

The Jewish Aspect

In his majestic vision of God upon His throne, Isaiah saw the “seraphims” (Isa. 6:2, 6). He described them without explaining their role and position among the other heavenly beings, commonly referred to as “angels.”

The Jewish book of Enoch (possibly first century B.C.) refers to the seraphim in several passages, taking them as angelic creatures. This appears to have been the common ancient view. The book does not specifically describe them, however (20:7; 61:1; 71:7).

The Jewish philosopher Philo (20 B.C.–A.D. 50) interpreted the seraphim from an allegorical viewpoint. “He maintained that all objects in the universe were composed of combinations of the four elements, interpreting the wings of the seraphim in Isaiah’s vision (Isa. 6) as the four elements, one pair representing earth and water, and the second pair, fire and air. The third pair he interpreted as the forces of love and opposition which initiate movement in the other four elements (*De Deo*, 9-10)” (AICE, “Nature,” www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org). His view was not a universal one, however.

Contemporary Orthodox Jews adhere to a specific angelic hierarchy, and the seraphim “represent the fifth rank out of ten ranks of angels” (www.seraphim.com/seraphim-in-judaism.html). This is based on the writing of the Jewish scholar Maimonides (A.D. 1135–1204). The ten ranks are (1) *Chayot ha kodesh* (Holy creatures), (2) *Ophanim* (wheels), (3) *Erelim* (valiant ones), (4) *Hashmallim* (shining ones), (5) *Seraphim* (burning ones), (6) *Malakhim* (messengers), (7) *Elohim* (godly ones), (8) *Bene Elohim* (sons of godly ones), (9) *Cherubim* (mighty ones), and (10) *Ishim* (manlike beings).

Some Jews contend that the angels are referred to in various ways to indi-

cate specific qualities of their characters. Yirmiyahu Ullman explained that “angels are referred to as standing *seraphim* (Is. 6)” (http://ohr.edu/explore_judaism). A Jewish commentator wrote similarly, saying that seraphim are “ministering angels [who] do not venture to gaze upon the Divine Presence” (Slotki, *Isaiah*, Soncino Press).

Some Jewish scholars identify the Hebrew word for “fiery serpent” (*saraph*) (Num. 21:8) as identical to the term for “seraphim.” They observe that Isaiah also referred to fiery serpents twice in his prophecy (14:29; 30:6). The bronze serpent that Moses made during the fiery serpent attack on Israel was still in the temple area during Isaiah’s time. It was finally destroyed by Hezekiah (II Kings 18:4). The Jewish book of Second Esdras (about A.D. 100), furthermore, refers to these fiery serpents (15:29). The seraphim, then, are said by some to be winged serpents that guarded God’s throne, just as winged creatures “carried dead [Egyptian] kings up to heaven” (Hirsch and Benzinger, “Seraphim,” www.jewishencyclopedia.com).

Nothing in the context of Isaiah 6, however, appears to be like serpents. The seraphim have faces, feet, and hands, which make them seem more human in form. “Rather than the noun being interpreted from the word . . . ‘serpent’ it should be related to the parent root of both words ‘fire.’ These angelic beings were brilliant as flaming fire, symbolic of the purity and power of the heavenly court” (Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Moody).

The seraphim are one of the classes of God’s angelic beings. They are around God’s throne and praise Him continually. They turn our attention to His holiness.

—R. Larry Overstreet.

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“Hi, my name is Larry. What’s yours?” Greetings similar to this are common. Most of the time we use our names simply as ways to identify ourselves.

Therefore, when we read “Praise the Lord, call upon his name” (Isa. 12:4), we pay little attention to the fact that the prophet referred to God’s “name.” To biblical Jews, however, God’s “name” had enormous significance. Jews today still regard it in the same manner.

Jews consider the name as communicating “the nature and essence of the thing named. It represents the history and reputation of the being named” (“The Name of God,” www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

We may compare this to the statement that a certain person “has a good name.” We do not mean that Andrew is a good name while John is not. This refers, instead, to the person’s character, his reputation, which is “good.”

Moses asked God what His “name” was so that he could tell Israel (Exod. 3:13). Moses did not desire to know what he should call God. Moses wanted to know the character of God—what He does, what He is like. God answered, “I AM THAT I AM” (vs. 14). “The ‘name of God was therefore not a mere word, but the whole of’ the Divine manifestation, the character of God as revealed in His relations to His people” (Orr, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Hendrickson).

The verb translated “I AM” (Exod. 3:14) is directly related to the proper name of God, translated “LORD.” It is the name “Yahweh.” It is composed of four Hebrew letters—*yod*, *he*, *waw*, and *he*—equaling *YHWH*. It is referred to as the “tetragrammaton,” meaning “four letters.” It occurs almost seven thousand times in the Old Testament and is exclusively used as the person-

al name of the living God of heaven.

