ELCA CONSULTATIVE PANEL
ON LUTHERAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

Preaching and Teaching "With Love and Respect for the Jewish People"

A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community:

"Moreover, we express our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people."

Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

INTRODUCTION

Christian engagement with Jews and Judaism has transformed in remarkable ways since the middle of the 20th century. Bible classes often include references to the Jewishness of Jesus. Outbursts of anti-Semitic rhetoric or violence draw Christian solidarity and support for the Jewish people. Jewish writers appear in book group studies. Faith formation classes draw on the spiritual insights of rabbis and Jewish scholars, even Jewish scholars of the New Testament. Congregational calendars include pulpit exchange with neighboring synagogues, and confirmation classes schedule visits to Shabbat services.

In more formal ways, church bodies have acknowledged the continuing identity of the Jewish people as covenanted people of God. A Lutheran World Federation consultation on anti-Semitism in 2001 wrote in its concluding statement: "We affirm . . . the validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people, which has never been superseded." Many have also acknowledged Christian anti-Judaism as a tragic contributor to the wider Western cultural anti-Semitism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The ELCA in 1994 rejected the invective in Martin Luther's violent recommendations regarding the Jews and expressed its "urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people." The church and its leaders have come a long way.

Building on these developments, the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations offers this guide to support preachers and teachers in reflecting and embodying these commitments in congregational life. Progress in understanding the Bible, its first communities and the development of Christian theology provides many resources for creating a foundational framework for moving forward. Such a framework can inform many aspects of our preaching and teaching. It will equip us better to deal with the legacies that more negative approaches have left in Scripture, theology, broad cultural attitudes and the shape of the Sunday lectionary.

In Scripture and theology, one of those legacies is a powerful theme of conflict that asserts Christian truths and virtues as the opposite of what Judaism holds. This has given rise to ideas such as the following:

a) Since Jesus is the light of the world, Jews are portrayed as being in the dark.

b) Because the gospel is freedom, Judaism is characterized as legalistic.

c) Jesus argued with Pharisees and scribes and the Jewish priests, so everything they taught and stood for has been invalidated.

d) Jesus fulfills the hopes of biblical Israel and its prophecies; therefore, Judaism is outdated and misguided and fails to understand the meaning of its own Scriptures.

e) Jesus shows us that God is loving and merciful, unlike the image of God in the Old Testament as angry and violent.

f) The promised land has become a spiritual home or exists wherever Christ is, so Jews are mistaken when they invest themselves in an earthly homeland and its well-being.

g) Christians learn about justice from the prophets of biblical Israel; surely, then, Jews should have a higher sense of justice and a deeper commitment to it than other people.

WHO ARE "WE/US"?

Throughout this guide, readers will encounter the pronouns "we" and "us." In some cases, this simply refers to the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations that has taken the lead in preparing the guide. In other cases, it means the church as a whole, or at least in a good deal of its experience. Recognizing that it is rarely accurate to characterize the church collectively with any grand generalization, we (the panel) believe that it is possible to speak with care about what we (the church) have known, done, learned, realized, etc., and what we (the church) hope for, find useful, aspire to or might gain. One thing is certain: we (the panel) hope that readers will increasingly identify with the spirit and approach of this guide, finding it helpful for the tasks of ministry and for building up the body of Christ, particularly in our understanding of Jews and Judaism.

These images yield strong rhetoric, but it is unfair to those who come out on the "wrong" side of the contrast. Common stereotypes of Jews and Judaism are another legacy that can distort the Christian message as people hear it. Because stereotypes operate unconsciously, even among people who explicitly reject them, we need to be alert to images that can activate them. For example:

a) It is a stereotype that Jews are wealthy and focus on money. How might this influence people's hearing of the parables of "the rich fool" (Luke 12:16-21) or "the Pharisee and the publican" (Luke 18:10-14)? When John's Gospel says that Judas "was a thief" (John 12:6), do we hear the indictment of one person or a familiar — and false — portrayal of Jews in general?

b) It is a stereotype that Jews are arrogant about being chosen, separate and exclusive. The stereotype does not help us understand the actions of the priests in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). It can also influence what people hear in stories about conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees over dining companions and handwashing, or in discussions of "the promised land."

The church treasures Scripture, tradition and confessional theology as both sources and norms in its ongoing life and work. We cannot simply remove from our heritage the images and formulations that have given rise to these troubling legacies. By understanding more fully and clearly what is essential to the heritage and what has attached to it or grown out of it in troubling ways, we can fashion more generous, constructive, gospel-informed patterns of theology to guide our thinking and practice in the church and in the world.

Pastors, academics and interfaith professionals, both Jewish and Christian, have devoted decades of research and dialogue to addressing these legacies. Their work is the indispensable basis for everything we present here. We recognize their contributions in the sectional bibliographies and a collated set of basic resources at the end of the guide.

The guide presents ten topics in two broad categories. The first six topics address issues that derive directly from Scripture in its development and interpretation. These are:

1. Prophetic language.
2. Pharisees, scribes, priests and Jewish elders.
3. Jesus and the Jewish law in the Gospels.
4. The historical settings of the Gospels.
5. Paul among Jews and Gentiles — and later readings of Paul.
6. Judaisms of the first century and 21st century.

The last four topics address issues that emerge from the theological elaboration of Scripture's witness, with particular attention to themes in Lutheran theology and to the structure and dynamics of the Revised Common Lectionary. These are:

7. Law and gospel; promise and fulfillment.
8. Where sin divides.
9. The old/new rhetoric of the Letter to the Hebrews
10. Misleading lectionary dynamics

Throughout the discussions here, two events emerge repeatedly as central to the approaches to these topics. First, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 CE had a powerful impact on the Jewish communities of Judea, Galilee and the wider world, including early Jesus communities. Understanding that impact affects our insights into the writings of the apostle Paul and the shaping of the Gospels. Second, Christianity's ascendancy as it became the official religion of the Roman empire over the course of the fourth century CE led the church's theologians to reframe their understanding of Jews and Judaism. It also shifted the way they understood "kingdom

of God" and laid a foundation for religious, political and cultural antagonism toward Jews and Judaism that has influenced Western ideas to our own day. When we set the church's heritage more explicitly within the context of these decisive events, we gain a useful perspective for discerning the gospel at the heart of that heritage. We are then better able to emphasize the gospel as we work to move beyond problematic reshapings of it.

In each of the ten topic areas, there is a brief articulation of the "problematic" way of understanding the topic. This is followed by a summary of a "better" understanding. The discussion that then follows provides evidence and argument that undergirds the better understanding and, often, examples of how it applies to specific biblical texts and points of theology. Call-out boxes like the one at right provide more focused information and the citation of biblical texts. Finally, a summary of "what we can do" concludes each section, to which a relevant bibliography is added for reference.

THE JEWISH ANNOTATED NEW TESTAMENT

One helpful resource for dealing with issues in the Scriptures is *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Brettler. More than 50 scholars have contributed to this study Bible, which is now in its second edition. In addition to the New Revised Standard Version New Testament, it includes an introduction and brief commentary for each book of the New Testament, as well as several dozen brief articles on general topics. The authors draw on up-to-date research to enrich a reading of the New Testament with relevant background from Jewish history, practice and literature. They often illuminate in unexpected ways the New Testament's relationship to the Scriptures of biblical Israel and their interpretation in Jewish communities.

We have shaped each topic area so that it can be accessed individually; the guide does not need to be read as a complete work from front to back. Indeed, it is not complete; the issues involved extend beyond what we have included here. With the help of the Scripture and lectionary indexes at the back, readers can pinpoint within the guide topics and Scripture passages that may be of particular interest for a given sermon, class or discussion, and turn directly to the section that addresses the relevant material. For this reason, certain key themes recur throughout the guide. Where this may become tedious or redundant, we ask your indulgence.

In developing this guide for living out our faith in Jesus Christ "with love and respect for the Jewish people," we have become more aware of the ways in which the church's legacy of negative attitudes toward the Jewish community relates to wider patterns of relationship to others. The guide points to habits of awareness, caution and discernment that we can develop to support efforts to portray Jews and Judaism more accurately and to relate to the Jewish community more graciously. The same habits can often smooth our engagements with other communities that are in some way different from our own. We would hope that the approaches we present here might in some small way also contribute to the church's life in those other settings, as well.

The Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations has enjoyed the encouragement and partnership of dozens of Jewish and Christian colleagues from many quarters who have reviewed portions or complete drafts of this guide. We are grateful for their investment in the effort and for the many improvements that their counsel has yielded. The staff for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations and Theological Discernment in the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA have been steadfast in their support and advocacy for the project, contributing both to its substance and to the process of development.

TOPICS

1. PROPHETIC LANGUAGE 6

2. PHARISEES, SCRIBES, PRIESTS AND JEWISH ELDERS 8

3. JESUS AND THE JEWISH LAW IN THE GOSPELS 11

4. THE HISTORICAL SETTINGS OF THE GOSPELS 15

5. PAUL AMONG JEWS AND GENTILES — AND MARTIN LUTHER'S READING OF PAUL 20

6. JUDAISMS OF THE FIRST CENTURY AND THE 21ST CENTURY 28

7. LAW AND GOSPEL; PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT 33

8. WHERE SIN DIVIDES (THROUGH THE CENTER OF OUR OWN HEARTS, NOT BETWEEN GROUPS) 37

9. THE OLD/NEW RHETORIC OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS 39

10. MISLEADING LECTIONARY DYNAMICS 42

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY 48

INDEX BY LECTIONARY SELECTIONS CITED 50

INDEX TO BIBLICAL PASSAGES CITED 53

Except as otherwise noted, biblical passages are quoted from the New Revised Standard Version.

1. PROPHETIC LANGUAGE

PROBLEMATIC: The prophets call out biblical Israel for its persistent sin and injustice, while Jesus shows a proper Christian commitment to justice.

BETTER: All of us as people of God's creation stray from God's ways, and both the prophets and Jesus challenge us to see how God's idea of justice can become our vision for society.

In the Revised Common Lectionary, the first lesson is a reading from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season, when it is from Acts). Nearly half the readings are from the prophets. Quite frequently, therefore, the weekly texts confront us with the challenges that Israel's prophets put to their leaders and their society.

In many cases, the prophets utilized harsh rhetoric in their attempts to communicate an urgent message that had life-or-death implications. Acrid denunciations, oracles of doom and sharp accusations are all commonplace in the prophets.

None of these texts is, in and of itself, anti-Jewish. But the long history of Christian interpretation demonstrates that the language, rhetoric and images they employ can easily be wielded against others — and especially against Jews and Judaism. Thus, when Isaiah says that God's vineyard, Israel, has yielded only wild grapes (or rotten berries), one might think that Judaism has nothing worthwhile in it (Isaiah 5:1-7). But Isaiah also says that "in days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit" (Isaiah 27:6). In Isaiah's view, God never abandons Israel.

The biblical prophets have much to offer the modern church. We ought never abandon these texts, and we in no way wish to dissuade leaders from using them. There is a very good reason why many of these texts are precious to Christians. They say something true about God, humanity and creation. One must keep in mind, however, that with few exceptions prophetic literature was composed to address issues within the prophet's own community. On the whole, they spoke to their society from within their society, as impassioned voices of critique, warning and hope. Their passion bespeaks their commitment to the life and continuity of the people, not to any desire for its suffering or demise.

"OLD TESTAMENT"

In the church, the Scriptures of biblical Israel are read as the Old Testament. The books that biblical Israel passed on to later generations are known in the Jewish community as the *Tanakh*, an acronym comprising the three segments in which Jewish readers organize the books: *Torah* (Pentateuch), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). In that form, they constitute the Jewish Bible.

They were written almost entirely in Hebrew (with a few passages in Aramaic) and therefore are sometimes called the Hebrew Scriptures. Each of these terms has a proper place in certain communities, recognizing the function of the books in those communities. In the church, as Scripture that stands in a foundational and corollary relationship to the New Testament, they are appropriately called the Old Testament. As our discussions here will make clear, we understand the designation of "old" to refer to the fact that the books are chronologically earlier than those of the New Testament, but in no way inferior or abrogated. Indeed, without the foundation of the witness of biblical Israel, the New Testament would be nearly unintelligible. We invite users of this guide to recognize that this terminology honors the witness of biblical Israel while respecting the distinctive reading of that witness by the Jewish community.

Some of the harshest judgments in the prophets focus on foreign nations. Yet even the oracles against foreign nations are meant for internal consumption by Israel. Amos builds a foundation of God's judgment against surrounding nations in order to lift up the charge against the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Amos 1:3–2:5). Ezekiel uses the destruction of other nations rhetorically to avert the reader's eyes from the horror of Israel's destruction (Ezekiel 25:1–33:20). Jeremiah points to God's dealings with other nations to make clear to those in Jerusalem that it is God's hand at work in history, whether for weal or woe (Jeremiah 46-51).

Even as these verses were written for biblical Israel, they can also serve well in our own spiritual life and growth. The prophets addressed the human condition in the particular ways in which it played out in their societies. For us, the challenge and gift of these Scriptures is to understand them in the context of our societies. The human condition remains much the same. The voice of the prophet can still address it in our day, reminding us of God's displeasure at faithlessness and waywardness, first and foremost within our own communities.

WHAT WE CAN DO

A good practice for preaching and teaching on passages from the prophets is to ask how their critique addresses our own communities and shortcomings. They should not be used as a foil for emphasizing a better, alternative or transformed model of relationship that comes with Jesus, but to call us back to the relationship with God that Jesus modeled as a faithful Jew. We read and proclaim the prophets best when we ask how they call us constantly to attend to the full implication of what it means to live a life shaped by the word of God.

RESOURCES

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2. PHARISEES, SCRIBES, PRIESTS AND JEWISH ELDERS

PROBLEMATIC: Jewish opponents of Jesus in the Gospel stories are characteristic of Judaism in general. Jesus shows the better, Christian understanding of God and faith.

BETTER: Like many religious leaders, Jesus clashed with others in his own religious community and was remembered by his followers as a heroic figure. The Gospel characters who oppose him in the stories represent legitimate alternatives and emphases that still challenge us today.

Christians are primarily aware of the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day because of their frequent appearances in the Gospels. These books often portray Jesus in conflict with Jewish leaders, particularly singling out "scribes and pharisees" (see, e.g., Matthew 22-23). The conflicts flare up in a variety of situations throughout the Gospel narratives. The Passion Narrative, for instance, is driven in large measure by the initiative of the High Priest and the priestly council (Sanhedrin) to contain any civic disruption that Jesus' presence and teaching in Jerusalem might arouse during the volatile season of Passover. With its theme of liberation, Passover courted suspicion among the Roman occupiers. The Jewish leaders would have wanted to protect the people from Roman retaliation against any perceived threat of insurrection. The New Testament's depictions of Paul's relationship to the Pharisees are less contentious. The apostle himself notes his training as a Pharisee and that this was a cause for him to boast "in the flesh" (Philippians 3:5; cf. Acts 23:6-7; 26:5).

PHILIPPIANS 3:4-6

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: [5]circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6]as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

ACTS 23:6

When Paul noticed that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he called out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees."

ACTS 26:5

[Paul said: "All the Jews] have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee."

