**Development of Modern Judaism**

November 6, 2015

**Eddie Breuer**

Edward Breuer, a native of Montreal, completed his doctoral work at Harvard and taught at the University of Pennsylvania and Loyola University. Since moving with his wife and four children to Israel in 2001, he has been teaching in the Department of Jewish History and the Rothberg International School of the Hebrew University. His research and publications have centered upon the Jewish Enlightenment and the writings of Moses Mendelssohn. He is the author of [*The Limits of Enlightenment*](http://www.amazon.com/Limits-Enlightenment-Eighteenth-Century-Scripture-Monographs/dp/0674534263/ref%3Dntt_at_ep_dpt_1).

* + - 1. Transition from October 23. The God-Man Relationship.
				* “The God of Second Chances” (lecture 1). Man is independent. We are endowed with the capability to make choices, even bad choices
				* “Abram and the Anxiety of Faith” (lecture 2). The Patriarch Abraham. What is the quality of the relationship to God? Abraham is not reproved by God for laughing. He laughs – but he is honest about it.
				* “The Giving of the Law” (lecture 3).
1. Implications of the Law.

Spirituality and the Law. When Breuer taught at Loyola Chicago, he would occasionally have students from the Theater Department. The theater students knew how to read texts and to see the possibilities that the text offered them.

In interpreting the Jewish textual tradition, said Breuer, there must be a “slavish” devotion to detail; but that is “slavery” to the truth. As Jesus said (Mark 10:43-44): “Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; (44) whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.” That is the “slavishness” of the Jewish legal tradition.

* + - 1. The Covenant. What God wants is that we be committed to the laws, commandments, mitzvoth, by which we are bound.

How should we find the “natural” way, through the myriad of tiny details, that shape our understanding of the Sabbath, that shape our understanding of property, and of morality? Every aspect of our being “belongs” to the covenant.

The law is like a piece of music. We have to know the notes, yes, but everything belongs to the interpretation.

Exodus 25:8-9. They are to make a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell in their midst.**[c](http://www.usccb.org/bible/exodus/25%22%20%5Cl%20%2202025008-c)** 9According to all that I show you regarding the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of its furnishings, so you are to make it.**[d](http://www.usccb.org/bible/exodus/25%22%20%5Cl%20%2202025009-d)**

The sanctuary is not to be “lived in,” not something to “contain” God. It is a means by which God “may dwell among them,” i.e., among us.

To “dwell” means “to live among” or “to be close to.” The sanctuary is a means, not an end.

God will dwell with us, depending on what we do. God is asking something in return. We should not take that for granted.

God “shows” human beings a pattern of the tabernacle – how to live.

The next step: To open up the TaNaKh and to put the other books into a context.

* + - 1. The *TaNaKh* and the Prophets
1. Structure. 929 chapters in the Bible.

The privileged place of the Pentateuch.

The subordinate place of prophets.

1. The Hebrew Canon.
2. James Cassidy: Who decided that the Apocrypha does not belong in the Hebrew Bible?
3. Breuer: the traditional understanding is that the TaNaKh was “canonized” before the Greek texts were written – in the time of Ezra. So to speak of the Apocrypha as “Bible,” we’re putting the cart before the horse.

There is no central authority that defined the canon, but Judaism has functioned with its Bible. The canon wasn’t closed, and there was no central authority, but there was “consensus,” even before the Pharisees and rabbinic tradition.

The canon was closed – at some point. We might reconsider the canon, but the consensus of Judaism might object. After a certain amount of time, and after a concrete text has influenced generations, it does not make sense to change the received text.

1. Vince Dulock: When was the Masoretic text established?
2. Breuer: in the ninth century. The Masoretes were not, however, creating a text; they had inherited a text, and they “created a scaffolding that would ensure the stability of the text.”
	1. The Septúagint was not the first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. “The Septúagint is so stamped by a Christian reading, that it does not reflect a genuine rabbinic reading.” More close to our tradition is the Aramaic translation, the Targúm of Onkelos.
	2. Does the Septúagint reflect “another interpretation” of the Hebrew Bible? Yes, said Breuer, an interpretation somewhat foreign to Pharisaic Judaism.
	3. The Dead Sea Scrolls show some textual variation, but they support the view that a normative text already existed in the first century.
		* 1. The Book of Isaiah.
3. What is its special place? How do Jews read Isaiah? See Isaiah 1:1. The vision which Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.
4. The vision is in Judah, not in Israel. So the kings of Judah are cited, not those of the northern kingdom.
5. The Hebrew Bible promised Abraham to be the father of a great nation, not a powerful nation. It is a nation “that is fairly insecure.” You are “put upon, and always having to defend yourself.”