Some texts use the word “name” to refer to the Lord’s character being connected with something. We see this use when David brought up the ark of God, which is said to have had His name “called on it” (1 Chron. 13:6). In a similar manner, God promised to “put his name” on the place where He would “cause his name to dwell” (Deut. 12:5, 11). Many texts place LORD and “name” in a parallel structure, showing that the “name” equals the LORD (cf. Ps. 18:49; 92:1).

Jewish rabbis have explained how the various names for God correlate with the name *YHWH*, which is said to be the only proper name for God. All the other names, such as *elohim* and *shaddai*, characterize various elements of His character. They “illustrate this by the instance of one who looks at the sun through various-colored glasses, which change the impressions produced upon the observer, but do not affect the sun” (“Names of God,” www.jewishencyclopedia.com).

Jews today commonly substitute the name “Adonai” for the name *YHWH* whenever they read their Scriptures. Orthodox Jews substitute the term *HaShem*, which means “the name.” This respect for the terms for God extends to all His biblical names when they are written. The names of God are written with a vowel omitted in order to prevent pronunciation, such as “G-d,” or “Alm-ghty.” In Lavina Cohn-Sherbok’s “The Names of God” (www.myjewishlearning.com) we read, “This carefulness is explained and justified by the prohibition” in the Third Commandment not to take His name in vain (Exod. 20:7). Although we do not follow Jewish teaching, their care provides a good example of seeking to honor God’s “name.”

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When you hear the word “seal,” what comes to mind? It may be an animal or the U.S. Navy Seals or a university seal. You may have thought of a letter that you sealed before mailing.

Just as we use the word “seal” in various ways, so too did the Jews of ancient times. During Old Testament times, a seal was “an instrument of stone, metal or other hard substance (sometimes set in a ring), on which is engraved some device or figure, and is used for making an impression on some soft substance, as clay or wax, affixed to a document or other object, in token of authenticity” (Orr, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Hendrickson).

The use of seals in the Bible goes back to Jacob’s time. Judah gave Tamar his signet ring, his seal, as a pledge (Gen. 38:18). Pharaoh gave Joseph his seal (signet ring) to show that Joseph had royal authority (41:42). The common use of seals is reported by archaeologists. Hundreds of them dating back to the eighth century B.C. have been discovered in Israel.

Seals “were highly valued and carefully guarded (Hag. ii.23) as tokens of personal liberty and independence, while as ornaments they were suspended by a cord on the breast (Gen. xxxviii.18), and subsequently were worn on a finger of the right hand (Jer. xxii.24) or on the arm (Cant. viii.6)” (Jacobs and Wolf, “Seal,” www.jewishencyclopedia.com).

Seals were used in many ways by the Jews. In addition to indicating authority, they also ratified business transactions (Jer. 32:10-14). A door could be sealed to prevent unauthorized entry (Dan. 6:17). An affixed seal showed ownership.

Seals were also used to preserve

scrolls securely (Jer. 32:14). “In sealing the roll, it was wrapped round with flaxen thread or string, then a lump of clay was attached to it impressed with a seal. The seal would have to be broken by an authorized person before the book could be read” (Orr, ed.).

Jews continued to use seals through the centuries. “In Talmudic times . . . seals were used as they are still employed, to attest the preparation of food according to ritual regulation” (Jacobs and Wolf). Jews were even prohibited from using seals for several centuries when subject to foreign rulers.

The literal use of the seal led to a figurative use. The earth, for example, “is turned as clay to the seal” (Job 38:14). A lover expressed his desire: “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm” (Song of Sol. 8:6). The seal is also used metaphorically in the sense of secrecy. God told Daniel to “shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4; cf. Rev. 10:4).

The figurative sense was the focus in Isaiah 29:11, as it was earlier in 8:1-16. In that passage, God told Isaiah to write in a scroll. In verse 16, however, God told him to seal it. This indicated that since Israel had rejected God’s Word, He deemed it futile to illuminate it at that time. A similar sealing of His Word is found in 29:11. “If the prophet or seer who is expected to be literate in the Word of God cannot read it, who can? Tragedy stalks the society where divine truth is sealed against its prophets and seers and where the masses are illiterate to that truth” (McKenna, *The Preacher’s Commentary*, Nelson).

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Jerusalem is a holy city to Christians, to Muslims, and especially to Jews. Since the time of King David, Judaism has maintained a strong connection with the site. From Babylon, Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10). For thousands of years, Jews have prayed daily facing Jerusalem. Synagogues also face it. Jews echo the sentiments of the psalmist: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning" (Ps. 137:5).

Jerusalem is first referred to in the Bible as "Salem" (Gen. 14:18). Other names are also used, such as "Ariel," "Jebus," "city of God," and "holy city." It first appears as "Jerusalem" in Joshua 10:1, and this name occurs over eight hundred times in the Bible.

