

Our Story:
An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Created by Ner LeElef

Dear Educator,

Thank you for choosing this course.

The goal of Ner LeElef Courses is to help you in your crucial work of spreading Torah.

Many Rabbis & teachers have told us that due to the limitations of time at their disposal, in addition to the classes that they prepare themselves, they would appreciate prepared materials if the quality and usability were high.

Ner LeElef has therefore have begun creating courses that can be taught in a variety of settings. This course, Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History, is one of our initial offerings. Also available are Judaism 101 and The Jewish Holiday Cycle.

Please Note:

- Please use as much of the course (or as little!) as you like – there are no firm rules about what to teach or how.
- The core part of each unit can be covered in a one-hour class, however, there are many options, tangents, room for discussion, appendices, etc. In most units, things can be shortened or lengthened as you wish.
- Note that this is a ‘work-in-progress’ – a first attempt at creating material that will be interesting to the students and user-friendly to the teacher. Students want to learn Jewish history and need a basic framework to put things in perspective. Yet most teachers don’t feel expertise in the subject. This course is one approach to help. We would be delighted to have your corrections, comments and suggestions as to how to improve this course. We are also most interested in knowing how relevant (or not) you found the material, and if you would like more. Please email all comments to Rabbi Doron Kornbluth at dkornbluth@nerleef.com. If you would like to be on the email list to receive further courses, please tell us.
- Note also that these classes, and the course as a whole, are only beginnings. They are not at all exhaustive or complete. It is literally a ‘taste of Torah’ – to get students in the door for a set amount of time, to give them a basic framework with which to understand Jewish ideas and practices, and to give you the teacher a sense of what they are interested in and where to put your focus. If students are particularly interested in a subject, you can add in classes (based on sources in the appendices here or your own material). If students are less interested in a subject, you can skip it entirely.
- There is no charge for using this material. We do ask that each time you use it, you email us (dkornbluth@nerleef.com) to let us know how students responded and to share any suggestions you may have. This will enable us to gauge effectiveness and improve in the future.

Wishing you much hatzlacha in all your endeavors

Ner LeElef

Contents of Jewish History Course

This course is designed to give students a basic outline of the main time periods and challenges of Jewish history. The first unit is an introduction to the study of Jewish history as a whole, and the next eight units cover all of history, from Adam and Eve until modern times. Teachers can of course choose which parts to teach, add or subtract as they see fit.

Unit 1: Introduction to Jewish History

In this unit we deal with basic questions such as:

- Why Study History?
- Why Study Jewish History?

Furthermore, there are three optional sections:

- Appendix 1: Is History Accurate?
- Appendix 2: Forces vs. Free Will
- Appendix 3: Does Judaism favor the study of history?

Unit 2: The Birth of Monotheism

In this unit we study the First Five Steps of Jewish History:

- Step 1. Adam and Eve
- Step 2. Noah and the Flood
- Step 3. Idol Worship and Monotheism
- Step 4: The Choice of Abraham.
- Step 5: Jacob, Wives and Tribes

Unit 3: Egypt, Exodus & Revelation

We continue the last unit and get up to the Giving of the Torah:

- Step 6: Joseph & The Brothers
- Step 7: Gratitude and Degradation
- Step 8: G-d Hears Our Cries
- Step 9: Free to be ... What?
- Step 10: The Jewish Role in the World & Revelation

Unit 4: The First Temple: David and Solomon

Beginning with a few words about the period of the Judges, this unit focuses on the greatness of the early Kingship and the early Temple, through the lens of the major events, struggles, successes and failures of King David and King Solomon.

Unit 5: The End of The First Temple and The First Exile

In this unit we will focus on the decline of the First Temple:

- The Split into Two Kingdoms
- Destruction
- Why Was the Temple Destroyed?
- The First Exile and Purim

Unit 6: The Second Temple Period

This unit will cover the entire Second Temple Period:

- The New Temple
- The Story of Chanukah
- Rome
- The Destruction of the Second Temple

Unit 7: Development of the Mishna & Gemara

In this session, we deal with

- Fall of Temple & Establishment of Yavneh
- The Importance of and development of the Oral Torah

Unit 8: Medieval Period – the Rishonim

Beginning with the great challenges and tragedies of the Crusades, Expulsion, etc, this unit focuses on gaining an appreciation of the Rishonim, through a close look at the work of the Rambam and Rashi.

Unit 9: *Modernity and Movements*

This unit covers the last five hundred years of Jewish History:

- The Flowering of Kabbalah
- The Emergence of Chasidism
- The Development of Yeshivot
- Rabbi Israel Salanter and Mussar Movement
- Non-Traditional movements
- Return to Israel
- Holocaust

Optional Unit 10: A Summary and Wrap-Up

Timeline for Outline of Jewish History Course

Common Date	Jewish Date	Event	notes	Study Unit
3760 BCE	0	Adam & Eve		Unit 2: The Birth of Monotheism
2704	1056	Noah born		
1812	1948	Abraham born		
1712	2048	Isaac born		
1652	2108	Jacob born		
1568-1561	2192-2199	Tribes born		
1522	2238	12 Tribes descend to Egypt		Unit 3: Egypt, Exodus & Revelation
1312	2448	Jews leave Egypt and get Torah at Sinai		
1272	2848	Jewish Nation enters Israel		Unit 4: The First Temple
907		David born		
848		Solomon born		
832	2928	First Temple built	First Temple stands for 410 years	
796	2964	Kingdom Divided		
555	3205	Northern Kingdom destroyed; Ten Tribes exiled		
422	3338	First Temple Destroyed		
422-352	3338-3408	Babylonian Exile		Unit 5: Decline of the 1 st Temple and Exile
355	3401	Central Purim events		
352	3408	Second Temple built	Second Temple stands for 420 years	
139	3622	Chanukah		
68 CE	3828	Second Temple destroyed		
c. 150-200	c.3900-4000	Compilation of Mishna		Unit 7: Development of Mishna and Gemara
c.200	c.4000	Jewish Center shifts to Babylon		
c. 500	4300	Gemara compiled		
1040-1105		Rashi's life		Unit 8: Medieval Period
1096		First Crusade		
1135-1204		Maimonides' (Rambam) life		
1492		Expulsion of Spanish Jewry		
1698-1760		Baal Shem Tov's Life / Chassidism		Unit 9: Modernity and Movements
1803		"Volozhin" (First Modern Yeshiva) created		
1810-1883		Life of Rabbi Israel Salanter, / Mussar		
1939-45		Holocaust		
1948		State of Israel born		

Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

Unit 1

Introduction to Jewish History

In this unit we deal with basic questions such as:

- Why Study History?
- Why Study Jewish History?

Furthermore, there are three optional sections:

- Appendix 1: Is History Accurate?
- Appendix 2: Forces vs. Free Will
- Appendix 3: Does Judaism favor the study of history?

Our Story
Unit 1: An Introduction to Jewish History

Source 1

"History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we made today."

Henry Ford¹

"Only a good-for-nothing is not interested in his past."

Sigmund Freud

Outline

- Why Study History?
- Why Study Jewish History?
- Conclusion & Final Story

Optional Sections

- Appendix 1: Is History Accurate?
- Appendix 2: Forces vs. Free Will
- Appendix 3: Does Judaism favor the study of history?

I want to start this course and this class with a basic question. It may seem obvious to you, but I think before we get into history itself, we should orient ourselves and try to better understand what we are doing here. In fact our real beginning of the historical trail will start next time. This class today we will not be getting into any actual historical periods at all, rather we'll be asking some fundamental questions:

*Why study history? And why Jewish history?
Furthermore, what is history?*

I hope that not only will asking these questions broaden our horizons as to why to learn history, and inspire us to learn it, but also will set the stage to understand the approach we are going to take over the next few weeks.

So let us start:

First Question: Should We Study History? Why?

Did you see the two quotations above from Ford and Freud? Which do you agree with? Why? Do you think history is important? Why?

¹ It is interesting to note these two views of history with the people expressing them. Freud was of course Jewish; Ford was a notorious anti-Semite.

[Ask students for their thoughts. Perhaps put a list up on the board. You might also want to ask students what they want to gain from the course (i.e. what they hope to gain from an introduction to Jewish history), which will help you get to know them and help focus the course to their satisfaction. Once they have answered, and shared their ideas, you can hand out the source sheets and continue.]

Reason #1: Learn From Past

The most famous reason to study history is to learn from the past. As George Santayana put it:

Source 2

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it!”

George Santayana

Can you think of any lessons that humanity has learned from the past? Generally speaking, do we learn from the past?

Note the following contrary opinion:

Source 3

Hegel was right when he said that the only thing that we learn from history is that man can never learn anything from history.

George Bernard Shaw

Which do you think is true? DO we learn from history? Was Shaw right? Does this mean that we shouldn't bother trying? Is that that man can never learn from history, or generally doesn't learn from history?

[Ask students what they think. Perhaps we can say that whether or others have learned from history, we can and should!]

Reason #2: Know Yourself

There is another, deeper reason to learn history. Consider the two following sources:

Source 4

To know yourself means to be aware of what it is that makes you who you are. And in this respect, the one thing which reveals this knowledge is history.

The History Guide:
A Student's Guide to the Study of History

It is sometimes said that historical facts do not matter. But citizens who fail to know

basic landmarks of history and civics are unlikely to be able to reflect on their meaning. They fail to recognize the unique nature of our society, and the importance of preserving it.

LOSING AMERICA'S MEMORY
American Council of Trustees and Alumni

In other words, Santayana's statement is certainly true – we need to learn about mistakes made in the past in order to help us avoid them. But there may be something deeper as well. Every person has as part of their make-up the challenge of struggling with the fundamental question, 'who am I?' Part of the answer to that lifelong question is uniquely personal, but part is communal, cultural, religious etc. Learning history can help us in this existential quest, helping us getting to know ourselves at all levels

Imagine waking up one morning to find out that you have no memory! You don't recognize your parents. You don't recognize your siblings. You don't remember your friends. You don't remember what foods you like, what your favorite movie is, what books you like, where you went on vacation...nothing. You can talk and think, but your entire history is lost. How would this affect your life? Would you be the same person?

[The point here is to emphasize the fact that history is a huge factor in *who we are*. Not necessarily the only factor, but certainly a large one. And someone who wants to get to know who they are, how they got to be who they are, where they are from, etc., should learn about their own history, personal and societal]

Review the other reasons students suggested, and summarize them.

Second Question: Why Study Jewish History?

We have discussed the benefits of learning history. Is Jewish history any different? Are there any additional reasons to learn Jewish history? What do you think?

[If students didn't already explore this question initially, let them do so now]

[We suggest you let students read and explain what these sources indicate, before you summarize the idea.]

Reason 1: Remembering Who We Are

Source 5

"The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history, Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster."

Blind Czech historian Milan Hubl in Milan Kundera's
The Book of Laughter and Forgetting

Do you feel this corresponds to the second reason above? How yes and how not?

[It could be understood in different ways. At one level, it sounds similar: people should know who they are. But there is a whole element of survival mentioned here that wasn't mentioned before. The new element is that without memory, a people cannot survive. Many Holocaust survivors went to great lengths to make sure that the world doesn't forget.]

Reason 2: Understanding World History

Source 6

... Jewish history covers not only vast tracts of time but huge areas. The Jews have penetrated many societies and left their mark on all of them. Writing a history of the Jews is almost like writing a history of the world, but from a highly peculiar angle of vision. It is world history seen from the viewpoint of a learned and intelligent victim.

(Non-Jewish historian) Paul Johnson, A History of the Jews, Prologue

To learn about Jewish history is to explore ancient Egypt, Babylon, Rome, the Medieval world and more. Furthermore it helps focuses on what those societies were really like, aside from which King conquered which territory.

Consider the following quotation. How does it fit in with the others? Is it a new category? A repetition of what we've seen before? [Note that there is no one answer to these questions. Let students share their thoughts]

Source 7

The Jewish Bible ... ranks as one of the most extraordinary documents of world literature ...it is a unique historical account of a religion, its rules and the contentious relation between the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" and his worshippers. It's a remarkable opportunity to study a culture whose roots stretch from the very beginning of recorded history down to the present. Of the great cultures of today, only Egypt and China offer a similarly rich historical past. In terms of documented history, no European culture can claim anything approaching the antiquity of the Jewish past.

... Jewish history is filled with fascinating episodes of political growth, national catastrophe, cultural rebirth, ... Jewish history is unusual not least because Jewish culture and society survived the destruction of its original political condition (the ancient Israelite kingdoms) and ... [was] capable of retaining a distinct identity even once all manifestations of political power and even the Temple center were finally lost in the two Roman-Jewish Wars. Jewish culture has proven remarkably persistent in the face of extreme adversity, and this is one of its greatest fascinations.

.... Jewish history holds interest and relevance for many other people... (The author of this learning guide is not Jewish!) ...

Reason 3 : Is There A Purpose to Life?

Source 8

Why have I written a history of the Jews?

.... the book gave me the chance to reconsider objectively, in the light of a study covering nearly 4,000 years, the most intractable of all human questions: what are we on earth for? Is history merely a series of events whose sum is meaningless? Is there no fundamental moral difference between the history of the human race and the history, say, of ants? Or is there a providential plan of which we are, however-- humbly, the agents?

