World Religions

Part 6: Judaism
Session 2: Major Developments
Between 70 and 1000 CE

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This Session

1. Rise of Rabbinic Judaism
2. Rise of Christianity
3. Rise of Islam
4. Jewish Medieval Diaspora
Part 6.2: Major Developments Between 70 and 1000 CE

1. RISE OF RABBINIC JUDAISM
Yohanan ben Zakkai

- c. 30 BCE – 90 CE
- Rabbi Academy at Javneh/Jamnia

“Yohanan laid the foundations for the development of rabbinic Judaism over the next two millennia.”


Rabban Gamaliel (II)

- c. 50 – 149 CE
- Successor to Rabbi Yohanan at Javneh
- Nasi (Prince, Patriarch)
- Amidah (Standing Prayer), 18 (later 19) Benedictions
- Prayer, 2 (later 3) times a day
- Passover Seder

Traditional site of the grave of Rabban Gamliel in Yavneh with a medieval Mamluk tomb on top of it. Until 1948, this 1293 tomb was only known as the Mausoleum of Abu Huraira.

Bar Kochba Revolt

- c. 132 - 136 CE
- Lead by Simon Bar Kochba
- Defeated by Hadrian
- Jewish population decimated
- Jews (and Christians) banned from Jerusalem

Entrance to a cave used by Bar Kochba rebels

Karaite Judaism, c. 760 CE
Deny that the Oral Torah is divinely inspired

The Karaite Synagogue in the Old City (Jerusalem)

Part 6.2: Major Developments Between 70 and 1000 CE

2. RISE OF CHRISTIANITY
A Climate of Controversy

“In the Middle Ages, tolerance, in the modern, liberal meaning of full equality, was not considered to be a virtue to be emulated. Monotheistic religions were by nature mutually intolerant. Adherents of the religion in power considered it their right and duty to treat the others as inferiors rejected by God, and, in extreme cases, to treat them harshly, even to encourage them (in some cases by force) to abandon their faith in favor of the faith of the rulers.”

A Window of Tolerance?

“We resolved, that is, to grant both to the Christians and to all men freedom to follow the religion which they choose, that whatever heavenly divinity exists may be propitious to us and to all that live under our government.”

“Edict” of Milan (312-313 CE)


Rise of Christianity

“Do you see the first attempt of the impudent Jews? Now look at the next. They tried the same thing in the time of Constantine. But the Emperor saw what they tried to do, cut off their ears, and left on their bodies this mark of their disobedience. He then had them led around everywhere, like runaway slaves and scoundrels, so all might see their mutilated bodies and always think twice before ever attempting such a revolt.”

John Chrysostom, *Homily V, On the Jews* (c. 387 CE), XI.3

Rise of Christianity

“If, then, the Jews fail to know the Father, if they crucified the Son, if they thrust off the help of the Spirit, who should not make bold to declare plainly that the synagogue is a dwelling of demons?”

John Chrysostom, *Homily I, On the Jews* (c. 387 CE), III.3


Rise of Christianity

“[Constantine] also passed a law to the effect that no Christian should remain in servitude to a Jewish master, on the ground that it could not be right that those whom the Saviour had ransomed should be subjected to the yoke of slavery by a people who had slain the prophets and the Lord himself.”

Eusebius, Life of Constantine, iv.xxvii.1

Rise of Christianity

“Let no Jew take a Christian woman to wife, nor any Christian seek marriage with a Jewess. For if any one admits anything of this sort, he will be charged with his crime just as if he has committed adultery, and furthermore liberty for accusations of this nature has been granted to the general public.”

Theodosius the Great to Cynegius (c. 438 CE),

Source: Codex Theodosianus, cited in James Everett Seaver, *The Persecution of the Jews in the Roman Empire (300-428)*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Publications, 1952), 47, note citing CTh., 3, 7, 2 or 9, 7, 5; 14/3/388.
“It is sufficiently established that the sect of the Jews is forbidden by no law. Hence We are gravely disturbed that their assemblies have been forbidden in certain places.”

Theodosian Code, XVI, VIII, 9 (c. 438)

And Yet...