The area of Jerusalem was first settled about 3000 B.C. The Jebusites controlled the city from the time of Joshua (1400) until King David defeated them (around 1000). It then became Israel's capital city, called "the city of David" (II Sam. 5:7).

Solomon dedicated the first temple there in 960 B.C. The Babylonians destroyed the city and the temple in 586 as the Jews went into captivity. In 539 the Persian king Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem, where they rebuilt the temple, completing it in 516. Nehemiah rebuilt the city's walls in 445. Jerusalem was under Persian control until Alexander the Great conquered Judea in 332. From then until 167, Jerusalem was under the Hellenistic control of either the Ptolemies or the Seleucids. The Jewish Hasmonean dynasty ruled from 167 to 163, when the Roman general Pompey captured the city.

Jerusalem remained under Roman rule until A.D. 324, when the Byzantine period began. The first Muslim period was from 638 to 1099, followed by the

Crusader period (1099–1187). Various groups of Muslims controlled the city from 1187 until 1917, when the British captured it. This began the so-called modern period of Jerusalem. The State of Israel was established in 1948, with Jerusalem divided between Israel and Jordan. During the Six-Day War (1967), Israel captured the Old City from Jordan, and Jerusalem was then entirely under Israeli control.

Estimates of the city's population in ancient times vary. The Roman historian Tacitus estimated the city at 600,000 about A.D. 70, while Josephus put it at 1,100,000 ("Statistics," www.jewishencyclopedia.com). Modern times have the population in 1844 at 15,510; in 1922 at 52,081; and in 1948 at 165,000. Jerusalem's 2009 population was 760,800; of these 476,000 were Jews, 247,800 Muslims, and 15,200 Christians (Bard, "Jerusalem—An Introduction," www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

Jews around the world maintain a vital interest in Jerusalem. At the conclusion of each Passover Seder, and at Yom Kippur, for example, Jews say, *L'shanah haba'ah b'Yerushalayim*—"next year in Jerusalem" (Snitkoff, "The Jewish Connection to Jerusalem," www.myjewishlearning.com). On each ninth of Av in the Hebrew calendar (16 July in 2013), Jews sit on their synagogue floors, read Lamentations, and mourn for the destruction of the two temples. Jerusalem is also remembered at each wedding ceremony with the shattering of the glass, which reminds Jews of Jerusalem's destruction and the Exile.

We Christians honor earthly Jerusalem, but our focus is more on the heavenly city which will come down from God. His reign will then be over all the earth (Rev. 21:2, 10).

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God required Jews to attend three annual feasts: Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles. Of these, Tabernacles was the “most holy and most eminent feast” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 8.4.1). Tabernacles is identified in Exodus 23:16. Its initial purpose was to celebrate the ingathering of the harvest. More detailed information is found in Leviticus 23:33-43. There the feast is given its second purpose—being a perpetual reminder of God’s care when He brought Israel out of Egypt. This reminder helped “keep the Israelites from pride and self-conceit” (Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Moody). This was the only feast at which they were to “rejoice” (Deut. 16:14).

Jews observed the Feast of Tabernacles on the fifteenth through the twenty-second of the Hebrew month of Tishri. This is usually the same as our last week of September or first week of October.

The Jews were to build temporary shelters (tabernacles or booths). This was to remind them of their time in the wilderness of Sinai after the Exodus (Neh. 8:14-18). The feast originally lasted seven days, but an eighth day was added before New Testament times to be observed with a Sabbath rest.

The first day of the feast was observed by sacrificing thirteen bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, and one goat. On each succeeding day, the number of bulls offered was reduced by one. On the seventh day, therefore, seven bulls were offered. On the eighth day, one bull, one ram, seven lambs, and one goat were offered. The total number of animals sacrificed was 199—more than during any other Jewish festival.

From the time of Ezra, specific traditions began to be adopted and described in the Mishnah. During the time the animals were being sacrificed on the first day, for example, the Levites chant-

ed/sang the Hallel (Pss. 113–118). As this occurred, the Jews waved clusters of palm branches to which a citron (a fragrant citrus fruit) was attached.

Each morning some priests took a gold pitcher and drew water from the Pool of Siloam to bring to the temple while a choir sang the words of Isaiah 12:3. After circling the altar, the priests poured water on it. This commemorated the times when God had given them water in the past (Num. 20:1-13) and provided yearly rain. On the seventh day, the priests circled the altar seven times, poured the water, and prayed for the rains to come. No water was poured on the eighth day.

During the time of Herod’s temple, each night of the feast except the last, four giant menorahs were lit in the temple courts. They were fifty feet tall. The wicks for the seven lamps in each one were “made from the wornout garments of the priests,” and they “illuminated the entire temple area” (Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Abingdon). The light reminded the Jews of God’s presence in the pillar of fire in the desert.