No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny. At a very early stage in their collective existence they believed they had detected a divine scheme for the human race, of which their own society was to be a pilot. They worked out their role in immense detail. They clung to it with heroic persistence in the face of savage suffering. Many of them believe it still. Others transmuted it into Promethean endeavours to raise our condition by purely human means. The Jewish vision became the prototype for many similar grand designs for humanity, both divine and man-made. **The Jews, therefore, stand right at the centre of the perennial attempt to give human life the dignity of a purpose.** Does their own history suggest that such attempts are worth making? Or does it reveal their essential futility?

Non-Jewish historian Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, Prologue

[Ask students how they feel about this idea.]

Reason 4: The Wonder of Jewish Survival

Has anyone seen before this Mark Twain quote. It is an incredible quote.

Source 9

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one per cent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

Mark Twain

Amazing quotation. Amazing observation.

[The point to bring across here is that our story is unique and special. We are the inheritors of a great legacy. Being introduced to our history is being introduced to one of the great mysteries and wonders of human civilization.]

In a similar vein, consider this story:

King Louis XIV of France, who lived in the 17th century, once asked Blaise Pascal, the great French enlightenment philosopher, if there was any proof of the supernatural. Pascal answered, "The Jews, your Majesty, The Jews." Why? Pascal understood that Jewish survival and contributions violated all the laws of history. Imagine what he would say today!

The following was written by a great Torah scholar:

Source 10

'No sensible person would deny that the knowledge of the history of our nation, in general and in detail, is indispensable for every intelligent person whose portion is G-d's Torah – so that he may know what G-d did with this Nation, how the people of our Nation always rise and fall and are led by G-d's particular Providence, and that in every generation 'they' rise up to annihilate us and at all times G-d appoints a faithful savior who endangers his life to save this great multitude: Great is the Sheperd who saves them'

R'Zvi-Hirsch Hayyoth of Brody,
in Kol Sifrei Maharitz Chayoth
p 406-407

Why is it important to appreciate the miracle of Jewish survival? What do you think? Why is it 'indispensable?'

Reason 5 : Dealing with the Challenges of Today

Consider the following quotation:

Source 11

“[A] perspective [of thousands of years of Jewish and world history] is essential for viewing the events and challenges of current Jewish and general life intelligently and wisely. People need heroes to identify with, historical events to remember and a feeling of continuity to gain the security necessary for productive and meaningful lives. The story of the Jewish people over the millennia will provide these requisite heroes, events, challenges, and lessons.”

Rabbi Berel Wein, Preface to *Echoes of Glory*

How do you understand it? Is it the same as the famous George Santayana quote above?

[There is indeed an overlap but it is not exactly the same. Santayana talked about avoiding mistakes. Rabbi Wein focuses on understanding the challenges of today. In another place he said that ‘attempting to be a Jew in the 21st Century without understanding the layers of political, cultural, and religious events that formed the world Jewish community is like entering the theater in the middle of the movie.’ How can we figure out what it means to be Jewish and what we should focus on Jewishly if we don’t know our own history?]

Conclusion & Final Story

These were the reasons we saw to learn history:

Reason #1: Learn From Past

Reason #2: Know Yourself

These were the reasons we saw to learn Jewish history:

Reason 1: Remembering Who We Are

Reason 2: Understanding World History

Reason 3 : Is There A Purpose to Life?

Reason 4: The Wonder of Jewish Survival

Reason 5 : Dealing with the Challenges of Today

Were there any other reasons mentioned? Anything you want to add now?

To us here today, all the reasons above apply.

- *We can learn lessons from the past.*

- *Learning about our past does help us understand who we are, where we came from, what we are doing here, etc.*
- *It helps us deal with our own challenges in our own lives and helps give context to the challenges of the Jewish world today.*
- *Furthermore, there is an added reason to study Jewish history now: Later on in the source above, R'Chaim Ozer explains that because Jewish history has been distorted and abused, often explained through Christian or Christianized sources – or through historians who have an anti-tradition agenda, we need to set the record straight.*

To be a Jew means to be very aware of the past. Whether we want to get into the details, the dates, etc., that is an individual question. But to know the basic history, time periods of the Jewish People – that we all need to know. It will help us understand who we are. It will help us grow in our Jewishness.

Let us end with this final story:

Source 12

You are walking down a road. It is a very long road taking you through vast, uninhabited land. At every crossroads there is a signpost giving directions to and from different locations. Sometimes a traveler will go for days without a crossroads, just following the road since the last signpost.

At one period you travel for many, many days alone. There are no crossroads and no signpost. Yet you know that you are to keep traveling until the next one and the signpost will tell you where to go.

You finally see a crossroads up ahead. But as you get close, the truth dawns on you – the signpost has been knocked down and turned over. Do you go left, straight, or right? How can you possibly know where to go?

[Let students suggest an answer. Often, people will guess it]

The answer is that you pick up the sign and find the arrow with the name of your city of origin and point it to the path you just walked on! You DO KNOW where you came from. And when you fix the sign in that direction, it will work in other directions as well!

The point is:

If you want to know where you are going, you need to know where you are coming from!

The same thing is true in life:

If we want to know where we are going, we need to know where we are coming from!

Appendix 1: Is History Accurate?

Source 13

[History is like] doing a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces are scattered all over the house in several boxes, some of which have been destroyed, and where once it is put together, a significant number of the pieces are still missing. The nature of the resulting picture will depend partly on how many boxes still survive and have been tracked down, and this depends partly on having some idea of where to look; but the picture's contours can still be filled in, even when not all the pieces have been located. We *imagine* the contours in this situation, and have to speculate on quite a bit of the detail; at the same time, however, the discovery of the existing pieces does set quite severe limits on the operation of our imagination. If they only fit together to produce a picture of a steam-engine, for instance, it is no good trying to put them together to make a suburban garden: it simply will not work.

Richard Evans, *In Defence of History*. (p. 89)

“It is not I who speak, but history which speaks through me.” Fustel de Coulange

Source 14

"The facts are really not at all like fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use - these two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch."

E.H. Carr, *What is History*, Penguin p. 23)

So which is it? Is history objective or subjective? Is it all up for argument?

[Ask students how they would define history. Then consider the dictionary definition below. Focus on the second verb – analyzes – that is where things get difficult! And as Professor Carr stated above, even the recording itself is not objective!]

Source 15

History: The branch of knowledge that records and analyzes past events
The American Heritage Dictionary, 4th Edition

So why did the Roman Empire fall? Don't expect any one reason to suffice! We're talking about a 500-year-plus empire here! It had incorporated many cultures, depended on a vast network of trade, tried to defend many borders, and recently switched religions (sort of). Expect a cluster of reasons. Expect scholars to argue over which reasons were more important. Expect complexity ... [And yet] All interpretations are **not** created equal. Some are more cogent than others. Some have more evidence in their favor. Some are false and some are lies. Even though history is more than a bunch of facts, evidence still counts for a lot.

Gerald W. Schlabach: *A Sense of History*

Appendix 2: Forces vs. Free Will

Source 16

It is interesting to note that the Bible itself in recording the great sweep of history over more than a millennia, deals not with historical, abstract, impersonal forces that push individuals around and into the corner of the story, but rather it depicts almost exclusively the stories and lives of individuals. And it is clear from the biblical narrative that these individuals through the exercise of their divinely granted freedom of will create the events and policies that we call history. To a great extent Marxism absolves humans from any responsibility for their actions. It postulates that things must happen in a certain way and that humans are powerless to stem that tide or defeat those forces that guide history.

Judaism, having postulated that G-d grants humans ultimate free will and freedom of action and behavior, makes humans responsible and acutely accountable for decisions, behavior, policies and actions. Thus, humans, individuals like you and me, are the true creators of history and its events. The individual is not a passive pawn in shaping events that affect human life. Rather, humans are the active catalyst that creates events and propels the story of human history onward.

Rabbi Berel Wein

How does the following source reflect itself in Rabbi Wein's comments above?

Source 17

Therefore a person must see himself the entire year as if he is half righteous and half wicked; and so for the entire world, half righteous and half wicked:

If he commits one sin, has tipped the balance for himself and the world to the side of wickedness, and caused them destruction; if he has done one mitzvah, he has tipped the balance for himself and the world to righteousness and caused them salvation.

Maimonides, Laws of Repentance 3:8

לפיכך צריך כל אדם שיראה עצמו כל השנה כולה,

הלכות תשובה פרק ג: ח

Appendix 3: Does Judaism Favor the Study of History?

It sounds obvious, but let us spend a few moments on this question. Do you think our religion wants us to know our history?

[Let students discuss]

Can you think of any parts of our religion that encourage the knowledge of history?

[Pesach Haggadah, Sukkos, Fast Days, Kinot, Bikkurim (Deuteronomy 26:1), Amalek (Deuteronomy 25:17) Study of Torah includes a lot of history...]

Source 18

<p>Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask thy father, and he will declare unto thee, thine elders, and they will tell thee.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Deuteronomy 32:7-9</p>	<p>זְכוֹר יָמוֹת עוֹלָם, בִּינּוֹ שָׁנוֹת דָּר-דָּר וְנִדְרָה שְׁאֵל אָבִיךָ וְיַגִּדְךָ, וְזָקֵיךָ וְיֹאמְרוּ לָךְ. דְּבָרִים פָּרָק לֵב ז:</p>
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And yet, despite the fact that we are a very, very historically-minded people, perhaps the most historically-minded people, consider the following:

Source 19

<p>“... Jews really thought they had in the Bible all the history that mattered ... History had nothing to explain and little to reveal to the man who meditated the Law day and night.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Arnaldo Momigliano, <u>The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography</u> (Berkeley, 1990), p. 23</p>
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Source 20

<p>Aren't the words of the great rabbis, rishonim and achronim, alive and living in the mouths of those who grab onto the Torah?! Every house of study is filled with rabbis and students learning a <i>living Torah</i>, as if [their words] were said today.</p> <p>Even those sages who did deal with history</p>	<p>גְּדוּלֵי הַתּוֹרָה מֵאִזּוֹ וּמֵעוֹלָם לֹא שָׁמוּ לֵבם לְהַעֲמִיק ש גַּם אֱלֹהֵי הַגְּדוּלִים הַמוֹעֲטִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַסְקוּ בַּדְּבָרִי</p>
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only did so incidentally, for they devoted the masses of their times to knowing the Torah, which is wider than the land and deeper than the sea. That is what they focused on and that is how they learned history.

In the words of the rabbis they delved and not in their histories or the places they lived.

R. Chaim Ozer Grodzenski approbation to RYH Lipschitz, *Sefer Dor Yesharim* (Petrokov, 1907), 8.

Source 21

“ [while] memory of the past was always a central component of Jewish experience, the historian was not its primary custodian.”

Historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zachor*, p 14.

[There are many other examples you can share of this seeming contradiction within Jewish thought. We saw how much remembering the past is central to Judaism. And yet when it comes to Avraham Avinu, we learn almost nothing of his own history and are introduced to him much later in life. The Book of Numbers is really called BaMidbar – yet it is really the story of the Jews in the desert? The Torah skips from the spies and Miriam which happened in year two in the desert to the portion of Chukas which occurs in the year 40!]

How do you understand this seeming duality? Why were we seemingly not focused on history when at the same time we are so historical?

A simple approach is to suggest that we were always very wary of having Jewish history become the focus instead of living Judaism. The Egyptians have a Book of the Dead. We don't. Judaism is about how one lives. And so we were always very historical – remembering lessons from the past, our experience as slaves, our liberation, etc. But we shouldn't get bogged down in the details and dates etc. Note that these DO have their place. It is good to know what happened and when. But that shouldn't become our Judaism.

Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

Unit 2

The Birth of Monotheism

In this unit we study the First Five Steps of Jewish History:

- Step 1. Adam and Eve
- Step 2. Noah and the Flood
- Step 3. Idol Worship and Monotheism
- Step 4: The Choice of Abraham.
- Step 5: Jacob, Wives and Tribes

Unit 2: The Birth of Monotheism

In this session, we'll see the first Five Steps of Jewish History, taking us from Adam until the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Note that in this one session we will be covering about 2200 years. The rest of the course will be moving much slower and all the other classes combined will cover the other approximately 3500 years

Introduction: When does Jewish history start?

Question: When should we really start this course? When does Jewish History really start?

Answer: There are various ways of looking at it.

- The Jewish People really became a People when we left Egypt, or more precisely when we got the Torah. So this is one possible point of beginning.
- But the lives & lessons of the Matriarchs and Patriarchs are central to understanding Judaism and the progress of Jewish history so they need to be included as well. The Jewish people itself never would have existed without the Matriarchs and Patriarchs and G-d's promises to them. So we need to spend a few minutes on them at least to give some perspective.
- And what about Adam and Eve? Is knowing the story of the Garden of Eve necessary? You could argue both ways². And what about Noah?

There is no one answer to this question. But it is good to hear the question.

