days of mourning (Zechariah 8:19).

At first glance it seems that the office of prophecy served to arbitrate in a matter of (Rabbinic) Law, a violation of the principle of the primacy of Moses' prophecy. But when we study the basic elements of this story we can see that there was no infringement of the supremacy of God's word through Moses. The Law that Moses presented taught the nation which statute would be relevant to each particular situation. Where a confluence of factors complicated matters, the question would be presented to the arbitrators of the Law. The archetype of arbitration of the Law is presented in Leviticus 10:16-20. Aaron as arbitrator of the Law recognized that the death of his sons would render his family unfit for consumption of the sacrificial offerings. The facts on the ground were clear to everyone. The question was how to add up all of the elements of the situation, and how much weight to attribute to each factor.

The incident recorded in Zechariah presented the judges with a different type of question. They were not asked what is the Law in this given situation. The question presented was - what is the situation? The Law itself would have been plain - it was the circumstances which were unclear. The individuals presenting the question knew even before they asked that if the Second Temple represented a turning point in their relationship with God - that they would no longer be required to observe the days of national mourning. The question was - what does the building of the Second Temple represent? This type of question is well within the purview of prophecy as delineated by the Law of Moses. It is the prophet's role to help the nation recognize where they stand in their relationship with God. And that was the question presented as recorded in the book of Zechariah.

The final exception to the principle of the supremacy of the Law of Moses, is found in the laws surrounding the building of the Temple. When Solomon built the First Temple he did not copy the Tabernacle that Moses had made in the wilderness. The dimensions of the Temple were different than the dimensions of the Tabernacle as were several other details. In the first book of Chronicles (28:12,19) we learn that the precise instructions for the construction of the Temple were written down by David as he had received in a spirit of prophecy. The book of Ezekiel (chapters 40 - 48) provides prophetic instruction concerning the building of the final Temple. It seems that the construction of the Temple violates the principle of the supremacy of the Law of Moses. We see the agency of prophecy setting forth commandments, a function beyond the range of prophetic authority.

This question is invalid. The instructions for the Tabernacle were relevant only for that generation. The Jewish people were not directed to rebuild the Tabernacle once they

entered the Land of Israel. In fact the prophecy of Moses itself tells us that prophetic agency will be necessary in determining the location of the future Temple (Deuteronomy 12:5,11,14,18,21,26, 14:23,24,25, 15:20, 16:2,6,7,11, 17:8, 18:6, 26:2, 31:11). There is no other commandment in the Torah which leaves room for future prophecy to determine its parameters. It is clear that the construction of future Temples requires the agency of prophecy, and it is equally clear that this is the exception and not the rule.

Another way the Torah teaches us the unique role that prophecy plays in the construction of the Temple is the wording the Torah uses in relation to the building of the Tabernacle. When the scripture describes the building of the Tabernacle, one phrase is repeated five times. God keeps telling Moses that the Tabernacle should be built “according to all that I show you on the mountain” (Exodus 25:9, 40, 26:30, 27:8 Numbers 8:4). It is obvious that Moses was shown something on the mountain which he did not record. What was this information that Moses learned on the mountain? Why did he not record it? And why is it important for us to know that he received it? The answer to all of these questions is that every one of the sanctuaries within which God’s presence was manifest, required a precise set of instructions that are unique to that temple. Aside from the general framework to which every temple adhered, each temple had details that were not repeated in the other temples. These details are revealed through prophecy for each temple separately. These were the details Moses was shown on the mountain concerning the Tabernacle. There was no point in recording these details, because they were only relevant for that generation. And it is of supreme importance that we learn of this communication, because this teaches us the role that prophecy plays in the construction of each one of the future temples.

We can conclude that the general scriptural axiom of the supreme authority of Moses’ Law remains unchallenged. Indeed, even in the messianic era, when the spirit of prophecy will be readily available (Joel 3:1), the questions concerning the Law will be directed to the arbitrators of the Law (Ezekiel 44:23). God’s word through Malachi (3:22) - “Remember the teaching of Moses My servant which I commanded him in Horeb concerning all of Israel” - ring eternal. “All of Israel” is not limited to the Jews of one particular generation, or of one specific era. “All of Israel” includes the entire stature of God’s firstborn son - Eternal Israel.

C. Christian Objections to the Jewish Emphasis on the Law

We now turn to address another general objection presented in an effort to challenge the Jewish emphasis on the Law. In order for us to properly appreciate this Christian objection, we must understand the mind-set within which this objection is rooted. Christians look at the totality of their belief system as an entity whose primary function is the provision of a path to eternal salvation. They project this attitude of theirs onto other belief systems that they might encounter, including Judaism. Furthermore, Christianity sees two potential paths that might lead to eternal salvation - the path of faith, and the path of Law. They then contrast these two paths, and they find the path of Law lacking.

Christians charge that the path of the Law is an impossible one. “For there is no just man on earth that does good and sins not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Christians assume that if one is guilty for breaking one law it is the same as if one had broken the entirety of the Law. Christians argue that no action on the part of man can count towards eternal salvation - for the scriptures teach that “all of our righteousness are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:5). If salvation were to be wrought through our own actions - “Israel would boast saying - my own hand has saved me” (Judges 7:2). The Christian then concludes that it is only the path of faith that truly leads to salvation, while the path of Law is impossible, futile, and can only lead to pride.

The refutation to these Christian arguments makes up the main body of scripture. The most prevalent theme in scripture is the theme of obedience. But before we elaborate on the scriptural emphasis on obedience, we must analyze the foundations of the Christian challenge to the Law.

The emphasis that Christianity attributes to eternal salvation is not reflected in the Jewish scriptures. There are perhaps a handful of verses throughout scripture which can be read as a promise for eternal salvation. Indeed, Judaism recognizes that God rewards those who obey Him, with an eternal reward. And whichever way you approach it, eternal reward is no light matter. But it cannot be said that scripture emphasizes the concept of eternal reward in any way. God does not demand our faith and obedience on the basis of an offer for eternal reward. The foundational basis of our faith and obedience is simply the fact that God is God and we are but His creations. Before any sin entered the world, and before anyone was in need of salvation, God demanded our faith and obedience (Genesis 2:16). Scripture portrays all of nature coming into existence through obedience to God’s command (Isaiah 45:12, Psalm 33:9, 148:5). Our very existence requires us to obey God. Yes, God does promise eternal reward to those who obey His commandments and preserve His covenant (Psalm 103:17,18), but this is not the basis of our faith and obedience. The basis of our obedience to God’s command, is the very fact that our existence is but an expression of His command.