The New Testament is only one among many witnesses to the Judaism of Jesus' time, of which the Dead Sea Scrolls and Josephus' *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities* are perhaps the best-known. Collectively, these sources paint a complex historical picture of Judaism in Jesus' time. Diversity and controversy characterized it as a cluster of dynamic and developing communities characterized by diversity and controversy. As a matter of properly and fairly representing their neighbors (Eighth Commandment — "You shall not bear false witness"), Christians owe it to Jews to understand the Judaism of Jesus' time and to represent it properly. But more is at stake for Christians. By reading the New Testament in light of the broader Jewish context, we gain a greater appreciation for the ways in which the New Testament authors are functioning within the broad arena of contemporary Judaisms, each of which is seeking to be faithful in its own way.

Reading the Gospels in their first-century context suggests the following insights:

- Jesus' teachings, beliefs and practices fit squarely within the conventions of first-century Judaism; he never ceases to be a Jew. He dresses, eats and observes his faith like a first-century Jewish man. While 19th- and early 20th-century biblical scholarship often emphasized the ways in which Jesus was unlike the Jews around him, more recent studies have shown the distortions in that emphasis. To a contemporary observer, Jesus would have fit in far more than he would have stood out.

- As we look for the relationship of Jesus himself to the Pharisees, we must press back behind the Gospel accounts, written two generations after the scenes they depict. His reported conflicts with them most likely are a reflection of close connections, as both he and they sought to understand and interpret biblical Israel's heritage in the relatively new setting of Roman occupation. Put differently, Jesus' disputes with the Pharisees are best seen as internal Jewish communal arguments about best practices for faithful life and survival, rather than debates about different ideas of salvation, grace, law and religion.

"CHRISTIANS" AND "RABBIS"

Prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, there is little evidence that followers of Jesus were seen as anything other than one more Jewish group. When the book of Acts says they were first called "Christians" in Antioch (11:26), we can understand that they were seen as similar to the "Shammaites" and "Hillelites," contemporary Jewish groups also named for their leading teachers.

Similarly, "rabbis" emerged in Judaism in response to the Temple's fall, as leaders of a movement to sustain Judaism without the Temple. The movement built on ideas and practices that Pharisees had advocated earlier, but we do well to underscore the significance of the year 70 CE in reshaping the Jewish world. Eventually the new shape would identify Christ followers and rabbi followers as two distinct religious communities.

- For Matthew, at least, the Pharisees are a caricature, a literary foil that offers the contrast in which Jesus' identity and teaching emerge more vibrantly. Their repeated "testing" of him (Matthew 16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35) verbally echoes the "temptation" by the devil in Chapter 4, demonstrating Matthew's notion of their role in the Gospel story he tells (see further in section 6 below, p. 28).

- Pharisees were the religious predecessors of rabbinic Judaism, whom Jewish tradition honors for their faithfulness to God and as key players in sustaining Jewish life through a difficult time. When the Gospels were being written for those who followed Jesus, their messages offered a developing alternative to the emerging rabbinic perspective. Both the Gospels and the rabbis defined a way to live out faithfully the Torah heritage of biblical Israel. The conflicts between early Christian congregations and neighboring synagogues would have sharpened the accounts of Jesus' adversarial interactions with Jewish leaders in his day. Even with the sharpened tone, though, the arguments are based in shared commitments to Torah, the Temple and Israel's calling as God's people. This should moderate our inclination to heighten the image of difference by simply repeating rhetorical barbs like "hypocrite" without their nuanced context.

PHILIPPIANS 3:4-8

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: [5]. . . as to the law, a Pharisee . . . . [7]Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. [8]More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

- Paul did not criticize Pharisees. Indeed, he praises the quality of what he gained as a Pharisee in order to show how much he values Christ (Philippians 3:4-8). Paul certainly was not shy about giving instructions to people and communities on how to live rightly before God, which was the Pharisees' reputation as well. He may have thought that some Jews had "stumbled" on the Torah (Romans 9:32), but it served God's purpose in reaching the gentiles, and both the Torah and the stumblers remain beloved of God (Romans 7:12; 11:1, 11, 28).

WHAT WE CAN DO

Read the Pharisees, scribes, priests and elders in the Gospel stories as legitimate religious leaders who were in many respects similar to Jesus. Ask what there is in their positions that resonates well with some of the values that we affirm in regard to life, ethics, worship and faithfulness. Present them as examples of different groups within the family of Jews, not as a picture of what all Jews believe or do, either then or now. Speak about their conflicts with Jesus in specific details — about purity, or Sabbath, or claiming power — rather than with generalities like hypocrisy, legalism or "pharisaism."

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3. JESUS AND THE JEWISH LAW IN THE GOSPELS

PROBLEMATIC: Jesus came to do away with Jewish law, which had been a temporary guide (at best) or a deadening burden (at worst) for the Jews.

BETTER: When God claims a people, whether Jew or Gentile, a certain ideal lifestyle will characterize their relationship with God. Disagreements about the lifestyle are inevitable, and people will differ over the importance of the lifestyle in either building or expressing the relationship. Jesus knew and lived the Jewish lifestyle embodied in the Law (Torah), pointed to the priority of the relationship with God and debated which practices in Jewish life best witness to that relationship. He never rejected Torah in principle as God's guidance for life.

The Gospels portray a fairly consistent picture of Jesus' relationship to the Torah as Jewish law or lifestyle. In various ways, the Gospel writers model their portraits of Jesus on major figures drawn from Israel's Bible, such as Moses. They depict Jesus as a faithful Jew who revered the law of Moses, observed it in his own life and energetically engaged in its interpretation. They show Jesus investing great energy in interpreting the Torah (Matthew 5:21-48). He cites it while being tempted by the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Matthew's Jesus says that, "until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the Torah until all is accomplished" (Matthew 5:18, NRSV emended). Even in the stories showing Jesus in controversy with other Jewish leaders over the Torah, the focus of his argument affirms the values of Torah and the relationship with God out of which they emerge.

"The Torah" refers to at least two things: the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch), sometimes referred to as "Moses" because of the tradition that Moses wrote it, and, the whole ritual, ethical and legal pattern that shapes Jewish life. As a kind of Jewish constitution, the Torah is a matter for interpretation and application in every aspect of personal and communal life. It is, in that sense, life-giving for the Jewish community. As with any constitution, its interpretation and application lead to different opinions and even different "parties" among faithful Jews. Jesus was, in his day, a leader of one such party, identified with him personally and with Galilee geographically.

In the era of the Gospels' composition, following the fall of the Temple, gentiles became a majority in the expanding Christian community. The distinction became more evident between those Jews who lived according to Torah as a lifestyle and those Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus who did not. That distinction made it easier for the Gospel writers to emphasize an adversarial attitude in the Gospel narratives.

TORAH — LAW — LIFESTYLE

When referring to people's holy things ("sancta"), we do well to be clear and respectful. The Torah is a central element in the Jewish community's sancta. Translating Torah as "law" began with the use of the word "nomos" in the Greek versions of the Jewish Bible. In English it dates back to the work of William Tyndale in the 16th century. Neither "Torah" nor "nomos" is as narrow in its meaning as "law" is in English. Moreover, the language of "law" was further distorted when Augustine, Luther and others used arguments from Paul's letters to address theological issues and church abuses that were not pertinent to a Jewish understanding of Torah (see section 5 below). To use "law" as a simple translation of Torah today is, therefore, misleading.

Torah, however, remains a somewhat unfamiliar word among Christians. In this guide, the Torah is most often characterized as the lifestyle, or shape of faithful life, that developed as the Scriptures of biblical Israel became normative.

Example: Healing on the Sabbath

Several Gospel texts depict Jesus healing on the Sabbath (e.g., Mark 3:1-6; 6:1-6; and Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17). In certain accounts, Jesus' decision to heal causes a stir among some of those present. In Luke 6, for instance, Jesus enters a synagogue and heals a man with a shriveled hand. The texts indicate that "the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him" (Luke 6:7). And when the man's hand was restored, the text indicates that the Pharisees and teachers of the law "were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6:11).

To be sure, debates around the preservation of life and the practice of sabbath did exist within Judaism and go back at least to the time of the Maccabees. In 167 BCE approximately a thousand Jews refused to fight on the Sabbath and died at the hands of their foes as a result. In response to this tragedy, a decision was made that would allow for defensive military action to preserve life on the Sabbath:

> [39] When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. [40] And all said to their neighbors: "If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth." [41] So they made this decision that day: "Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the Sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places" (1 Maccabees 2:39-41).

This position stands in significant tension with the second-century BCE book of Jubilees, which retells Genesis and parts of Exodus. This book explicitly condemns warfare on the Sabbath. In short, Sabbath observance was a contentious issue at different points within Second Temple Judaism.

Like every community shaped by sabbath, the communities that shaped the Gospel stories also had to wrestle with how best to navigate the sabbath injunctions among other realities of life. Something of that struggle is reflected in these stories about Jesus healing on the Sabbath. The decisions he is shown to make — to heal on the Sabbath — would have set Jesus at a particular point along the spectrum of sabbath debate but well within the norms of Jewish practice.

WHAT WE CAN DO

When talking about controversies over Sabbath healings, set the dispute within the competing values of a single faith community, not as a rejection by Jesus of Jewish sabbath practice in general. These disputes are similar in many ways to those with which we are familiar: every congregation has to make choices about how to balance worship, learning, service, housekeeping, etc. We set priorities among these values for everyday life and then, when urgent needs arise, sometimes we have to reassess and/or override those priorities temporarily.

Example: Ritual (Im)purity

Jesus' relationship to Judaism's ritual purity system is one of the most misunderstood elements of his ministry. Our unfamiliarity with systems such as this makes it difficult to get inside the arguments in the Gospels. That leaves us with a general sense that Jesus opposes the whole system as "stringent" or "legalistic" and then offers something "more compassionate."

This view misrepresents both Jesus and Judaism. Purity systems in general function to ensure that the world is kept in good order by not mixing things that do not belong together. In the first biblical account of creation in

Genesis 1, the entire universe is set in place by God doing a succession of separations: light from dark, day from night, seas from dry land, etc. Mixing those things would threaten creation itself. Similarly, the purity system sustains life by navigating dangerous interactions that are unavoidable in daily life. Part of the navigation can be understood as establishing and maintaining priorities. When a person has died, for example, attending to that person's body, burying them and caring for the family are more important than Temple service.

The Gospels, too, portray Jesus as addressing the issue of life and well-being in this regard. His response to a debilitating impurity is not to challenge or eliminate the purity system but to eliminate the source of the impairment.

MARK 5:25-34

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. [26]She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. [27]She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, [28]for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." [29]Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. [30]Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" [31]And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" [32]He looked all around to see who had done it. [33]But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. [34]He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Mark 5:25-34 is illustrative (cf. Matthew 9:20-22; Luke 8:42b-48). In this account, Jesus encounters a woman who has suffered from a 12-year genital discharge. This would have had profound consequences for her health, comfort, ability to engage in marital sexual relations (Leviticus 18:19), and spiritual well-being. It would not have prevented Jesus or anyone else from touching her; Jesus does not challenge any taboo about simply touching. Nor, in this encounter, does Jesus critique the law that restricts the woman's activity. Instead, a force or power leaves his body and heals the woman, removing the illness that so severely compromised her life because of the purity system. Her life is transformed not by changing the system within which she lives but by changing the individual circumstances that led to her disadvantaged condition. There certainly are times when systems need to be changed in order to make possible the dignity of life and the well-being of individuals, but Jesus is not shown to engage the Torah purity system as one of those evil or broken systems.

In general, the Gospel writers depict Jesus as someone whose life was lived within and shaped by the concept of purity and its communal functions. Luke's Gospel portrays this from the very beginning of Jesus' life, when his parents go to the Temple for "purification" after his birth (Luke 2:22-24). In his teaching about what defiles a person (Mark 7:18-23), Jesus draws an analogy based on a central principle of the purity system — that what comes out of a person conveys impurity. In everyday life, this would be understood as blood, semen or other bodily fluids; in the analogy, Jesus is shown to broaden the sources to include the evil that comes out of a person's heart, mouth and intention.

This topic is complex, and a full treatment would offer a deeper understanding of how Judaism maps objects within the world, categorizing them as pure or impure, holy or profane. This symbolic system takes time to understand, but it was part of the world that Jesus not only assumed but also cherished. At the center of it all stands a God whose holiness was both life-giving and dangerous (cf. Leviticus 10). The concern for ritual purity therefore was centered in activities related to the Jerusalem Temple, the symbol and center of God's presence. Reaching out into the community from there, the system compassionately afforded one the opportunity to interact safely with the holy God, even while one daily encountered sources of ritual impurity.

WHAT WE CAN DO

On the whole, the Gospels rarely show Jesus in situations that entail ritual purity or impurity. The idea that he consistently, radically or fundamentally opposed the purity system, or that he frees people from it, is thoroughly unfounded. Where ritual impurity does appear, as in the example of the hemorrhaging woman in Mark 5, we can correct listeners' misunderstanding by emphasizing that the story is about healing, not about purity. We also need to be cautious about assuming that purity issues are present without evidence of that in the biblical text.

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4. THE HISTORICAL SETTINGS OF THE GOSPELS

PROBLEMATIC: God sent Jesus to correct and complete what God had begun in biblical Israel. The Judaism of Jesus' day had warped God's covenant into a deadening burden, which Jesus eliminated by showing and being what God had really meant the covenant to be.

BETTER: As the Word of God made flesh, whose spirit leads the church into all truth (John 3:14; 14:26; 16:13), Jesus addresses every generation in language and images that are specifically meaningful to their time. So, too, did the Word of God as it came to biblical Israel and as it comes to the Jewish community (and others) today. The differences between the words that various communities hear as the Word of God do not demand a choice between them but can be understood as developing and expanding our understanding of God's Word. Thus, we understand, for example, the value of four different Gospels and 150 different psalms; and thus, we can begin to value the different understandings of covenant that we find within the Old and New Testaments and in ongoing communities of God's people.

The Gospels reflect the times in which they were written at least as much as they do the time of Jesus' life that they narrate. The authors and communities of 70-100 CE were shaped by the devastating destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, a widening rift between those who followed Jesus and those who followed the early rabbis, and the suspicion with which Roman authorities regarded them. Each of these factors has set a stumbling block in the text of the Gospels that can trip up a reader. Each can be recognized and each can be carefully transposed to our times, leaving the Gospel message intact while minimizing inaccurate and unintended antagonism.

STUMBLE 1

A destroyed Temple *sets up* Images of Jesus as the "New Temple," as in:

Mark 1:2, quoting Isaiah 40:3 — John prepares the way of "the Lord."

Mark 15:38 and parallels — The Temple curtain is torn at Jesus' death.

John 2:20-21 — Prediction about Temple destruction and reconstruction is about "the temple of his body."

Mark 11:15-19 and parallels — Jesus challenges Temple practices.

Background:

After the Temple fell to the Romans in 70 CE, the question of God's presence among the people became acute. Rabbinic Jews located Temple holiness in the Torah and its lifestyle. The Torah became a kind of portable Temple, and Jewish households were to continue a form of holiness akin to the priestly system in the Temple. By contrast, the Jesus community located Temple holiness in Jesus. Even so, the Jesus group did not reject the Temple in principle. The book of Acts shows the earliest Jesus community in Jerusalem continuing to pray at the Temple after the resurrection, as well as Paul offering sacrifice there. Indeed, prior to the crisis of 70 CE, there is very little in the literature of the Jesus communities that criticizes the Temple at all.