Educator: There is an optional opening here called Why Are We Here? It appears in the appendix and can be added into the class at this time.

Here are the Five Steps of Jewish History that we are going to see today:

Step 1. Adam and Eve
Step 2. Noah and the Flood
Step 3. Idol Worship and Monotheism
Step 4: The Choice of Abraham.
Step 5: Jacob, Wives and Tribes

Step 1: Adam and Eve³

² On the one hand, they are part of a different reality where the Jewish People doesn't exist at all. They are the first people, not the first Jews. So they are not really part of Jewish history. On the other hand, all of Jewish history is a result of what happened in the Garden of Eden. We can't begin to understand anything about G-d's plan for humanity unless we know about it.

³ Question: Were Adam and Eve Jewish?

Answer: Absolutely not. Way before the Jews appeared or needed to appear. This is proto-Jewish history.

You know the story – Adam and Eve live in a perfect, spiritual, beautiful place called the Garden of Eden. They were given one commandment, not to eat from the Tree. They could have lived the most incredible lives ever – spiritual bliss, and yet at their level they failed. They don't listen. Don't think they were spiritual slouches – they were incredible human beings who made a mistake. We can see that in depth at a different time.

G-d confronts them. Adam blames Eve. She blames the snake. G-d exiles them from the Garden of Eden. And the last 5767 years since then is humanity's attempt – at some level – to repair the breach, to get back to that spiritual, beautiful place. Mystically and metaphorically, we are all trying to repair ourselves and repair the world and go back to that place of perfect spirituality – really to go back to G-d, to perfection itself.

Again, we will hopefully this in depth at some later point. The lessons of Adam and Eve are fundamental – there is an incredible amount to understand there. All the great themes and challenges - innocence, perfection, temptation, regret, exile, etc – they are all there in the first chapters of the Torah. And the image of the Garden of Eden and the basic storyline has been a staple of world literature for thousands of years.

In any case, they have kids, the generations progress.

Step 2: Noah

After the exile from the Garden of Eden, G-d waits and waits for humanity to improve. But it doesn't. In fact it gets worse and worse. Robbery, murder, depravity. Worse than you can imagine:

Source 1

<p>5 And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.</p>	<p>ה וַיִּרְא יְהוָה, כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ, וְכָל-יִצְרָר ו וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה, כִּי-עָשָׂה אֶת-הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ ; וַיִּתְעַצֵּב,</p>
<p>6 And G-d regretted that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart.</p>	
<p>Genesis Chapter 6</p>	

Notice the language: the evil was great, all thoughts were always evil. G-d waits and waits and waits. He waits for generations for there to be some improvement. But there isn't. By the tenth generation after Adam, things are beyond repair. Since humanity has already destroyed itself and the world in a moral and spiritual sense, G-d decides to destroy it physically with the flood – but not completely.

G-d gives us another chance. The righteous Noah and his family are saved to start again. You know the story – he builds the Ark, 40 days and 40 nights, the dove is sent out to find dry land and humanity gets to try again. The world is destroyed but the microcosm

of the Ark is allowed to give the world a fresh start. A new beginning. G-d also promises that He will never wipe out the earth again.

Step3: Idol Worship and Monotheism

And yet humanity does not learn the lesson. They forget about G-d and get more and more involved in idol worship.

It is hard for us to relate to this today, since there is very little real idol worship left and the whole idea seems silly. But it was a very powerful force and attraction for many intelligent, sophisticated people for thousands of years.

How did it start? This phenomenon is fascinating.

How did people come to worship G-d so soon after Adam and Eve?
How did they ignore G-d so quickly?

Maimonides explains what happened:

Source 2

<p>In the days of Enosh⁴, people made a big mistake, and the counsel of the wise people degenerated into stupidity... They said that since G-d created the skies and spheres ... and that they are servants who serve Him, it would be appropriate to ... honor them as well... in the same way that a king wants to honor the servants who serve him ...</p>	<p>א בימי אנוש טעו בני האדם טעות גדולה, ונבערה ב כיון שעלה דבר זה על ליבם, התחילו לבנות</p>
<p>Once this matter was decided upon, they proceeded to build temples to the stars, to bring sacrifices to them...</p>	<p>ג ... לא שהם אומרים שאין שם אלוה אלא כוכב</p>
<p>...they did not [initially] deny the existence of G-d ... but their mistake and foolishness was to imagine that idolatry was G-d's will.</p>	<p>ד ואחר שארכו הימים...</p>
<p>After some time... people started to make figures in the temples, under trees and on the tops of mountains and hills, and they congregated and bowed down to them.</p>	<p>ה...התחילו .. לעשות צורות בהיכלות ותחת</p>
<p>[These false] prophets said that through this service one will multiply and be</p>	<p>ו...ופשט דבר זה בכל העולם... ז וכיון שארכו הימים, נשתקע השם ... עד שנולד</p>

⁴ Adam and Eve's grandchild

<p>successful ...</p> <p>... [idol worship] ... became propagated throughout the whole world.</p> <p>.... As time passed, G-d was forgotten by everyone... [Things continued in this manner] until Abraham the Patriarch ... was born.</p> <p>... he, as a child, began contemplating and thinking day and night.. Abraham did not have a mentor, but was immersed among the foolish idolaters of Ur Casdim.</p> <p>His father and mother and the entire people, served idols, as did he. In his heart, however, he continued to contemplate, until he realized the way of truth ...and knew that there is a G-d who directs the spheres, created the world, and besides whom there is none other...</p> <p>Abraham was forty years old when he recognized his Creator.</p> <p>Once he achieved this, he began to reason with the inhabitants of Ur Casdim ... and began to proclaim that it is not fitting to serve anyone other than G-d ...</p> <p>Since his reasoning was stronger than theirs and people were listening to him, the king tried to kill him, but a miracle was performed for him...[and he was saved]</p> <p>He went and gathered people together from cities and kingdoms, until he reached the land of Canaan ... until thousands and tens of thousands came to him. These were the people of the house of Abraham.</p> <p>He placed this important principle in their way of thinking, wrote books, and taught it to his son Isaac. Isaac also brought people back [to the way of truth], and taught it to</p>	<p>ט ... התחיל לשוטט בדעתו והוא קטן, ולחשוב</p> <p>י ואביו ואימו וכל העם עובדים עבודה זרה, והוא</p> <p>יא ... ובן ארבעים שנה, הכיר אברהם את</p> <p>יב כיון שהכיר וידע, התחיל להשיב תשובות על</p> <p>יג כיון שגבר עליהם בראיותיו, ביקש המלך</p> <p>יד ... עד שנתקבצו אליו אלפים ורבבות, והם</p> <p>ושתל בליבם העיקר הגדול הזה, וחיבר בו</p> <p>הלכות עבודה זרה פרק א</p>
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Jacob, instructing him to teach as well	
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Hilchos Avodas Kochavim1:1-3	
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Question: What does the Maimonides mean? What is he trying to say?

Answer: The essential point he is trying to make is to explain how Idol Worship entered the world. He explains that it started as a mistaken belief. People thought since G-d made the sun and created it to be powerful, etc., it was G-d's will to serve them as well. With the passage of time, G-d was forgotten and only the sun and stars were remembered. Eventually they started making their own statues, etc to worship as well.

It is important to note that the Maimonides says there that there were individuals who did know G-d – but there were only small handful and they didn't affect others significantly. Until Abraham.

Step 4: The Choice of Abraham

As Maimonides mentions, G-d waited and waited. However, while there are individuals who 'know G-d', humanity as a whole doesn't. Finally, after 20 generations, there is one individual who is truly remarkable. Who stands out. Abraham. Abraham is a huge focus, a huge turning point in Jewish history and world history.

It is important to realize that Abraham was not chosen randomly. Through an amazing process of searching and self-change, He discovered G-d on his own.

A similar idea is in the old ditty:

*"How odd of G-d to choose the Jews.
It's not so odd - The Jews chose G-d!"*

A famous story is told of Abraham's youth and his first steps towards monotheism

Source 3

<p>Abraham's father, Terach was an idol-manufacturer. One day when Terach was away, so he left Abraham to manage the shop. People would come in and ask to buy idols. Abraham would say, "How old are you?" The person would say, "Fifty," or "Sixty". Abraham would say, "How can it be that a man of sixty wants to bow down to a one-day-old idol?" The man would feel ashamed and leave.</p>
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<p>One time a woman came with a basket of bread. She said to Abraham, "Take this and offer it to the G-ds," and then left.</p>
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<p>Abraham got up, took a hammer in his hand, broke all the idols to pieces, and then put the hammer in the hand of the biggest idol among them.</p>
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When his father came back and saw the broken idols, he was appalled. "Who did this?" he cried. "How can I hide anything from you?" replied Abraham calmly. "A woman came with a basket of bread and told me to offer it to them. I brought it in front of them, and each one said, 'I'm going to eat first.'" Then the biggest one got up, took the hammer and broke all the others to pieces."

"What are you saying?" asked Terach, "Do they have minds?"

Said Abraham: "Listen to what your own mouth is saying, Father! They have no power at all! So why worship them?"

(Midrash Bereishit 38:13)

There were individuals who knew G-d before Abraham. But not in the same way and they didn't react to it like he did. He gained complete clarity and spread clarity. Not only did he believe in G-d, he actively tried to spread belief in G-d. He explained. He argued. He tried to show the foolishness of idolatry. Remember how this fits into the overall plan that we outlined before.

We are called Jews, but we were once known as Hebrews – Ivrim. Abraham was called haIvri, which literally means "on the other side" – he stood alone against the whole world.

Abraham found G-d, but it is not until later that G-d openly addresses him:

Source 4

G-d said to Abram, "Go from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.	א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם, לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ
Genesis 12:1	

This is of course the introduction to the Land of Israel, the country that plays such a vital role in Jewish history and thought. Abraham and Sarah and their household come to Israel. But G-d also gave them a promise:

Source 5

"I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you and make your name great; and you will be a blessing ⁵ ."	ב וַיֹּאמֶר, לְגוֹי גָדוֹל, וַאֲבָרְכֶךָ, וַאֲגַדְלֶה שְׁמֶךָ;
Genesis 12:2	

⁵ I.e. to others

This promise is really the beginning of the Jewish People.

Abraham was a loyal servant but here he becomes more. Because of his greatness – and because it fits into G-d's plan for humanity – Abraham here leaves the status of a great individual and becomes the progenitor of the Jewish people. We are the children of Abraham. So this is a core element in understanding Jewish history.

This is really where G-d says that *there will be a Jewish history!* Without this, it all could have ended and Abraham would've gone down in history as a great individual. But because of his extraordinary devotion, he becomes much more.

Abraham and Sarah have Isaac – he is their heir and next step in the Jewish nation. Sarah had previously given Abraham her maidservant Hagar to enable him to have children and the child is named Ishmael, the first of the Arab peoples.

Abraham goes through many tests. He is thrown into a burning fire. He must leave his homeland. He is told to sacrifice his son, Isaac, although G-d calls it off before he can do the deed. Isaac marries the caring Rebecca.⁶

Step 5: Jacob, Wives & Tribes

Isaac and Rebecca have twins. These twins are the *grandchildren* of Abraham and Sarah. Their son Esau is evil and their son Jacob is righteous. Jacob is renamed *Israel* which means struggle with G-d and that is where we get the name of our people and eventually our Land.

An important thing happens here. *Jacob has twelve sons. This is when the small family turns into a clan.* These children (Benjamin, Ephraim, Yehudah, etc) become the famous twelve tribes of Israel.

Today we don't really know⁷ who belongs to which tribe but historically it was [and will be!] an important part of Jewish self-definition. The tribes are given different territories in Israel, focus on different aspects of life and Judaism, and for many hundreds of years the tribes really have very different identities and loyalties from one another. And this is where it starts – the Twelve Sons of Jacob.

So let us summarize:

Step 1. Adam and Eve – then ten generations later:
Step 2. Noah and the Flood – and then ten generations later:
Step 3. Idol Worship and Monotheism (Maimonides' History lesson)
Step 4: The Choice of Abraham.

⁶ Educator: Her feeding of the camels, epitomizing the trait of chesed, can be mentioned here

⁷ except with Levites

Step 5: Jacob, Wives and Tribes Two concubines as well. 12 sons in total. This is when the family turns into a clan, and the twelve children of Jacob eventually become the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Appendix 1: Why Are We Here?

Optional Opening: Why Are We Here?

In order to get greater perspective, we also need to have – at a very superficial level – an idea of *what* the point of the Jewish People is. What the point of life is. In other words, *we can't really start the story – or even know when to start the story – until we know what the main theme of the story is.*

By definition, monotheists believe that G-d is perfect. He doesn't lack anything. Or Need anything. This means that Before He created the world, He didn't need us or need the world. He was perfect.

So why did G-d create the world?

Source 6

The point of creation was for Him to give of His Goodness to another...

Derech G-d Part I Chapter 2 #1

א. הנה התכלית בבריאה היה להטיב מטובו

He created it as a *chesed* to us. G-d didn't need it. Life itself is an incredible gift to be appreciated. We are supposed to enjoy, but life is deeper.

