text. Other works projected for release in this series will cover Luther, Wesley, and Barth.

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Author Barry Freundel, an alumnus of Yeshiva University, is the rabbi of Kesher Israel Congregation in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C., where Senator Joseph Lieberman worships. Rabbi Freundel is currently a vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America. He has written thirty-one chapters summarizing Orthodox Judaism's views on topics from God to the Holocaust. This book is written for three different kinds of readers: Jewish high school students, Jewish people who need to know more about their own heritage, and recent converts or those outside the Jewish community who want to understand Jewish laws and ethics.

In the most restricted sense the Bible, or Torah, refers only to the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch). In the general sense the Bible (Written Law) consists of twenty-four books that have the same content as the Christian Old Testament but in different divisions and arrangements. Traditional Judaism considers the Pentateuch as more important than the later books—the Prophets and the Writings. Only Moses can influence the oral laws; no other prophets can. The acceptable interpretation methods include plain and other deeper or mystical levels. Freundel accepts the Torah given at Sinai as inerrant. He says that scholars derived the idea of the Documentary Hypothesis from the Synoptic Gospels. The influence of the Bible on world civilization is the most important evidence of its inspiration. Judaism does not accept any more claims to the status of prophet after the close of the twenty-four books of the Bible.

Halakhah, the oral tradition, is the subject of the third chapter. Maimonides (1138–1204) was the major codifier of all oral laws. The oral laws consist of three concentric circles: Torah at the center, rabbinic interpretation as the middle ring, and the community custom as the outer ring. The differences among different branches of Judaism reside in their different understandings of authority. Conservative Judaism places more emphasis on rabbinic interpretation, Reconstructionism on communal practice, and the Reform movement on individual understanding. By contrast, Orthodox Judaism recognizes the proper authority of all three circles.

The treatment of the human spiritual condition, according to Freundel, is the biggest difference between Judaism and Christianity. Judaism does not accept the depravity or sinful nature of human beings. Since Judaism is optimistic about man's nature and enthusiastic about creative power,
Freundel is not against human cloning. "Life is measured by what one is and what one becomes, not by where one comes from" (p. 49). Freundel tries to understand the problem of evil not just through God's love and power, but through his laws. He thinks that the rationality of the universe will provide an answer now or in the future. Regarding human behavior, Judaism, emphasizing personal repentance, resolve, and actions, considers that no outside help, even God's, is needed, which is different from Paul's teaching in Romans 8.

Freundel states that there are two kinds of Gentiles: idolaters and Noahides, who keep the seven laws given by God to Noah after the great Flood. Noahides, or the righteous Gentiles, including Muslims and Christians, will share the world to come (heaven). Regarding the State of Israel, Freundel takes a middle ground, not accepting its theological significance, but thanking God for its existence. Its ultimate theological significance awaits the appearance of the Messiah who will gather Jews to the land of Israel. From a Christian point of view, the second coming of our Lord Jesus will make Jews accept him as the Messiah, and the prophecy of the apostle Paul in Romans 11 will be fulfilled.

Maimonides's thirteen principles are generally considered as the creed or dogma of Judaism. However, whether a person is Jewish or not is determined by whether one's mother is Jewish or whether one has been converted properly. One could reject the teaching and practice of Judaism, but one is still Jewish halakhically. Within the Jewish communities, the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reformed are differentiated by their different practices of laws. Freundel lists the benefits of observing Orthodox practices, including Sabbath and kosher food. The Sabbath is considered as one of the days of creation, not just a day of rest; so creative spiritual work is encouraged.

Freundel argues that miracles should not be used as evidence for God's existence. If God uses miracles to compel human belief, then human free will is lost and the elevation of faith above senses is rendered impossible. He says that human beings must see themselves as controlled by natural law. Freundel mentions that Talmud prohibits relying on miracles, and he emphasizes that Judaism's God wants humans to do their best based on natural laws instead of depending on miracles. The afterlife is not important in Judaism; instead, "one hour of good deeds and repentance in this world is better than the entirety of the World-to-Come" (p. 173). Good deeds will lead to eternal reward in heaven.