The Christian world- view which sees faith and observance of the Law as a means to achieve a certain end is inaccurate. Our observance of the Law is not merely a means through which we achieve a goal, but it is also a goal in and of itself. The scripture enumerates observance of the Law as one of the privileges that the nation enjoys in her relationship with God (Deuteronomy 26:18). The nation’s observance of the Law is her life and her joy (Psalm 119:93, 111).

The distinction that Christians see between the path of Law and the path of faith has no basis in the Jewish scriptures. Both faith and obedience count for righteousness before

God (Genesis. 15:6, Psalm. 106:30,31). God demands both our faith and our obedience (Deuteronomy 10:12,13). Man owes both of these to his creator. When emanating from a recognition that our faith and obedience belong to God, they will lead to humility (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). And when emanating from a belief that we are sovereign to choose the entity towards which to direct our faith and obedience, both will only lead to pride.

The Christian doctrine that states that one who is guilty to one detail of the law is considered as having violated the entirety of the law - is also without scriptural foundation. Scripture does not attempt to hide David's sin, yet his obedience is still held up as an example and as a merit that stands for his descendants after him (1Kings 11:34, 15:4,5). It is clear that a sin doesn't erase the merits of obedience.

The most pervasive theme of scripture is that God values our actions - He treasures those actions of ours which are good, and He despises those that are evil. God chose to recreate the world through the ark of Noah (Genesis 7 and 8). God chose to dwell in a tabernacle built through the love and the dedication of His children (Ex. 25:8). It is difficult to think of a passage in scripture which does not demonstrate the significance of our actions in God's eyes. Not that our actions are intrinsically meaningful to God (Job 35:6,7). From a perspective of absolute truth - our deeds are no better than filthy rags (Isaiah 64:5), and from a perspective of absolute truth - the world need not exist (Job 34:13). God did create the world, and the world does exist - on the basis of His kindness (Psalm 89:3), and in the realm of God's mercy within which we exist, our actions are indeed significant (Isaiah 3:10,11, Job 34:11).

D. Christian Objections to Observance of the Law

1. The new covenant

We now move on to address those Christian objections directed against general observance of the Law. The classic Christian argument against observance of the Law is based on the new covenant passage of Jeremiah 31:30. Christians read this passage as an annulment to the Law presented at Sinai and the introduction of a new spiritual law.

The problems with the Christian interpretation are manifold. Even if the interpretation were true (which it is not), the prophet makes it clear that the new covenant era has yet to begin. The prophet tells us that during the new covenant times all of Israel will know God (Jeremiah 31:33) - something we still look forward to. As of the writing of these words (July 2007), we have yet to enter the new covenant.

Furthermore - the new covenant is not a new Law. Jeremiah was not the only prophet who spoke of the new covenant - Moses spoke of the New covenant as well. There can be no question that the circumcision of the heart described by Moses (Deuteronomy 30:6)

stands as a direct parallel to the new covenant of Jeremiah. Both are set in the context of the last days (Deuteronomy 30:1 - note the parallel to Deuteronomy 4:30, Jeremiah 31:26 - note the parallel to Ezekiel 36:11,12). Both describe the return to the land (Deuteronomy 30:3, Jeremiah 31:22). Both describe the great blessing of the land, and God's joy in bestowing that blessing (Deuteronomy 30:9, Jeremiah 31:27). Both; the circumcision of the heart spoken of by Moses, and the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah result in a remaking of the nation's heart for everlasting loyalty (Deuteronomy 30:6, Jeremiah 31:32).

In the context of this new covenant, Moses describes our observance in the end times as "obeying all that I (Moses) command you today" (Deuteronomy 30:8) - hardly a new Law.

2. Observance in the Land of Israel

Another argument presented in the Christian effort to render observance of the Law dispensable focuses on Moses' words in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses describes the Law as that which ought to be observed in the land - namely the Land of Israel (Deuteronomy 6:1, 12:1). The Christian argument then is that outside of the Land of Israel the Law need not be observed.

The truth is that there are quite a number of commandments that are only pertinent in the land of Israel. These passages in Deuteronomy are followed by the commandment to destroy the idols in the newly conquered land (7:1-6, 12:2-4). The commandments relating to the tithes (Deuteronomy 12:6-12, 17-19, 14:22-29, 18:4, 26:12-15), the Sabbatical year (Deuteronomy 15:1-11), the cities of refuge (Deuteronomy. 19:1-10), and first-fruits (Deuteronomy 26:1-11) are all pertinent only in the land. The totality of the commandments can only be fully observed in the land. But all the commandments which are not linked to the land are applicable wherever we live. The Torah makes this clear in Deuteronomy 30:2, where Moses tells us that by obeying the commandments we will merit to return to the land - it is evident that obedience to the commandments is demanded from us while we are yet in exile.

3. The "legal loopholes" of Rabbinic Judaism

Another argument that missionaries present to justify an abandonment of the Law is based upon the unsound maxim of "two wrongs make a right". Missionaries argue that the religious leaders of the Jewish people have also abandoned the Law. In some cases the missionaries contend that they have simply ceased to observe the Law, while in others they are accused of creating legal loopholes which effectively negate the authority of the Law. While these do not justify an abandonment of the Law on behalf of Christianity, this does represent a serious accusation against Judaism. Let us then examine this accusation.

As an example, we will focus on one of the situations in which missionaries accuse Israel of abandoning the Law is in the application of capital punishment. The Talmud reports that when murder became rife in the later years of the Second Temple, the courts ceased to administer capital punishment (Avoda Zora 8b). Is this an abandonment of the Law? Did any Jewish leader declare the Law to be null and void? The Talmud itself painstakingly records all of the details of the laws of capital punishment. It is clear that the Rabbis recognized the eternal nature of these laws. It was only in the realm of application that the Rabbis applied their understanding of the totality of the Law, and decided that in that limited situation the Law does not apply. This is well within the jurisdiction of our judges to decide. God explicitly appointed them arbitrators in matters of application of the Law (Deuteronomy 17:10). There is no way this example can be used to justify a wholesale abandonment of the Law.

The legal loopholes which the missionaries ridicule are not what they seem to be at first glance. The example most often cited by the missionary is the Prozbul instituted by Hillel. The Torah ordains that all debts be annulled in the Sabbatical year (Deuteronomy 15:2). The Talmud tells us that when Hillel saw that people refrained from lending to the poor for fear of losing their money, he instituted the Prozbul. By writing a Prozbul, the loan is effectively transferred to the hands of the courts to whom the nullification of debts does not apply (Gittin 36a). At first glance it seems that Hillel invented a legal fiction to neutralize the Law of God. But this is not so. The laws of the Sabbatical years were part of a fifty-year cycle spelled out in the book of Leviticus (25:1-24). This fifty-year cycle was only relevant when the land of Israel was apportioned to the twelve tribes. One of the main functions of the Jubilee year was the return of the land to the proper tribal inheritance. This was only relevant during the First Temple era, when each tribe had its designated portion. In the times of the Second Temple, the majority of the nation was still in Babylon. The only tribes that were represented in the Land of Israel were the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The fifty-year cycle could no longer be observed. Still, in order to preserve the spirit of the Law, the leadership of the nation instituted that the nation continue to maintain the seven-year cycle despite the fact that the full fifty-year cycle could not be followed. Thus in Hillel's time the nullification of debts was not a biblically ordained law, it was only a rabbinical institution. In light of the fact that this law was not biblical in nature, Hillel was able to circumvent it. This legal loophole serves to reinforce the distinction between biblical law and rabbinical institutions. Instead of circumventing the Law of scripture as the missionaries contend, these loopholes actually sustain the supremacy of Torah.