Why was the world created? In order to understand the March of History, as Jews, we need to know what the goal of life is. If we understand what G-d is trying to achieve and what our role is, then certain parts of history start to make sense. If we have no idea why we are here, it is much harder to get a handle on what happens to us and why.

G-d wanted to give to us. The greatest kindness He could give. What is the greatest kindness that G-d could give us? Spirituality – connection to Him. The world has many wonderful things – and we can certainly enjoy them – but the ultimate reason that G-d created the world is to enable us to become the incredible people we can be; to connect to the True Source. To live lives of joy, meaning, connection, and Truth. Everything we are going to see in Jewish history fits into this overall plan – of giving humanity the opportunity to raise themselves up rather than get dragged down.

Keeping this in mind – that it is G-d's goal to raise humanity up, we can begin the first Steps.

Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

Unit 3

Egypt, Exodus & Revelation

We continue the last unit and get up to the Giving of the Torah:

Step 6: Joseph & The Brothers

Step 7: Gratitude and Degradation

Step 8: G-d Hears Our Cries

Step 9: Free to be ... What?

Step 10: The Jewish Role in the World & Revelation

Unit 3: Egypt, Exodus & Revelation

Last class we saw the beginning of world history and Jewish history. We asked a question that really has no one answer, namely when does Jewish History start.

We then saw the first Five Steps:

Last Class (First Five Steps of Jewish History)

Step 1. Adam and Eve

Step 2. Noah and the Flood

Step 3. Idol Worship and Monotheism

Step 4: The Choice of Abraham.

Step 5: Jacob, Wives and Tribes

In the 5th step we learned about Jacob, Rahel, Leah and their kids – who become the Twelve Tribes of Israel. This is where our narrative picks up.

In this unit we will see:

Step 6: Joseph & The Brothers

Step 7: Gratitude and Degradation

Step 8: G-d Hears Our Cries

Step 9: Free to be ... What?

Step 10: The Jewish Role in the World & Revelation

Step 6: Joseph & The Brothers

You have no doubt heard about Joseph. He had strange dreams of grandiosity. His brothers conclude that he is a real danger to the Jewish People and decide to get rid of him. He is sold to Egypt, rises up and becomes 2nd in charge only to Pharaoh.

In one of many 'exiles' from the Land of Israel, the brothers went down to Egypt because there was a famine in Israel. Eventually Joseph reveals himself to them and - being the all-powerful viceroy, second in charge of Egypt - protects them and provides for them. The Egyptians originally are very grateful to Joseph, for he had saved them from the famine. But their gratitude did not last.

Step 7: Gratitude and Degradation

Let us take a look at the Bible

Source 1

<p>8 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.</p> <p>9 And he said to his people: 'Behold, the people of the children of Israel are too many and too mighty for us;</p> <p>10 Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and whenever this is a war, they will join our enemies, and fight against us...</p> <p>11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Raamses ...</p> <p>13 And the Egyptians forced the children of Israel to work ceaselessly.</p> <p>14 And they made their lives bitter with hard service,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Exodus Chapter 1</p>	<p>ח וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ, עַל-מִצְרַיִם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע, אֶת-</p> <p>ט וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶל-עַמּוֹ: הִנֵּה, עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל--רַב</p> <p>י הֲבֵה נִתְחַכְמָה, לוֹ: פֶּן-יִרְבֶּה, וְהָיָה כִּי-תִקְרָאנָה</p> <p>יא וַיִּשְׂמְרוּ עָלֵינוּ שָׂרֵי מִסִּים, לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוּ בְּסִבְלָתָם;</p> <p>יב וַיִּבְנוּ אֶת־עָרֵי מִצְרָיִם, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיִּבְנוּ,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">יג וַיַּעֲבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּפָרֹךְ.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">יד וַיַּמְרֹרוּ אֶת-חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעִבְדָּה קָשָׁה...</p>
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Comment: We see here a massive change in attitude towards the Jews. Note that this is a running theme in Jewish history. Time after time after time Jews were kicked out of one country, and welcomed into another. There the rulers and sometimes the populace were initially grateful for Jewish contributions to local development. And then eventually they turned on the Jews, denied their contributions, and kicked them out to a new place where the cycle started again. In Egypt things were different because no one ever left Egypt – they just tried to kill us all. But the pattern of appreciation and then abrupt change is common.

The actions of the fathers are signs for the children, as explained by Nachmanides and other commentators. Seeing what our Matriarchs and Patriarchs went through helps us understand our challenges and – this is one of the main reasons for us to learn about the early generations of Jews.

In any case, Egypt, which had been a place of refuge for the Tribes, eventually becomes a terrible cruel murderous prison. Jews are starved and beaten to death. Jewish babies are

plastered into walls. Hell on Earth. *It started as a refuge but becomes a place we need refuge from.* This is a pattern in history.

Step 8: G-d Hears Our Cries

Persecution. Oppression. Infanticide. Slavery. Things got as bad as can be imagined.

Source 2

<p>23 and the children of Israel sighed because of the slavery, and they cried, and their cry came up unto G-d ...</p>	<p>כג ... וַיִּאָחֲזוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן-הָעֲבֹדָה, וַיִּזְעֻקוּ;</p>
<p>24 And G-d heard their groaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.</p>	<p>כד וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים, אֶת-נַאֲקָתָם; וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים כה וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים, אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיֵּדַע, אֱלֹהִים.</p>
<p>25 And G-d saw the children of Israel, and G-d took cognizance of them.</p>	
<p>Exodus Chapter 2</p>	

It is difficult to overstate how important the Exodus from Egypt was. Egypt was the single greatest power on earth. Much bigger and stronger than any superpower we know of today. A culture of decadence, immorality, materialism, cruelty – you name it. Many tribes had been enslaved in Egypt but none had ever left Egypt.

You may know many of the details from the Haggadah we read on Pesach night at the Seder. Moses is the main actor in Torah, being put in a basket and raised by Pharaoh's daughter, escaping to Midian when he identifies with his Jewish brethren, and then being addressed directly by G-d at the burning bush when he is commanded to go back to Egypt and lead us out.

Interestingly, Moses's name doesn't appear in the Haggadah to emphasize that G-d Himself took us out, and Moses was only his emissary. Moses is sent. Pharaoh is stubborn. Moses gives signs. Pharaoh is stubborn. G-d does the Ten Plagues to force the Egyptians to let us go. They eventually do, we leave through the Splitting of the Red Sea and are free!

Step 9: Free to be ... What?

This next source, from the book of Exodus, is very famous. Or at least part of it is very famous. G-d of course sent Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The famous line that is always quoted is one of the confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh where Moses says, 'Let My people go.' The ultimate symbol of freedom, justice.

And it is an important quotation. Only it is not the full quotation. What else did G-d say?

Source 3

<p>26 And G-d spoke to Moses: 'Go to Pharaoh, and say to him:</p> <p>Thus says G-d:</p> <p>'Let My people go so they may serve Me.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Exodus Chapter 7</p>	<p>כו וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, בֹּא אֶל-פַּרְעֹה; וְאָמַרְתָּ:</p> <p>שְׁלַח אֶת-עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי.</p>
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In other words, G-d certainly wanted to save us from oppression. But there were and are many peoples and individuals who are oppressed. G-d doesn't often break the natural order of things, Nature, openly in miracles to save people. If he shows Himself too much, there is no Free Choice and the whole point of Creation is removed.

Question: So why save the Israelites then?

Answer: Because of the merit of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and because of our destiny to be a Holy Nation, dedicated to living by the Torah and spreading an example of Monotheism. Which 3300 years ago was a radical idea but by now is more and more accepted, even normal!

Separating the Freedom from the point of Freedom is missing the boat. An example: Passover is widely celebrated. Yet Passover is the first part of a holiday connection⁸. We start counting the Omer until Shavuot, the holiday of the giving of the Torah. Because the point of the Freedom of Passover is to lay the groundwork for the Giving of the Torah.

So Freedom is indeed wonderful. But the freedom to do what? Did G-d free us from slavery to live like everyone else? Or was there a point, a goal?

Step 10: The Jewish Role in the World & Revelation

We are about to get to the point in time when G-d revealed Himself and gave the Torah at Mount Sinai. Before that happened, though, G-d reveals what the Jewish role is supposed to be. He frames what is happening. Why we were taken out and what we are supposed to represent.

Source 4

<p>2 ...and they came to the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain.</p> <p>3 And Moses went up unto G-d, and G-d</p>	<p>ב ... וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַר סִינַי, וַיַּחֲנּוּ, בְּמִדְבָּר; וַיִּחַן-שָׁם</p> <p>ג וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה, אֶל-הַאֱלֹהִים; וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה,</p>
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⁸ Similar to Sukkos having an eighth day connected to it, namely Shemini Atezeret, so too Pesach has an eighth day connected to it, namely Shavuot.

<p>called to him from the mountain, saying: 'Thus shall you say to the House of Jacob, and tell the Children of Israel:</p> <p>4 You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself.</p> <p>5 Now therefore, if you will listen to My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine;</p> <p>6 and you will be for Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Exodus Chapter 19</p>	<p>ד אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם, אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם; וְאֲשָׂא</p> <p>ה וְעַתָּה, אִם-שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי, וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם, אֶת-</p> <p>ו וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ-לִי מַמְלַכַת כֹּהֲנִים, וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ:</p> <p>שמות פרק יט</p>
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G-d is making a very clear connection here – He took us out of Egypt with something in mind, so to speak. It wasn't random. And we have a role to fulfill.

Think back to last class. We saw Adam and Eve. And then Noach. All those generations and the message of Monotheism did not get through. It was perverted. Abraham – a revolutionary – shows up on the scene and becomes the prototype, the first of a nation that will have as its national goal the spreading of the Knowledge of G-d. Of true spirituality. We know see this happening as we are brought out of Egypt and given our formal role.

What is this role?

For three days we had prepared. The stage was being set for a major event. It was not lacking in special effects.

Source 5

<p>16 And it came to pass ... there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and the voice of a <i>shofar</i> extremely loud; and all the people in the camp trembled ...</p> <p>18 And Mount Sinai was full of smoke, because G-d descended upon it in fire...and the whole mountain quaked greatly.</p> <p>19 And the voice of the <i>shofar</i> grew louder and louder</p>	<p>טז וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיט הַבָּקָר, וַיְהִי קוֹל</p> <p>יח וְהָרַם סִינַי, עָשָׁן כְּלוֹ, מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו יְהוָה,</p> <p>יט וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר, הוֹלֵךְ וְחֹזֵק מְאֹד;</p> <p>שמות פרק כ</p>
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Exodus Chapter 20

In fact, our sources tell us, Revelation at Mount Sinai was the most unique event in human history. Every human present reached the level of prophecy. The experience was so intense that we actually *died* and had to be brought back to life. For the one and only time in history, G-d revealed himself to an entire people, to make clear the authenticity of the experience.

Educator: Two options are present here:

- (1) continue on with the text, describing the Ten Commandments; or
 (2) take a few moments to focus on the uniqueness of Revelation as a type of ‘proof’ of Judaism’s authenticity. For the second option, please see the appendix

Source 6

<p>1 And G-d spoke all these words, saying:</p> <p>2 I am the Lord your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shall have no other gods before Me.</p> <p>3 Thou shall not make for yourself a graven image... Thou shall not bow down unto them, nor serve them...</p> <p>6 Thou shall not take the name of the LORD thy G-d in vain...</p> <p>7 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...</p> <p>11 Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy G-d giveth thee.</p> <p>12 Thou shall not murder.</p> <p>Thou shall not commit adultery.</p> <p>Thou shall not steal. Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour.</p> <p>13 Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's house; thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-</p>	<p>א וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים, אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאָמֹר.</p> <p>ב אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ</p> <p>ג לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל, וְכָל-תְּמוּנָה... לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה</p> <p>ו לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת-שֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לְשׁוּא: כִּי לֹא</p> <p>ז זָכוֹר אֶת-יּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת, לְקַדְּשׁוֹ...</p> <p>יא כִּבֹּד אֶת-אֲבִיךָ, וְאֶת-אִמְךָ--לְמַעַן, יֵאָרְכוּךָ</p> <p>יב לֹא תִרְצַח, {ס} לֹא תִנְאֻף; {ס} לֹא תִגְנוֹב,</p> <p>יג לֹא תִחַמֵּד, בֵּית רֵעֶךָ; {ס} לֹא-תִחַמֵּד אִשְׁתְּ</p>
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servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.	
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Now we have all heard of the Ten Commandments. They are also known as the Decalogue (or Decalog) - derived from the Greek *deka*, which means ten, and *logos*, which means word. In fact in Hebrew they are known as the Aseret HaDibrot – the Ten Utterances or Ten Sayings – because when you count them up, there are actually more than 10 commandments! When the Ten Commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy there are slight variations.

Question: Notice how G-d introduces Himself. The First Commandment⁹ does not refer to the Creation of Heavens and Earth – but to the leaving of Egypt, our subject for this class. Why is that? Shouldn't G-d have started with the big stuff?

