

# History of Judaism

## *Rabbinic Judaism*

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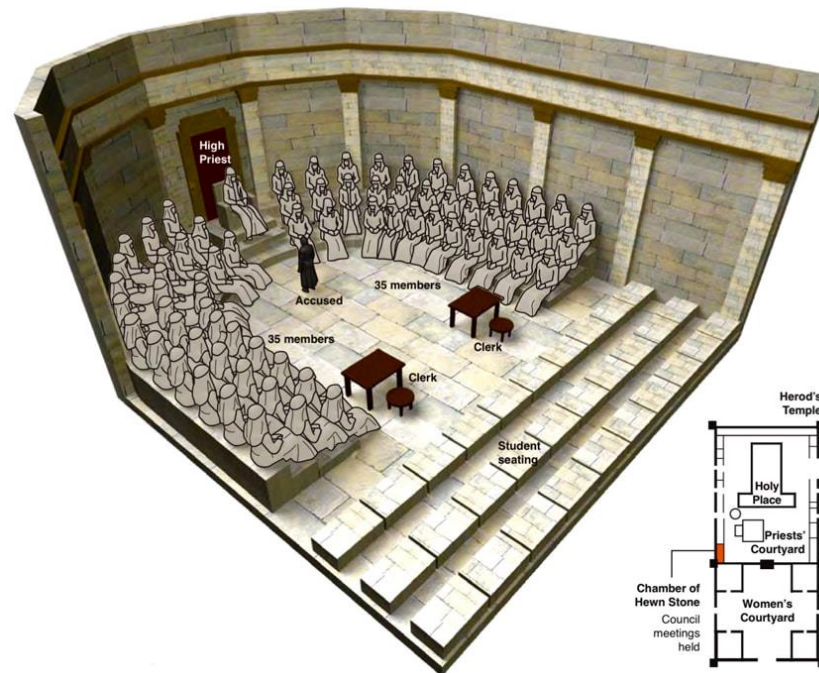
# Rabbinic Judaism post-Bar Kokhba Resistance (135-136 CE)

- Rabbinic ideology and practice replaced Temple, priesthood, political autonomy
- Rabbis mediated between Roman rulers and Jewish community
  - Kept the peace and provided continuity
    - Despite becoming diasporic religion, practice of purity laws and study of Scripture provided continuity – rewarded by messianic deliverance and resurrection
    - Sanhedrin replaced by a high court organized under Simeon ben Gamaliel (r. c.135-c.175 CE) of the house of Hilel – unified different interests and schools; succeeded by Judah the Prince – standardized Jewish practice through corpus of legal norms – the Mishna subsequently emerged, the primary reference work in all rabbinic schools and basis for the Talmud

# The Sanhedrin

## THE SANHEDRIN

The Jewish high court consisted of 71 men and was led by the high priest. The Sanhedrin council could decide almost any fate of its people—except the death penalty, which was decided by the Romans. The courtroom of the Sanhedrin was located within the Chamber of Hewn Stone inside the Temple.



# The Mishna

- Preceded by earlier Midrashim (investigations/interpretations)
  - Application of Scripture to practical problems – 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE
    - Judah followed structure of these Midrashim, while compiling universally accepted views and contrasting them with disputed views – reduced room for individual interpretation of the law; became widely accepted as ‘The Mishna’; accompanied by the Tosefta (Additions)
    - Six divisions of the Mishna – deal with agriculture, festivals, family life, civil law, sacrificial and dietary laws, and purity
      - Included a wide range of theological positions – some taking the Torah as principal, others focusing on mystical and esoteric teachings