Joshua and Judges say: the nation was blessed so long as it was faithful. Once it departed from God’s law, the nation weakened.

Adherence to the Torah means political and even military strength.

1. The biblical message: we, the children of Israel, are responsible. We are the authors of our own existence.
2. What is true 2,000 and even 3,000 years ago, said Breuer, is true today.
3. Israel is a weak nation. It was not the Roman Empire.
4. The Hebrew Bible does not aspire to empire. It is important to be “small, weak, and insecure – and that is the only way to be honest about our human condition.” And that is healthy. That is “the relationship that we have built for ourselves with our God.” But “if we shoot ourselves in the foot, we have done so – and must accept the consequences.”
5. Isaiah and the Kings of Judah.
6. There is a myth of the “ten lost tribes” – all except for the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (plus the tribe of Levi).
7. Rebellion (Isaiah 1:2-4). Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth, for the LORD speaks: Sons have I raised and reared, but they have rebelled against me![**a**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001002-a) 3An ox knows its owner, and an ass,[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001003-1) its master’s manger; But Israel does not know, my people has not understood.[**b**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001003-b) 4Ah![**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001004-1) Sinful nation, people laden with wickedness, evil offspring, corrupt children! They have forsaken the LORD, spurned the Holy One of Israel, apostatized,[**c**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001004-c)
8. Continued rebellion (Isaiah 1:5-8). Why[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001005-1) would you yet be struck, that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, the whole heart faint. 6From the sole of the foot to the head there is no sound spot in it; Just bruise and welt and oozing wound, not drained, or bandaged, or eased with salve. 7Your country is waste, your cities burnt with fire; Your land—before your eyes, strangers devour it, a waste, like the devastation of Sodom.[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001007-1) [**d**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001007-d) 8And daughter Zion[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001008-1) is left like a hut in a vineyard, Like a shed in a melon patch, like a city blockaded. 9If the LORD of hosts[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001009-1) had not left us a small remnant, We would have become as Sodom, would have resembled Gomorrah.[**e**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001009-e)
9. The Consequences for Worship.
10. The problems with ritual (Isaiah 1:11). 11What do I care for the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD. I have had enough of whole-burnt rams and fat of fatlings; In the blood of calves, lambs, and goats I find no pleasure.[**f**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001011-f) 12When you come to appear before me, who asks these things of you? 13Trample my courts no more! To bring offerings is useless; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath, calling assemblies— festive convocations with wickedness— these I cannot bear.[**g**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001013-g) 14Your new moons and festivals I detest;[**h**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001014-h) they weigh me down, I tire of the load. 15When you spread out your hands, I will close my eyes to you; Though you pray the more, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood!
11. The obligation to God (Isaiah 1:17 ff). 17Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; 17learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan’s plea, defend the widow.[**j**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001017-j) 18Come now, let us set things right,[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001018-1) says the LORD: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be red like crimson, they may become white as wool.[**k**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001018-k)
12. What God wants: righteous actions, and not just appearances.
13. The demands of social justice.
14. The message of hope: however you have soiled herself, you can be redeemed.
15. The Demands.
16. God Wants Obedience (Isaiah 1:19 ff.). 19If you are willing, and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land; 20But if you refuse and resist, you shall be eaten by the sword: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken!
17. Israel’s behavior has political consequences.
18. Israel has come down in the world.
19. But God can be reconciled to us.
20. What God will do (Isaiah 1:24). 24Now, therefore, says the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: Ah! I will take vengeance on my foes and fully repay my enemies![**n**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001024-n) 25I will turn my hand against you, and refine your dross in the furnace, removing all your alloy. 26I will restore your judges[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001026-1) as at first, and your counselors as in the beginning; After that you shall be called city of justice, faithful city.[**o**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001026-o) 27[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001027-1) Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and her repentant ones by righteousness.
21. Political edge. The sins of the people will earn retribution.
22. God is saying: your suffering comes from your broken relationship with me. Suffering, says the LORD, becomes my way of cleansing you again.
23. God will get satisfaction from God’s “foes,” and when Israel repents, God will take Israel back, and punish those who have harmed Israel.
24. Israel will get a drubbing, yes, and that is God’s will; but at the same time, those who have dealt out the drubbing will themselves be punished.
25. The gardens of Israel will wither (Isaiah 1:29 ff.). [**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/1#29001029-1) 29You shall be ashamed of the terebinths which you desired, and blush on account of the gardens which you chose. 30You shall become like a terebinth whose leaves wither, like a garden that has no water. 31The strong tree shall turn to tinder, and the one who tends it shall become a spark; Both of them shall burn together, and there shall be none to quench them.
26. Terebinths are trees that are worshiped like fertility sites.
27. They are like asherah.
28. The Second Chapter of Isaiah.
29. The days to come (Isaiah 2:1-3). This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/2#29002002-1) In days to come,The mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it.[**a**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/2#29002002-a) 3Many peoples shall come and say: “Come, let us go up to the LORD’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, That he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths.”[**b**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/2#29002003-b) For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem
30. Beating Swords into Plowshares (Isaiah 2:4). [**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/2#29002004-1) He shall judge between the nations, and set terms for many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;[**c**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/2#29002004-c) One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.[**d**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/2#29002004-d) 5[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/2#29002005-1) House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!
31. We shall be judged in accord with how we act.
32. The universal message: there is a problem of hypocrisy.
33. The message of Isaiah was not originally a “universal” message, but rather it was written as a “mirror” for the Israelites. “You wonder why you’re suffering? Look at yourselves!”
34. The problem is not that people are *not* worshiping God. They are. But this is the danger of a spirituality built on commands and obedience.