Tabernacles was a joyous occasion. Jews celebrated much of the night with dancing and flute playing, while the Levites sang/chanted the Psalms of Ascent (Pss. 120–134), one psalm “for each of the steps between the court of Israel and the court of women” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Eerdmans).

During New Testament times, Josephus wrote that in A.D. 66 the whole prosperous commercial town of Lydda, except for fifty people, attended this feast (*Wars of the Jews* 2.19.1). Jesus Himself attended and taught during Tabernacles (John 7).

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Shakespeare said, “The apparel oft proclaims the man” (*Hamlet*, 1.3). In modern terms, “clothes make the man.” Although we live in a time of frequent casual dress, it is still true that certain occasions require more formal clothing. That was definitely the case for the Jewish priests.

Priests wore the common clothing of everyday Jews except when they ministered. At that time, the Mosaic Law required specialized clothing.

The first item a priest put on was his “linen breeches” (Exod. 28:42), which extended from his loins to his thighs, similar to today’s long boxer shorts. No other Jew in Scripture is said to have worn these, and they were clearly for modesty (20:26).

The priest next put on a coat “of fine linen” (Exod. 39:27), which was a close-fitting long garment. This was “brodered” (28:4), indicating that it had a checked design formed by different colors of thread. According to Josephus, it was linen that had been woven in one piece. It had sleeves and came down nearly to the feet (*Antiquities of the Jews* 3.7.1).

The priest next attached the girdle (Exod. 28:40). It was made of “fine twined linen” and had needlework on it of “blue, and purple, and scarlet” (39:29). It was described as being four fingers broad and long enough to wrap around the body several times (Josephus, 3.7.2).

Upon their heads the priests wore a bonnet of “fine linen” (Exod. 39:28). These were to be placed on them (29:9), indicating that they were wound around the head in some fashion, like a turban.

No sandals are indicated for the feet. This probably means that they served barefoot.

Scripture commanded that the priests

wear all four of these articles of clothing—and only these four—when they ministered. Death was the result for disobedience (Exod. 28:43). The priest engaged in holy service, and his clothing distinctly set him apart for his ministry.

Jewish teaching in the Talmud and the Midrash is that “the chief purpose of altar and priesthood is to make atonement for, and effect the forgiveness of, sin. . . . Even the priestly garments were supposed to possess efficacy in atoning for sin” (“Priest,” www.jewishencyclopedia.com).

The Jewish priesthood ceased when the Romans destroyed the temple in A.D. 70. For the past two thousand years there have been no serving priests. Jews believe, however, that God has continued to keep the priests identified within Judaism. The Jewish surname “Cohen” is derived from the Hebrew word for priest, and Jews believe that those with that name are in the priestly line.

This is particularly stressed by the Jewish group the Temple Institute. To facilitate their goals, they currently have tailors making garments for the new order of priests. Until recently these garments had to be hand-sewn and were only for display in their museum. According to an 8 July 2008 Associated Press release, however, all that changed when the “institute recently received rabbinic permission to begin using sewing machines for the first time, bringing the cost down and allowing them to produce dozens or hundreds of garments” (“Priestly Garments on Sale in Jerusalem,” www.ynetnews.com).

The entire outfit will be tailor-made for a cost of about \$800 (instead of \$10,000) for anyone who is of priestly descent. These Jews believe that God is bringing light back to Israel.

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Holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas are easy to remember. They follow a solar calendar, beginning on the first of January. Easter, however, is more complex. It follows a lunar calendar and occurs the Sunday after the Passover full moon. This keeps it in the same relationship to the full moon as was true at the time of Christ's resurrection.

In biblical times, Jews used the moon as their basic way to calculate dates. The Gezer Calendar, a Jewish limestone tablet dating to around 925 B.C., identified a yearly agricultural calendar of twelve months. The year began in the fall and set forth the months for planting, hoeing, and harvesting (Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed., Hendrickson).

In a lunar calendar, each month begins with the appearance of the new moon. "The lunar month on the Jewish calendar begins when the first sliver of moon becomes visible after the dark of the moon" (Rich, "Jewish Calendar," www.jewfaq.org). The time from one new moon to the next, however, is only "29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes and a fraction" ("The Jewish Calendar," www-spf.gsfc.nasa.gov). Following a lunar cycle meant the Jews adopted a calendar with months of thirty days. If a new moon appeared on the thirtieth day, then a new month began on that day. The Jewish twelve-month year typically had 354 days.

The earth revolves around the sun, however, in about 365.25 days. Following a lunar cycle meant that each Jewish year was short about eleven days. To solve this difficulty, Jews added "leap months." During a span of nineteen years, extra months were inserted in "years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19" ("The Jewish Calendar").

Of the twelve months in the Jewish

calendar, only four are named in the Old Testament before the Babylonian Exile: Abib, the first month (March/April) (Exod. 13:4); Zif, the second month (April/May) (I Kings 6:1); Ethanim, the seventh month (September/October) (8:2); and Bul, the eighth month (October/November) (6:38).