Answer: The emphasis is on G-d's being active in the world. Not just His creation of the world but the fact that He is still involved in it.

Question: What is special about these ten?

Answer: The Torah actually includes 613 commandments! These Ten though do seem to be the basic ideological categorization of the Torah. Several works including that of Rav Saadia Gaon understood that the entire 613 were really grouped with and included in these ten, and explained how. However, intrinsically all mitzvot are equally important – and when too much emphasis was placed on them, daily communal recitation of the Ten Commandments was abolished (Berachot 12a).

Question: Were there Two Tablets?

Answer: In this respect, the movies and pictures *were* accurate. Moses got two tablets, with five on each. The first were the Bain Adam lemakom or Between me and G-d Mitzvot. The second were the Bain Adam leChavero or interpersonal mitzvot. Why was Honoring parents on the first? Some suggest that our relationship to our parents is core to our relationship to G-d.

The impact of Ten Commandments has been enormous. Today there are court cases in the USA about showing the Ten Commandments outside of Capitol buildings and inside Courts of Justice. Atheists want them removed. Whether they should be there or not is not our subject - consider *why* they are there in the first place: because the Ten Commandments are rightly seen as the core, the origin of all Western law and Justice.

Conclusion:

A national revelation. Not to one person like other religions – the entire Jewish people experienced this. Lightning. Thunder. G-d gives the Ten Commandments as they are known. And finally we are a people. A nation. We have a shared history in terms of the

⁹ We will see in depth in the Judaism 101 course if and how this is a commandment

Matriarchs and Patriarchs and our experience in Egypt. But now we have much much more.

We have the Torah. Our religion. Our way of life. Our connection to G-d. Our guidebook. People often wonder how the Jews made it through all our wanderings and exiles. And indeed it is beyond comprehension. But there is one answer. We didn't have our land, but we did have our homeland – the Torah. The Torah defines who we are and it has been the key that has kept us going. And this is when we got it.

Appendix 1: The Uniqueness of Sinai

G-d Himself later referred to the uniqueness of the event of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Source 7

<p>32 For ask now of the days past, which were before you, since the day that G-d created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven unto the other, whether there has ever been any such thing as this great thing is, or has been heard like it?</p>	<p>לב כִּי שָׁאַל-נָא לְיָמִים רִאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר-הָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ, לג הֲשָׁמַע עִם קוֹל אֱלֹהִים מְדַבֵּר מִתּוֹךְ-הָאֵשׁ,</p>
<p>33 Did ever a people hear the voice of G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live?</p>	<p>לד אוּ הִנֵּסָה אֱלֹהִים, לְבוֹא לְקַחַת לוֹ גּוֹי מִקְרֹב</p>
<p>34 Or has G-d miraculously gone to take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your G-d did for you in Egypt before your eyes?</p>	<p>לה אִתָּה הִרְאִיתָ לְדַעַת, כִּי יִהְיֶה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים: לו מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם הִשְׁמִיעַךְ אֶת-קוֹלוֹ, לְיִסְרֹךְ; וְעַל- לז וַתַּחַת, כִּי אָהַב אֶת-אֲבוֹתֶיךָ, וַיִּבְחַר בְּזַרְעוֹ,</p>
<p>35 To you it was shown, that you would know that the Lord, He is G-d; there is none else beside Him.</p>	<p>לח לְהוֹרִישׁ, גּוֹיִם גְּדֹלִים וְעַצְמִים מִמֶּךָ--מִפְּנֵיךְ;</p>
<p>36 Out of heaven He caused you to hear His voice, that He might instruct you; and upon earth He caused you to see His great fire; and you heard His words from the midst of the fire.</p>	<p>לט וַיְדַעַת הַיּוֹם, וַחֲשַׁבְתָּ אֶל-לִבְבְּךָ, כִּי יִהְיֶה הוּא מ וְשִׁמְרַת אֶת-חֻקָּיו וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתָיו, אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי</p>
<p>37 And because He loved your fathers, and chose their descendants after them, and brought you out with His presence, with His great power, out of Egypt,</p>	<p>דְּבָרִים פָּרָק ד</p>
<p>38 To drive out nations from before you, greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance,</p>	

as it is this day;

39 Know this day, and lay it on your heart, that the Lord, He is G-d in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else.

40 And you shall keep His statutes, and His commandments, which I command you this day, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, and that you may lengthen your days upon the land, which the Lord your G-d gives you forever.

Deuteronomy Chapter 4

Extra Reading

A Rational Approach to the Torah's Divine Origin Lawrence Kelemen

The beginnings of all ancient and modern religions have a common thread: one or two people have a revelation and persuade others to follow. Thus, for example, Buddhist writings tell us that Prince Siddhartha Gautama launched Buddhism after his solitary ascendance through the eight stages of Transic insight; Islamic texts tell us that Muhammad founded Islam following the first of many personal, prophetic experiences; Christian writings reveal that Paul first met Jesus, converted to Christianity, and spread the faith more than three decades after Jesus' death; Joseph Smith, Jr., and his partner, Oliver Cowdery, launched the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon church) after the two men were visited by angels and long-dead disciples of Jesus; and Sun Myung Moon launched the Unification Church after privately receiving direct orders to do so from Jesus himself. The beginnings of Children of God, Christian Science, Eckankar, Elan Vital, I AM, and Theosophy — in fact, the beginnings of all world religions — are equally unverifiable. Never does a large, clearly identifiable group of people experience prophecy and live to tell others about it. Moreover, in a handful of cases wherein large groups of people supposedly witnessed miracles, rarely are these witnesses named or identified in any way that would allow for verification; and in the very exceptional cases involving clearly identified groups of witnesses, never more than one or two of the religion's current adherents claim to have met or descended directly from the named witnesses. In all these cases, the religion's credibility rests on the credibility of its one or two founders. While it is certainly possible that the beginnings claimed by any of the thousands of sects and cults included in the world's more than three hundred major religious traditions could be true, it is easy to imagine how charismatic charlatans could have launched any of these movements.

The one known exception to this rule is Judaism. The Torah claims that every Jewish man, woman, and child alive in 1312 B.C.E. — about three million people, according to the Torah — heard God speak at Mount Sinai and survived to teach their descendants about the event. Here we have an easily identifiable group — all of Jewry — who could have verified or denied the story any time during the first two or three generations after the alleged mass prophecy transpired. While it is easy to imagine how most religious mythologies could have been fabricated and spread, understanding how Judaism could be a lie requires more extensive analysis.

Smart Lies and Foolish Lies

Anyone who has studied history will affirm that people are gullible. We consistently find that sufficiently charismatic leaders can persuade people of any lie, even a lie that obligates followers to engage in painful or self-destructive behavior, *as long as followers cannot check the lie*. Lies that cannot be checked or validated are “smart” lies, insofar as they are maximally seductive. However, claims that can be checked, “foolish” lies, tend to be tested and rejected, especially when the lie obligates followers in unpleasant or suicidal observances.

As an illustration of this principle, consider the case of the California cult known as Heaven's Gate. The group, led by Marshall Applewhite, included seventeen men and twenty-one women between the ages of eighteen and seventy-two. Applewhite taught his followers that he was an alien who first “moved into and took over” Jesus' body just prior to Christianity's founding, and that he again in 1970 “incarnated into” his current human body. In March 1998, Applewhite revealed to his followers a prophecy indicating that an approaching spaceship trailing the Hale Bopp comet was coming to pick up members of Heaven's Gate, but that they would have to take lethal doses of phenobarbital in order to join him aboard the alien craft. On video, members of the group affirmed their faith in Applewhite's vision and then commenced committing suicide. Significantly, Applewhite did not tell his followers that “the spaceship that dropped you (or your grandparents) here on Earth is coming to pick you up.” This would be a foolish lie. Applewhite, like all successful religious leaders, told smart lies — lies that couldn't be checked.

Moses Theory and Fred Theory

The claim that three million people heard God speak appears in every intact Torah scroll ever found. The claim is either true or false. If it is a lie, and no such revelation ever took place, at some time in the past someone must have made such a claim. If we contemplate what the scene

must have looked like when a false claim of national prophecy was first launched, we find ourselves locked into one of two scenarios: The person making the claim either told his followers (a) that the national prophecy happened in the present — “You *personally* heard God speak” — or (b) that the national prophecy happened in the past — “Your *ancestors* once heard God speak.” We might call the first theory “Moses Theory,” since the Torah records that “Moses” was the name of Jewry’s leader when the prophecy took place. We can call the second possibility “Fred Theory,” since the leader during this post-Sinaitic period need not be Moses — he might as well be Fred.

According to Moses Theory, ancient Jewry’s leader told a foolish lie: “You personally heard God speak, and He said these words: ‘I am the Lord your God. . . .’” We can imagine the scene as people first examined the supposedly divine Torah and their charismatic leader tried to explain to Jewry some of the text’s more unpleasant rituals: “Circumcision? Yes, use a very sharp knife and a quick downward motion . . . *and it was the God Whom you heard speak Who told me you should do this!*” People would probably know if they had heard God speak; and if they hadn’t heard God speak, they might be a little hesitant to accept the Torah’s validity. Because people won’t accept foolish (checkable) lies that demand self-destructive behavior, even critics who posit that the Torah is a fictional, man-made document reject Moses Theory.

Those who view the Torah as a work of human imagination therefore put their faith in Fred. They posit that the initial lie was: “God spoke not to you but to your ancestors. He gave them the Torah. They carried the Jewish tradition for a period but then fumbled, and it was forgotten. Now I, Fred, am returning to you your long-lost religious heritage.”

When would Fred claim the national prophecy took place? If he said it happened recently — to his followers’ parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents — the lie would be checked, discovered, and rejected. Therefore, Fred must claim the national prophecy took place during “ancient times,” five hundred or a thousand years earlier.

This is a smart lie insofar as it can’t be checked. Followers would understand why they have no memory of a tradition supposedly lost hundreds or thousands of years before. However, followers would reasonably wonder how Fred himself recalls this otherwise forgotten tradition. Fred could explain things, again with a smart (uncheckable) lie, claiming that God spoke to him alone and revealed the Torah’s long-lost text and the story of its original revelation at Mount Sinai. Indeed, most modern skeptics gravitate toward a theory like this.

A major problem with this theory is we’ve never heard of Fred or his heroic resurrection of Judaism. Certainly one of the most significant events in Jewish history would have been the fumble, when world Jewry forgot they were the three million prophets, and the recovery, when Fred reminded the Jews about the national prophecy at Mount Sinai. Yet in an otherwise comprehensive Jewish history we find no mention of such a claim. Jewish texts describe myriad historical crises and the heroes who assisted during these difficult times. We know that Moses brought the Torah down from Mount Sinai, Joshua first brought the Jews into the Land of Israel, David slew Goliath, Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem, and Ezra brought the Jews back to the Land of Israel after the Babylonian exile. We know that Rabbi Judah the Prince compiled the Mishnah and that Ravina and Rav Ashi compiled the Talmud. We know about Maimonides, Nachmonides, and hundreds of other stars of medieval Jewry and what their respective contributions were. We possess detailed records about every great Jewish personality, except for one. We don’t have any mention of the man who reminded Jewry that they were the only people in human history ever to experience national prophecy, and we don’t have any record of the amnesia Fred rescued them from.

Until two hundred years ago (with the founding of the Reform movement), every Jew and member of a Jewish breakaway group (like the Christians, Sadducees, and Karaites) affirmed that ancient Jewry, *their direct ancestors*, had experienced national prophecy at Mount Sinai. Indeed, virtually every Jew alive today can trace himself back to Orthodox relatives (usually within five generations) who believed with all their heart and soul that they were links in an *unbroken* genealogical chain going back to Sinai. Yet not a single ancient or contemporary individual or religious community has any tradition about the man who should have been the second greatest hero of Jewish history: Fred. Why? Calm, unbiased observers will be quick to admit that perhaps there never was a “Fred” who lied about a national revelation; perhaps something supernatural really transpired at Sinai.

(Occasionally people try to pin the title “Fred” on minor players like Hilkeyahu, Shafan, or Yoshiyahu. At best, such attempts are forced and ask the reader to interpret texts with crowbar and mallet in hand. They also require shamefully contrived rationalizations attempting to explain (a) why not one Biblical verse explicitly mentions the key point that the Jews forgot about the Torah and “Fred” reintroduced them to it, and (b) why the name of the second most important Jewish hero (next to Moses) appears in the Bible less often than the names “Pharaoh,” “Yeravam,” and “Haman.”)

Science, History, and the Probability Paradox

The ultimate attack on both Moses and Fred Theories sprouts from the work of physicists and historians. Physicists believe that the laws of nature are constant and can be depended upon, and that therefore natural events will reoccur. Indeed, when faced with a phenomenon that cannot be naturally duplicated, scientists and historians doubt it ever transpired naturally in the first place.

As an illustration, imagine someone exhibited a brick of solid gold and claimed that it was once wood, but that he had used a natural chemical process to convert the wood into gold. Imagine further that twenty thousand chemists were handed a description of the process supposedly used, but that in fifty years of trials not a single experimenter succeeded in duplicating the effect. What would the scholarly community conclude? Precisely because we believe that natural events will happen more than once, we would deduce either that wood never really became gold, or, if the phenomenon really took place, that it transpired supernaturally.