# Grave of Judah haNasi, Beit Shearim



# The Talmud

- The period of the *amoraim* (lecturers/interpreters)
  - Interpretation, compilation, and harmonization of Mishna with extra-Mishnaic traditions
- Palestinian Talmud (c. 220-c.400 CE)
  - Taught in primary school through to advanced 'house of study' and academies (*yeshiva*), synagogues, and Jewish court
    - Ages 5-6 – Scripture; 10 – Mishna; mid-adolescence – Talmud
    - Academies established in Lydda, Caesarea, Sepphoris, and Tiberias – students trained for communal service as teachers and judges
    - Palestinian Talmud arose from a tract compiled at the academy of Caesarea around 350 CE, combined with a collection of tracts issued of the Mishna at the academy of Tiberias 50 years later

# Tiberias, Sea of Galilee



# The Talmud

- **Babylonian Talmud (200-650 CE)**
  - Adoption of Christianity as religion of empire – led to reduction of Jewish disciplinary rights over Jews of other traditions; interference in patriarchal taxes; restrictions on the building of synagogues; the abolition of the patriarch after Gamaliel VI around 450 CE
  - Babylonia provided a safe haven for Jews under Persian rule
    - Parthian (Arsacid) rulers (247 BCE-224 CE) – appointed an exilarch ('head of the Jews in exile') in 100 CE
    - C. 220 CE Abba Arika (Rav) and Samuel bar Abba, disciples of Judah ha-Nasi – promoted Mishna and other tannaitic literature; developed a Babylonian rabbinate
    - Historical legitimacy claimed from Sasanian dynasty (224-651 CE) and native Jewish officials basing their traditions on Palestinian norms; patriarch claimed stronger Davidic lineage than Palestinian patriarch
    - Babylonian Talmud came to represent Judaic authenticity – preserved for dissemination among all Jewish communities from 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (the High Middle Ages)
    - Sura and Pumbedita – eminent centres of rabbinical study; freedom granted by Persian rulers led to Jewish missionary activities throughout the Middle East – led to conversion of last Himyarite rulers in Yemen, Dhu Nuwas (r. c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE)

# Persian or Arsacid Empire (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE)



# Texts of Rabbinic Judaism

- **The Torah**
  - Written form – first 5 books of the Bible
  - Oral form – unwritten laws or customs and interpretations of these – called ‘oral Torah’
    - The role of the prophet as a source of Torah ended with Ezra (return from Babylonian Exile in 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE)
- **The Mishna**
  - Oldest authoritative postbiblical collection and codification of Jewish oral laws – compiled by tannaim (scholars) over two centuries – finalized in 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE under Judah ha-Nasi; supplements laws in the Torah, and presents oral interpretations since Ezra (c. 450 BCE)
- **The Talmud and Midrash**
  - Talmud: Consists of the Mishna, the Gemara (completion), and other relevant material; Gemara – collection of commentaries and elaborations of the Mishna [‘Gemara’ later referred to the Talmud itself]
  - Divided into Halakha (law) and Haggada (narrative)
  - Midrash: exposition/investigation – refers to both a mode of biblical interpretation found in Talmudic literature and to a separate body of commentaries
- **Opposition to the Talmud**
  - Karaite sect in Babylonia – 8<sup>th</sup> century CE
  - Medieval Jewish mystics
  - Messianic sects in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries
  - Post-enlightenment Jews
  - Anti-Semitic groups within Christian societies

# Content of Talmudic and Midrashic Literature

- Mishna
  - Divided into 6 orders (sedarim), tractates (masekhtot), and chapters (peraqim)
    - Zera'im (Seeds) – laws concerning agriculture in Palestine
    - Mo'ed (Festival) – ceremonies, rituals, observances, and prohibitions on special days of the year
    - Nashim (Women) – laws concerning betrothal, marriage, sexual and financial relations between husband and wife, adultery, and divorce
    - Neziqin (Damages) – civil and criminal laws concerning damages, theft, labour relations, usury, real estate, partnerships, tenant relations, inheritance, court composition, jurisdiction and testimony, erroneous decisions of the Sanhedrin, and capital and other physical punishments
    - Qodashim – regulations concerning sacrifices, offerings, and donations
    - Tohorot (Purifications) – laws concerning ritual impurity of vessels, dwellings, foods, and persons, and purification processes
    - Tosefta – a subsidiary text to the Mishna; comments on the Mishna and sometimes offers contradictory interpretations