E. Christian Objections to the Oral Law

We now move on to those Christian objections directed against the Jewish belief in the unwritten teachings of Moses. This group of Christians recognize the eternal validity of the Law of Moses. These people accept that the Law of Moses in its entirety is incumbent upon all Jews at all times. Their difference with Judaism lies in their rejection of those teachings of Moses which are not recorded in the Five Books. The basis of this rejection

is rooted in the doctrines of the Evangelical Church which posits that there is no source of divine guidance outside of the pages of scripture. Evangelical Christians believe that all the instruction that God intended for mankind is contained within the pages of scripture.

The odd thing about this doctrine is that it is non-scriptural. There is no verse in scripture which states that all divine instruction must be contained within scripture to the exclusion of any other source. The principle that these biblicists consider axiomatic - “sola scriptura” (- solely scripture) - has no basis in scripture. On the contrary, the scriptures repeatedly emphasize the need for living teachers.

When Moses came down from the Mountain of Sinai, he had in his hands the two tablets upon which were inscribed the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:29), and nothing more. But God had told him much more (Deuteronomy 5:28). The rest of the commandments were told to the people orally. In fact, the two tablets were not available for public reading. They were stored in the Ark of the Covenant which was kept in the holy of holies - a place which was accessible to no one but the high priest on the Day of Atonement. During the 40 years under Moses’ leadership the process of studying the Law was intense. It was necessary to appoint a leader for every ten men in order to guide them in matters of the Law - necessitating more than 60,000 teachers for a nation of 600,000 (Exodus 18:13-26). During these 40 years the scriptures record only two personal violations of the Law (Leviticus 24:11, Numbers 15:32). It is clear that the nation as a whole observed the Law without having seen a written word. The observance of the Law took root amongst the Jewish people through the spoken word. It was only shortly before Moses died that the Five Books of Moses were put into writing (Deuteronomy 30:9). After the Law was put into writing the people still needed living teachers for guidance. The entire tribe of Levi - approx. 4% of the nation - were not given any agricultural lands (Numbers 18:24, Deuteronomy 18:1). They were supported by the tithes of the nation and their role was the teaching of the Law (Leviticus 10:11, Deuteronomy 17:9,18, 21:5, 33:10, 1Chronicles 26:32, 2Chronicles 17:8, 31:4, Nehemiah 8:7). When the nation strayed from God, the scriptures point to the lack of a teacher as one of the factors precipitating this period of disobedience (2Chronicles 14:3). The scripture tells us that the living teachers were influential components in the national waves of repentance (Judges 5:9, 2Chronicles 17:7-9, 31:4, 35:3, Nehemiah 8:7). The Evangelical notion, where the individual turns to his printed KJV bible for guidance and to nowhere else, cannot be supported by the same KJV bible. For scripture is unequivocally clear that the nation requires a class of living teachers in order to guide them in the application of the Law.

This Evangelical doctrine which rejects all extra-scriptural teaching, is untenable from another angle. The canon of scripture precedes scripture. In order to have scripture one must acknowledge the authority of the society that canonized and preserved the scriptures. The same body of people who gave us scripture, also give us the unwritten teachings of Moses. If we are to dismiss the testimony of our nation concerning the Law, then why should we accept our nation’s testimony concerning scripture? To the Jew, the

acceptance of scripture and the rejection of the nation's legacy is an exercise in self-contradiction.

In order to fully appreciate the weight of these questions, it will be necessary to elaborate upon them at some length. We hope to be able to accomplish this in the second section of this work. For now we hope to address the specific arguments that Christianity presents in support of her rejection of the legacy of the Jewish nation.

1. The completeness of the Written Law

There are certain passages in scripture which at first glance seem to indicate that the written Torah is complete in that it contains the entirety of Moses' teachings. These passages are to be found in the Five Books where a list of commandments is preceded by "these are the statutes and commandments" suggesting that those teachings that are recorded constitute the exhaustive list of that which the Jewish people must observe (Leviticus 26:46, Deuteronomy 4:44,45, 12:1). Similarly we find that when the prophets refer to the Law of Moses they speak of "that which is written in the book" - again implying that the "book" contains the totality of the teachings of Moses (Joshua 1:8, 23:6, 1Kings 2:3, 2Kings 17:37, 22:13, 2Chronicles 34:21). How can we then accept a teaching of Moses that is not recorded in the Five Books if the scriptures seem to indicate that the Five Books contain all of Moses' teachings?

This Christian objection is rooted in a misunderstanding of the role of the unwritten teachings of Moses. The Five Books of Moses are indeed complete in that they record every single one of the commandments that God gave us through Moses. The unwritten teachings of Moses do not introduce any laws that are not already transcribed in the Five Books. The role of the unwritten teachings is to define those laws and to preserve the spirit of those commandments that are listed in the Five Books.

The role of the Five Books of Moses can be compared to a teacher's roll book or to a map. The name of every student will be recorded in the book and the name of every village will be transcribed on the map. Some descriptive comments may be appended to any of these transcriptions. But the teacher does not know the student unless he actually met the student, and the traveler cannot truly know the village unless he visits it. The roll book and the map are complete documents. Each records every item that ought to be recorded. But the knowledge gained by personal interaction with the individual students or with the geographical locations, give life and color to the words recorded in the respective documents.

The same applies to the legacy of the Jewish people. Moses speaks of the Sabbath in his Five Books. But what is the Sabbath? What is the personality of the Sabbath and what is her spirit? (Psalm 119:24 indicates that each one of the commandments possesses a

distinct character). Is it the Sunday of the Puritans, the Saturday of the Adventists, or the Shabbat of Rabbinical Judaism? They all lay claim to the same name, but they are as far apart from each other as east is from west. It is the legacy of the nation which brings the Sabbath to life for us and helps us know her as we would know a friend.

We return to the objection presented above. Is the Five Books of Moses a complete book? It certainly is in that it contains all of the commandments of Moses. But the legacy of the Jewish people is still necessary to provide identification and to flesh out the character of each of the commandments recorded in the book.