The axiom that natural events reoccur is translated by historians into the principle “History repeats itself.” Since history is the story of natural creatures interacting according to natural laws, we expect and do find the same sort of human experiences and responses happening over and over again. Hence religions throughout history and across the globe have produced a strikingly limited set of claims of how they began: *individual* founders of religion have interacted with the gods, sun, moon, stars, oceans, trees, animals; *individuals* claim to have been visited by the dead or by aliens from outer space; and *individuals* claim to be incarnations of divinity. Although the details of theology vary, all of the general claims about how the world’s religions began fit neatly into a handful of general categories. There is only one categorically unique claim in mankind’s religious history: only the Torah claims that a large, easily identifiable group heard God speak and survived to tell about it.

The Torah is aware of its uniqueness and unabashedly offers this challenge to every Jew who has lived since Sinai:

You might inquire about times long past, going back to the time God created man on earth [exploring] one end of the heavens to the other. See if anything as great as this has ever happened, or if the like has ever been heard. Has any nation ever heard God speaking out of fire, as you have, and still survived?

(Deuteronomy 4:32–33)

Crucially, the Torah’s claim about national revelation isn’t esoteric. If a religion claimed to have started when a centipede metamorphosed into a gorilla who, falling into a river, exploded in flame and disintegrated into ashes before rising in the form of a great human prophet, we would understand why such a claim might never be repeated. It is unlikely that two people would independently dream up identical stories with such intricate and nonintuitive details. Yet the Jewish claim is obvious and simple: God spoke to a group of people. This is the sort of claim that would occur to anyone.

Moreover, the claim of mass revelation was needed by other religions. Because Jews believed that millions of people — all of their ancestors — received the Torah directly from God, they were hesitant to accept just Jesus or Muhammad’s word that the Torah had been annulled. If God changed His mind, Jewry reasoned, why didn’t He let us or any other large group of people know? Furthermore, intelligent pagans might have wondered why, if God really intended to reveal an equally acceptable alternative to Judaism, He didn’t do it in front of a few million non-Jews. By hesitating to claim a mass prophecy, early Christians and Muslims thus lost an opportunity to raise their credibility, even in the gentile world.

Skeptics who would construct apparently reasonable scenarios explaining Judaism’s beginning are thus faced with a paradox: as they become more convinced of any scenario’s plausibility, they become increasingly incapable of explaining why no other group seized the obvious, simple, and valuable claim of national prophecy. Maybe one generation of Jews was

unusually wily and succeeded in forming and maintaining a national conspiracy. Maybe one generation of Jews were exceedingly gullible and incorporated the whole story without checking their older relatives. Maybe the Jews were developmentally disabled or on a massive drug trip. Maybe thunder sounded like "I am the Lord, thy God. . . ." Whatever scenario we formulate, we face the challenge: if it's natural for an entire people to think they or their ancestors heard God speak, why didn't it happen more than once in history? Just as thousands of failed trials would persuade us that wood cannot naturally be transformed into gold, so too the total absence from history of the most basic religious claim — national revelation — should tell us that people don't naturally come to the conclusion that they or their ancestors experienced prophecy.

We understand the beginnings of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and modern cults. We can envision how such faiths started. But how do we explain Judaism's genesis? What rational, natural explanation describes the events leading to the only claim of mass revelation in four thousand years of recorded human history? The proposition that God indeed spoke to the Jewish nation seems at least as probable as the alternatives.

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Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

Unit 4

The First Temple: David & Solomon

Beginning with a few words about the period of the Judges, this unit focuses on the greatness of the early Kingship and the early Temple, through the lens of the major events, struggles, successes and failures of King David and King Solomon.

Unit 4: The First Temple, David & Solomon

Background: Judges

Section 1: King David

- Who was David?
- King David and the Temple
- Batsheva
- Summary of King David

Section 2: King Solomon

- If G-d Were to Grant One Thing
- Two Women, One Baby
- King Solomon builds the Temple
- Solomon's Wives
- Summary of King Solomon

Background

We saw the first steps of Jewish history and world history (Adam, Noach, the Birth of Monotheism, the Twelve Tribes) and our experience in Egypt and with the Exodus. We finished last time describing the earth-shattering experience of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. What happened next?

Moses leads the people. They are supposed to go straight into Israel but keep messing up and things get delayed. Very delayed.

After Moses died, Joshua took over, led the people into Israel and divided up the land. Joshua basically continued Moses' leadership until he (Joshua) died.

For a few hundred years there was a period of time known as the Period of the Judges, the Shoftim. There was no centralized authority in Israel:

Source 1

<p><i>In those days, there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in his eyes. (Judges 21:25)</i></p>	<p>בְּיָמִים הָהֵם, אִין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: אִישׁ הַיֵּשֶׁר</p>
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Theoretically this could have been good – our only King was G-d, we didn't have to be like other nations, etc. But unfortunately there were real ups and downs. Jews would do

well, and live in peace and security. Then we would get complacent, start worshipping idols and lose our Divine protection. The neighbors would come and attack, oppress and persecute us and G-d would send a leader – a judge – who would lead Israel back to righteousness and victory over our enemies. There were many judges: Devorah was one of the most famous, Shimshon (Samson) was another. The prophet Samuel anointed Saul to be the first King of Israel, in a short and unsuccessful reign.

Section 1: King David

Who was David?

Kingⁱ Davidⁱⁱ was one of the greatest Jews – and greatest leaders the Jewish people ever had. This is somewhat surprising when we consider his background:

Source 2

And G-d said to Samuel, "... Fill up your horn with oil and go, I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, because I have seen among his sons a King for me."	א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל, ... מִלֵּא קֶרֶןךָ שֶׁמֶן,
And Samuel did that which G-d told him and he went to Bethlehem. ... And he called them to an offering.	ד וַיַּעַשׂ שְׁמוּאֵל, אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה, וַיֵּבֵא, בַּיַּת ו וַיְהִי בְבוֹאָם, וַיִּרְא אֶת-אֱלִיָּאב; וַיֹּאמֶר, אַךְ נֶגְדַּ
And when they came, he saw Eliav and said (to himself), "G-d is with his anointed one."	ז וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל, אֶל-תַּבַּט אֶל-מְרֹאֲהוּ
And G-d said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his height, for I am disgusted with him. (My vision is) not like the vision of man – because man's vision is (only) with his eyes, but G-d sees to the heart."	ח וַיִּקְרָא יְשִׁי אֶל-אֲבִינָדָב, וַיַּעֲבֶרְהוּ לִפְנֵי שְׁמוּאֵל;
And Jesse called Avinadav and brought him in front of Samuel. And he said, "G-d does not choose this one either."	ט וַיַּעֲבֵר יְשִׁי, שְׁמָה; וַיֹּאמֶר, גַּם-בְּזֶה לֹא-בָחַר י וַיַּעֲבֵר יְשִׁי שִׁבְעַת בָּנָיו, לִפְנֵי שְׁמוּאֵל; וַיֹּאמֶר
And Jesse brought Shamah and he said, "G-d does not choose this one either."	יא וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל-יְשִׁי, הֲתַמּוּ הַנְּעָרִים, וַיֹּאמֶר
And Jesse brought his seven sons in front of Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "G-d does not choose any of these."	יב וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיְבִיאֵהוּ וְהוּא אֲדָמוּנִי, עִם-זֶפֶה עֵינַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה קוּם מִשְׁחָהוּ, כִּי-זֶה הוּא.
And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all of	

<p>your young men?" And he said, "The youngest one remains, he is with the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him ..."</p> <p>And they sent and brought him, he was with a ruddy complexion with nice eyes and good looking.</p> <p>And G-d said come and anoint him because he is it (the King)." Shmuel I, ch. 16</p>	<p>שמואל א פרק טז</p>
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*Question: Why does the text make such a big deal out of David's youth and small size?
Answer: David was the youngest. So 'unimpressive' that his father didn't even bother to bring him to meet the prophet Samuel who was to anoint one of his children as King! It didn't enter Jesse's mind that David might be the one. He was on the lowest of this list. We have to remember that in the ancient world the King was often the strongest, tallest, etc. Even the prophet Samuel is initially impressed by the older, more impressive looking brothers. It is G-d who explains that mortals see with the eyes, but G-d sees into the heart. David had the qualities that G-d himself wanted in the King – the prototype King – of the Jewish People. And physical size and strength were not the main criteria.*

Another famous story in the Tanakh about David emphasizes this idea: David vs. Goliath. The Philistines have a huge hero named Goliath who is taunting the Jews and insulting G-d day and night. Everyone is afraid of him. David is not even there. He is too young to be in the army. He goes to visit his older brothers in the army and David refuses to accept the insults to G-d and the Jewish People. He is warned, but declares that G-d will help him end this disgrace. He goes out with a slingshot and kills Goliath and we are saved from oppression.

It is clear from these accounts that David's greatness is not his physical strength or stature. Far from it. He is considered one of the greatest Jews who ever lived and this is due to the qualities of character, faith, etc that he had. He becomes a great warrior leading the Jews to victory over the enemies that have oppressed them. He is called the Sweet Singer of Israel, who wrote most of Psalms (ie the famous The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want' from Psalm 23) and so many others. He was a great Torah scholar who delved into the Torah, describing it as his 'delight'.

King David unifies the Jews, captures Jerusalem, and defeats the enemies of the Jewish People. He was thirty years when he became King, and he ruled for forty years. Life was not without personal problems, however. One son rapes a half-sister and is killed by a different son, who then leads a large but unsuccessful revolt against King David.

King David and the Temple

He requested permission to build a permanent Temple for G-d. Look at G-d's answer:

Source 3

<p>And now say this to my servant, to David ... 'I took you from the corral from watching the sheep, and made you the leader of My People of Israel.</p>	<p>ח ועתה כה-תאמר לעבדי לדוד... אני לקחתיו</p>
<p>And I was with you wherever you went. And I destroyed all of your enemies ...'</p>	<p>ט ואהיה עמך, בכל אשר הלכת, ואכרתה את-</p>
<p>And G-d said that [He] will establish a dynasty for you: 'When your days are complete and you will lie with your fathers, I will raise up after you your descendant ... and I shall make his kingdom firm. He will build a Temple for My sake Your dynasty and your kingdom will remain steadfast before you for all time, your throne will remain firm forever.'</p>	<p>יא ... והגיד לך יהוה, כי-בית יעשה-לך יהוה. יב כי ימלאו ימיך, ושכבת את-אבותיך, יג הוא יבנה-בית, לשמי.... טז ונאמן ביתך וממלכתך עד-עולם, לפניך:</p>

We see here an amazing testament to G-d's incredibly high opinion of King David. The context is that King David wanted to build a permanent Temple for G-d. G-d actually said no – that David's son would do it – but notice the incredible trust and love He has of David. The Radak explains at the beginning of Sefer Yehoshua that only when a person directs all their actions in the world toward serving G-d is someone called 'My servant' so-and-so. There are not many examples. David and Abraham are two of the main ones.

Question: *Why wasn't King David allowed to build the Temple?*

Answer: *Many explanations are offered but two common reasons are: (a) David was a warrior and the great House of G-d should not be built by someone that has 'blood on his hands.' As the verses say: "You will not build a house for My name" G-d said to him, "for you are a man of battles and have shed blood" (I Chronicles 28:3) and (b) the era of David was one of strife and the Temple was to be built in a time of serenity and peace.*

Batsheva

One of the most famous, most complex, and most mis-understood parts of David's life is the matter of Batsheva. Basically, in a very simplistic and generalized form: David sees a beautiful woman on a rooftop bathing. He is entranced. He arranges to meet her, they spend the night together. The only thing is that she was married

to a man named Uriah. As if this wasn't bad enough, David sends him into the front lines and he is killed. And he marries her. That is the famous story.

Two important notes, though: (a) technically she wasn't married. All Jewish soldiers gave their wives conditional Gets (divorce bills) before they went to war in case they would be killed. And regarding Uriah, the verses make clear that he disobeyed the King's orders and was liable for the death penalty.

So technically speaking he wasn't guilty. This is clear, though not very well-known.

But look what the Bible says and look what he does.