After the Babylonian Exile, Jewish writings identify the months of the religious year as follows, beginning with Nisan in March/April: Nisan, first month (Esther 3:7); Iyar, second month—not in Bible; Sivan, third month (Esther 8:9); Tammuz, fourth month—not in Bible; Av, fifth month—not in Bible; Elul, sixth month (Neh. 6:15); Tishri, seventh month—not in Bible; Marcheshvan, eighth month—not in Bible; Kislev (Chisleu), ninth month (Neh. 1:1); Tevet (Tebeth), tenth month (Esther 2:16); Shevat (Sebat), eleventh month (Zech. 1:7); and Adar, twelfth month (Esther 3:13). Whenever a "leap month" was added, it was a second Adar, *Adar Sheni*. A thirteen-month year was called *Shana Me'uberet*, which literally means "pregnant year."

A critical issue for Jews has been the date of the Passover. This event was celebrated in the first month of their religious calendar (Exod. 12:2). The month of Abib (Nisan) was identified by observation (Deut. 16:1) of the new moon, and Passover was on its fourteenth day.

The year identified on the Jewish calendar indicates the years since God created the world. This year of 2012–2013 is the Jewish year 5773. According to their calendar, creation took place in 3761 B.C.

Calendars will always be part of our lives. Jews and Christians alike use them to identify their days, years, and holy days.

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Many Americans practice fasting for various reasons, a primary one being for health. Supposed benefits range from weight loss to fighting multiple diseases to lowering cholesterol. Jews have observed fasting for centuries, but not for reasons of health.

God commanded Israel to observe one fast day a year—the Day of Atonement. Scripture states that on that day, Israel was to “afflict [their] souls” (Lev. 16:29), referring to fasting. “This custom resulted in calling this day ‘the day of fasting’ (Jer 36:6) or ‘the Fast’ (Acts 27:9)” (Lockyer, ed., *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nelson). It is significant that with all the details given on Israel’s diet in the Mosaic Law, no instruction was given concerning fasting.

During the Babylonian Captivity, Israel added four national times of fasting in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months of the Jewish calendar (Zech. 7:1-7; 8:19). These were observed to remember the tragic events of Jerusalem’s destruction. The siege of Jerusalem began in the tenth month, its walls were breached in the following fourth month, the temple was destroyed in the fifth month, and Gedaliah was assassinated in the seventh month.

Fasting could last a day (I Kings 21:9), three days (Esther 4:16), seven days (I Sam. 31:13), or forty days (Deut. 9:9). Sometimes fasting required complete abstinence from food and water (Esther 4:16), but other times it referred to eating a meager diet (Dan. 10:3). On the Day of Atonement, the rabbis asserted that fasting included not only abstaining from food and drink but also “other forms of self-denial such as abstention from ‘washing, anointing, wearing shoes, and cohabitation’” (Milgrom and Herr, “Fasting and Fast

Days,” www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

Jews practiced specific times of national fasting during occasions of great stress. These were natural outcomes of the circumstances, when loss of appetite might occur. These times could be personal, as when David fasted before his son died (II Sam. 12:15-20). They could be a response to a national emergency, as when Israel was attacked by Philistines (I Sam. 7:1-9). A fast could also be a demonstration of national repentance (Neh. 9:1-3). Fasting did not always please God, however. Isaiah condemned Israel for going through the motions of fasting without any heart devotion to God and His law (Isa. 58:3-8).

During intertestamental times, the Apocrypha shows that fasting was seen as gaining merit with God. Fasting is connected with prayer and alms, as that which does “purge away all sin” (Tobit 12:9).

By the time of Jesus, fasting was routinely practiced—often in a proud manner, which Jesus condemned (Luke 18:12). Jesus did not command or prohibit fasting but clearly emphasized its inner quality, not its outer show (Matt. 6:16-18). Some godly people did practice it when seeking to serve God. Anna (Luke 2:36-37) and the early church are examples (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).

No New Testament epistle mentions fasting as a requirement for the church. Contemporary religious Jews continue to fast during biblical fast days and on special occasions. “It has become apparent that in our more affluent society, the haves find it more difficult to fast than did our have-not ancestors of previous generations” (Wein, “Days of Fasting,” www.torah.org).

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The Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity brought gifts for the temple's reconstruction. We read in Ezra 8:28 that their "silver and gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers." The Hebrew word translated "freewill offering" was used of the voluntary gifts brought for the construction of the tabernacle (Exod. 35:29; 36:3). The word stressed "sacrifice made 'out of devotion'" (Harris, Waltke, and Archer, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Moody).

These words may remind Christians of the offering time in our churches when we are encouraged to give of our tithes and offerings. Jews in Bible times clearly gave of their tithes and offerings as part of their worship. How does that compare to modern practices in Jewish synagogues?