Regarding life, Talmud teaches that all human souls were created in the beginning of time, and the Messiah will not come until all these souls have come into the world. Because the Holocaust eliminated one-third of all Jewish people, procreation is strongly encouraged. Birth control is not prohibited; however, rabbinic counsel is needed. In general, Freundel is quite lenient in his views of reproductive technology, such as artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, and cloning.
Freundel encourages organ donation under halakhically appropriate circumstances. He does not hold a definite position about whether brain death meets halakhic criteria of death. He thinks that active euthanasia as done by Kevorkian is murder; passive euthanasia, such as denial of nutrition and water, is not allowed even for the terminally ill patients. He recommends a specially designed living will and advanced directive that satisfy halakhic concerns.

Judaism does not officially adopt any scientific theories of origins and can accept theistic evolution. Consistent with his view of natural laws, Freundel finds that evolution of the universe according to natural law is more cogent than special creation. He also points out the problems of evolution theory and laments the scientific community’s silence about these problems.

According to Freundel, Judaism does not take either the pro-choice or pro-life position regarding abortion. When the life of a mother is in danger, abortion is required. Freundel cites Talmud to support the view that the fetus changes its status to a person only after reaching the point of independent viability. Here he deviates from Maimonides, who granted the fetus full human status. Freundel regrets that some Jewish groups align themselves with either the pro-choice or the pro-life movement.

The role of women is considered by many as the major difference between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities. Freundel defends the Orthodox position as protecting a woman’s place in the family and society. He argues that the status of men and women are equal, but their roles are not equivalent. Men are given more responsibilities, and women are exempted from religious obligations because of their focus on family and children. Interestingly, Freundel contrasts the men’s praise that God “has not created me a woman” (p. 274) to Paul’s assertion that “There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female.” In addition, Orthodox Judaism prohibits premarital sex and considers homosexual lifestyle unacceptable.

From the fact of the Holocaust, Freundel acknowledges that human power alone cannot bring good to the world. He believes that human beings need faith in God, morality, and a sense of right and wrong. He also sees, post 9/11, that Auschwitz and Hiroshima are closely related. To learn the lessons from history, to value the preciousness of every human soul, and to control the dangers of technology, he concludes, will make human lives much more meaningful and significant.

Overall, this book is a very good introduction to Orthodox Jewish thought in the modern time. It complements Jacob Neusner’s *An Introduction to Judaism: A Textbook and Reader*. It helps readers understand contemporary Judaism. Reading through the book, one notices that differences between Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity, such as law and grace, practice and faith, still exist today. One also realizes that the historical experiences, including the Holocaust, have influenced the Jewish response to modernity. Rationality, self-reliance, hard work, creativity, and communal closeness have become Jewish distinctives. On some
contemporary ethical issues, Freundel explains the intramural debates within Orthodox Judaism, but he almost always sides with the lenient positions. Endnotes provided at the end of each chapter and a detailed subject index are useful guides for further research.

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Endings is the companion volume to Hooker’s suitably titled 1997 book Beginnings. In Beginnings Hooker examined the prologues of the four canonical Gospels. In Endings the author turns her attention to the other end, the conclusions to the four Gospels and Acts. The material in this volume was developed from a series of lectures given most recently at Fuller Theological Seminary. The book itself consists of six chapters: an introduction to beginnings and endings, an epilogue, and one chapter each devoted to the four Gospels (with Acts discussed in the chapter with Luke).

Hooker’s thesis is straightforward. She contends that endings are critical components to literary works in that an author’s conclusion is intended to shape the reader or hearer’s understanding of the whole. Furthermore, Hooker suggests that the endings of the Gospels plus Acts function in three important ways. First, an ending forms an inclusio with the beginning of the book in order to invite the reader to look back again to the beginning of the story. Second, the endings are “suspended” in that they do not provide closure but, like the endings to many of the Old Testament books, are forward-looking, leading the reader to anticipate what will happen next. Third, the authors of the Gospels use the endings to urge the reader “to turn the end into a beginning, and to continue writing the story for ourselves” (p. 83).

There is much to commend in Hooker’s work. She is to be applauded for focusing attention on these oft-neglected portions of Scripture. Her discussions are brief and understandable, simple but not simplistic. She does not tackle the issues by dwelling on exegetical minutia, but rather focuses on the broader scope of how the various endings function within their constituent Gospels. In this, Hooker displays sensitivity to the literary character of the Gospels and Acts. This sensitivity is also evidenced by the