The passages above were framed in the context of that crisis in order to give clear, compelling reassurance to a frightened community. The tearing of the Temple veil need not be a symbol of judgment on the Temple; it has been seen as an image of God in mourning, tearing God's own clothing — the veil — in grief at the Temple's loss. The images that show Jesus as the new Temple focus positively and narrowly on Jesus as the continuing place of God's presence now that the Temple cannot be God's home on earth. We saw in section 3 above that the Torah came to serve a similar function in rabbinic Judaism.

"New Temple" is not the only way that Christians see God present in the world, though. Paul says our bodies are "God's temple" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Already in the New Testament, God is shown as present in sacraments (Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29), "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40, 45) and the unfolding of Israel's Scriptures (Luke 24:35). Luther urged the faithful to be "little Christs" to the neighbor. God is felt by many people to be present in nature, meditation and relationships.

Rather than setting "Jesus as Temple" against either the old Temple or the Judaism of the rabbis, we can present the image as a victory over the powers that would destroy God's presence in the world. These are represented in the Romans who destroyed the Temple in 70 CE. Though they could destroy the Temple, God remained faithful to being present with God's people, now seen by Christians in the risen Christ, Word, Sacrament, community and humble service. (Jews today see God's presence in the Torah, prayers and humble service.)

WHAT WE CAN DO

Emphasize God's promise and power to be present with us in any way necessary and in every circumstance, not a preference of God to be present in Jesus rather than in the Temple.

Ask what worldly powers now try to eliminate God from the world. How does God remain present to us despite any apparent victories of those powers?

STUMBLE 2

Competition among Jewish communities *sets up* stories about conflicts between Jesus and other Jewish leaders, as in:

Mark 7:1-23; Luke 6:1-11 — Handwashing, food laws, sabbath.

Matthew 23 — Woes against the Pharisees.

Matthew 5:21-48 — "You have heard . . . . But I say to you . . ."

Background:

In claiming to be the legitimate heir to the legacy and promises of biblical Israel, the gospel communities understood that legacy in terms that distinguished them from the emerging rabbinic Jewish communities. On both sides of the dispute, differences and distinctiveness tended to be emphasized, even exaggerated.

While the church faces challenges to its legitimacy in every age, including our own, the connection to biblical Israel that was central to the gospel communities' conflicts is no longer a significant point of contention. We do not need to prove our integrity as worshipers of the God of biblical Israel as they did. Yet even the Gospels do not show Jesus devaluing the Torah, as though he were in competition with it. Rather, he values it as he interprets and builds on it, applying it for his community. The positive message of these scenes is that Jesus brings his followers into the community, service and worship of the God of Israel, the creator of heaven and earth, together with Jews. Today, we also celebrate a diversity of Christian practices in Christ's one church, as we learn from one another's perspectives and insights.

WHAT WE CAN DO

We can temper (or abolish!) our embrace of victimhood and vulnerability, as though we lived under the same threats as the early church. Our values often parallel and echo those of the Jewish community in ways that we can affirm. As we have learned to do in the ecumenical movement of churches, so we can also see communities beyond the Christian church as places where God continues to be at work, in ways that can sharpen and deepen our understandings of God and faith.

STUMBLE 3

Prejudice and suspicion from a powerful majority *sets up* Softened portrayals of Roman power and authorities, as in:

Matthew 27:15-26 — Pontius Pilate disposes of Jesus' case.

John 19:6, 16 — Pontius Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified.

Matthew 17:24-27; 22:15-22 — Jesus, taxes and the empire.

Background:

People subject to Rome were required to offer sacrifices and worship to the emperor. Jews were exempted from this because of Roman respect for the antiquity and civility of "Jewish law." After the fall of the Temple in 70 CE, Roman authorities began to question the legitimacy of the gospel communities' claim to be covered by that exemption, leading the Gospel writers to minimize any image of conflict between Jesus and the Roman authorities and to shift responsibility for Jesus' death away from Pontius Pilate.

Historically, it is inconceivable that a Roman governor such as Pilate would have allowed anyone to exercise the power of execution within his domain. Pilate was totally in charge in Jerusalem; the Jewish high priest, Caiaphas, held his leadership position only at Pilate's pleasure. It is implausible at best, therefore, that Caiaphas or any other Jewish leader or group would be able to accomplish or to compel an act of capital punishment. As they write their Gospels, though, the evangelists do shift responsibility from Pilate to Jewish leaders, with the dynamic growing more intense across the quarter century when the four Gospels were completed. This reflects the increasing importance of positive Christian relations with Rome as the separation from other Jewish communities increased.

Paul, the Gospels, and a classic Lenten hymn all testify to human sin — and our personal sin, in particular — as responsible for Jesus' death: "I it was denied thee; I crucified thee." ("Ah, Holy Jesus," ELW 349, verse 2) The focus should be not on what happened in the first century CE but on the intrinsic significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, as God's redemption of the sin that would otherwise destroy us. This is Luther's theology of the cross, a word of life that should never be turned toward crucifying, mocking, scourging, demeaning or condemning anyone.

The self-incrimination of "the people" in Matthew 27:25, "his blood be on us and on our children," deserves specific attention, given two facts: (a) It is highly unlikely that a crowd of people would ever really articulate this self-cursing sentiment, and (b) Through many centuries, this verse was cited as the basis for authenticating the deicide charge, laying blame for Jesus' death on the Jewish people as a whole.

When Matthew wrote, it was the children of those portrayed in the Gospel who had seen the Temple fall in 70 CE. Matthew may well have meant only to point to that event as a consequence of the betrayal of Jesus. Moreover, the crowd Matthew portrays certainly was not all Jews, since many already lived in far-flung parts of the Roman empire. It was almost as certainly not only Jews but a mixed group including non-Jews gathered in Jerusalem for a major festival. In John 12:20, the Passover is said to have attracted "Greeks," and in Acts 2:5, Luke portrays a similar festival group coming at Pentecost "from every nation under heaven." Even taken literally, then, the "blood curse" could reasonably apply to all humanity and align with the Pauline and long-standing Christian tradition that Jesus "died for our sins."

WHAT WE CAN DO

Emphasize that "the crowd" in the Passion story is all of us, willing to see someone suffer and die rather than stand up for what is right. Clearly state at every mention of Jesus' crucifixion that it was Rome's decision, Rome's power, Rome's form of execution. If the "plain meaning" of the Gospel stories leads people to raise questions, use this historical information to account for the slanted portrayal. We can still find plenty of Gospel in Jesus' death and resurrection without basing it on a misrepresentation of both Pilate and "the Jews."

STUMBLE 4

Distance from the realities of Jesus' context *sets up* The Gospel of John's broad negative stereotypes of Jews, as in:

John 5:16 — "Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath."

John 7:13 — "No one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews."

John 8:31-59 — Jesus argues with "the Jews who had believed in him," telling them, "You are from your father the devil."

John 10:31 — "The Jews took up stones again to stone him."

Background:

The writer of the Gospel of John uses the simple label "the Jews" (*hoi Ioudaioi*) four times as much as the other three Gospel writers combined (71 versus 16). Particularly in the story of the Passion, where the synoptics name specific protagonists such as chief priests, John says it is "the Jews" who take action (18:12; 19:7, 12, 14). We have already seen above (stumble 3) that Pilate is said to hand Jesus over "to them . . . the Jews." (John 19:13-16) In addition, the pattern of controversy between Jesus and various Jewish figures or groups, already familiar from the synoptics, hardens into enmity and violent rejection in John. When dealing with stories in John's Gospel, this portrayal of "the Jews" as implacable enemies of Jesus and the gospel can become overwhelming, leading to repetition of the stereotypes that are then carried over to "the Jews" universally and in all eras.

The situation is complicated by John's use of the same term, "the Jews," in very positive references. "Salvation is from the Jews," according to Jesus in John 4:22. Both across the Jordan and among the Jews who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, many "believed in him" (10:42; 11:45). There seem also to be places where the term is used geographically, rather than ethnically or religiously: it refers to "Judeans," people who live in Judea (7:1; 11:8. Even within a single story, the author of John will switch from a specific group to "the Jews" in the narrative (from 6:22 to 6:41, from 8:13 to 8:22 and from 9:16 to 9:18).

Efforts on the part of biblical scholars to deal with John's portrayals of "the Jews" have ranged widely and have not yet reached a consensus. What does seem clear is that the author of John, the last of the Gospels to be written, had an immediate context in which relations with "the synagogue" were conflicted, even threatening, and that the author had either limited knowledge of or limited concern for specifics about the many different subgroups of Jews who surrounded Jesus in his lifetime. These two factors lent themselves to the literary construction of "the Jews" as a collective character in John's Gospel. As a character, "the Jews" serve narrative and theological purposes more than they reflect accurately the realities of Jesus' own historical experience in the Jewish community of his time.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Approach any passage that refers to "the Jews" in John's Gospel with an extra measure of critical caution. Both in the passage and in its Gospel context, explore how the character that John calls "the Jews" functions to advance the story or to make a theological point. Then, rather than repeating John's language, translate that dynamic into an image or context that will convey it constructively to your hearers. Help your hearers to understand that the picture conveyed in the Gospel was quite specific to its historical setting, which we cannot know thoroughly. Moreover, whatever John's experience was with "the synagogue" in his time and place, as a matter of common sense and lived experience it cannot be true of all Jews everywhere at all times. If we want to apply their character to anyone in today's world, it may be most appropriate to ask how "the Jews" in John resemble ourselves at our spiritual worst and then to hear the Gospel's criticism of them as cautionary for us.

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5. PAUL AMONG JEWS AND GENTILES — AND MARTIN LUTHER'S READING OF PAUL

PROBLEMATIC: The Jewish law was given at Mount Sinai and elaborated in "oral law" that became the Talmud and the system of halakhah — the rules that Jews have to follow. This system was at best temporary and at worst exclusivist, elitist and oppressive. Paul converted from Judaism to announce the good news that faith in Jesus Christ took the place of any law, and Jewish law especially. Only faith in Christ can save Jews or anyone.

BETTER: The Jewish lifestyle described in Torah from Mount Sinai and elaborated in oral law is God's gift of life to the Jews. God redeemed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, where they had been Pharoah's people. The revelation of Torah came as an answer to the question, "How shall we live, now that we are God's people?" For Paul, it remains "holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12), "spiritual" (7:14) and something in which Paul finds "delight" (7:22). For gentiles, non-Jews, God exercised the same pattern of redemption, making them God's people, through Jesus' death and resurrection. Just as Jews are guided by the spirit of God into the lifestyle of Torah, gentiles are guided by the gifts of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 25) into the lifestyle — or law — of love (Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13).

Paul understood that he was an apostle to the gentiles — to non-Jews — for the sake of the Gospel (Galatians 1:16; 2:8-9; and Romans 1:1-6; 11:13; 15:16). The gospel is the good news that God chooses to redeem people from worldly powers that are not of God, thereby making them part of the people of God. "Faith" is the word Paul uses to name the relationship that people have with God as a result of God's redeeming action. Paul knew that this faith existed already in the life of Abraham and that it undergirded the Torah lifestyle of the Jewish people. His mission to the gentiles was to announce that the same relationship, the relationship he called faith, had become available to non-Jews through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Gentiles, too, could be part of the people of God — "Israel" — alongside Jews.

Paul's conflict with other apostles centered on this question: whether the relationship that God had created with gentiles in Jesus was enough to bring those non-Jews fully into the people of God. All the apostles were confident of God's grace to the Jews; they wondered whether what God had done in Jesus was enough to extend grace to the non-Jews. Paul said it was, so the identity of a gentile as part of God's Israel did not depend on adopting the practices of the Torah lifestyle. Other apostles argued that the lifestyle was necessary for full identity as part of Israel. In Paul's time, the arguments were about practices and belonging between and among different groups that could be identified within one people of God, all of whom could be called Israel.

Beginning with early Christian theologians such as Justin Martyr and Augustine, Paul's arguments were read in a very different context and used to answer very different questions. By that time, those theologians were confident of God's grace to the gentiles and wondered instead whether God still loved the Jews. Paul's language was used and interpreted to focus on how two different faith communities were related to one another and what separated them. More than a millennium later, in the 16th century, Martin Luther (an Augustinian by training) used Paul's language in his conflict with the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Like the earlier Christian theologians, Luther built a new structure of understanding around the words "faith," "works," "salvation" and "gospel." The structure addressed powerfully the questions of the day for Luther and went on to shape in significant ways how Lutherans and many Christians have read Paul. A decent respect for this history of the theological tradition can restore Paul's abiding respect for Jews and Judaism, distinguish it from later developments that have their own, separate value, and offer it as a renewed model for our time.

BACKGROUND: THEOLOGICAL ARITHMETIC, DIVISION AND MULTIPLICATION

1. Paul's arithmetic: One God, one faith, many lifestyles.

Romans 3:21-26 — God's righteousness "apart from law."

Romans 10:4 — Christ is the end of the law.

Galatians 2:15-21 — Justified not by works of the law but by Christ-faith.

Philippians 3:7-11 — Righteousness not from the law but through Christ-faith.

We do not know what Paul's experience was on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-19), but we know that it led to his conviction that Jesus was God's Messiah. He also came to believe that non-Jews could be part of the people of God — Israel — by God's gracious gift of faith through the Messiah, Jesus. Thus, Paul's experience led him, as a Jew, to undertake God's mission to the world by proclaiming God's good news in Jesus. This was his call, not a conversion. He remained a Jew all his life, though this mission led him to live among gentiles and to focus on their relationship to God. He says very little, if anything, about how faithful Jews should live.

Jewish life is built on biblical Israel's heritage and has been shaped by the Torah lifestyle that befits God's people. Already in Paul's day, non-Jews had the option to become part of the Jewish people through conversion. They were then expected to take on "the yoke of the kingdom" (blessings before the Sh'ma, the Jewish daily prayer, incorporates this language) by adopting the Torah lifestyle. As Paul worked to build up the Jesus community, the central conflict developed around this question: whether non-Jews in Jesus communities also had to live as Jews.

Paul insisted that they did not. He saw Abraham's faith relationship to God as prior to circumcision and prior to the faith practices of the Torah given at Sinai (Galatians 3; 5:2-6; and Romans 3:27–4:17; 9:6-18; 10:5-13). He also knew that God's saving power in the Exodus came prior to Sinai. He does not challenge the Torah-shaped life of Jews as though it were deficient. He does, though, affirm that it follows God's creation of a redeeming relationship with Israel. Therefore, it does not precede, create or condition that relationship. Faithful Torah life is, rather, expressive of living in the relationship.

PAUL AND FAITH

The long history of Christian theology has given "faith" different varieties of meaning from what Paul meant. While Christians today may understand faith as something one believes about Jesus, or as a relationship of trust in Jesus, or as commitment to a community gathered around Jesus, Paul sees it as something that existed prior to Jesus.