2. The Rabbinic institutions – adding to the Law

We now move to the next Christian objection directed specifically at the Rabbinic institutions which are so prominent in Judaism. Moses specifically commands the people “do not add onto that which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2, 13:1). How then can the Rabbinic leaders legislate new decrees and institutions? Is this not a direct violation of Moses’ command?

This question should not be directed at Judaism, but rather, scripture itself should be the target of this objection. Scripture records that the leaders of the Jewish people instituted a festival of celebration and several days of mourning quite some time after Moses had closed the Law. It is clear that the Author of scripture looked at these institutions in a positive light (Esther 9:31). There can be no question that the Law of Moses allows the Jewish people to be guided by their leaders in the acceptance of new observances. As long as these new observances are not given the same weight of authority as the observances explicated in the Law of Moses, then there was no addition to the Law of Moses. The Jewish people recognize a clear distinction between those laws set down by Moses and those set down through the leaders who followed Moses.

3. The arguments of the Talmud

Another Christian argument in support of her rejection of the legacy of the Jewish nation, is that the legacy of the Jewish nation cannot be considered infallible. These Christians point to the many arguments in the Mishna and Talmud. How could this tradition be trusted if there is no agreement on so many basic points? If God meant to preserve these traditions, then why are so many of them clouded in the obscurity of contention and disagreement?

In response to this objection we will first point out that although there is much disagreement, the areas of consensus far outweigh the areas of contention - in terms of both quality and quantity. In terms of quality we cannot lose sight of the amazing achievement of the legacy of our nation - this legacy succeeded in maintaining the unity of our nation’s thought process in the diverse geographical and cultural environments that

our nation inhabited throughout her long history. In the ongoing living discussion of our nation every locale and every era which our nation encountered is amply represented. An overall assessment of our traditions must recognize that the unity achieved certainly transcends the differences.

In terms of quantity - it must be noted that every disagreement must rest on a basis of agreement. As a general rule, there is agreement on the basic underlying concept of the law and of her spirit, the disagreements are generally limited to the details of the law. Furthermore, most disagreements relate to areas of the law which have no major bearing on common day to day practice. The disagreements generally center on areas of irregular circumstances. The common practices of the nation of the nation are generally well within the parameters of all the contending opinions.

The disagreements that exist within the ongoing national discussion, actually give force to the areas of unanimity. The fact that so many disagreements were maintained and recorded for posterity tells us how this society values and respects the opinions of individuals. It is obvious that there was no artificial pressure blindly silencing every dissenting voice. When the nation does agree that a given teaching originates with Moses, we can be confident that their testimony is true. Had this teaching not originated with Moses, there would have been no hesitation to challenge the teaching.

There is no question that had our nation not sinned and been exiled from the land, that our nation would have more easily come to a consensus, and the areas of disagreement would be greatly restricted. Because of our dispersal much was forgotten and the unity of the thought process is not what it should be. Still, God's promise to His nation holds fast. Neither the scriptures nor the traditions put forth a guarantee that every last detail of the Law will be preserved. What the scriptures and the traditions clearly indicate is that Israel will always possess a workable understanding of the Law (Deuteronomy 30:2, Malachi 3:22). It is precisely through this living discussion in which dissenting opinions are heard and respected that this promise is upheld.

4. Historical objections – the Torah scroll of Josiah

Another objection put forward by Christians in support of their rejection of the Jewish national legacy relates to the history of our people. Scripture records many instances where the Jews forsook the Law. In the times of the Judges and in the times of the wicked kings of either the Northern or Southern Kingdoms, the nation fell into idolatry. The searing words of rebuke recorded in the scriptures describe a corrupt nation that disregarded the Law. This does not sound like a nation that was meticulously guarding minor details of the complex traditions. In scripture's depiction of the religious revivals that followed some of these periods of disobedience, we learn how the written word was a central factor in getting the people back on track. Under the reign of Josiah, the finding of one scroll of the Law (the Five Books of Moses), triggered a wave of national

repentance (2Kings 22:8 - 23:25, 2Chronicles 34:14 - 35:6). The implication seems to be that the nation had lost the written Law. If the people had forgotten the basic written directives of Moses, how could the same nation have retained a vast and complex body of unwritten teachings of Moses? In the times of Ezra and Nehemiah the people needed to read about the festival of Tabernacles and about the law prohibiting intermarriage in order to learn of their existence (Nehemiah 8:14,13:1). How could this same nation who had forgotten some of the foundational written laws, at the same time have memorized countless details of an Oral tradition?

These questions are not new. This criticism was formulated by the Muslims long ago in an attempt to discredit the scriptures themselves. The responsa of Rabbi Solomon ben Aderet (13th century Rabbi of Barcelona) records this Muslim argument - If the Jewish nation was disloyal to God, how could we trust them to preserve the scriptures? How can we know that the Torah scroll that Josiah found was truly the scroll that Moses had written?

For those who believe in the divine origin of scripture, this question is not relevant. If it was important to God to preserve His message, the fallible nature of man will not stand in His way. The Christian who believes in the inspired nature of scripture, recognizes that God maintained the accuracy of His word, through the medium of the Jewish nation. The question only remains - what is God's word? If God had given Moses directives that were not recorded in the Five Books, and those directives were relevant to the later generations, then we can trust that God protected those directives from corruption.

Those who present this challenge to the authenticity of the Law, be they Muslim imams or Christian missionaries, are missing an important feature of the nature of scripture. Scripture's objective in recording Israel's past, is not to satisfy the curiosity of the history buff. The purpose of scripture is to improve our future. We are therefore enjoined to recall our shortcomings (Deuteronomy 9:7) and these are magnified and emphasized with the most forceful words. Before Moses died, he spoke to the people. He did not commend them for all the love that they had poured into the Tabernacle. He did not praise them for following God into the wilderness (Jeremiah 2:2). The Jewish people would have to wait almost 1000 years before hearing this compliment from God. Instead Moses rebuked them for every failing that occurred throughout the 40 years, and described these at length (Deuteronomy 1:26-45, 9:7-24).

The book of Joshua further illustrates this point (7:1). One individual, a man named Achan, had violated the oath that Joshua had declared to the people. The terminology that scripture uses to describe this incident seems to be way out of proportion to the crime committed. The chapter opens with the words "The Children of Israel trespassed". The entire nation is declared guilty for the sin of one lone individual. Further on in the chapter we read "Israel sinned, they have also violated My covenant that I have commanded

them, they have also stolen and denied” (Joshua 7:11). Not only is the nation being blamed for the sin of one of her members, but the crime itself is magnified in the strongest possible terms. The consequence of this one sin seems exaggerated as well. The nation was punished with a defeat in battle (Joshua 7:5), and God tells Joshua that He will no longer be with the Jewish people. All this for the crime of one individual! This gives us an insight into the standard that God demands of His people. The sin of one man is the sin of the nation, and the repercussions come on a national scale.