Source 4

<p>1 And G-d sent [the prophet] Nathan to David ... and [he] said to him: 'There were two men in one city: the one rich, and the other poor.</p>	<p>א וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת-נָתָן, אֶל-דָּוִד... וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ שְׁנֵי ב לְעֶשֶׂיר, הָיָה צֹאן וּבָקָר--הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד</p>
<p>2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds;</p>	<p>ג וְלָרֶשֶׁת אִין-כֹּל, כִּי אִם-כַּבְּשָׂה אַחַת קִטְנָה אֲשֶׁר</p>
<p>3 but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and reared; and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it ... lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.</p>	<p>ד וַיָּבֵא הַלֵּךְ, לְאִישׁ הָעֶשֶׂיר, וַיַּחְמַל לְקַחַת מִצֹּאֲנוֹ ה- ו וַיַּחַר-אַף דָּוִד בְּאִישׁ, מְאֹד; וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶל-נָתָן,</p>
<p>4 And there came a traveler to the rich man, and [the rich man] did not take of his own flock ...but took the poor man's lamb, and prepared it for the man that was come to him.</p>	<p>ז וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל-דָּוִד, אַתָּה הָאִישׁ; כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה ח וְאַתָּה לֵךְ ... אֶת-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהוּדָה; וְאִם-</p>
<p>5-6 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan: 'As G-d lives, the man who did this deserves to die ...because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'</p>	<p>ט מַדּוּעַ בָּזִיתָ אֶת-דְּבַר יְהוָה, לַעֲשׂוֹת הַרַע בְּעֵינָיו י וְעַתָּה, לֹא-תִסּוּר חֶרֶב מִבֵּיתְךָ--עַד-עוֹלָם: עֲקֹב,</p>
<p>7 And Nathan said to David: 'You are the man! So says the Lord, G-d of Israel: I anointed you King over Israel ...</p>	<p>יא... כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה, הִנְנִי מְקִים עָלֶיךָ רָעָה מִבֵּיתְךָ</p>
<p>8 and I gave you ... the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that were too little, then</p>	

<p>would I add for you so much more.</p> <p>9 Why then have you despised the word of G-d, to do that which is evil in My sight? Uriah the Hittite you killed with the sword, and his wife you took to be your wife, and him you killed with the sword of children of Ammon.</p> <p>10 Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house; because you have despised Me, and because you took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife</p> <p>11 So says G-d: Behold I will raise up evil against you out of your own house ...</p> <p>13 And David said unto Nathan: 'I have sinned against the LORD.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2 Samuel Chapter 12</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">יג ויאמר דוד אל-נתן, חטאתי ליהוה ;</p> <p style="text-align: center;">שמואל ב פרק יב</p>
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What we have just seen is one of the most dramatic confrontations ever witnessed. The prophet Nathan, King David, and of course G-d Himself were all fully aware that technically David had a right to do what he did. But it still wasn't right. That was far from ideal behavior. Judaism has checks and balances. We don't just have Kings with limitless powers. Kings have to follow the rules. And they have prophets to keep them in line and criticize them. Nathan finds a way not just to rebuke David but to make David understand – at a deep emotional level – what David's sin was.

And it works. David repents immediately. In fact, he never really stops repenting. His teshuva is so deep, great and authentic that it becomes one of the great models of all time. He admits his mistakes and accepts the consequences. And his repentance is accepted. How do we know?

When his son, Solomon, tries to dedicate the Temple¹⁰, the doors won't open. He says 24 prayers. He tries all different things. Only when King Solomon mentions the merit of his father, King David, do the doors open. This was a public acknowledgment of G-d's acceptance of David's teshuva, and an indication of how beloved he was to G-d.

¹⁰ See Gemaras in Sanhedrin 107a, Shabbos 30b, Moad Katan 7a

Summary of King David:

- King David was one of the greatest Jews who ever lived and one of the greatest leaders of the Jewish People
- He came from humble beginnings and even the prophet didn't think that David would be King. Only G-d saw inside. King David authored most of the Psalms, which are amazing words to G-d and about G-d that inspire and help millions of people to this day, three thousand years later.
- His faith and trust in G-d helped him beat Goliath, and subsequently beat Israel's enemies and unite the people.
- While technically not at fault, he committed a sin in the episode of Batsheva. He was castigated and repented. Eventually there was a public showing that his repentance was accepted.

Section 2: King Solomon

If G-d Were to Grant One Thing

King David's most famous son is Solomon. Solomon is famous because when David is dying, he skips over other children – including older ones - to appoint Solomonⁱⁱⁱ

*Solomon was all of 12 years old when he became king.
Did he feel ready?*

Source 5

<p>5 ... G-d appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and G-d said: 'Ask what I shall give you.'</p>	<p>ה בַּגְּבוּעוֹן, נִרְאָה יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁלֹמֹה--בְּחִלּוֹם הַלַּיְלָה; ו וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלֹמֹה, אֶתְּה עֲשִׂיתָ עִם-עַבְדְּךָ דָּוִד אָבִי</p>
<p>6 And Solomon said: 'You showed to Your servant David, my father, great kindness, as he walked before You in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; and You have kept for him this great kindness, that You gave him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.'</p>	<p>ז וְעַתָּה, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי, אֶתְּה הַמְּלִכְתָּ אֶת-עַבְדְּךָ, ח וְעַבְדְּךָ--בְּתוֹךְ עַמְּךָ, אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתָּ: עִם-רַב, אֲשֶׁר</p>
<p>7 And now, O LORD my G-d, You have made Your servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little youth; I know not how to go out or come in^{iv}.</p>	<p>ט וְנִתַּתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לֵב שׁוֹמֵעַ, לִשְׁפֹט אֶת-עַמְּךָ, לְהַבְיֹא, י וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר, בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנָי: כִּי שָׁאַל שְׁלֹמֹה, אֶת-</p>
<p>8 And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great</p>	<p>י וַיִּיטֵב הַדָּבָר, בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנָי: כִּי שָׁאַל שְׁלֹמֹה, אֶת-</p>

<p>people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.</p> <p>9 Give Your servant therefore an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this Your great people?'</p> <p>10 And the speech pleased G-d, that Solomon had asked this thing.</p> <p>11 And G-d said to him: 'Because You have asked for this thing, and did not ask for a long life, nor for riches for yourself, nor for the life of your enemies; but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice;</p> <p>12 Behold, I have done according to your word: I have given you a wise and an understanding heart; so that there have been none like you before you, neither after you shall any arise like you.</p> <p>13 And I have also given you that which</p> <p>14 And if You will walk in My ways, to</p>	<p>יא וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֵלָיו, יַעַן אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתָּ אֶת-</p> <p>יב הִנֵּה עָשִׂיתִי, כְּדַבְּרֶיךָ; הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לְךָ, לֵב חָכָם</p> <p>יג וְגַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-שָׁאַלְתָּ נָתַתִּי לְךָ, גַּם-עֶשְׂרָה גָּם-</p> <p>יד וְאִם תֵּלֵךְ בְּדַרְכֵי, לְשֹׁמֵר חֻקֵי וּמִצְוֹתַי, כַּאֲשֶׁר</p>
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And indeed King Solomon became known as the wisest of all men. His wisdom in Torah was of course incredible, but G-d also granted him incredible wisdom about the physical world, etc.

Source 6

<p>And he became wiser than all men ...His fame spread through all the surrounding</p>	<p>יא וַיִּחְכַּם, מְכַל-הָאָדָם... וַיְהִי-שְׁמוֹ בְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם,</p>
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<p>nations.</p> <p>He composed 3,000 parables, and 1,005 poems.</p> <p>He discoursed about trees, from the cedars of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows from the wall. He also discoursed about animals, birds, creeping things and fish.</p> <p>People of all nations came to hear</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Kings 5:11-14</p>	<p>יב וַיְדַבֵּר, שְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים מְשָׁל; וַיְהִי שִׁירוֹ, חֲמִשָּׁה</p> <p>יג וַיְדַבֵּר, עַל-הָעֵצִים, מִן-הָאֲרָז אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְנוֹן, וְעַד</p> <p>יד וַיְבֵאוּ, מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים, לִשְׁמֹעַ, אֶת הַחֲכָמָה</p>
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He wrote the Song of Songs, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Proverbs. To think that one human being wrote these – we are discussing three of the deepest, most sublime, most powerful works ever written – it is incredible. The more one studies those works the more one is astounded by the author.

Two Women, One Baby

[Educator: If you have time to see this source, most people have heard of it and will be interested]

There is a famous story about King Solomon as a Judge. Does anyone know what it is?

Source 7

<p>3:16 Then came there two women^v... unto the king, and stood before him.</p> <p>3:17 And the one woman said: 'Oh, my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house.</p> <p>3:18 And it came to pass the third day after I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also; and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house.</p> <p>3:19 And this woman's child died in the</p>	<p>טז אָז תְּבֵאנָה, שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים... אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ;</p> <p>יז וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה הָאַחַת, בִּי אֲדֹנָי, אֲנִי וְהָאִשָּׁה</p> <p>יח וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, לְלִדְתִּי, וַתֵּלֶד, גַּם-הָאִשָּׁה</p> <p>יט וַיָּמָת בֶּן-הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת, לִילָה, אֲשֶׁר שָׁכַבָּה</p> <p>כ וַתָּקָם בְּתוֹךְ הַלַּיְלָה וַתִּקַּח אֶת-בְּנֵי מֵאֲזֵלֵי,</p>
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<p>night; because she lay on it.</p> <p>3:20 And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while [I] slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom.</p> <p>3:21 And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead; but when I had looked well at it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, whom I did bear.'</p> <p>3:22 And the other woman said: 'Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is your son.' And the other [woman] said: 'No; but the dead is your son, and the living is my son.' So they spoke before the king.</p> <p>3:23 Then said the king: 'The one says: This is my son that lives, and your son is the dead; and the other says: No – but it is your son who is dead and my son is the living [one].'</p> <p>3:24 And the king said: 'Fetch me a sword.' And they brought a sword before the king.</p> <p>3:25 And the king said: 'Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.'</p> <p>3:26 Then spoke the woman of the living child to the king, for she had pity on her son, and she said: 'Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and in no way kill it.' But the other [woman] said: 'It shall be neither mine nor yours: Divide it!'</p> <p>3:27 Then the king answered and said: 'Give her the living child, and in no way kill it – for she is its mother.'</p> <p>3:28 And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king; for they saw that the wisdom of</p>	<p>כא וְאָקַם בְּבֹקֶר לְהַיְיִק אֶת-בְּנִי, וְהִנֵּה-מֵת; ;</p> <p>כב וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה הָאַחֲרִית לֹא כִי, בְּנֵי הַחַי וּבְנֵי</p> <p>כג וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ--זֹאת אִמְרָת, זֶה-בְּנֵי הַחַי וּבְנֵי</p> <p>כד וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ, קָחוּ לִי-חֶרֶב; וַיָּבֵאוּ הַחֶרֶב, לִפְנֵי</p> <p>כה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ, גִּזְרוּ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי לְשְׁנַיִם; וַתִּגְו</p> <p>כו וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר-בָּנָה הַחַי אֶל-הַמֶּלֶךְ, כִּי-</p> <p>כז וַיַּעַן הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר, תִּגְוֵלָה אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד הַחַי,</p> <p>כח וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶת-הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר שָׁפַט</p>
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G-d was in him, to do justice.	
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Kings I: Chapter 3	
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King Solomon builds the Temple

As mentioned before, King David was not allowed to build the Temple. That was left to his illustrious son, Solomon. And he built an incredible, magnificent, and of course holy Temple in Jerusalem^{vi}. It was large. It was covered with gold. He spared no expense building it, importing from Lebanon huge amounts of excellent wood and stone. Thirty thousands people worked on it, ten thousand at a time. 3,300 officials oversee the incredible project.

At the dedication, King Solomon even invites non-Jews to come and pray there. He asks G-d to pay particular heed to their prayers: "Thus all the peoples of the earth will know Your name and revere You, as does Your people Israel; and they will recognize that Your name is attached to this House that I have built" (I Kings 8:43).

Solomon's Wives

His wisdom spread throughout the world. So did his Empire. It is important to understand that King Solomon's Empire was the pre-eminent of the entire world. The wisest, most moral, wealthiest, most powerful, etc. The Pharaoh of Egypt married off his daughter to him^{vii}. He married other wives of foreign kings as well. Foreign dignitaries visited Jerusalem, of whom the most famous is probably the Queen of Sheba^{viii}.

Of course everything was not perfect for him. He took too many wives (700!), many of whom were foreigners. While they converted, many of them returned to their old ways of Avodah Zarah.

Source 8

<i>In Solomon's old age, his wives turned away Solomon's heart after other gods. And his heart was not complete with the Lord his G-d, as the heart of David his father.</i>	ד וַיְהִי, לְעֵת זְקֵנָתוֹ שְׁלֹמֹה, נָשְׂיוּ הַטּוֹ אֶת-לִבָּבוֹ,
1 Kings 11:4-5	

Other verses describe him as responsible for the Avodah Zarah.

Question: Do you think that King Solomon actually worshipped other gods as he got old?

Answer: Definitely not. Scripture judges him harshly - he should have stopped their actions instead of turning a blind eye to what they were doing. And yet let us keep this in perspective – the First Temple which he built was a magnificent House of G-d. The first Israelite Kingdom was the pre-eminent of the entire world. The wisest, most moral, wealthiest, most powerful, etc. He was one of the greatest Jews ever, his works and wisdom live on, yet he was human and made mistakes, as Scripture makes clear.