Coffee Break

* + - 1. Tradition: Its Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary.
		1. Is the Torah less important, asked John Michalowski, than the Mishnah and the Talmud?

The written world is ink on paper, said Breuer. Judaism says that the *real* tradition is the oral tradition.

The words on paper mean nothing without the oral tradition. The law is also oral. “We are, and have always been, an oral tradition.” It’s not the text, it’s the *interpretation* of the text. Jews are not fundamentalists.

* + 1. The Prophetic Books do not instruct Jews about their everyday lives, as the Pentateuch does. If only the prophets survived (without the Torah and historical books), the heart and soul of Judaism would be gone.
1. The real challenge is not just to teach the rituals, but to explain what they mean. The prophets mean nothing without the law.
2. The prophetic books are less important than the Mishnah and Talmud, because they articulate in writing the oral tradition. If Michaelangelo did not prepare the canvas, the painting would flake after 100 years. So the prophets are like the “paint” or “decoration” on the canvas or foundation, which is the Torah.
3. Christians once said: “You Jews are heretical, because you have overthrown the Bible.” Yes, that’s true, in one sense; the interpretation is more important than the words on paper. The text itself is “overthrown.” The interpretation (Mishnah and Talmud) is the concrete reality.
4. Dulock: Is the interpretation inspired or is the text inspired? Breuer: we have a consensus already about what the text means. So the text is inspired in that it “inspires interpretation.”
5. Breuer: the prophets are *not* fundamental. What *is* fundamental is the Torah, which is the “canvas” which supports the “painting” of the prophets.
	* + 1. The Discontinuity after the Destruction of the Second Temple.
6. The Aftermath of 70 AD.

Israel lost its center. It was crisis and dislocation. Rabbinic Judaism filled the void. It established a foundation for the tradition that would carry Judaism forward. The Jews “drifted away” from Jerusalem

Rabbinic Judaism defined the new center. It wasn’t land or temple. It was the Law.