An article on "tithes" (Jacobs, Seligsohn, and Bacher, www.jewishencyclopedia.com) explains how Jewish thought on tithing developed after Bible times. Rabbis believed that tithing clearly was an ancient practice (Abraham and Melchizedek) and was included in the Mosaic Law. The rabbis observed that tithing was originally restricted by the Law to apply only to Jews living in Palestine, since that was where the temple and the Levites were. Amos makes it clear that Jews in the northern kingdom of Israel brought tithes and freewill offerings to their idolatrous places of worship (4:4-5).

As Jews spread to other lands, however, the rabbis said tithing also applied to those living in Egypt, Ammon, Moab, and Syria. The rabbis also believed that tithing was meritorious. "Through the merit of tithes, also, the Israelites after death escape the punishment which the wicked suffer for twelve months in hell (Pesik. xi. 97b-

98a)" (Jacobs, Saligsohn, and Bacher). As time passed, rabbis began to question the process of tithing. Some said that tithes should be given to the poor, since no temple worship existed.

Practices vary among contemporary Jews. Many discount the practice completely, since no priests or Levites are being supported by religious gifts today. One rabbi, for example, believes that if a Jew pays a tithe to the synagogue, it "would be 'sin' both to the giver and the receiver" (Martin, *The Tithing Dilemma*, www.askelm.com). The rabbi judged it a sin since no priest or Levite serves in the proper place of worship—the temple. Some observant Jews, however, "donate a tenth of their annual income to charity" (Jacobs, "Tithing," www.myjewishlearning.org).

Jews financially support their synagogues without tithes or any type of Sabbath collection plate. Many follow a system by which families "buy seats" in the synagogue for a year. The better seats sell for a higher price. Some Jews actually spend more than a tithe to obtain these seats. According to an Associated Press release (9 September 2007) the Temple Emmanuel in Miami Beach, Florida, auctioned off two lifetime, front-row seats in their synagogue with a starting price of \$1.8 million (www.ynetnews.com).

In addition to selling long-term seats, "synagogues are financed through membership dues paid annually, through voluntary donations, through the purchase of reserved seats for services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur . . . and through the purchase of various types of memorial plaques" ("Synagogues, Shuls, and Temples," www.jewfaq.org). Synagogues, however, welcome all worshippers, regardless of contributions.

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Next month, from 18 to 25 September 2013, Jews will celebrate a joyous festival—the Feast of Tabernacles. In lesson 5 we saw the ancient observance of the feast. We now focus on the contemporary celebration.

There are five days between Yom Kippur and the beginning of Tabernacles. Across the world, hundreds of thousands of temporary shelters will be built. These are called *sukkot*, or booths. Families, businesses, and even Israeli army bases build them. They are built to remind Jews of the dwellings in which their ancestors lived during the forty years in the wilderness.

Each *sukkah*, or booth, must be made with at least three walls that are sturdy enough not to be blown away by the wind. It must be large enough to “dwell” in. This means Jews must eat all their meals during this festival in their booths. Many, however, do more. If “the weather, climate, and one’s health permit, one should live in the *sukkah* as much as possible, including sleeping in it” (“Sukkot,” www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

Each booth’s roof is made of a *sekhakh*, or “covering.” These are things that grew from the ground and were cut. They could be sticks, cornstalks, tree branches, and even two-by-fours. “*Sekhakh* must be placed sparsely enough that rain can get in, and preferably sparsely enough that stars can be seen, but not so sparsely that more than ten inches is open at any point or that there is more light than shade” (“Sukkot,” www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

Each day of the festival, except the Sabbath, Jews wave the “Four Kinds” of branches, rejoicing before the Lord. They wave these both in the *sukkah* and in synagogue services. These four

branches are an *etrog* (a citrus fruit native to Israel), a *lulav* (a palm frond), three *hadassim* (myrtle twigs), and two *aravot* (willow twigs).

These four kinds of branches represent four types of Jews. The *etrog* has both taste and aroma; it represents Jews who have Torah learning and do good deeds. The *lulav*’s fruit is the date, which has taste but no aroma; it signifies the Jew who has Torah learning but no good deeds. The myrtle has aroma but no taste; it symbolizes the Jew who has good deeds but no Torah learning. The willow has neither taste nor aroma; it corresponds to Jews who have neither Torah learning nor good deeds. Of all of these together, Jews believe God says, “Let them all bond together in one bundle and atone for each other” (Tauber, “It Takes All Kinds,” www.chabad.org).

Synagogues have morning services. Jews chant the Hallel (Psalms 113 through 118), wave the Four Kinds, and have a procession down the aisle. Various Scripture passages are read through the week. The seventh day of the Feast is its most solemn day. Jews believe “the season of judgment really ends on this day” (Goldberg, *Our Jewish Friends*, Moody). The procession with the Four Kinds is repeated seven times on this day.