# Content of Talmudic and Midrashic Literature

- Midrashim (Interpretations/Investigations)
  - Halakhic
    - Exegetic commentaries on legal content of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
  - Haggadic
    - Originated with weekly synagogue readings and explanations – deal with ethics, moral teachings, biblical narrative
  - Important Midrashim
    - Midrash rabba (Great Midrash) – oldest portion 5<sup>th</sup> century CE (the Genesis *rabba*); The Tanhuma (following 4<sup>th</sup>-century Palestinian *amora Tanhuma bar Abba*)

# Key Religious Doctrines of Rabbinical Judaism

- **God**
  - Experienced through senses rather than intellect
  - Universal and directly involved in the world
  - Immanent and transcendent – God a father to mankind; new appellations of *Shekhina* (Presence) and *Maqom* (Place) in addition to YHWH and Elohim
- **Torah**
  - Created by God before the creation of the world; God himself depicted as studying the Torah
- **Israel**
  - Bound together by commitment to bring the Torah to the world and bear responsibility for this mission
- **Worship**
  - Sanctify every aspect of life – prayer upon rising in the morning, before dressing, before and after meals, and during all activities
- **Messianic kingdom**
  - Messiah to redeem the Jews in exile and re-establish independent Israel; universal peace would follow, allowing for uninterrupted study of Torah
- **Humanity**
  - All created equal in the image of God
  - Each has personal and social responsibility; free will strongly emphasised

# Rabbinical Law and Jurisprudence

- Talmud – source of comprehensive judicial system
  - Courts
    - The Great Sandhedrin – 71 members in the Temple; matters of national and public nature
    - The Lesser Sandhedrin – each town with population of 120 or more – 23 members; capital punishment
    - Lower courts – all other cases
  - Rules for trial
    - Two eyewitnesses required; witnesses required to be mentally and morally fit, and no relatives served as judges or witnesses
    - Court decided through investigation, deliberation, and voting; each side's case had to be heard in the presence of the other; majority of one sufficient for acquittal but majority of two necessary for conviction; if court erred only convictions overturned not acquittals
  - Criminal law
    - Ritual and non-ritual law punishable – 36 severe transgressions punishable by death penalty; in reality capital punishment rarely used; 207 other transgressions punished by flagellation
  - Civil and social law
    - Social welfare; torts; family law; financial law

# The Halakha



# Rabbinical Practices and Institutions

- **Interconnection between daily life and synagogue**
  - Daily prayers and reading of the Torah (written scriptures) and Mishna (oral law); observance of the Sabbath and related ceremonies (e.g. the Kiddush); celebration of festivals (e.g. Sukkoth, Seder, Hanukkah)
- **Synagogue practices**
  - Public reading of scriptures – on Sabbath, holy days, and festivals; Monday and Thursday mornings
  - Sefer Torah (Book of the Torah) is removed from the ark (cabinet) at front of synagogue – reader chants the reading
  - Order: preparatory blessings and prayers; passages recalling the Temple sacrificial cult; recitation of Psalms and biblical prayers; recitation of the Shema; the prayer (tefilla) as a petition; confession and supplication (tahanun) on weekdays; reading of scripture; concluding worship
- **Life cycle ceremonies**
  - Circumcision on 8<sup>th</sup> day (Genesis 17)
  - Bar mitzvah (son of the commandment) – coming of age at 13
  - Marriage (*hatuna*) – betrothal ceremony (*erusin*); marriage ceremony (*nissu'in*)
  - Burial – body prepared in a shroud; mourning period of 30 days, and 11 month post-death ceremony when Kaddish (synagogal doxology) is recited and again on anniversary of death

# Synagogues