1. Compounding of the Problem.
2. Just as it took Christianity many centuries to be formed, so Rabbinic Judaism had to form itself. The most profound part is the Jew’s relationship to God. This is the heart and soul of the covenant.
3. Diaspora Judaism had to define itself without a land and temple. Jews were tormented by the question, “Is the covenant still valid?”
4. The Rise of Christianity (and later, Islam).
5. Christianity and Islam claimed the mantle of prophecy. They were “wildly successful” by any measure. They brought the “word” to others, they conquered lands and peoples. Christianity and Islam claimed that the “mantle” given by God to the Jews now belongs to them.
6. Christianity forced Israel to redefine itself, just as the Mormon Church or Scientology, have challenged Christianity. Judaism regards Christianity in the way Catholics view Scientology or Mormonism. To the Jews, the covenant was a treasure that someone else snatched and ran away with. But Christianity may claim: “God has blessed us.”
7. The Way Jews Regard Jesus.
8. At age 19, Breuer read the New Testament. “It moved me the way Isaiah moved me.” He said to himself, “I get it, because it builds on biblical and rabbinic Judaism.”
9. The animosity between Christians and Jews. The Jews regard Jesus in the same that they regard Isaiah. He is important, but he is not the Torah.
	* + 1. The Contribution of Maimonides.
10. Biography. He was born in the southern Iberia Peninsula, the Muslim area of Spain, in Cordoba.

The Almuhad invasion from Morocco brought a less tolerant regime, unfriendly to the Jews.

So Maimonides’s family fled to North Africa and landed in Cairo. He wrote in both Arabic and Hebrew. He had read widely. He knew that Arab scholars had “discovered” Greek philosophy.

Muslims had captured the libraries of monasteries, and so inherited the Greek tradition.

1. The Corpus of Maimonides.
2. In the ultra-Orthodox communities, people still read Maimonides. He wrote a code of law in Hebrew.
3. His philosophic writings were written in Arabic, and then translated into Hebrew.
4. Attitudes toward Christianity and Prophecy.
5. Maimonides’s writings are self-censored. Still he commented that Christianity and Islam brought the “word of the Lord” and so overturned pagan traditions, and that is to their credit.
6. Isaiah imagined that other nations can come to Jerusalem and “learn” (if not be converted). Conversion is frowned (by the Jews) on because one can be more content if one is not as aware of what God demands (as the Jews are).
7. For Maimonides, Christianity was less monotheistic than Islam. It “verges on idolatry.”

For a Jew to believe in Christianity, in a Trinity, is unacceptable.

The real debate among Jews is this: Is belief in the Trinity an “idolatry” for people who are not Jews? For gentiles? Some Jews say that it is idolatry for Jews, but not for gentiles.

1. Jews living in Muslim lands believe that Jews living in Christian lands “have it better,” while Jews in Christian lands believe that Jewry in Muslim lands is better.
2. Maimonides’ Attitude toward Prophecy.
3. Maimonides’ Arabic-language introduction to the Mishnah.
4. He argues that, according to Judaism, prophecy is over. It ended in the fifth century BC (long before Jesus or Muhammad).
5. Are we cut off from God if there is no more prophecy?
6. The “spine” of the Jewish tradition is not the prophets, but the oral Law.
7. Maimonides asks: “What voice would Isaiah have in determining Sabbath observance?”
8. He answers: Prophecy has nothing to say about Sabbath observance. Prophecy has nothing to do with being the Bearer of the Tradition, the rabbinate.
9. There are many sciences in the world. One science is the science of the Talmud.
	* 1. In the *Guide to the Perplexed*, Maimonides asked, “What is the nature of the knowledge that we claim for prophecy, and that we claim for the rabbinate?” The rabbinical school is like a law school. You have the right personality to carry the tradition forward.
		2. But a prophet must have intellectual excellence and be a master of both physics and metaphysics. You have to have an “imaginative faculty,” the ability to dream. “Dreaming is one-sixtieth prophecy,” i.e., a little prophecy. The link between cause and effect evaporates. There is a melding of imagination and practicality, a talent to inspire.
		3. The imaginative faculty means that the prophet has (1) intellectual excellence and (2) imaginative excellence. The prophet is capable of inspiring others. It is a natural ability and training.
10. In short: the prophet is a “genius” because he has the natural ability articulate and inspire. But this is only a natural ability. And so Jesus and Muhammad, both prophets, have a “natural” ability – and thus are knocked down from their pedestal.
11. The Jews were not able to return to the land because they were weak; but they continued to dream, and eventually they were able to go back to the land.
12. Jews don’t live by prophecy.
13. “The only prophet who counts for Judaism is Moses.” Every other prophet is subordinate. No one else can give the law. The other prophets are either political leaders (e.g., Elijah) or simply inspired articulators of the tradition.
14. Moses laid the groundwork for observing the Sabbath. That ground is the Law, which liberates the Jew for joy.