Part 6.2: Major Developments Between 70 and 1000 CE

3. RISE OF ISLAM
“The Islamic world housed the majority of the world’s Jews for most of the medieval period, and the Jewish communities of the Islamic world were responsible for many of the institutions, texts, and practices that would define Judaism well into the modern era.”

Rise of Islam

“At the outset, most scholars agree, Muhammad assumed the Jews would flock to his preaching and recognize him as their own prophet—indeed, the final, or “seal” of the prophets. Fred M. Donner argues, in fact, that originally the new religion—the “community of believers,” he calls them—was meant as an ecumenical community open to Jews and Christians.”

The “Constitution” of Medina

“(This shall be a pact) between the Muslims of Quraysh, the people of Yathrib (the Citizens of Madina) and those who shall follow them and become attached to them (politically) and fight along with them. (All these communities shall be the constitutional subjects of the state.) The aforementioned communities shall formulate a Constitutional Unity as distinct from (other) people.”

Quran: Surah 2:256

“There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing.”

Quran: Surah 9:29

“Fight those of the People of the Book who do not [truly] believe in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not obey the rule of justice, until they pay the tax and agree to submit.”

Rise of Islam

Jews banished from Medina by 625

Detail from miniature painting The Prophet, Ali, and the Companions at the Massacre of the Prisoners of the Jewish Tribe of Beni Qurayzah, illustration of a 19th-century text by Muhammad Rafi Bazil. Manuscript now in the British Library.

Rise of Islam

‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (Umar I) conquers Syria, including Jerusalem, 638 CE

The Legendary “Sword of Umar”

Rise of Islam

“The Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705) began building the Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al-Sakhra) on the site of the Temple Mount, and its location and physical form constituted direct challenges to Judaism, the site of whose former sanctuary it now filled, and to Christianity, whose Church of the Holy Sepulchre was now no longer the highest point in the city. The structure was a grand announcement that Islam had superseded both previous religions.”

“Legally speaking, Jews shared with other non-Muslims the status of dhimmīs, or ‘protected people.’ In return for security, freedom of religion, and communal autonomy, they were obligated by the Qur’an to pay an annual poll tax.”


Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (996-1021), sixth Fatimid caliph and 16th Ismaili imam.
“Arabic would remain the language spoken by the vast majority of the world’s Jews until the later medieval and early modern periods, when the Romance languages (including Ladino) and, finally, Yiddish eclipsed it; and it is the language in which many of the most important Jewish works of the Middle Ages were composed.”

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4. JEWISH MEDIEVAL DIASPORA
Jewish Medieval Diaspora

“By the tenth century, the rabbinic forms of Judaism that had begun to develop in Mesopotamia and Palestine in late antiquity had spread far beyond those regions and taken root in a huge swath of land, from Iberia [modern Spain & Portugal] to Khorasan [in Northeast Persia]. In that sense, Islamic rule not only transformed Judaism but enabled its consolidation and diffusion.”

Jewish Medieval Diaspora

**Ashkenazim** - Central Europe

**Sephardim** - Iberia (Spain & Portugal) and Northern Africa

**Middle Eastern**

The Geonim (sing. Gaon)
Heads of the yeshivot (Rabbinic academies) in Sura and Pembunita (in Iraq)

A depiction of Rav Ashi teaching at the Sura Academy

Radhanites

Map of Eurasia showing the trade network of the Radhanites (in blue), c. 870, as reported in the account of ibn Khordadbeh in the Book of Roads and Kingdoms.

Jewish Medieval Diaspora

“The diffusion of three technological innovations made the production and circulation of written texts possible: paper, an empire-wide postal system, and the codex (the bound book as we know it today). ...[U]ltimately, they were Islamic-era developments that entirely transformed Jewish culture. The latter two had Roman precedents, but spread under Islam to an unprecedented extent.”

Cairo Geniza

Collection of ~330,000 (mostly Jewish) manuscripts and documents, dating from the 9th to 19th century.

The Ben Ezra Synagogue, Old Cairo, Egypt, housing the Geniza’s treasures