Contemporary Jews observe a ninth day to the feast, the “Rejoicing of the Law.” The yearly reading of the Law (Pentateuch) concludes on this day and begins again with Genesis.

Ancient Jewish writings regarded Tabernacles as prophetic, in addition to being a reminder. Zechariah 14:16 asserts that in the future kingdom of God, all the nations shall come to Jerusalem “to keep the feast of tabernacles.”

—R. Larry Overstreet.

The Jewish Aspect

Nehemiah wrote that God testified against Israel “by thy spirit in thy prophets” (Neh. 9:30). Christians read that verse and think of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Jews, however, deny the Trinity. They understand biblical references to God’s “Spirit” in ways distinct from Christian theology.

The Hebrew word for “spirit” is *ruach*, which comes from a root word meaning to breathe. It appears more than 370 times in the Old Testament and is used in a variety of ways. It can refer to the breath of animals and people, as when the Noahic Flood destroyed all “in whose nostrils was the breath of life” (Gen. 7:22).

Ruach can also refer to the wind, as when God brings the “four winds from the four quarters of heaven” (Jer. 49:36). At times the word refers to the minds of people, as when God stated that He knew “the things that come into your mind, every one of them” (Ezek. 11:5). *Ruach* also refers to the inner spirit of people. A person dies, and the body goes to dust; but “the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccles. 12:7). The term can also refer to angelic beings (Ps. 104:4).

The problem for Jewish interpreters arises when the Scriptures refer to God’s Holy Spirit (Isa. 63:10-11; cf. Ps. 51:11), or the “Spirit of God” (Gen. 1:2; cf. Exod. 31:3; Job 33:4), or the “Spirit of the Lord” (Judg. 6:34; I Sam. 16:13; Isa. 61:1). Christian interpreters know that the details of the personality of the Holy Spirit are not taught in the Old Testament. These passages, however, indicate that God acts personally in His Spirit. These texts therefore prepare the way for the New Testament teaching concerning the Holy Spirit.

Jews reject the doctrine of the Trinity. Most of their discussions focus on the

Person of Jesus Christ, rejecting Him as the Second Person of the Trinity. They do consider the question of the whole Trinity, however. Milton Steinberg explained, “During the Middle Ages the Jewish assertion of God’s unity became an explicit denial of the Christian dogma of the Trinity, a total disavowal of the thesis that God, though one, is somehow at the same time three persons, ‘coeternal and coequal’” (*Basic Judaism*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). Concerning references to God’s “spirit,” Jews assert that it means God is a “Mind” that reflects or a “Power” that works—“to put it in different words, that He is Reason and Purpose.”

The Jewish Study Bible (Berlin and Brettler, eds., Oxford) often translates *ruach* with words other than “spirit.” In Genesis 1:2, for example, it says there was “a wind from God sweeping over the water.” At times, however, it does translate “spirit of the Lord,” always with a lower case s. Marginal notes explain what this phrase means. When God’s Spirit came upon Othniel, for example (Judg. 3:10), the marginal note asserts that this “refers to a temporary endowment of power or charisma that allows him to be a successful warrior and leader.” When God’s Spirit was on Elijah (I Kings 18:12), the note reads that one “of the supernatural abilities that was attributed to Elijah as a man of God was the ability to travel large distances suddenly.”

In biblical texts where the Spirit is directly associated with God, Jews identify the term as a synonym for God. For Jews, God’s “spirit” functions “to encourage men to be godly, inspire men in the preparation of the Scriptures, and help godly men in their pursuit of the study of the Word of God” (Goldberg, *Our Jewish Friends*, Lozeaux Brothers).

—R. Larry Overstreet.

The Jewish Aspect

In his morning prayer, a Jewish man recites these words: *"Blessed are You Hashem ("The Name"), our G-d, King of the universe . . . (1) Who has not created me as a **non-Jew**. (2) Who has not created me as a **slave**. (3) Who has not created me as a **woman**"* ("Bracha, Man vs Woman," <http://ohr.edu>). These words seem to imply that Jewish women have a role vastly inferior to that of men. Our lesson text, however, indicates that women worshipped *equally* with the men (Neh. 12:43).

In ancient times, Jewish women had the opportunity to buy, sell, own property, and make business agreements (Prov. 31:10-31). Deborah served as a judge of Israel (Judg. 4:4). Women were also prophetesses of God, such as Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Huldah (II Chron. 34:22), Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:3), and Anna (Luke 2:36). Jews have taught that God's creation happened in a progressive order. At the lowest level was space, followed by time, energy, inanimate matter, plants, fish, birds, and animals. Man came next; above him came woman; and finally, at the pinnacle, came the Sabbath. This leads to the conclusion that in "the spectrum of Creation, woman was created after/above man and before Shabbat. Therefore, in the hierarchy of spirituality, man is closer to the mundane while woman is closer to sanctity" (Ullman, "One-upwomanship," <http://ohr.edu>).