Faith is what Abraham had, and his faith became the model for all people (Galatians 3:8 and Romans 3:30; 4:22). Faith is what some in Israel misunderstood, and as a consequence they failed to fulfill the Torah lifestyle (Romans 9:32). Faith is, in short, a gift of God for the Jews and for all people. Specifically, it is the relationship that God creates with us when God brings us into the people of God.

Israel had always known this in its biblical heritage and life, and it became known and effective for all people in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. For Jews, it continues in their communal life. For gentiles, it becomes real through the preaching of what Paul calls "Christ-faith" (variously in Greek as "faith of Christ" and "faith in Christ").

That insistence is what Paul expresses in the passages noted above. He speaks about non-Jews who are joining God's Israel — both Jews and gentiles — through Jesus Christ. For them, righteousness exists apart from the Torah lifestyle. For them, Christ offers the same thing the Torah has been aiming at all along. For them, righteousness and justification are by "Christ-faith," the relationship God creates through Jesus Christ. So,

for them, adopting the Torah lifestyle would be superfluous ("Judaizing" — Galatians 2:14, Judaizing is a term familiar in literature on Christian-Jewish relations, particularly with regard to its condemnation by Paul in Galatians, by early church theologians, and by Martin Luther). If it were made into a requirement for non-Jews to be identified as part of God's people, it would be even worse than superfluous — it would be a flagrant rebuke of the good news.

GALATIANS 3:6-9

Just as Abraham "was related to God in faith, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,"[7]so, you realize, those who are of faith are the descendants of Abraham. [8]And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles by the faith relationship, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the gentiles shall be blessed in you."[9]For this reason, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham through the faith relationship. (NRSV, amended)

For Jews, though, righteousness and justification and the gifts of the spirit through Torah are already part of what they know, have, and, one hopes, live. Gentiles in Christ are simply joining them as part of the one Israel of God that has been in view since God told Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through him (Galatians 3:8). This is Paul's arithmetic. The one people of God who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ are added to the one people of God who were redeemed by God in the Exodus, and they add up to one people of God — all Israel (Romans 11:26 — "and so all Israel will be saved."). One plus one equals one!

Faith practices, for Paul, are always about witnessing to the power of the Gospel and serving the good of the neighbor (1 Corinthians 7:17-24; 10:23-33; and Philippians 1:27–2:4). Therefore, non-Jews and Jews living together in a Jesus community need to base their respective faith practices on those objectives. This can allow for Jews to practice the Torah and for non-Jews to live differently, united in the relationship ("faith") by which God has drawn them all into one body. That body, for Paul, is both "Israel" and "of Christ," in a way that holds those two realities together in God's redemptive grace.

GALATIANS 3:28-29

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. [29]And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Holding that body together was a central aim of Paul's ministry. He seems to have pursued it by focusing on the faith that Jews and non-Jews share. Torah practice from non-Jews was not wrong because it was Torah; it was wrong because it could displace the shared faith from its central position and rupture the unity of the body. In the world's experience even until today, Paul's vision of unity among all those who share the faith of Abraham has not been realized. Later readers of Paul would therefore understand him in terms of the later separation between Jews and Christians. They came to read his challenge to Torah much more broadly and fundamentally than he ever intended.

2. Augustine's division: To be "this" you must be "not that."

Augustine was one of the most influential of those later readers of Paul. He wrote theology in the early fifth century CE for a Roman Empire that had been made Christian under a series of fourth-century emperors. Jews were legally distinguished from Christians in the empire and treated unequally under the law unless and until they converted to the different religion of Christianity. Building on the conflict language in Paul and in early Christian theologians such as Tertullian and Justin Martyr, Christian bishops in the empire looked at Jews as condemned and rejected by God for their participation in Jesus' execution and their refusal to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

In that context, Augustine had to account for the continuing presence of the Jewish community. If they had been condemned, why were they still around? Augustine's proposal picked up on a line of thinking that had developed among the earlier bishops and theologians. God was maintaining the Jewish community in the world to be the opposite of what Christians are. Thus, Jews became for Augustine the paradigm of what opposition to God and Christ must be. Ironically, if tragically, the division that Paul so ardently sought to avoid became essential to Christian theology and helped to shape it in every succeeding century, even to our own day. Part of the framework of this fateful division was to set "law" and "legalism" against "gospel" and "grace."

3. Luther's multiplication: The pope, the devil and everything evil are like the Jews.

In the 16th century, Martin Luther struggled against a religious system in the Roman Catholic church that he saw as contrary to the free gift and grace of the gospel. It appeared to him to withhold the gifts of God from people until they produced something of value for the church. In the paradigm he had learned from Augustine and church tradition, this opposition to the gospel meant that the papacy had become like the "Judaizers" of the Bible: they legalistically demanded obedience to certain laws and practices from people before they would bless them with forgiveness, life and grace.

As Luther's theology developed, the contrast between free grace and earned reward became fundamental. Everything that opposed his understanding of the gospel could be clustered under the heading of "Jewish" or "Judaizing." Skillful Augustinian that he was, Luther saw the image of a Jewish rebellion against God multiplied throughout the world until it encompassed all humanity as the essence of sin.

Luther's limited experience with the Jewish community multiplied the problem even more. As a young pastor and professor, he was convinced that Jews had never heard the gospel in its truth and purity from the church. Therefore, they could not be blamed for refusing to heed it. By the end of his career, when he had been preaching that gospel for three decades, he could no longer excuse the Jews on the ground of ignorance. Moreover, he saw their continuing "unbelief" as a threat to the social order and a potential cause for God's wrath. His writings against them in the last years of his life are scathing, suggesting that even violent and deadly consequences were justified. The ELCA in 1994 rejected Luther's invective and pledged itself "to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people."

"AGAINST THE JEWS" — SUPERSESSIONIST OR REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

Among the early Christian theologians, there developed a form of writing known as *adversus Judaeos*, "against the Jews." It taught the truth of Christian doctrine as an explicit contrast to Jewish belief and practice. The basis for it was the idea that the Jews had lost their claim to God's grace and promises by their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Instead, Christians now constituted the true people of God, the "new Israel," the "true Israel." This interpretive foundation shaped many dimensions of Christian theology for centuries, particularly in the Roman, or Western, tradition. In modern times, this approach has been referred to as supersessionism and as replacement theology.

MOVING FORWARD

The church has always tested its received wisdom and tradition against the spirit of Christ to determine its fit with the present time. So, we must now also do with this posture "against the Jews," which came into theology quite early and spread throughout its systems. Even in the New Testament we can see the beginning of its impact, but more important is the way in which its widespread acceptance has led to reading the New Testament against its own meaning.

Testing the tradition will undo misunderstandings of Paul that developed in relation to later circumstances and conflicts. It will also deepen our reading of Paul's positive message about God's gracious gift of life in the spirit and the relationship with God that it creates, which we know as faith. Several key passages and themes appear in the Revised Common Lectionary and can serve as examples of this process.

Romans 3:19-28 — As the second lesson each year on Reformation Sunday, this reading needs careful attention. The long habit of reading Paul here in light of Luther's critique of the Pope's "Judaizing" tendencies is a dangerous one. Paul opens the way for gentiles to enter into the relationship that previously only Jews have had; he does not categorically delegitimize that relationship as Jews know it. Indeed, it is a relationship that Paul grounds in the figure and faith of Abraham as the "father of us all" (4:16), both "the circumcised" Jews and "the uncircumcised" gentiles (4:11-12). Jewish hope had long envisioned the inclusion of the gentiles in the fulfillment of God's promises (Isaiah 2:2-3). The point of righteousness being manifested "apart from law" is to make it available to gentiles without the Jewish lifestyle, "or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of gentiles also?" (Romans 3:29). It is not the Torah in itself, but sin working through the Torah, that deceives and misleads (7:7-12), and it does so not only through the Jewish law from Sinai but also through every sense of law that any people knows (1:19-21; 2:12-16).

ROMANS 3:21-24

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, [22]the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, [23]since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; [24]they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 10:4 — The statement "Christ is the end of the Torah" does not actually appear in the Revised Common Lectionary readings. However, the passage that follows, 10:5-15, does appear in Lectionary 19 of Year A, as part of the 16-week sequential reading of Romans, and in Lent 1 of Year C. Romans 10:4 has long been an interpretive crux, and its ambiguity and difficulty should not be obscured by overconfident claims to understand what "the end of the Torah" means. If it is taken as "goal" or "aim," Christ does not necessarily bring the Jewish lifestyle to an end. Rather, through the announcement that Christ's death and resurrection bring redemption to non-Jews and draw them into the faith relationship with God, God achieves something that has been integral to the faith of Abraham and the lifestyle that accompanies it.

ROMANS 9:31-32

Israel…did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone.

Even in its meaning as "termination," the context suggests that it is not the Torah itself that comes to an end, let alone Judaism as a whole. Rather, it is the Torah's ability to mislead people regarding a right relationship with God that can no longer stand. The right relationship starts with God's redemption and is fully established by it; lifestyle then follows. This is also what Paul probably means in Romans 9:31-32 when he says that Israel has stumbled over the stumbling stone. They did not achieve "righteousness" or "fulfillment of the Torah," because they "did not strive

for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works." Paul's judgment is that some in Israel (some, not all; see 9:6; 11:5, 7) have made the Torah-lifestyle a condition or requirement rather than a gift and result. It was placed in Zion for Israel's blessing, but some had mistaken it for a burden. Sadly, that is also how it was misunderstood by Christians, leading to centuries of accusation that Judaism is a religion of legalism that demands people's scrupulous observance of even petty instructions in order to be loved and accepted by God.

ROMANS 11:1, 11, 28-29

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!.... [11]But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles….

[28]As regards the gospel they are enemies for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; [29]for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (NRSV emended)

For Paul, though, those Jews who already have a proper understanding of grace, faith and lifestyle within the Jewish framework of Exodus and Torah remain the dynamic paradigm for everyone with whom God creates a faith relationship. For them, Christ-faith is superfluous, since they already have a faith relationship with God like Abraham's. It is not Judaism that is wrong, although some Jews, like some in the Jesus community, will fail to understand what God is doing. Paul goes on to say that this failure among the Jews is part of the purpose of God, something that he calls a "mystery" (11:25). Even though "as regards the gospel" for Paul's gentile readers they have become "enemies," they remain "beloved" with regard to their election through the ancestors of Israel (11:28, where the Greek text does not say they are enemies "of God," as most translations insert; see also 9:4-5). The decisive factor for Paul is not that everyone would share his belief about Jesus as the Messiah, but that Jews and gentiles alike recognize the good news of God: that a right relationship with God is the one that God creates by grace, through redemption. Some have experienced this in the Exodus, and some have experienced it in Jesus' death and resurrection.

According to Paul, Jews could test their own understanding against what God has done in Jesus for gentiles, since God is one (1 Corinthians 8:6; Romans 3:29). What they will find there will be a reminder and reiteration, in new terms, of what they, as Jews, already have. Conversely, the Jesus-community — those of Christ-faith — can understand themselves in terms of what God has been doing in the Jewish community. Thus, when gentiles come into Christ-faith through God's grace, they become "those who share the faith of Abraham" (4:16); they have been "grafted in" to the holy root, part of the dough that is made holy by the holiness of its first fruits (11:16-17). Whatever the exact message that Paul may have intended by saying "Christ is the end of the Torah," he could not have meant that Christ brought the end of Judaism. In the end, he reaffirms that "the gifts and promises of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29) and that "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). For him, Judaism continued as the people of God alongside the Jesus communities that he shepherded, just as it does alongside the church today.

Philippians 3:7-11; Galatians 2:15-21 — In both passages, Paul speaks about righteousness and justification in relation to his former life, before he took up the commission to preach God's good news to gentiles. Both are strongly shaped by the dynamics of the specific communities to which Paul is writing and the witness he believes will best support them in maintaining the unity of God's one Israel.

Philippians 3:7-11 is the second lesson on the fifth Sunday in Lent of Year C. Here, Paul is urging the congregation to hold on through conflict and persecution. He shapes his encouragement around the congregation imitating him (3:17; 4:9), as his life has been shaped around imitating Christ (1:20-21, 29-30; 2:17; 3:10-12, 21). His opposition is to those who misrepresent Christ out of envy, rivalry or partisanship (1:15-17) or who threaten the unity of the congregation (1:27-2:4) with their minds set on earthly things (3:19). They clearly advocate the circumcision of gentiles as necessary for faith and salvation, and Paul opposes it. Yet his opposition is not a rejection of Judaism and its symbols in general. Indeed, he holds his own "fleshly" credentials in such high regard that it is their forfeiture that shows the measure of his dedication to his calling (3:4-11); were they worthless, he would hardly notice that he had forfeited them.

The RCL includes the Galatians passage as part of Lectionary 11 in Pentecost of Year C. Galatians is the letter in which Paul most strongly describes and argues against the opponents who want to make Torah lifestyle a requirement of those who have received Christ-faith. Because he perceives that the Galatians are under a serious threat to their identity as people of God, he identifies with them as strongly as possible. He surely is of God's people, a "Jew by birth" (2:15). Since he believes that the relationship the Galatians have with God, Christ-faith, is the same relationship that Abraham had and that he himself has, it follows that they are also of God's people. To express this, he takes the radical step of reversing the expected argument. Before even explaining that they are justified by Abraham-faith (3:6-9), he emphasizes the validity of their relationship by saying that he is justified by Christ-faith. Thus, the two relationships — the one he has known as a Jew and the one in which the Galatians live as a Jesus community — are in fact one relationship, one faith, experienced by Jews and gentiles through different historical encounters with God.

GALATIANS 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned
and guarded under the law until faith would
be revealed. [24]Therefore the law was our
disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might
be justified by faith. [25]But now that faith has come,
we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, [26]for
in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through
faith. [27]As many of you as were baptized into
Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28]There
is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave
or free, there is no longer male and female; for all
of you are one in Christ Jesus. [29]And if you belong
to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs
according to the promise.

Galatians 3:23-29 — The second lesson of Lectionary 12 in Pentecost of Year C includes Paul's reference to the law as the "disciplinarian" under which "we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed" (3:23-24). As with Romans 10:4 ("Christ is the end of the law"), we must read this in the full context of what Paul says about God, Israel, Jews, gentiles, grace, Torah, Christ and faith. We must also recall that, in Galatians particularly, Paul is addressing the issues of non-Jews in a Jesus community. Accordingly, while in 3:17, as part of a different argument, Paul specifically names the Torah from Sinai, his understanding of "law" as a guardian until faith is revealed seems to be somewhat broader. In Chapter 4, he goes on to say that the "guardians and trustees" under which "we" were "enslaved" are "elemental spirits of the world . . . beings that by nature are not gods" (4:2, 8). It is these from which Paul and his community have been freed to become heirs of God along with Abraham (3:14, 29).

Moreover, Paul is not attempting to make sense of the Torah for Jews in this passage. He is precisely working to help the Galatians understand that non-Jews do not need to adopt the Torah lifestyle. From the perspective of a gentile who was hearing from Paul's opponents that the Torah lifestyle was necessary for their salvation, it might appear that Jewish practice of the lifestyle validates the argument against Paul. The practice of some non-Jews who were "God-fearers," participants in synagogue life without having undertaken full conversion, might also do so. Paul, in countering the argument, says that such practices may have had some legitimate value in other circumstances, but his readers are not in those circumstances. Because of their Christ-faith, they are already fully part of God's people.