With this in mind we can appreciate that the intense words of rebuke that the prophets directed against the nation do not imply that every individual member of the nation was guilty of every trespass that the prophets mention. The prophets looked at the nation as a corporate whole, and the sin of some of the members is attributed to the complete national entity. The divinely inspired authors of scripture were certainly people of great moral caliber, yet they included themselves when they spoke of the nation’s sins. Exodus 16:28 has God accusing Moses together with Israel for refusing to obey His commandments. Isaiah 6:5, 42:24, and 64:8 have Isaiah including himself in confessing the sins of the nation. Jeremiah 14:7,20, Micha 7:9, Psalm 106:6, Lamentations 3:42, Daniel 9:20, Ezra 9:6, and Nehemiah 1:6 all record how the divinely inspired authors recognized the sins of the nation as their own sins.

There can be no question that there were times when a large percentage of the nation was disobedient to God. But even in the lowest times there was a recognizable element that was loyal to God. Not an element that saw themselves as separate from the nation, but an element that saw themselves as part of the nation - and the nation saw this element as a part of them. When the nation recognized that they had strayed and needed to return to God, they knew to whom to turn. God always had representatives amongst His nation, and these representatives were the medium through whom God preserved His Law. These were the people who treasured every word of God’s Law, both written and unwritten and passed them on to the future generations.

This element of Jews who maintained their loyalty to God never lost the written Torah. When the scriptures tell us that the reading of the Torah taught the people about the holiday of Tabernacles (Nehemiah 8:14), or about the prohibition against intermarriage (Nehemiah 13:1), this refers to the lower elements of the populace. The scripture itself makes the distinction between the two segments of the population - “those who know the laws of your God” and - “those who do not know them” (Ezra 7:25). These people who knew the Law, and certainly Ezra himself and the leadership around him, did not need to read a verse to discover something they never knew. Ezra himself is described as a “scribe of the law of God” (Ezra 7:12). Having copied the Torah we can safely assume that he knew what he had written.

Similarly, we can understand that the scroll that was found in the times of Josiah, was not the last surviving copy of the Five Books of Moses. It would be ludicrous to believe that the recently converted Samaritans only several miles to the North, possessed their own copies of the Law (which differ significantly from the Judean version), while Jeremiah, Hulda the prophetess, and Zephaniah never saw a copy of the book. If every last copy of the Five Books went lost until Josiah found this one scroll, then who preserved the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Micha, Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes? The fact that these books are with us today, tells us that in Josiah's generation there must have been someone who was safeguarding them. If there were people who took the pains to preserve the writings of David and Solomon that related to the Temple appointments (2Chronicles 35:4), these same people would certainly recognize the importance of preserving Moses' Five Books. It is only sensible to assume, that God's prophets and those loyal to God were faithfully preserving all of God's word, both written and unwritten.

Jeremiah began prophesying in the 13th year of Josiah's reign, five years before the scroll was found. He criticizes those who "grasp the Torah" for their lack of intimacy with God (Jeremiah 2:8). Jeremiah denounces those who boast in their superficial possession of the Torah (Jeremiah 8:8). These verses clearly imply that even the lesser elements of the population had not lost track of the Torah. They certainly did not comply with her spirit, but the letter of the Law was with them to some degree. It is clear then that when Josiah found the scroll, he was not discovering a book that no one knew about. The scroll did not cause an impact through the information it imparted. The impact of the scroll was inspirational.

We must consider which particular scroll it was that belonged in the Temple in the first place. Deuteronomy 31:9 informs us that Moses himself wrote a scroll of the Law and presented it to the priests and Levites who bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord. The ark had been moved from its rightful place (2Chronicles 35:3) - presumably some time during the reign of Menashe - who had violated the Temple precincts (2Kings 21:7, 2Chronicles 33:7). In the process, this particular Torah scroll disappeared. We can only speculate if it was some righteous priest who hid it from the ravages of the wicked kings, or if God used some other means to protect this holy scroll. What the scripture does tell us is that it had vanished. During the renovations of the Temple that took place under Josiah, this precious scroll was found. When the curses of the covenant were read from this very scroll (2Chronicles 34:24), Josiah was affected to the core of his being. The discovery of the scroll at this juncture in his career, and the words being read - as if Moses himself was commanding him, helped him see that the past ten years of repentance were as shallow as the young Jeremiah had declared them to be.

The word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8). When God promises Israel that His spirit will remain in our midst (Isaiah 59:21), we can be confident that His promise will stand. All the forces that our enemies bring to bear against us will never prevail - be they

external enemies or our own fallible nature. When it is time for our nation to return, we will still have the teachings of Moses to guide us on our path back to God (Deuteronomy 30:2).

5. The factions of Judaism in the Second Temple era

Yet another objection that Christians present in an effort to discredit the national legacy of our nation, focuses on the history of the Second Temple era. Josephus reports that there were three factions amongst the Jewish people who differed in their theological approach to Judaism - the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Pharisees are described as accepting the national legacy of the Jewish people as authoritative. The Sadducees are described as rejecting the traditions and accepting only that which was written in the Five Books of Moses. Little is known about the Essenes, but they are described as a sect which practiced extreme ascetics. Christian missionaries point to these divergent opinions and ask - if the Oral Law was truly given by Moses, why was it not unanimously accepted amongst the Jews of the Second Temple period? Why did they dispute the authority of this body of Law? This lack of agreement amongst the Jewish people at this early stage in their history, is presented as evidence that the Oral Law could not have originated with Moses as the Pharisees claimed.

This argument fails for several reasons. First, it must be pointed out that the description of the Sadducees as rejecting the Oral Law, is only a crude representation of the facts. While the Sadducees did differ from the Pharisees in some matters of Law, with the Sadduceean view generally following a more literal approach to scripture - but in many areas of the Law, the Sadducees did not dispute the national legacy of the nation. The debates recorded in the Mishna between the Sadducees and the Pharisees can only be understood if these two groups had a general consensus concerning the structure of the Law. Archeological evidence (from Qumran) suggests that the Sadducees defined the term “mikve” (- “pool of water” - as it relates to matters of ritual purity - Leviticus 11:36) in precisely the same manner as did the Pharisees. The complex laws of teffilin and mezuzah (Deuteronomy 6:8,9, and 11:18,20) were almost identical for the two groups - with the minor variation in that the Sadducees allowed for additional texts to be placed in these ritual objects. The Sadducee Sabbath law as revealed in the Qumran texts included much of the Rabbinic enactments that have no basis in the text of scripture. There can be no question that the Sadducees accepted much of the national legacy as an authoritative definition to the Law of Moses. There is simply no basis to assume that Sadducee theology reflects the Evangelical “sola scriptura” (- solely scripture) approach to the Law.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that this split between the Sadducees and the Pharisees took place within the three centuries that followed Ezra. The religious leadership of the Jewish people was united in the early days of the Second Temple. The fact that the leadership was able to introduce the holiday of Purim to the collective nation, tells us that the nation was able to achieve a consensus in recognizing their leaders - something that could have never occurred after the Pharisee - Sadducee split. One of

these two ideological communities must have broken off from the other. The question that must be addressed is - which of these two communities (Pharisee or Sadducee) reflects the true continuation of the scripturally validated spiritual leadership of Ezra.