Reform and Conservative Jews differ from Orthodox Jews in that they will ordain women as rabbis, while the Orthodox will not. Concerning the daily men's prayer, however, they all agree that it never implies inferiority of women. Traditional Judaism asserts that women are separate but equal and that women actually have more intuition, understanding, and intelligence than men. "The rabbis in-

ferred this from the fact that woman was 'built' (Gen. 2:22) rather than 'formed' (Gen. 2:7)" ("The Role of Women," Judaism 101, www.jewfaq.org). Jews teach that a woman's influence is exceptional. For example, if a righteous man marries a wicked woman, the man will become wicked. If a wicked man marries a righteous woman, however, the man becomes righteous.

In light of this high view of women, what is the significance of the daily men's prayer in which they thank God they are not women? Jewish teaching is consistent that the three categories in the prayer are in ascending order of religious duty. The "non-Jew" (or Gentile) is required to observe only the seven laws of Noah to please God: to avoid idolatry, murder, theft, sexual immorality, blasphemy, eating a limb removed from a live animal, and to establish law courts.

A Jewish slave had to adopt Judaism, including circumcision. The slave had to observe most of the Law. The slave's responsibilities were, therefore, more demanding than the Gentile's. A woman is responsible to observe all the Law, except for fifteen commandments. Her responsibilities are higher yet.

The man, finally, must observe all the commandments, without exception. Jews teach that the reason men have more responsibilities—more commands to obey—than women is spiritual in nature. Men have "further to go in order to perfect themselves in the world. . . . Thus, a man can legitimately thank Hashem for not having been made a woman, because he has a greater number of opportunities to use the mitzvot [commands] as tools to connect to G-d" (Kohn, "Who Hast Not Made Me a Woman," www.torah.org).

—R. Larry Overstreet.

The Jewish Aspect

The word “Sabbath” occurs ten times in this week’s lesson text. It was a critical day for Jewish life in biblical times. The Sabbath was a day when all normal work ceased (Exod. 16:29; 34:21; 35:3). It was also a time for regular worship, a “holy convocation” (Lev. 23:3).

While faithful Jews observed the Sabbath, most either ignored or desecrated it. This was a primary reason God judged Israel through the Babylonian Captivity (Ezek. 20:24; Hos. 2:11). During the Exile, the Sabbath gained prominence because the temple had been destroyed. During the intertestamental years, Sabbath regulations expanded greatly. This helped safeguard Jewish faith and identity.

Contemporary Judaism continues to place a strong emphasis on Sabbath observance. Rabbis correctly declare that the Sabbath is the only ritual observance listed in the Ten Commandments. Jews do not consider it a day of oppressive restraints or as only a day of prayer and worship. Jews certainly pray on the Sabbath, but observant Jews pray three times every day.

The emphasis of the Sabbath is on rest. No other ancient culture observed one day of rest out of seven. “The Greeks thought Jews were lazy because we insisted on having a ‘holiday’ every seventh day” (Rich, “Shabbat,” www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm).

Contemporary observant Jews focus on two related emphases for the Sabbath. The first is that it is a day to remember: to remember God’s Creation (Exod. 20:11) and to remember the freedom from Egypt’s slavery (Deut. 5:15). The second emphasis is that the Sabbath is a day to observe (vs. 12), which means no “work” is to be done. To a Jew, however, “work” is *melachah*,

emphasizing that which is creative or exercising control over one’s environment, such as the work used in constructing the tabernacle (Exod. 31:13-17), not merely physical exertion.

Avoiding all work of this type leads Orthodox and some Conservative rabbis to conclude that traveling and buying and selling are prohibited. Using electrical appliances, unless set on a timer beforehand, and driving an automobile should be avoided, since these require “kindling a fire” (cf. Exod. 35:3). Reform and most Conservative rabbis permit using an automobile on the Sabbath to attend synagogue services.

On Friday afternoon, Jews leave work, and the family prepares for the Sabbath. They clean the house, bathe, and put on their best clothes. They set the table with their finest dishes and prepare an excellent meal. Two Sabbath candles are lit eighteen minutes before sunset. These bring focus on the two commands: to remember and to observe. The family next attends a Friday evening synagogue service. After this they return home for a leisurely meal, to which guests are commonly invited. It concludes about 9:00 P.M. This is followed by talking and reading the Torah before retiring for the night.

The family attends a Saturday synagogue service from 9:00 A.M. until noon. Another unhurried family meal follows, and the afternoon is spent in leisure activities. A third light meal is usually eaten before Sabbath ends at nightfall. The family then recites several concluding blessings. A special benediction is recited over spices “to restore the soul saddened by the departure of the day” (“Sabbath,” www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org).

—R. Larry Overstreet.