WHAT WE CAN DO

In general, the past half-century of study in Paul's writings has increasingly shown that he thought and taught from within a personal perspective of Pharisaic Judaism with a specific focus on the inclusion of non-Jews as fully part of the people of God alongside Jews. Despite the complexities, this yields a fairly simple principle for our reading of Paul: **Paul's letters never set the Jesus community or its Christ-faith in opposition to Judaism in general.** When we are tempted to frame Paul's argument or proclamation in those terms, we must stop and ask again what he means. Recall that "faith" is the relationship that God creates with people – both Jews and gentiles. Recall that Paul is addressing the issue of including gentiles with Jews in the one people of God, albeit with different histories of being brought in and with different lifestyles. Resist the temptation to make "Jews" and "Jewish" the opposite of whatever benefit Jesus has brought to the world. Paul saw Jesus bringing to non-Jews exactly the benefits that Jews already knew in their Jewish life.

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6. JUDAISMS OF THE FIRST CENTURY AND THE 21ST CENTURY

PROBLEMATIC: The Judaism portrayed in the New Testament continues to be essentially the same as Judaism today. Even if details have shifted with progress and the passage of time, the heart of the religion is the same. What the New Testament challenges and criticizes in Jewish figures can still be charged categorically against Jews and Judaism today, including in their national life as the State of Israel.

BETTER: Jews and Judaism in the New Testament are characters in stories written by people, most often other Jews, who disagreed with what they represented on some key points about God, Jesus and faithful life. The writers often described those characters in ways that would emphasize the disagreements and bolster their own ideas as correct. We should exercise care in presenting the New Testament picture as accurate, or representative, even of Jews and Judaism in its own time.

Furthermore, Judaism has developed in many ways and several broad directions over the 2,000 years since the New Testament was written. In particular, the Jewish community we might think of as "most traditional" or most representative of ancient Judaism, the ultra-Orthodox and hasidim, crystallized in fact as a response to a "modernized" Jewish community less than 200 years ago. Similarly, another figure that might stand in for "the Jews" in our thinking is the State of Israel, which is diverse and multiethnic. We do well to respect Judaism as a living, dynamic community today and through the ages, and to look at Jews in the New Testament as characters drawn by the New Testament authors to serve Christian theologies.

We encounter a particular challenge when we work with any biblical passages that include reference to Jews or Jewish practices. The challenge lies in managing the understandable — but treacherous — tendency to associate those references with Jews and Judaism of our own time. We do not do this with the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, tax collectors or others we encounter in the Bible's stories. The continuity of Judaism and Jewish peoplehood from ancient times, though, taken together with the long history of anti-Jewish legislation and practice in Western European Christian culture, opens us to this temptation without our noticing it.

TEMPTATION 1 — Portraying all first-century Jews as either opponents of Jesus or believers in Jesus.

It is impossible to say that "all first-century Jews" were anything in particular other than Jews. Ancient historians such as Josephus portrayed various Jewish groups and noted their differences. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls reframed our reading of ancient Jewish texts in a fundamental way: rather than seeing a unified Judaism that gradually fragmented into several key groups, we now recognize that there was already a broad spectrum of Jewish groups in the centuries before Jesus. Being Jewish was not only — or even primarily — a religious identity. It included religion, but it named a wider identity that drew in ethnic, political, social and cultural factors as well, and that allowed for great diversity under the umbrella identity of "Jewish."

The Jesus communities of the New Testament were part of this Jewish spectrum. Even they were not all located in the same place or in a definable cluster on the spectrum. Only their common recognition of Jesus as Lord can make them a group distinct from the others. As with "North/South" in discussions of the Civil War and "left/right" in contemporary politics, a complex set of relationships is oversimplified when any one characteristic is used to create binary categories. At least before the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE and perhaps for quite some time even after that, there is no contrast of "Jewish" and "Christian" as entirely separate religions, and certainly not as we know them.

The Gospels themselves recognize that Jews responded to Jesus differently. The 12 disciples and the women who were the first witnesses to the resurrection were Jews, as were Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Herod Antipas, who was tetrach of Perea and Galilee, and the priests of Jerusalem responded quite differently to Jesus. The only person of whom Jesus is reported to say, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" is "one of the scribes" (Mark 12:28-34). Paul's letters and the book of Acts refer to many Jews, particularly women, who supported and gave leadership to the early Jesus communities. Yet the majority of first-century Jews, in all likelihood, never heard of Jesus and so didn't respond to him in any way.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Be specific in referring to characters in the Bible rather than using any group identity that would generalize them without evidence. (See also the next "temptation" for more on group identities.)

Highlight the behavior or attitude that is at issue, not the person. When referring to the person, recognize their failing as a common human experience, not something specific to Jews.

TEMPTATION 2 **Contrasting Christianity with Judaism as competing, mutually exclusive options.**

All the New Testament writers make a case for the power and possibility of the gospel in their communities. As with any advocacy or persuasive writing, strong contrasts are effective in leading people to realize what is at stake and to appreciate the depth of the writer's conviction. The portrayal of alternative positions and groups is shaped with the intent of making the choice and the preference as clear as possible. It is not meant to offer a neutral — let alone sympathetic — description. In that vein, such depictions are more accurately called "caricatures," even as the figures serve as characters in the story being told.

For example, Matthew includes stories of Jesus being "tempted" (peiradzo) six times. The first two, in Chapter 4, concern the devil's temptation of him in wilderness. In the other four the subjects of the verb are: Pharisees and Sadducees (16:1), Pharisees (19:3), Pharisee-disciples and Herodians (22:18) and a lawyer of the Pharisees (22:35). The last two lead into the story of Jesus' sustained denunciation of the "scribes and Pharisees" in Matthew 23. In building this composite picture, Matthew lets the theme of the devil's opposition to Jesus take over the shaping of the stories, such that he pairs the figure of the Pharisees with various groups that would not have been their allies historically (also with the high priest in 27:62). The point for Matthew is that Jesus repeatedly faced diabolical temptation and denounced it. The literary effect is powerful, but the historical picture is unlikely at best.

For the Gospel writers, in particular, the cultural and historical distance between their communities and the time of Jesus is significant. They were already being influenced by the fairly rapid shift toward a Gentile majority among the Jesus-believers, so firsthand familiarity with other Jews and varieties of Judaism was waning. The groups they portrayed as interacting with Jesus were no longer present or, at the very least, were not functioning as they had before the destruction of the Temple. It is unlikely that any of the Gospels were composed in Jerusalem, where their stories locate much of Jesus' conflict with Jewish figures. This makes the writers' references to Jewish groups there more a matter of projection than of reporting.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Refer to the Gospel stories about Jesus as just that: stories. They are Matthew's stories, Mark's stories, etc., about Jesus, and they have come into the New Testament as stories that witness to the risen Christ, not necessarily to the experience of Jesus in his lifetime. Nor do the characters function the same way across the Gospels; each writer fashions them differently to serve in the Gospel story. For example, in relating the confrontation with the Pharisee-lawyer in Matthew 22:34-40, one can say:

> Matthew challenges any attempt to narrow the range of God's claim on our lives. The lawyer in the story who tempts Jesus echoes the figure of the devil who tempted Jesus. The fact that he is portrayed as a Pharisee builds on Matthew's caricature of that school of Jewish thought as demonic, a caricature that Mathew later builds into Jesus' denunciation of hypocrisy and blindness.

As with temptation #1 above, stories of conflict focus on the behavior or attitude being challenged and recognize that it is something to which anyone can be susceptible. Avoid making the Jewishness of the figure in the Gospel story the source of the problem; rather, it is their human sinfulness — and ours.

TEMPTATION 3 **Referring to Jews and Judaism today as though there is only one such entity.**

It is no accident that Jews today will say of their own experience, "Where there are two Jews, there are three opinions." Not only are Judaism and the collective Jewish community characterized by wide diversity, Jews today divide along very different lines from those in the first century. The experience of the European Enlightenment has arguably had as much impact on Jewish thought and identity as the fall of the Temple did in 70 CE. In its wake, several modern movements have developed within Judaism, including the Reform, Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements. As with Christian denominations, issues of Scriptural and personal authority, pluralism and the understanding of God in a scientific age present challenges and create divisions among the movements and within them. Core concepts such as Torah, ritual purity, ethics, Israel and life after death are open to a variety of Jewish understandings. Even an experience as deep and broadly felt as the Shoah — the Holocaust — evokes a variety of responses within the Jewish world.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Refer to contemporary Jews only in relation to the issues that are significant within their own communities. Recognize the complexity that characterizes the collective Jewish communities and their various approaches to many issues.

Whenever possible, use references to Jews and Judaism to illustrate issues and challenges that are common to those we face as Christians (without making them the foil against which our own responses emerge as superior). Use authentic examples from Jewish life and literature to exemplify positive values that you wish to emphasize.

TEMPTATION 4 Making Zionism into a "new Pharisaism."

We noted above, in section 2 (p. 10), that we do well to avoid such generalities as "legalism," "hypocrisy" and "Pharisaism" when describing the Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus in the conflict stories in the Gospels. Those generalizations can create unfounded caricatures about all Jews and the essential character of Judaism. In a similar way, broad denunciations of Zionism and the State of Israel can make it difficult for listeners to understand the place of Israel in the thought and life of the Jewish people. The analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, let alone its resolution, lies well beyond the scope of this guide. In the context of speaking about the State of Israel in our preaching and teaching, that conflict should not overwhelm the picture or distort its reality.

Zionism is the movement for national self-expression by the Jewish people. It has deep roots both in the memory of ancient Jewish sovereignty and as a reaction to nearly two millennia of Jewish exile among the nations of the world. In exile from their biblical homeland, Jews were denied citizenship and expulsion was a constant threat. In its broadest sense, Zionism embraces any effort to build up and enhance the authentic expression of Jewish life in the world. For nearly all those who embrace Zionism, the existence of a sovereign nation-state identified with the Jewish people is an essential foundation for Jewish self-expression anywhere. The State of Israel has been that foundation since 1948.

ANTI-JUDAISM, ANTI-SEMITISM AND ANTI-ZIONISM

Anti-Judaism: Opposition to the religion of Judaism as wrong or obsolete.

Anti-Semitism: Opposition to the Jewish people as inherently inferior or harmful.

Anti-Zionism: Opposition to the existence of the State of Israel.

By contrast, people have the right to disagree or argue about the Jewish religion, people and state as long as their integrity, legitimacy and essential right to exist are respected.

Because Judaism is not simply a religion but a cultural identity comprising many different dimensions, the State of Israel functions in Jewish life and thought as something other than simply a modern nation-state or religious wellspring. It is a national home for nearly all the Jewish cultures of the world. It is a treasured haven should world events ever turn against the Jewish people again. It is a place of both memory and hope. It is a symbol of Jewish unity among all the diverse Jewish identities that have developed over the millennia.

The circumstances in which the State of Israel came into existence and has continued to live have embroiled it in ongoing conflict with Arab peoples and Arab states in the region. The rights and well-being of Arab peoples and states are matters of profound concern to us as Christians, as is the Palestinian aspiration for national self-expression. Our efforts to "live out our faith with love and respect for the Jewish people" properly go hand-in-hand with our awareness, accompaniment and advocacy in relation to Palestine and the Palestinians.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Given the integral place of the State of Israel and its Zionist character in Jewish life and thought, our references to them call for the same kind of respect and care we give to other Jewish sancta ("holy things") such as Torah, covenant and peoplehood. When we teach about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the parties to that conflict all deserve to be represented as authentically as possible and heard in their integrity and legitimacy. In both preaching and teaching, we must be alert to the temptation to transfer to Zionism or the State of Israel those dangerous caricatures of Jews and Judaism that we are striving to overcome.

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7. LAW AND GOSPEL; PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT

PROBLEMATIC: God made a covenant with biblical Israel, which was embodied in the Jewish law. Because Israel wasn't faithful to the law and because all people are "slaves to sin," God sent Jesus, who fulfills the law and all God's promises and died to save all people from their sins. So the Jewish law has been replaced by Jesus' love command and everyone needs to believe in Jesus in order to be righteous — right with God.

BETTER: God is love and God's grace makes it possible for all people to live in a relationship with God (called "faith"). God's power redeems people from powers greater than themselves that are not God. Thus God redeemed Israel from Egypt. That is gospel — good news. God also gave Israel the gift of the Torah to shape its life of faith, which God promised Abraham would be a blessing to all people.

In Jesus, God redeems from the power of sin, just as God redeemed from Pharaoh's power. So, too, God established a relationship — faith — with all who are redeemed from sin and gave a model of sacrificial love in Jesus to shape the life of the redeemed.

As God has been faithful to the promises to Israel, so God will be faithful to the promises to all who are redeemed from sin. "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). Sin is not the essential starting point for understanding God's redemptive, covenantal ways; the starting point is God's love and grace, creating the relationship of faith with Abraham (Romans 4:9-25) and with all whom God redeems. Jesus fulfilled God's promises to Israel in the sense that his life, death and resurrection vindicated the character of the promises and made them known for all people. At the same time, they may yet be fulfilled in the experience of the Jewish community, as well as other of God's children, in other ways.

A. Law and Gospel: In the view of Martin Luther, God's one Word, addressed to the world, comes to us as law or gospel, depending on our circumstances. The Word is good in both encounters. The law restrains evil; it also demands, accuses and weighs all human activity in the world, leading us to recognize and try to walk in God's more righteous ways. The gospel grants forgiveness, creates new life and gives hope.

Too often, Christians have mistaken the law's demands and accusations to be a sign that the law itself is negative or bad. Negative connotations about Judaism, with its high regard for the Torah, easily develop from this mistake when Torah is erroneously understood as only "law." Similar dynamics can feed a Christian hesitation to engage meaningfully with the Old Testament.

Luther's understanding of law and gospel, however, is far richer than such caricatures make it out to be. As already noted, law and gospel are both dimensions of God's one word to creation; both are good and both are necessary. With the law, God makes demands that indicate how the creation is to live so that it may flourish. Human beings, however, have shown a special propensity for violating this law, thereby inviting death, chaos and destruction into their communities. In calling out our shortcomings, the law exposes our destructiveness to ourselves and to the world, thereby pointing to our need for God's redemptive grace. Luther recognized that in the face of obstinance, one might need to preach words of the law's condemnation. By contrast, in the face of distress, one might need to offer a word of the gospel's promise. Both words have a place in daily life.

This understanding of law is only one part of Luther's model. Another is the law's necessity and value in shaping faithful life within the Christian community and beyond it. This sense aligns more nearly with Jewish understandings, which receive the Torah (insofar as it is law) as a gift at Mount Sinai to shape the life of the people God has redeemed from slavery in Egypt.

GENESIS 21:16-18

And as [Hagar] sat opposite [her son], she lifted up her voice and wept. [17]And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. [18]Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him."