There are several approaches through which we can try to answer this question, and all of them point to the Pharisees as the true heirs of Ezra. The simple fact that the Pharisee traditions preserve many of Ezra's teachings establishes a strong connection between the Pharisee community and Ezra. The fact that a prominent family of the Pharisee leadership was directly descended from Ezra only strengthens this connection. The fact that the vast majority of the nation saw the Pharisees as true teachers of the Law confirms this conclusion even further. Yet there is still a more decisive way to determine which of the two parties (Sadducees or Pharisees) represents the faithful continuance of Ezra's leadership.

During the entire span of the Second Temple era, there were two major Jewish communities - the one in the Land of Israel, and the other in Babylon - these aside from many minor communities scattered around the globe. These communities were all established in the process of the first exile from the Land of Israel, an event which took place long before the period of Ezra's leadership. Ezra himself was a recognized leader in the Babylonian community before he came to the Land of Israel (Ezra 7:6). All of these diaspora communities recognized that the Pharisees were the legitimate successors of Ezra and Moses. Some of the most famous Pharisee scholars were products of the Babylonian community (- such as Hillel the Elder). The diaspora communities referred their legal questions to the centers of Pharisee scholarship, and they accepted the Pharisee rulings as a valid expression of the Law of Moses. If the Sadducees were the true heirs of Ezra, we would expect their influence to be more widespread. The fact that there is no record of a Sadducee community outside of the Land of Israel, tells us that the Sadducees were the splinter group. It is clear that the Pharisee ideology was the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob, and the Sadducees were the ones who introduced the new doctrine.

Another piece of evidence to consider in relation to this Christian argument is the Samaritan community. Scripture records that the Samaritans were converted to Judaism under the guidance of a priest from the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2Kings 17:28). We can expect their theology to reflect the beliefs of the corrupt priesthood of the Ten Tribes who were exiled from the land long before the destruction of the First Temple. Indeed, the Samaritans do not accept God's choice of Jerusalem as the place for His Temple, neither do they accept God's choice of the Davidic dynasty to rule Israel. These are beliefs we could expect the priesthood of the Ten Tribes to promote (1Kings 12:16,28). In the same vein, the Samaritans do not accept the canon of the Judean Bible - the Bible that we know today. The Samaritan scriptures contain only the Five Books of Moses and the book of Joshua - and no more. The Samaritan version of the Five Books of Moses varies significantly from the text that both Jews and Christians consider authentic. It is

evident that the root of the schism between the Samaritans and the Jews predates the canonization most of the books of Jewish scripture. If these two communities were to agree on anything, it would have had to originate before the schism. The Samaritans did not recognize the authority of the religious leadership of the Southern Kingdom from the point of the schism and onward. Yet we find that the Samaritans possess many details of the unwritten teachings of Moses. The Samaritans recognize that the prohibition to do work on the Sabbath includes even minor activities that could be categorized as work. The Samaritans slaughter their animals with the same cut to the neck that Rabbinical Jews acknowledge as valid according to the teachings of Moses. The Samaritans, as do the Rabbinical Jews refer to God as “the Name”, for fear that God’s name not be taken in vain. The Samaritans follow the law which dictates that the Sabbatical year (Leviticus 25:2) begins on the seventh month. The first ten days of the seventh month are devoted for repentance in Samaritan practice as they are in Rabbinical Judaism. None of these customs are recorded in the Five Books of Moses. It is clear that these teachings of Moses were extant amongst the Jewish people even before the Ten Tribes broke off from the Southern Kingdom after the death of Solomon. The Christian accusation which charges that the Pharisees invented the Oral Law in the Second Temple era is put to rest when we examine the relevant facts.

6. Talmudic application of scripture

Another Christian objection directed against the authenticity of our nation’s legacy targets the Talmudic application of scripture. The Talmud is replete with quotations from scripture, but these quotations frequently fail to conform to the plain meaning of scripture. On some occasions the Talmudic interpretation seems to stand directly opposite the straightforward reading of the verse. The Christian points to these Talmudic applications of scripture and presents a double-edged accusation. The Christian’s first charge is that we can deduce from the repeated quotations of scripture that the authors of the Talmud recognized the inadequacy of their own authority and sought to augment their teachings with scriptural support. The second charge of the Christian is that these same authors were incompetent in their application of the scriptures, and that it would be unwise for anyone to rely on their teachings.

It is beyond the scope of this work to analyze the specific Talmudic applications of scripture. (The reader is referred to the works of Malbim and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch - the latter has been translated into English and is available at many Jewish book-stores.) I will address the general concepts that elucidate the Talmud’s approach to scripture.

There are four different techniques that the Talmud uses in her application of the scriptures. There is the simple straightforward reading of scripture. There is a midrashic approach to scripture, which sees beyond the literal meaning of scripture. The midrashic technique will draw spiritual and ethical insights from the words of scripture in a process that is unrelated to the immediate context of the verse. This method is not applied in legal

discussions. It is limited to the area of rabbinic literature which focuses on the narratives of scripture and on the moral lessons to be learned from scripture. A third application of scripture is the system of drasha. This method sees additional levels of meaning in every departure from the norms of the Hebrew language. This system of interpretation originates with Moses and is authoritative in matters of law. A final application of scripture is the use of a phrase from scripture as a mnemonic device. Being that in the era of the Talmud no written books existed aside from the books of scripture, an important method of memorizing information was to connect a piece of information with a verse from the scriptures. In this method, the information may have had no relationship whatsoever to the meaning of the verse. The point of the scriptural quote in this context was not to interpret scripture, but rather to remember the information.

When the critics charge that the authors of the Talmud have misquoted scripture in any given instance, it must be first determined which of these four methods of applying scripture is operating. Unless it was the first method - where the Talmud is attempting to give the plain meaning - then this criticism has no validity. Upon examining the works of the critics we see that not one of their examples is drawn from an instance where the Talmud is attempting to find the plain meaning of the verse. (For those who want to verify the matter - search the Talmud for the word “legufei”.)