On a related point, some Christians readily assume that the "law" and "gospel" are synonyms for the Old Testament and the New Testament. Though Luther does at times fall into this imagery, a full reading of his biblical interpretation shows that he would see it as a misleading oversimplification. The Old Testament is overflowing with gospel promise, forgiveness and compassion. Luther, who was himself a professor of Bible and particularly of the Old Testament, often pointed to the prophets as exemplary preachers who chastised their communities for their failures and then consoled them with assurances of God's mercy and renewal. Hagar, he said, was tried and tested by her expulsion into the wilderness, and then, as Genesis 21:17 shows, God's word of hope and promise came to comfort her.

For its part, the New Testament can speak about God's judgment just as easily as do Isaiah or Jeremiah. Vivid examples include Matthew's account in Chapter 25 of the scene of final judgment and Paul's excoriation of those who would mislead the Galatians into false hope based on legal observance. Neither testament, as God's word, is without the twin dimensions of that word: law and gospel. When the misconception exists, however, that the two dimensions define the two testaments in an exclusive way, it is all the easier to equate Judaism with law and Christianity with gospel. In fact, both religions value God's redemption and promises and the subsequent elaboration of what faithful life will look like.

WHAT WE CAN DO

When referring to law, gospel and the relationship between them, make clear God's voice in both of them. Learn to see the gospel in God's dealings with Israel, in Judaism. Never equate Judaism with a legalism that God rejects; the Jewish law, or Torah lifestyle, is God's good and gracious will for Jewish life. It is our human penchant for preferring slavery to law over freedom to act responsibly and faithfully that God challenges, as much in Christians as in anyone.

B. Promise and Fulfillment: A parallel dynamic of paired terms that can lead to misunderstanding and misrepresentation occurs with "promise" and "fulfillment." This theme is widespread in Christian practice, liturgy and teaching and is related to law and gospel. For example, the Gospel of Matthew contains 12 fulfillment sayings (Matt 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15, 35; 21:4-5; 29:9-10). Taken as a whole, these passages indicate that Jesus is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Matthew is not alone. Many New Testament books make explicit their belief that Jesus fulfills prophetic hopes voiced in the Old Testament.

That belief expresses and underscores the conviction that there is one God, who has been active in the life of biblical Israel and in the life of Jesus. If we portray Jesus as the sole or final fulfillment of Israel's promises, though, we undercut God's faithfulness to Israel and put limits on God's freedom to bring fulfillment in many ways.

The language of fulfillment should be read in reverse historical sequence — the one who sees a contemporary event as "fulfillment" claims its relationship to a promise. This does not mean that the particular event that is claimed as fulfillment was in view when the promise was made, nor that the promise points to only one event as its exclusive fulfillment. The biblical texts show a remarkable capacity for reinterpretation in light of shifting circumstances. This is all the more true for prophecy, in which the verbally inventive conventions of Hebrew poetry offer ambiguities and metaphors that invite creative interpretation.

The well-known "Immanuel" passage in Isaiah 7 illustrates this point. Verse 14 reads, "Therefore the Lord will personally give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (NRSV, emended). In the broader context of Isaiah's time, the promise is made to King Ahaz and is meant to reassure him during a national crisis (Isaiah 7:1-2). The verse clearly has the prophet's own historical context in mind. Verses 15-16 read:

> He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

The reference here to the "two kings" (Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel; see Isaiah 7:1) clearly indicates that the Immanuel child, already in the womb, will not be old enough to know right from wrong before these two kings, contemporaries of both Isaiah and Ahaz, will fall. When the Assyrian king conquered Aram and Israel within two or three years (2 Kings 16:5-9), the prophecy was fulfilled.

The Gospel of Matthew, centuries later, interprets this same prophecy within a very different horizon. After Mary is found to be with child by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18), Matthew provides its first fulfillment saying: "All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Immanuel'" (Matthew 1:22-23 NRSV, emended). In Isaiah's Hebrew, the word translated above as "young woman" ('almah) lacks the specificity of the English term, "virgin," and is more appropriately understood to be simply a young mother-to-be. The Greek term parthenos, however, does carry the specificity of "virgin," and it is the word used to translate `almah in the Greek translation of Isaiah 7. Reflecting the practice of many in the early church, Matthew may well have read Isaiah in Greek, not in Hebrew. This subtle shift in the translation allowed Matthew to perceive in Isaiah 7 something more than the ancient Israelites may have heard. For Matthew, working in a community where Jesus was recognized as the Messiah of Israel's expectation, the idea of a miraculous, virgin birth could be more than just the time-marker it had been in ancient Israelite geopolitics. It became a support for his messianic claims for Jesus.

The book of Isaiah appears with particular frequency as the first lesson in the Revised Common Lectionary. Careful attention to the dynamics of prophecy and fulfillment becomes crucial in preaching and teaching the Isaiah texts. Recognizing that Jews have understood differently these prophecies from their Scriptures can be helpful in this regard. For example, the servant songs of Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 52-53 have been read by Christians as fulfilled in Jesus. They appear in the lectionary at the Baptism of the Lord in Year A, Lectionary 24 in Pentecost of Year B, and throughout Holy Week, from the Liturgy of the Passion through Good Friday. Jews, however, read the servant as an image of Israel or of the prophet. More broadly, there is a sequence of seven readings from the last third of Isaiah that is read annually in the synagogue as "The Seven of Consolation." These follow the observance of the annual "Memorial Day," the 9th of Av, which commemorates the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem. One could say that the consolation God promises in Isaiah comes to Jews through their commemoration and community, just as it comes to Christians through remembrance and a community gathered around Jesus.

WHAT WE CAN DO

When dealing with a promise to biblical Israel or a fulfillment saying or image in the New Testament, emphasize the faithfulness of God to promises, which God can and does express in many different ways. Avoid portraying the fulfillment of a promise in Jesus as a contrast to its failure or disappointment of hope among the Jewish community. Leave open the possibility of multiple fulfillments in different communities and eras. Don't let Jesus as a fulfillment of God's promise for Christians close off the promise of God to Israel and its hope.

In summary, the following points are important to remember:

- Law in the Christian theological sense is not equal to the Jewish Torah. Luther's understanding of "law" was shaped by his experience of late medieval Roman Catholic practice and theology, absent any direct engagement with Jewish theology or communities. Neither his formulations nor his understanding of law accurately reflects Jewish self-understanding broadly, much less the diversity of either ancient or modern Jewish identities.
- Law and gospel are two dimensions of God's one Word to creation. Law and gospel cannot be separated and applied to texts or groups of people differentially; all of us are subject to the law and seduced by law, and all are included in the gospel promise.
- The language of fulfillment must categorically be read in reverse historical sequence — the one who sees fulfillment in an event claims its relationship to a promise. This does not mean that the promise came with the particular fulfillment in view, nor that it points to only one claim to fulfillment.

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8. WHERE SIN DIVIDES (THROUGH THE CENTER OF OUR OWN HEARTS, NOT BETWEEN GROUPS)

PROBLEMATIC: We are called to be like Mary, not Martha, paying attention to the living Word of Jesus rather than worrying about the details of proper behavior and living up to some arbitrary standard. We should repent like Peter and not betray and despair like Judas. God wants us to feed, clothe, welcome and visit "the least," as the sheep of Matthew 25 do, not ignore them as the goats do.

BETTER: In every one of us there is a Mary and a Martha, a Peter and a Judas, a goat and a sheep. Only by God's grace does the more faithful part of ourselves emerge to be a blessing to the world. Even then, like the sheep, we may not even recognize it when it happens. On our very best days, we remain as fundamentally sinful as ever, relying on God's grace and forgiveness to take our next breath.

The New Testament and the Old Testament contain texts rife with divisions between the faithful and the unfaithful, sinners and righteous, believers and unbelievers, loving and unloving, wise and foolish. These binaries are particularly well represented in wisdom literature, the prophets, and apocalyptic texts such as Daniel and Revelation.

The figures drawn with such stark contrasts are effective in the stories where they appear. They embody in dramatic fashion the starkness of the opposition between God's will and human willfulness, between faithfulness and rebellion. As characters in the biblical narrative, they offer us sharp mirrors for our own lives. However, such writings can also encourage a similar boldness in characterizing the circumstances of our own world. When we do, the line of sin is drawn between one group and another, with God on one side and not the other.

As we try to speak about our world with the kind or sharp clarity we see in the Bible, it is easy to characterize Jews and "unbelievers" as the examples of what — and who — we don't want to be. In the process, we can unintentionally reinforce negative stereotypes and encourage a kind of spiritual arrogance toward other groups.

Central to Martin Luther's understanding of humanity and redemption is the notion that Christians remain, after baptism and throughout life, both saint and sinner at the same time (*simul iustus et peccator*). He points out that it is frequently when we feel we are most clearly on the side of righteousness that we become most dangerous and susceptible to cause harm to others. Luther's anthropology emerges out of his reading of Paul, and especially the book of Romans. There the apostle claims that nobody stands outside of God's judgment: "both Jews and [Gentiles] are under the power of sin" (Romans 3:9). God's law is holy and good, and part of its function is to expose every human being for who they are: a sinner in need of forgiveness.

Every Scriptural writing that draws a stark line between sin and faithfulness, therefore, draws it through the center of our own lives and hearts. Our proper posture before God is "to be drowned and die through daily sorrow for sin and through repentance," and "daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity" (Small Catechism, Holy Baptism #4).

The one line that can be drawn is between God as Creator and all of creation, including every human being. In Christ God entered our experience to redeem us from the power of sin, and Christ died "for all." That expresses God's care and concern for the entire creation, not for only some. All people, including we as preachers and teachers and all in our communities, remain in the tension between the power of Christ's gift of redemption and the power of sin still active among and within us.

JOHN 3:14-15

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, [15]that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

As we encounter familiar texts, particularly from the gospels, in which key themes of Christian faith and hope are the focus, it is important to maintain the line in its proper place: we are on the side of all humanity, and God is the only one on the side of righteousness. Thus, in John 3:14-21, the Gospel lesson for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year B, of the Revised Common Lectionary, the bronze snake of Israel's wilderness experience is the image that establishes the focus of the passage. It is God's own gift to offer respite from the consequences that come when we ignore God's care and concern. Israel applied it to its own wilderness rebellion; John applies it to all people. John goes on to say that it is "people" who "loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Jesus is not lifted up for a singular moment of getting faith, which one then has forever; he is lifted up for all people, who will have moments of loving darkness and will repeatedly need a path back to the light. John affirms that Jesus can be that path for anyone, but finally it is the life that God sends into the world that is the light (John 1:4), and that light existed already for Israel in the wilderness in the glint of a bronze snake.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Keep the spotlight of Scripture's judgment focused on ourselves, so that we do not imply that it falls more heavily on any one group of people than another. Make the journey of sanctification a daily renewal, not a life project that implies we might — now or someday — be farther along the road than others.

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9. THE OLD/NEW RHETORIC OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

PROBLEMATIC: The Letter to the Hebrews is a theological treatise about the superiority of Jesus to nearly every meaningful figure and symbol of biblical Israel. The author convincingly demonstrates the ascendancy of Christianity over Judaism, which has become obsolete and is destined to disappear.

BETTER: The Letter to the Hebrews is an extended message of encouragement to a community that is losing hope and therefore lagging in its perseverance. What they hope for is a new world, which will replace the current world and be more excellent in every way. Biblical Israel's key figures showed faith and perseverance in their hope for God's promises even in this world; they are the role models for the present community of "Hebrews" as they persevere for a hope that looks to a new "world to come."

The Letter to the Hebrews is the New Testament writing that most fully expands the new-covenant promises of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the new-covenant language of some eucharistic traditions into a broad old/new pattern of relationship between biblical Israel and Jesus Christ. The old/new pattern is augmented in this writing with references to Christ as superior to angels (1:14), "worthy of more glory than Moses" (3:3), "made perfect" and "designated by God a high priest" (5:9), having "obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree is the mediator of a better covenant" (8:6). The cumulative effect in Hebrews has influenced formal theology and the popular imagination to conceive of Jesus as superseding and relegating to obsolescence the "old covenant," understood as Judaism.

Several key insights about the cultural and rhetorical frameworks of this letter can lead us in a different direction for teaching and preaching its energetic, courageous gospel message.

INSIGHT 1

Hebrews is encouragement and reassurance, not systematic theology or a treatise on Judaism and Christianity.

The author of this work is explicit about its purpose: to urge steadfastness, perseverance and confidence in a community that is suffering and on the verge of giving up hope. The rhetoric is more like a sermon than a letter, more like a pep talk than a theological discussion. While the voices of some opponents with different messages can be heard in the writing, the focus is on the writer's own conviction and urgent message, not on the failings of any other group.

This insight may be difficult to sustain, given the way that we encounter Hebrews in the lectionary. Typically, we see only a short paragraph of the text, and most of those selected for lectionary reading focus on some aspect of Jesus' character as the savior and high priest of the age to come. This is clearest in the six-week sequence of readings from Hebrews in October and November of Year B in the Revised Common Lectionary. The effect is to hear Hebrews as a set of theological propositions concerning the identity of Jesus, most of which include a contrast with something in the present-age experience of biblical Israel (see insight #2 for more about this). The function of these contrasts to encourage the reader is thereby lost, and into the void enter the demons of a false dichotomy of Israel and Christ, or Judaism and Christianity.

HEBREWS 3:12-14

Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of
you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that
turns away from the living God. [13]But exhort
one another every day, as long as it is called
"today," so that none of you may be hardened by
the deceitfulness of sin. [14]For we have become
partners of Christ, if only we hold our first
confidence firm to the end.

INSIGHT 2

The worldview of the writer differs in fundamental ways from our own.

We live in an age of confidence and optimism about the world around us. Even some people's distress about ecological challenges and sustainability are grounded in a basic belief that creation is good and humans are capable of learning, mastering and managing well its complexity. Whatever our fears about the "end of the world," the activism we see in response to global threats indicates that some of us, at least, are not yet ready to give in to a vision of inevitable decline and the collapse of reality as we know it.

For the author of Hebrews, it was precisely the decline and collapse of reality that lay ahead. This view was shared by those in the Greek philosophical school known as Middle Platonism and by thinkers caught up in apocalyptic imagination. They believed that the decay and disintegration of creation is not about a failure to sustain it; it is in the nature of the created world to be unstable, eventually fall apart, and be followed by a world that will endure.

The author's argument in Hebrews builds on the radical philosophical difference between the transiency of this world and the glorious existence that awaits (2:5). When we read that "what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear" (8:13), it is creation as a whole that is following its course, not Judaism as a faith community or a set of beliefs and practices that has become decrepit.

> **HEBREWS 2:5**
>
> Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels.

The contrasts of Hebrews serve to emphasize the distinction between the present age and the age to come, not the difference between Judaism and Christianity. For example, the contrast that famously opens the book — "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days [God] has spoken to us by a son" (1:2) — should not be understood to set Christ against the prophets. The "but" (let alone "now at last" in the Contemporary English Version) that many translations place between the clauses is not reflective of the Greek and misleads the hearer. The prophets themselves spoke often of "these last days," and the author of Hebrews may well have expected that readers would hear echoes of the prophets in this use of the phrase (e.g., Hosea 3:5; Jeremiah 20:24; Ezekiel 38:16). God's action in these last days can be understood as continuous with and affirming of what God has done previously in Israel.

INSIGHT 3

The book of Hebrews does not criticize the Judaism of its own day; it extols the long legacy of biblical Israel's faith as a model for its own community.

The picture of biblical figures from Israel's past is only ever laudatory (Chapter 11) or descriptive of the limitations of the present created world. They should not be assumed to be the counterpart to the positive images presented of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:15, for example, says that Jesus is "not . . . a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." This affirmation of Jesus' sympathy is emphasized by a double negative: he is "not. . . unable" to sympathize. The emphasis should not lead to a conclusion, though, that for some reason the priests of biblical Israel, or the religious leaders of Judaism in general, are "unable to sympathize." The background to Jesus' sympathy is in 2:11-18, and his faithfulness in suffering what humans suffer is paralleled to Moses' faithfulness as a leader in God's house in 3:2, 5. The reference to disobedience or inadequacy in this context (3:7–4:13) is raised in order to warn the reader away from surrender to their own despair or weariness, since "all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of [God]" (4:13).

Commentators have suggested that the absence of any reference to the Temple's destruction in 70 CE points to a date earlier than that for the book's composition. More likely, the author simply did not see the Temple's destruction as relevant. References to priestly sacrifice name the wilderness tabernacle as its locus (9:1-6) and

the litany of the Bible's faithful run from Abel to David and the prophets, whose mighty deeds do not include the building of even the first Temple. The concern is not with the inadequacy or failure of Temple worship in the author's own day.

Rather, the author demonstrates by contrast how different the tabernacle of a new age will be from the one that has served in this age. The new one will be "not made with hands, that is, not of this creation" (9:11; see also 9:24; 12:22, 27) and therefore will not suffer the instability and transiency of this age. The difference is not ethical, cultic or spiritual; it is eschatological. And if Israel's "great . . . cloud of witnesses" (12:1) could persevere in their faith to gain promises that are part of a fleeting existence, how much more ought readers to find the courage to endure their suffering for the sake of the enduring homeland and blessings to come?

WHAT WE CAN DO

Hebrews is about endurance and perseverance under persecution and suffering. Keep the focus on the promise of what lies ahead and the model of those in biblical Israel who have been faithful and courageous, even for promises that were understood as pertaining to this life only.

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10. MISLEADING LECTIONARY DYNAMICS

PROBLEMATIC: There is an internal dialogue within Scripture that points consistently toward Christ as the key to God's ultimate, saving plan for the world. Whether by association or by contrast, the lectionary readings, particularly those from the Old Testament and the Gospels, form a unit that emphasizes Jesus Christ as the final, definitive revelation of God's will.

BETTER: The use of similar images and figures in the Old Testament and the New Testament, especially the Gospels, offers the opportunity to see God at work in similar ways across different ages and communities. Lectionary patterns in the past have sometimes skewed our vision toward a contrast that casts biblical Israel and our idea of Judaism in a negative vein. We need to break those patterns by careful reading and interpretation, so that the good news of Jesus Christ does not depend on or result in bad news for the Jewish people.

In addition to the language, images and dynamics of individual passages of Scripture, the association of passages through the structure of the lectionary system contributes to the potential for polarizing rhetoric. Many lectionary pairings developed over the centuries with the explicit purpose of presenting the contrastive and supersessionist view of Judaism and Christianity. Old Testament readings and psalms were sometimes chosen to show how they were corrected or replaced in the Gospel tradition. The Revised Common Lectionary, developed between 1969 and 1994, reflects awareness of this problematic heritage, particularly in its alternative sequence of first lessons. Yet the weight of tradition, especially around Holy Week, has extended problematic old patterns into the RCL and our worship planning.

The pattern of lectionary reading itself can also contribute to misreading the biblical text. Figurative language, images, quotations from and allusions to earlier biblical passages, and literary structures often develop within biblical writings over longer passages, even whole books. Yet, as noted above with regard to Hebrews, so elsewhere, too: the lectionary pattern of reading brief pericopes of only a few sentences or paragraphs can leave such developments without their appropriate context. We and our hearers will then supply a context in order to make sense of what we encounter. Too often, that supplied context will reflect either the anachronisms of our own era or the assumptions that have been embedded in the church's self-understanding through centuries of anti-Jewish hermeneutics.

When we are alert to these lectionary dynamics, we can be prepared to counteract the polarization and misrepresentation they engender.

ALERT 1 Lectionary Association of Figures and Phrases

Example 1: On 1 Lent in Year A, the lectionary includes Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-7, Romans 5:12-19, and Matthew 4:1-11. Common to the passages in Genesis and Matthew is the theme of temptation. The association of these passages with one another implicitly equates the serpent and Satan as the tempter. Into the mix, the choice of the Romans passage adds a reference to the reign of death "from Adam to Moses," even though "sin is not reckoned when there is no law" (Romans 5:13-14). Together, the three can easily suggest that Jesus brings a power to resist Satan that Judaism never could have.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Through careful attention to the texts, we can avoid this anti-Jewish interpretation in several ways. The serpent in Genesis is never identified as Satan. Jesus counters Satan in the wilderness precisely with insights and wisdom drawn directly from Judaism's Bible. In Romans, Paul says explicitly that "the law is spiritual" (7:14) and that "we uphold the law" (3:31). We can read and present each of the three lectionary passages, individually, in ways that have nothing to do with judging the value of Judaism vis-à-vis Christianity, or with contrasting the Torah with Christ.

Example 2: A similarly suggestive association can be seen in the reading of the Passover narrative (Exodus 12:1-14) with 1 Corinthians 11 on Maundy Thursday in Years A, B and C. Paul says nothing about the Passover in regard to his eucharistic tradition, and it is unclear, in reading the Gospels, whether the final meal Jesus ate with his disciples was a Passover meal. (Both the chronology of John's Gospel and the editorial history of the synoptic tradition contribute to this unclarity.) The association of the readings in the lectionary reflects long Christian tradition, but it creates an identification of the two meals that is not consistently attested in the Bible. The fact that this tradition has led to anachronistic and inaccurate portrayals of "Passover Seders" in many churches on Maundy Thursday underscores the potential impact of such association. To be sure, there are important parallel themes in the Passover and the Eucharist. Each one embodies the community's central remembrance of redemption by God. The later community that gathered around Christ sometimes used images from the Passover and Exodus in understanding its own redemption experience in Christ (Romans 6:4, cf. 1 Peter 3:21; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Mark 14:12-16). The two experiences remain historically distinct, though, and we confuse and devalue Jewish identity if we present the Eucharist as the fulfillment or true meaning of the Passover and its ritual meal, the Seder (see also section 7B above, pp. 39-41).

WHAT WE CAN DO

Refrain from identifying the Last Supper as a Passover meal except when dealing specifically with a passage that uses that imagery (e.g., Mark 14:12-16 and parallels). Help people understand that Christians associated the Last Supper with Passover as part of a theological claim that is not intrinsic to the Passover as it was originally celebrated or intended. Encourage them to learn about and respect the Passover Seder meal as a sacred family ritual of the Jews. In the Jewish community, it has its own integrity and history of growth and development from before Jesus' time and continuing today. It is one of the *sancta* ("holy things") of Jews that we owe respect.

Example 3: A third example can be seen in the association of Deuteronomy 26:1-11 with Romans 10:8b-13 on 1 Lent in Year C. Here the common point is the confession that a worshiper makes to God. In the first lesson, the Israelite's confession over a first-fruits offering acknowledges the gift of the "land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 26:9). The second lesson, which is not part of a semicontinuous reading of Romans but specifically selected for this day, brings in a Christological confession that "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9). Paul says that this confession brings the gift of salvation and goes on to assert that "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all" (Romans 10:12).

ROMANS 3:29-30

Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30]since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

One might use this pairing to lead a congregation toward understanding the high value of the land in Jewish self-understanding, to be sure. It will be a stiff pull, though, against the strong current of an anti-Jewish understanding: that Christianity is about eternal salvation while Judaism is about worldly blessing. Moreover, while Paul in Romans is making the point that the gentiles, too, can receive what Israel already has (3:29-31; 4:13-17; 11:1), the pairing will suggest that Jews should look to Jesus as Lord and make a better confession.

ROMANS 4:16

. . . in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham.

ROMANS 11:1

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!

WHAT WE CAN DO

Where the lectionary makes such associations and invites misunderstanding, we have several possibilities. First, we must be aware of the potential problem. Then we might use the opportunity to show the positive connection that the association can provide, as in the case with the third example above. Another possibility would be to address the association directly as a challenge, particularly if the critique of it can be framed in line with the gospel message of the day. In the first example above, this might mean connecting Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 to address the "temptation" to put ourselves in the place of God. Finally, if we have the option, we might choose to use only one or two of the appointed lessons, setting aside what would create the association. Reading all the lessons that contribute to the association and failing to address it in some way simply leaves the misunderstanding open and available to those who listen carefully to the Scriptures.

ALERT 2 Intensification of Contrast and Conflict by the Lectionary Pairings

The frequency of conflict stories and of contrastive language throughout the New Testament writings encourages an adversarial Christian self-understanding. The good news of Christ can easily be heightened and underscored by emphasizing the bad news of other beliefs, commitments and self-understandings. Indeed, a healthy Christianity will be alert to the ways in which we stray into such bad news on a regular basis; Luther spoke of daily repentance and forgiveness for just that reason. When the conflict and contrast are projected outside ourselves, though, we run the risk of self-righteousness and bearing false witness against other people and communities (see also section 8, above, pp. 37-38).

Lectionary pairings can intensify this risk by deepening the negative image of those Jesus opposes, by heightening the contrast between Jesus and other figures, and by making a general criticism of human failing into a particularly Jewish issue. Each of these can be mitigated or avoided by understanding the dynamic at work, as we can see from a series of lectionary sets drawn from the fall of Year B (Lectionaries 22, 27-29).

Dynamic 2a: Deepening the Negative Image (Lectionary 22 and Lectionary 27, Year B)

In Mark 7, the Gospel reading for Lectionary 22 in Year B (verses 1-8, 14-15, 21-23), Jesus is portrayed in conflict with Pharisees and scribes about an issue of handwashing and being "clean." Though the criticism of Jewish tradition vis-à-vis biblical commandment in Mark 7:9-13 is omitted from the reading, verses 3 and 5 still refer to the Pharisees being motivated by "tradition of the elders." The lectionary pairs this reading with Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9, which includes the injunction "You must neither add anything to what I command you

nor take away anything from it" (Deuteronomy 4:2). This deepens Jesus' reported criticism of the Pharisees by setting their "tradition of the elders" in direct contradiction to an instruction in the Torah.

A similar dynamic is set up in Lectionary 27 in Year B, with its disputation about divorce. In the Markan story (10:2-16), Jesus quotes the Torah, with its absolute commandment that came in God's voice. He says that other commandments, attributed to Moses, lessen the rigor of God's command in order to accommodate human obstinacy. By pairing the Markan reading with Genesis 2:18-24, the lectionary emphasizes the divine voice to which Jesus points. However, neither the Torah itself nor Jewish or Christian theology ever attribute a lesser authority to what Moses received at Sinai/Horeb than they do to the words of God in the narratives of Genesis 1-11. When the lectionary also includes Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12 in this set of readings — here, as the beginning of a sequential reading of Hebrews that will occupy the subsequent five weeks — it further deepens the apparent divide. If Moses is understood as the greatest of Israel's prophets, then the opening of Hebrews pits Moses against Jesus, the "son" through whom God has spoken "in these last days."

HEBREWS 1:1-2

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and
various ways by the prophets, [2]but in these last
days he has spoken to us by a Son.

WHAT WE CAN DO

We can attenuate the impact of these dynamics by noting that the Jewish interpretive community itself has taken account of the instruction in Deuteronomy 4:2. Already in the first century, there was internal dispute among Jewish groups about the extent to which the Torah stood apart from tradition in the degree of its authority or inspiration. One might also note that it is inconsistent, at best, to argue in one case that Jewish ethics are lax and self-serving and in other cases that they are hyper-legalistic and hypocritical. Moreover, Jesus is depicted making interpretations of Torah on many occasions in ways that move beyond the "letter of the law" in ways similar to the interpretations of his opponents here (Matthew 5:21-48).

Dynamic 2b: Heightening Contrasts Between Jesus and Others (Lectionary 29, Year B)

The Gospel reading of Mark 10:35-45 focuses on the character of leadership and the role of the Son of Man. His baptism in suffering and servanthood is contrasted with the request of two disciples, James and John, sons of Zebedee, to have places of honor in the coming kingdom. Jesus characterizes such a desire as typical of "the Gentiles," and it can too easily be inferred that the desire to be with the Messiah "in…glory" (Mark 10:37) is a Jewish wish. The contrasting portrait of Jesus as a servant Son of Man is then heightened by the lectionary when it pairs this Gospel reading with one of the "Suffering Servants" poems of Isaiah (53:4-12) and with Hebrews 5:1-10. The images of suffering, sacrifice, sonship and salvation among the three lessons are not identical or equivalent. Yet, hearing this cluster of passages, people can understandably be misled to think

MARK 10:35-37

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came
forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want
you to do for us whatever we ask of you." [36]And
he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for
you?" [37]And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at
your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

ISAIAH 53:11-12

The righteous one, my servant, shall make many
righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.
[12]Therefore I will allot him a portion with the
great, and he shall divide the spoil with the
strong; because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors; yet
he bore the sin of many, and made intercession
for the transgressors.

that servanthood is the only Christology in the New Testament or Christian theology, or that it is biblical Israel's only eschatological image of God's intervention in history.

HEBREWS 5:8-9

Although he was a Son, [Jesus] learned obedience through what he suffered; [9]and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

WHAT WE CAN DO

We help avoid such misunderstanding when we distinguish among the passages and their different meanings and contexts. We can cite passages that would support James and John in their request as simply a reasonable expectation, e.g.:

Isaiah 55:5 — "See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you."

Micah 5:8-9 — "Among the nations the remnant of Jacob, surrounded by many peoples, shall be like a lion among the animals of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep . . . . Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off."

Zephaniah 3:16-20 — "On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: . . . I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord."

We can also acknowledge that it is in Mark's Gospel that Jesus says to Peter, "There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age . . . and in the age to come eternal life" (10:29-30). The lectionary associations intensify and isolate the image of the suffering Messiah, while the Gospel passage itself demands a more nuanced, complicated exegesis.

Dynamic 2c: Particularizing a General Criticism as a Jewish Issue (Lectionary 28, Year B)

Mark 10:17-31 presents the story of a man who sought to inherit eternal life. After the man affirms to Jesus that he has been faithful to the commandments, Jesus tells him: "Sell what you own, and give the money to the poor . . . then come, follow me" (10:21). The man goes away shocked and grieving, "for he had many possessions" (10:22). Jesus then goes on to comment on the difficulty — even impossibility — of the wealthy to enter the kingdom (10:23-27). Nothing in the story emphasizes that the man, though clearly Jewish by his acknowledgement of the commandments, was indicted as a Jew; the issue lay in his wealth.

The command that the man cannot bring himself to follow is not specifically a Jewish command — to sell all that one has. The invitation to follow Jesus is one that is extended to the disciples and, implicitly, to all readers of the Gospel. Jesus himself calls it "impossible" for mortals. When the lectionary pairs this with Amos 5:6-7, 10-15, it emphasizes the call of God to Israel to consider the poor and needy and thereby implicitly narrows the Gospel's critique to focus on Jews. The further pairing with Hebrews 4:12-16 underscores the sharpness of the "word of God" and its exposure of our vulnerability. To this, the response seems to be only Jesus, through whom mercy and grace become accessible.