Christian missionaries have taken the lead of secular historians in discrediting the talmudic method of “drasha” on a historical basis. It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss this matter which requires a certain level of mastery of the Talmud. The interested reader is referred to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch’s fifth volume of *Collected Writings* (published by Feldheim) in which he provides a comprehensive refutation to these accusations.

The Talmud’s regular quotations of scripture cannot support the missionary’s contention to the effect that the authors of the Talmud did not fully trust their own traditions. First, it must be noted that the authors of the Talmud sought to augment statements and concepts found in the scriptural books of the prophets, with support from the Five Books of Moses (Yoma 38b, Taanit 9a). It is not that they doubted the authenticity of the books of the prophets. The authors of the Talmud understood that every facet of true knowledge is present in the Five Books of Moses on some level. They saw it as part of the national effort to attain a full picture of the Law, by finding the connections that exist between the books of the prophets and the books of Moses. In the same vein they saw it as part of the national effort to understand the fullness of God’s Law, that they attempt to find the connections between the written words, and the traditions. From the context of the Talmud’s discussions we can gather that the national testimony that a given practice dates back to Moses, was more than enough to establish the authenticity of that practice. After all, the Five Books of Moses themselves are validated by the same method - it is the testimony of the nation that informs us that Moses existed and that these are his books. The accepted practices of the nation will not stand or fall on the basis of the scriptural

derivations. The Talmud points to the scriptural derivations in order to enhance our appreciation for the totality of the Five Books.

7. Where is the scriptural evidence?

We now move on to the final missionary objection to the living traditions of Israel. The missionaries ask - where is the scriptural evidence? Why does scripture not explicitly say - "there is an oral law"?

For someone who has an understanding of the living legacy of our nation, this question is meaningless. It would be like pointing to a map and asking "where does it say here that there is a real country"? Or like pointing to a teacher's roll book and asking "who says that there are any three dimensional people in this class"? This is what the Torah is talking about. It is talking about a living law. It is talking about a real spiritual entity called "Sabbath", and another called "purity", it is obvious that the author of this book wants you to live out these spiritual entities on a personal basis.

This question is meaningless from another angle. The question is predicated upon the Evangelical template of the structure of faith. The Evangelical Christian believes that all revelation must be contained in the Bible, hence the assumption, if it is not in the Bible it can't be true. The truth of the Bible comes first for the Christian, and everything else must flow from there. The problem is that this faith structure is not supported by the Bible. Nowhere does the Bible say that all revelation must be contained in the Bible. The Bible cannot be the first truth, because it must first be established that the Bible itself is true. The same method that God employed to tell us that the Bible is true, tells us that the living tradition of our nation is true. It is the living tradition of our nation itself, which tells us that the Bible is true. And it says this in the Bible.

The Bible itself tells us how God established His truth in Israel. God had spoken to the Jewish people. God had taken the nation out of bondage in Egypt. God did these things directly and openly. The people did not need to hear about these matters from a prophet neither did they need to read it in a book. God ensured that the later generations of Jews will also encounter these events on the experiential level. The methods that God designated to pass the impact of these events to the future generations are the national observances, and the telling and retelling of the story from father to son (Exodus 10:2, 12:14,25,26,27, 13:8,9,13,15,16, 34:18, Leviticus 23:42,43, Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:20,21, 16:3,12, Judges 6:13, Psalms 44:2, 78:6). The foundational events through which God established His faith amongst His chosen people, are to be found in the hearts of this same people. The truth of scripture stands upon the testimony that God established in Israel's heart (Psalm 78:5). The power of Sinai and the exodus as it reverberates through the body of Eternal Israel is the pillar upon which God established faith in Israel. In other

words, it is the national testimony which corroborates the Bible. If this testimony is to be considered invalid, then the Bible itself has no leg to stand on.

Another way that the Bible testifies to the truth of the national traditions is in the way it emphasizes the corporate entity. Most of the commandments are addressed to all of Israel with the singular “You”. Corporate Israel is to observe the Law as one. This would be impossible if there was no united understanding of the Law. If all we had to go by was the written word and the written word alone, the nation would splinter into fragments, each insisting upon its own interpretation of the Law.

The corporate entity of Israel is enjoined to appoint judges and establish courts that are to adjudicate all matters of God’s Law (Deuteronomy 16:18). In order for any system of justice to operate it is necessary that there be an authoritative interpretation of the Law. If there were to be no authoritative interpretation of the Law no one could be declared guilty by the courts. Every violator could justify his actions by appealing to his own interpretation of the Law. The only way this can be understood is when we realize that the corporate understanding of the Law is incumbent upon every individual.

Furthermore, there are many laws which are not sufficiently explicated in the words of the scripture alone. Let us take the law of tithing as an example. Numbers 18:21 teaches that all tithes belong to the sons of Levi. Deuteronomy 14:22-27 tells us to take the tithes of our crop to the chosen place and eat it together with our families. In the next paragraph (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) we are told to give the tithes of the third year to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow. On the basis of the written word alone one would not know the proper procedure of tithing the crops. This commandment is incumbent upon every farmer (- the vast majority of the population in the agricultural society of biblical times), yet the scripture itself does not fully explain the procedure. Without an authoritative national understanding that reconciles these seemingly contradictory passages, the system of tithing would not work.

Another series of laws that are not fully revealed in the pages of scripture are the laws pertaining to the holidays. Scripture emphasizes the importance of observing the holidays in their proper times, yet scripture never informs us how we should construct the calendar. The holidays are to be observed in unison (Deuteronomy 31:11). This cannot happen if there is no authoritative method of creating a calendar. During the Second Temple era, when some elements in Israel began rejecting the authority of the Pharisee leaders, the calendar was one of the first areas they took issue with. Since the details of the calendar are not specified in the Five Books, and since the corporate understanding of the calendar relied on living leaders to apply the principles of the calendar, these schismatic communities refused to observe the Pharisee calendar. (It is interesting to note that the early Jewish-Christian community did obey the Pharisee leadership in this

regard). The observance of the holidays would be impossible if all the information given to the nation were the words recorded in the Five Books.

The laws of forbidden work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10), the laws of forbidden fats of the animal (Leviticus 7:23), and the civil laws of Exodus 21 and 22 would be quite difficult to observe if all the information we had to go with was the words recorded in the Five Books. These laws were obviously meant to be taken seriously, yet the written word is open to various interpretations. If the nation is expected to follow these laws, we can be sure that they were given an enhanced understanding. These laws are practically meaningless without an Oral Law.