ALERT 3 Lectionary Shaping of Interpretation

The examples already provided in the first two "alerts" give ample evidence of the crucial role of context in the interpretation of biblical passages. Section 9, above, on the book of Hebrews, also points out the role of pericope selection in lifting texts out of their larger literary contexts. This alerts us to the risk that hearers will interpret passages in contexts that shift their meaning beyond what their literary and historical backgrounds suggest.

Reading the Scriptures in contexts beyond their original ones cannot be, in itself, categorically problematic. Certainly, we have good reason to read the Bible as a whole and interpret it through the theological lenses of our creeds and confessions. Individual passages thereby do take on valuable added meaning. The alert here is to recognize that the lectionary itself functions in this way. It creates new contexts for passages and it does so without commentary or discussion. The framers of the lectionary have made choices that are not self-evident or necessary or inerrant. Other choices could have been made and some would have lessened the tendency for anti-Jewish implications to be set before our congregations.

WHAT WE CAN DO

With care, one can point out that biblical Israel is the case study for God's engagement with all people (see Amos 1-2, 9:7), not a particular case of either calling or failing. And one can recall, as we have noted elsewhere in this guide, that biblical Israel is the model of faith and perseverance for the author of Hebrews. Thereby we might counteract the implication that Jews are particularly unable to cope with wealth and that only by seizing on the Christian confession of faith might they be saved from such weakness.

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Cunningham, Philip A., et al., eds. *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Relationships*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011. A wide-ranging collection of essays by Christian scholars with Jewish respondents that explore key topics in Christian theology: history, Bible, Christology, trinitarian doctrine, and salvation and ecclesiology. The consistent theme is that the heritage of Christian anti-Jewish thought can be filtered from contemporary theological formulations in light of both advances in scholarship and engagement with Jews and Jewish thought.

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INDEX BY LECTIONARY SELECTIONS CITED

Discussions of lectionary passages as a group

1 Lent-A 42
1 Lent-C 43
Maundy Thursday-ABC 43
Lectionary 22-B 44
Lectionary 27-B 44, 45
Lectionary 28-B 46
Lectionary 29-B 45

Explicit references to lectionary dates

Year A

Baptism of the Lord-A 35
Holy Week-A 35
Lectionary 19-A 24
Reformation-A 24

Year B

4 Lent-B 38
Holy Week-B 35
Lectionary 24-B 35
Reformation-B 24

Year C

5 Lent-C 25
Holy Week-C 35
Lectionary 1-C 24
Lectionary 11-C 26
Lectionary 12-C 26
Reformation-C 24

Lectionary dates of passages cited

Year A

1 Advent-A 24
4 Advent-A 20, 34, 35 *bis*
Christmas III-A 38, 40, 44
1 Christmas-A 34, 40
2 Christmas-A 38
Baptism of Our Lord-A 35
2 Epiphany-A 35
3 Epiphany-A 34
5 Epiphany-A 11
6 Epiphany-A 11, 16, 45
7 Epiphany-A 11, 16, 45
1 Lent-A 11, 29, 42, 44
2 Lent-A 15, 21, 24, 25, 33, 38, 44
3 Lent-A 18
4 Lent-A 18
5 Lent-A 18
Sunday of the Passion-A 15, 17 bis, 34, 35
Monday of Holy Week-A 3, 35, 41
Tuesday of Holy Week-A 17, 35
Wednesday of Holy Week-A 35, 41
Maundy Thursday-A 16, 20, 43
Good Friday-A 17, 18, 35, 40
Saturday of Holy Week-A 29
Easter Vigil-A 13, 16, 43, 46 bis
Easter Evening-A 16, 43
3 Easter-A 16
6 Easter-A 43
Vigil of Pentecost-A 17
Pentecost-A 17
Holy Trinity-A 13
Lectionary 9-A 24, 25
Lectionary 10-A 13, 21 bis, 24, 25, 33, 44
Lectionary 12-A 16, 34, 43
Lectionary 14-A 20
Lectionary 18-A 25, 46
Lectionary 19-A 21, 24
Lectionary 20-A 9, 25, 33, 44
Lectionary23-A 7, 20
Lectionary 25-A 22, 25
Lectionary 26-A 22, 25
Lectionary 27-A 6, 8, 9, 21, 25 (quater)
Lectionary 28-A 8, 25
Lectionary 29-A 8, 9, 17, 29
Lectionary 30-A 8, 9, 29, 30
Lectionary 31-A 8, 16, 29
Lectionary 34 / Christ the King-A 16, 34, 37

Year B

2 Advent-B	15
Christmas III-B	38, 40, 44
1 Christmas-B	13, 26
2 Christmas-B	38
Epiphany-B	34
Baptism of Our Lord-B	13
2 Epiphany-B	16
4 Epiphany-B	25
1 Lent-B	43
2 Lent-B	21 bis, 24, 25, 33, 44
3 Lent-B	15
4 Lent-B	15, 38
5 Lent-B	17, 39
Sunday of the Passion-B	15, 35, 43
Monday of Holy Week-B	3, 35, 41
Tuesday of Holy Week-B	17, 35
Wednesday of Holy Week-B	35, 41
Maundy Thursday-B	16, 20, 43
Good Friday-B	17, 18, 35, 40
Saturday of Holy Week-B	29
Easter Vigil-B	13, 16, 43, 46 bis
Easter Evening-B	16, 43
Vigil of Pentecost-B	17
Pentecost-B	17
Holy Trinity-B	13, 15, 38
Lectionary 9-B	12
Lectionary 10-B	44
Lectionary 13-B	13
Lectionary 14-B	12
Lectionary 19-B	18
Lectionary 22-B	13, 16, 44, 45
Lectionary 24-B	35
Lectionary 27-B	40, 44, 45
Lectionary 28-B	40 bis, 46 bis
Lectionary 29-B	39, 45, 46
Lectionary 31-B	29, 41
Lectionary 32-B	41

Year C

3 Advent-C	46
Christmas III-C	38, 40, 44
2 Christmas-C	38
Epiphany-C	34
4 Epiphany-C	20
1 Lent-C	11, 21, 24, 43
2 Lent-C	25 bis
3 Lent-C	46
5 Lent-C	3, 8, 9, 21, 25 (quater)
Sunday of the Passion-C	15, 35
Monday of Holy Week-C	3, 35, 41
Tuesday of Holy Week-C	17, 35
Wednesday of Holy Week-C	35, 41
Maundy Thursday-C	16, 20, 43
Good Friday-C	17, 18, 35, 40
Saturday of Holy Week-C	29
Easter Vigil-C	13, 16, 43, 46 bis
Easter Evening-C	16, 43
3 Easter-C	21
6 Easter-C	15
Vigil of Pentecost-C	17
Pentecost-C	17
Holy Trinity-C	15
Lectionary 10-C	20
Lectionary 11-C	21, 25, 26
Lectionary 12-C	21, 22, 26 bis
Lectionary 13-C	20
Lectionary 15-C	3
Lectionary 18-C	3
Lectionary 19-C	40
Lectionary 20-C	6, 40
Lectionary 21-C	12, 41
Lectionary 30-C	3
Thanksgiving Day-C	25

Lesser Festivals and Commemorations

Name of Jesus-ABC	26
Commissioning of Paul-ABC	20, 21
Presentation of Our Lord-ABC	13, 40
Joseph, Guardian of Jesus-ABC	21, 24, 25, 33, 35, 44
Annunciation of Our Lord-ABC	35
Barnabas, Apostle—ABC	35
Mary, Mother of Our Lord-ABC	26
Holy Cross Day-ABC	15, 38
Simon and Jude, Apostles-ABC	15
Reformation Day-ABC	18, 21 *bis*, 24
Andrew, Apostle-ABC	43
Stephen, Deacon and Martyr-ABC	8, 16
John, Apostle and Evangelist-ABC	13
Holy Innocents, Martyrs-ABC	34
New Year's Eve-ABC	16, 34, 35, 37

INDEX TO BIBLICAL PASSAGES CITED

Genesis 1-11 45
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7 42
Genesis 2:18-24 45
Genesis 3 42
Genesis 21:16-18 34
Genesis 21:17 34

Exodus 12:1-14 43

Leviticus 10 13
Leviticus 18:19 13

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 44
Deuteronomy 26:1-11 43
Deuteronomy 26:9 43

2 Kings 16:5-9 35

Isaiah 2:2-3 24
Isaiah 5:1-7 6
Isaiah 7 35 *bis*
Isaiah 7:1 35
Isaiah 7:1-2 35
Isaiah 7:15-16 35
Isaiah 27:6 6
Isaiah 40:3 15
Isaiah 42 35
Isaiah 49 35
Isaiah 50 35
Isaiah 52-53 35
Isaiah 53:4-12 45
Isaiah 55:1-5 46

Jeremiah 20:24 40
Jeremiah 46-51 7

Ezekiel 25:1-33:20 7
Ezekiel 38:16 40

Hosea 3:5 40

Amos 1-2 47
Amos 1:3-2:5 7
Amos 5:6-7, 10-15 46
Amos 9:7 47

Micah 5:8-9 46

Zephaniah 3:16-20 46

1 Maccabees 2:39-41 12

Matthew 1:18 35
Matthew 1:22-23 34, 35
Matthew 2:5-6 34
Matthew 2:15 34
Matthew 2:17-18 34
Matthew 2:23 34
Matthew 4 34, 44
Matthew 4:1-11 11, 42
Matthew 4:14-16 34
Matthew 5:18 11
Matthew 5:21-48 11, 16, 45
Matthew 8:17 34
Matthew 9:20-22 13
Matthew 12:17-21 34
Matthew 13:14-15 34
Matthew 13:35 34
Matthew 16:1 9, 29
Matthew 17:24-27 17
Matthew 19:3 9, 29
Matthew 21:4-5 34
Matthew 22-23 8
Matthew 22:15-22 17
Matthew 22:18 9, 29
Matthew 22:34-40 30
Matthew 22:35 9, 29
Matthew 23 16, 29
Matthew 25 34, 37
Matthew 25:40,45 16
Matthew 27:15-26 17
Matthew 27:25 17
Matthew 27:62 29
Matthew 29:9-10 34

Mark 1:2 15
Mark 3:1-6 12
Mark 5:25-34 13, 14
Mark 6:1-6 12
Mark 7:1-23 16, 44
Mark 7:18-23 13
Mark 10:2-16 45
Mark 10:17-31 46
Mark 10:21 46
Mark 10:22 46
Mark 10:23-27 46

Mark 10:35-45 45
Mark 11:15-19 et par. 15
Mark 12:28-34 29
Mark 14:12-16 43 *bis*
Mark 15:26 et par. 15

Luke 2:22-24 13
Luke 4:1-13 11
Luke 6:1-11 16
Luke 6:6-11 12
Luke 8:42b-48 13
Luke 13:10-17 12
Luke 24:35 16

John 2:20-21 15
John 3:14 15
John 3:14-15 38
John 3:19 38
John 4:22 18
John 5:16 18
John 6:22 18
John 6:41 18
John 7:1 18
John 7:13 18
John 8:13 18
John 8:22 18
John 8:31-59 18
John 9:16 18
John 9:18 18
John 10:31 18
John 10:42 18
John 11:8 18
John 11:45 18
John 12:20 17
John 14:26 15
John 16:13 15
John 18:12 18
John 19:6, 16 17
John 19:7 18
John 19:13-16 18

Acts 2:5 17
Acts 9:1-19 21
Acts 11:26 9
Acts 23:6-7 8
Acts 26:5 8

Romans 1:1-6 20
Romans 1:19-21 24
Romans 2:12-16 24
Romans 3:9 37
Romans 3:19-28 24
Romans 3:21-24 24
Romans 3:21-26 21
Romans 3:27-4:17 21
Romans 3:29 24, 25
Romans 3:29-30 43
Romans 3:29-31 44
Romans 3:30 21
Romans 3:31 43
Romans 4:9-25 33
Romans 4:11-12 24
Romans 4:13-17 44
Romans 4:16 24, 25, 44
Romans 4:22 21
Romans 5:12-19 42
Romans 5:13-14 42
Romans 6:3-5 16
Romans 6:4 43
Romans 7:7-12 24
Romans 7:12 9, 20
Romans 7:14 20, 43
Romans 7:22 20
Romans 9:4-5 25
Romans 9:6 25
Romans 9:6-18 21
Romans 9:31-32 24
Romans 9:32 9, 21
Romans 10:4 21, 24, 26
Romans 10:5-13 21
Romans 10:5-15 24
Romans 10:8b-13 43
Romans 10:9 43
Romans 10:12 43
Romans 11:1 9, 25, 44 *bis*
Romans 11:5, 7 25
Romans 11:11 9, 25
Romans 11:13 20
Romans 11:16-17 25
Romans 11:25 25
Romans 11:26 22, 25
Romans 11:28 9, 25
Romans 11:29 25, 33
Romans 13:8-10 20
Romans 15:16 20

1 Corinthians 5:7 43
1 Corinthians 6:19-20 16
1 Corinthians 7:17-24 22
1 Corinthians 8:6 25
1 Corinthians 10:23-33 22
1 Corinthians 11 43

1 Corinthians 11:23-29 16
1 Corinthians 13 20

Galatians 1:16 20
Galatians 2:8-9 20
Galatians 2:14 22
Galatians 2:15 26
Galatians 2:15-21 21, 25
Galatians 3 21
Galatians 3:6-9 22, 26
Galatians 3:8 22
Galatians 3:14, 29 26
Galatians 3:17 26
Galatians 3:23-29 26
Galatians 3:28-29 22
Galatians 4 26
Galatians 4:2-8 26
Galatians 5:2-6 21
Galatians 5:14 20
Galatians 5:22 20
Galatians 5:25 20

Philippians 1:15-17 25
Philippians 1:20-21 25
Philippians 1:27-2:4 22, 25
Philippians 1:29-30 25
Philippians 2:17 25
Philippians 3:4-8 9
Philippians 3:4-11 25
Philippians 3:5 8
Philippians 3:7-11 21, 25
Philippians 3:10-12 25
Philippians 3:17 25
Philippians 3:19 25
Philippians 3:21 25
Philippians 4:9 25

Hebrews 1:1-2 45
Hebrews 1:1-4 45
Hebrews 1:2 40
Hebrews 2:5 40
Hebrews 2:5-12 45
Hebrews 2:11-18 40
Hebrews 3:2 40
Hebrews 3:3 39
Hebrews 3:5 40
Hebrews 3:7-4:13 40
Hebrews 3:12-14 39
Hebrews 4:12-16 46
Hebrews 4:13 40
Hebrews 4:15 40
Hebrews 5:1-10 45
Hebrews 5:8-9 46
Hebrews 5:9 39
Hebrews 8:6 39
Hebrews 8:13 40
Hebrews 9:1-6 40
Hebrews 9:11 41
Hebrews 9:24 41
Hebrews 11 40
Hebrews 12:1 41
Hebrews 12:22 41
Hebrews 12:27 41

1 Peter 3:21 43

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