Yet another method through which scripture validates the Oral Law is where mention is made of details of the law that are not explicated elsewhere. The wording of scripture indicates that no new law is being presented, but rather the reader is expected to be familiar with these details. Deuteronomy 26:14 has the farmer declaring that he has not eaten of the tithes while in a state of mourning nor has he given of them to the dead, details that are mentioned nowhere else in the Five Books. Numbers 31:23 has Elazar telling the soldiers details to the purity laws that are not presented elsewhere. We can see that the laws came with explications that are not written in the text.

Finally and most simply, there is one commandment where scripture is most direct and explicit in reporting to us that an extra-scriptural explanation came along with the commandment. This commandment is the law that prohibits idolatry. The text goes to great lengths to describe that the nation as a whole was granted a prophetic revelation which made clear to them who it is that they are to worship, and who it is that they are not to worship (Deuteronomy 4:9 – 39). It is clear that God felt that the written word will not be enough to convey the full meaning of the commandment, and additional revelation was necessary. This was given to the nation together with the admonition to pass the message on their progeny (Deuteronomy 4:9). If there is one commandment in which scripture tells us that there is a supplement to the written word alone, it is this commandment of idolatry. It is precisely here where all of Christendom (with the exception of the Unitarians) rejects the Jewish legacy. The Christian rejection of the Jewish legacy is not rooted in a respect for scripture.

F. The Christian Claim for Recognition as Legal Heirs to the Legacy of Israel

Some Christians recognize the vital nature of the legacy of the Jewish nation. These people recognize that if there is no authenticity to the legacy of the Jewish nation, then scripture itself has no validity. These Christians do not submit to the legacy of our nation, instead they attempt to usurp the authority of our national inheritance. The argument that these people put forth posits that the early Jewish Christians are the true remnant of loyal Israel, and that Christendom is their legal heir. This doctrine sees the first Jewish

Christians as the Jews who remained loyal to God, while the rest of the nation strayed from the true faith by rejecting Christianity.

This line of argumentation is untenable for four separate reasons. First and foremost, the mere fact that God allowed this Jewish Christian community to be eradicated (by the gentile Church - their supposed heirs), tells us that this was not the covenant community. God promised the Jewish people that the Sabbath will stand as an eternal sign for His covenant with the Jewish people (Exodus 31:16). From the time that the Jewish Christian community was destroyed by the Roman Bishops, this sign was not to be found in that community - for that community ceased to exist. The sign of the Sabbath was borne by those who rejected Christianity's claims, and not by those who accepted them. Since this group disappeared as a recognizable Jewish entity, we can be confident that it was they who were cut off from the midst of their people and it wasn't the Jewish people who were cut off from them.

A second reason why the Christian argument cannot be considered is because we have no way of knowing what it is the first Jewish Christians believed. The only records that we possess, were preserved and edited by the very people who planted the seeds of their destruction. All of the original Aramaic and Hebrew documents are gone. Unless we trust the canon of the Gentile Church, there is no way we can know what the early Jewish Christians believed. For all we know, they would more readily identify with the Jewish position on the key theological issues rather than with the Christian position. (It is in place to note here, that many scholars recognize that a deep theological divide separated the early Jewish Christian community from the Gentile Christian community.)

Thirdly, we must consider the available evidence. The Samaritans, the Sadducees and the Pharisees all agreed on the issues which stand between Judaism and Christendom. All of these Second Temple communities recognized that the deification of a human is a violation of the Jewish perception of God. All of these communities acknowledged the efficacy of repentance for achieving God's forgiveness, and they all agreed on the foundational role that observance of the Law plays in our nation's relationship with God. These principles of our legacy were never open to question or dispute. If the early Jewish Christian community truly rejected these tenets of our legacy, we cannot assume that they were following a more accurate tradition than the vast majority of the nation. If their version of our legacy has any veracity to it, we would expect it to be reflected in the earlier records of our nation's traditions. The fact that every record of our nation's legacy unequivocally renounces the doctrines of Christianity does not allow us to consider this Christian argument.

Finally and most simply. The early Christians never put forth the claim that they were following a true tradition. They claimed to follow a new teaching which was unknown to them before they heard it from the founders of Christianity. There is simply no historical

basis for the modern claim - generated by polemical pressure - that these doctrines were inherited from a previous generation of loyal Jews.

Another variation of Christian respect for the legacy of our nation has some modern day Jewish Christians following the precepts and practices of Rabbinical law in many areas of life. These people recognize that the legacy of the Jewish nation is the authority upon which scripture stands. They have also noticed that it was through Rabbinic Judaism that God preserved His covenant with His chosen people. These Christians have come to the unavoidable conclusion that Rabbinical Judaism is the only valid context from within which the Law of Moses can be observed. This Christian community discovered that Rabbinical Judaism allows for and even encourages disagreement and diversity within the proscribed boundaries of observance. These Christians propose to combine Christian theology with observance of the Law and expect this crossbreed to be tolerated as a valid opinion within the parameters of Rabbinical Judaism.

The error of this Christian community lies in the fact that they have never looked into the heart of Judaism and the Jew. All of Rabbinical Judaism's observance of the Law is only an expression of her relationship with the God of Israel. Following the observances of Rabbinical Judaism in worship of an entity other than the One towards whom Rabbinical Judaism identifies as the God of Israel, is not only a misunderstanding of Judaism, it is the absolute antithesis of Judaism.

Furthermore, if there is one issue about which scripture is most explicitly clear in confirming the authority of our national legacy - it would be the issue of identifying God. Scripture records that it was God Himself who taught the nation this important lesson long before the first books of scripture were put into writing (Exodus 20:2,3,19,20). The Sinai revelation is spoken of by scripture as the defining teaching that gave the Jewish people to understand who it is they are to worship (Deuteronomy 4:15,35,39). To accept the definitions of our national legacy as they relate to the Rabbinical observance of Channuka, while rejecting the same legacy as it defines our relationship with God - is the height of absurdity.

G. Conclusion

God called Israel "My firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22). God took His son out of bondage so that His son may serve Him" (Exodus 4:23). Obedience to the direct command of God is the highest calling of the Jew. The purpose and meaning inherent in the act of a created being following the explicit directive of the Creator of all is as great as a created being can hope to achieve. The Sages of Israel expressed this sentiment when they stated "One instant of repentance and good deeds in this world is more beautiful than all of the life of the world to come" (Avot 4:17). Obedience towards God takes on an entirely different dimension when it is part of the general subservience of Eternal Israel. The greatest gift

God granted to the Jew, is the ability and the opportunity to serve Him as a member of the corporate body of God' firstborn son.

Those Christians who advocate a general abandonment of obedience to God's direct commandments, are rejecting the absolute sovereignty of God – Israel's Heavenly Father. While the Christians who reject Israel's corporate understanding of the Law, are denying God's firstborn son together with the holy spirit that dwells in their midst.