Summary of King Solomon

- King Solomon was the wisest of all men. When becoming King at 12 years old, G-d asked him what he wanted and he asked for wisdom. G-d gave him that in abundance as well as incredible wealth, power, etc.
- He wrote the Song of Songs, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Proverbs
- His reign was the high point for the Jewish People and the Kingdom. He built the Temple in Jerusalem.
- His most famous court case was with the two women and one baby
- The Torah does not pretend people are perfect. We are humans, not G-d. We make mistakes. King David and Batsheva. King Solomon and his wives. It doesn't take away from their greatness to recognize that they weren't perfect.

ⁱ We have not referred to King Saul in this course though you may choose to mention that he was the first King of Israel, etc

ⁱⁱ Despite the Bible's lengthy account of his life and accomplishments, for years some scholars felt that King David never really existed. In the last number of years, however, archaeological discoveries have verified that King David was a real historical figure. In 1993 in the ruins of the ancient Israelite city of Dan, a piece of a monument was found that mentioned David and his dynasty. The fragment has been dated to about 100 years after David's death. As Biblical Archaeology Review (March-April, 1994, p. 26) reports: "Avraham Biran and his team of archaeologists found a remarkable inscription from the 9th century (B.C.) that refers both to the 'House of David' and to the 'King of Israel.' This is the first time that the name David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible. That the inscription refers not simply to a 'David' but to the House of David, the dynasty of the great Israelite king, is even more remarkable."

Another reference to King David was 're-discovered' in 1995. The fragment is called the Moabite Stone or the Mesha Stela, and although it was originally found in 1868, it was broken into pieces and never re-assembled until 1995 when scholar Andre Lemaire finally put it all together and discovered the words "House of David." In line 31 of the Moabite Stone are the words "... the sheep of the land. And the house (of Da)vid dwelt in Horonen" (Biblical Archaeology Review, May-June, 1994, p. 33).

ⁱⁱⁱ *This is what King David says to his son*

<p>"I go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man,</p> <p>And keep the charge of the Lord your G-d to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes and His commandments and His testimonies. (1 King 2:2-3)</p>	<p>ב אֲנִכִּי הֵלֶךְ, בְּדַרְךְ כָּל-הָאָרֶץ; וְחֻזְקָתִי, וְהִיִּיתִי לְאִישׁ. ג וְשִׁמְרָתִי אֶת-מִשְׁמֶרֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לְלָקֶת בְּדַרְכָּיו לְשֹׁמֵר</p>
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^{iv} This is a reference to leadership

^v The verse actually indicates that they were prostitutes. In order to avoid this class getting taken on a tangent, we have removed the reference here. Of course you can re-introduce it if so desired.

^{vi} When you visit the Western Wall and go on the Tunnel Tours beneath the Wall, you can actually see many of the stones used in the First Temple. (The Second Temple stones are the normal stones we see above ground. It was build on the ruins of the First Temple).

^{vii} She converted

^{viii}

<p>And the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, through the name of G-d and she came to test him with hard questions.</p> <p>She arrived in Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels bearing spices, a great quantity of gold, and precious stones" 1 Kings 10:1-2</p>	<p>א וּמַלְכַת-שֶׁבָא, שָׁמְעַת אֶת-שְׁמֵעַ שְׁלֹמֹה--לְשֵׁם יְהוָה; ב וַתָּבֵא יְרוּשָׁלָּיִם, בַּחֲמִיל כָּבֵד מְאֹד, גַּמְלִים נֹשְׂאִים</p>
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Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

Unit 5

The End of The First Temple and Exile

This unit includes:

- *The Split into Two Kingdoms*
- *Destruction*
- *Why Was the Temple Destroyed?*
- *The First Exile and Purim*

Unit 5: Downfall and Exile
The End of The First Temple and The First Exile

Outline

- *The Split into Two Kingdoms*
- *Destruction*
- *Why Was the Temple Destroyed?*
- *The First Exile and Purim*

The Split into Two Kingdoms

We saw last time that King Solomon built a magnificent Temple for G-d, and for the honor of G-d in this world. He was commanded to do so. Yet it still had to be paid for and he paid for it at least partially by high taxes. After the Temple was built, and Solomon was dead, the people asked his successor – his son Rehoboam - for a tax break:

Source 1

Your father made our yoke heavy. Now lighten the ... heavy yoke which [your father] laid on us and we will serve you. 1 Kings 12,4	ד אבִינִי, הַקֶּשֶׁה אֶת-עֲלֵנוּ; וְאַתָּה עֲתָה הַקֵּל
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When Rehoboam consults Solomon's advisors, they counsel him to listen to the people, to lighten their burdens and to win their favor:

Source 2

... If this day you will be a servant to this people and serve them, and answer them, and speak to them kindly - they will be your servants forever. 1 Kings 12:7	... אִם-הַיּוֹם תִּהְיֶה-עֶבֶד לְעַם הַזֶּה וְעַבַדְתֶּם,
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Young, impetuous, and power-hungry, he rebuffs the advisors and the people:

Source 3

My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke 1 Kings 12:11	יֵא וְעַתָּה, אָבִי הֶעֱמִיס עֲלֵיכֶם עַל כָּבֵד, וְאֲנִי,
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Did the people simply accept his harsh decrees?

<p>And when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them ... so Israel rebelled against the House of David... 1 Kings 12: 16-19</p>	<p>וַיִּרְא כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי לֹא-שָׁמַע הַמֶּלֶךְ אֱלֹהִים... ... לא-שמע המלך אלהים...</p>
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Basically around the year 800 BCE, the ten northern tribes secede and call themselves Israel. A man named Jeroboam is their King. Rehoboam stays King of the southern Kingdom of Judah, which includes two tribes but also has Jerusalem and the Temple.

This lack of unity – in fact this complete separation is really the beginning of the end. Very quickly after David and Solomon, things go badly. The Kingdom splits.

Destruction

Furthermore, the King in the North is jealous and the people's connection to Jerusalem and so builds his own Temple and brings in Idol Worship. Things go from bad to worse, with one bad king after another and very few exceptions.

With the great division in the People, the corruption and especially the idol worship and spiritual decline, it is no wonder that our enemies were able to overcome us. The Assyrians (from the same area of modern day Syria) attack and conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Question: *Has anyone heard of the Lost Tribes of Israel? The Ten Tribes?*

Answer: *This is exactly who we are learning about now. They are famous. When the Northern Kingdom was conquered, ten tribes disappeared from sight. Only the Southern Kingdom with its two tribes remain. We know that many individuals of these tribes managed to return to Judah and so became part of who we are today, but many thousands did not. There are literally millions and millions of people who claim to be descendants of the Ten Tribes and many books and scholars have tried to trace their route and history. Some of the tribes from Muslim fundamentalist Afghanistan and Pakistan claim to be descendants of the Ten Tribes and have some curious customs. Similarly are the Makuya and the Beit Shalom in Japan, the Lemba in South Africa and Zimbabwe, etc.*

The Southern Kingdom lasts over a Century longer than the North. It is more stable and less corrupt than the North. Eventually, it too slides in spirituality and morality. Look how the Bible describes Manasseh, the son of the righteous King Hezekiah.

Source 4

<p>He did what was evil in the eyes of G-d... He erected altars to Baal ... He passed his son through fire, practiced astrology and read omens, and performed necromancy and conjured spirits. He did very much that what was evil in the eyes of the Lord, to anger Him."</p>	<p>וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע, בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה--... ; וַיִּקַּם מִזְבְּחֹת</p>
<p>2 Kings 21:2-6</p>	

There are ups and downs of course but overall it is a series of down. The prophet Jeremiah is abused and thrown in prison for the great sin of urging the Jews to repent. The prophet is put to death by King Manasseh, his own grandson.

Jerusalem is entered on the 7th day of the Hebrew month of Av and the Temple is destroyed on the 9th day. The 9th of Av is the worst day of the Jewish calendar. It is in Jewish law a day of fasting and mourning. It is the saddest day of the year for Jews^{viii}. And for good reason – an incredible number of terrible things happened on the Ninth of Av. Look in the appendix for a short list.

Why Was the Temple Destroyed?

Question: Does anyone know why the Temple was destroyed?

Answer: Keep in mind that ‘how’ and ‘why’ are very different questions. The how is easier – the Babylonians came and first attacked the Northern Kingdom, then the Southern Kingdom, etc. In Jewish terms, the ‘why’ can start with practical reasons (rise of certain powers, ego of leaders, etc) but the ultimate why is always spiritual. Why did G-d let his Temple be pillaged and burned, and his country and people ruined?

We ask this question about the Holocaust and of course we cannot really understand why. But then after the First Temple there were prophets who were able to explain why the Temple was destroyed.

Source 5

<p>Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three things that existed then: Idol worship, Immorality, and the Spilling of Blood...</p>	<p>מִקֵּדֶשׁ רֵאשׁוֹן מִפְּנֵי מָה חָרַב מִפְּנֵי גִ' דְּבָרִים שֶׁהָיוּ מִסַּכְת יוֹמָא דְף ט, ב,</p>
<p>Talmud Yoma 9b</p>	

Question: Does anyone recognize this list of sins? Does this list of three sins appear anywhere else?

Answer: *Definitely. These are the three Cardinal Sins of Judaism.*

- *If someone puts a gun to your head and says, “Eat pig or die.” What do we do? Eat the pig.*
- *If someone puts a gun to your head and says, ‘Drive on Shabbat or die.’ What do we do? Drive.^{viii}*

But there are three exceptions:^{viii}

- *If we need to choose between being killed and murdering someone. Or between being killed and raping someone or doing some other sexually immoral act. Or being killed and worshipping idols... What do we do? We die.*

These are three exceptions to the rule. Three things that a Jew can never, ever do.

And Jews (not all, but enough) living towards the end of the First Temple did these things. Considering the close connection they had to G-d, His presence in the Temple, the existence of prophets...how could they do these awful things? It is hard for us to understand. In terms of Idol Worship, there was a huge urge to do Idol Worship. It doesn't exist today so we can't understand it.

The First Exile and Purim

You may recognize the following words:

Source 6

<p>By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, we also wept, when we remembered Zion.</p>	<p>א על נהרות, בבל--שם ישבנו, גם-בכינו:</p>
<p>We hung our lyres on the willows in its midst.</p>	<p>ב על-ערבבים בתוכה-- תלינו, כנרותינו.</p>
<p>For there our captors demanded of us a song; and those who tormented us required of us happiness, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.</p>	<p>ג כי שם שאלונו שובינו, דברי-שיר-- ותוללינו שירו לנו, משיר ציון.</p>
<p>How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?</p>	<p>ד איך--נשיר את-שיר-יהוה: על, אדמת נכר.</p>
<p>If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.</p>	<p>ה אם-אשכחך ירושלים-- תשכח מימיני.</p>
<p>If I do not remember you, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth - if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.</p>	<p>ו תדבק-לשוני, לחכי-- אם-לא אזכרכי:</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Psalms^{viii} 137:1-6</p>	

These words are sung at Jewish weddings to this day, and immortalize the love of Jerusalem within the Jewish people. Popular music has also used the Psalm in various ways. While this may well have described the inner feelings of the Jews, especially at the beginning, Babylonian exile was not that harsh.

Babylon was eventually taken over by Persia and the whole Purim story happened there during the short exile (called the Babylonian exile)

Basics of the Purim story:

We will learn about it much more in depth before Purim but basically here are the facts:

- *Haman tries to kill all the Jews – men, women, and children – in a scary foreshadowing of the Final Solution and the king is happy to let him do it.*
- *Mordechai and Esther are the heroes. Or better yet – G-d is the hero, for he puts Esther into the Palace at the right time in order to enable her to convince the King to save the Jews. The evil Haman^{viii} is killed and the Jews are saved.*
- *Why did it happen? The Jews had gotten used to the good life in Babylon and were quickly assimilating. Mordechai wanted to wake them up and the threat of annihilation, and Esther's direction to them to fast and pray brought them back to a full acceptance^{viii} of Torah.*

Summary

We saw the Split into Two Kingdoms caused by Solomon's son, and eventually leading to the destruction of the First Temple. When we asked why was the Temple destroyed?, we saw that they were guilty of the three cardinal sins. And then we saw that the Jews were exiled to Babylonia, which was conquered by Persia. And there in exile was where the famous Purim story took place.

Appendix

A Short History of the Ninth of Av^{viii}

1312 BCE	Spies return from 40 days in Israel with evil reports of the Land of Israel. Jewish people cry in despair, give up hope of entering the Land of Israel.
421 BCE	Destruction of First Temple by the Babylonians. About 100,000 Jews killed during invasion. Exile of remaining tribes to Babylon and Persia.
70 CE	Destruction of Second Temple by Romans. Over 2,500,000 Jews die as a result of war, famine and disease. Over 1,000,000 Jews exiled to all parts of the Roman Empire. Over 100,000 Jews sold as slaves by Romans. Countless Jews killed and tortured in gladiatorial "games" and pagan celebrations.
132 CE	Bar Kochba revolt crushed. City of Betar destroyed with over 100,000 killed.
133 CE	Turnus Rufus ploughs site of Temple. Romans build pagan city of Aelia Capitolina on site of Jerusalem and de Judaize the city.
1095 CE	First Crusade declared by Pope Urban II. 10,000 Jews killed in first month of Crusade. Crusades bring death and destruction to thousands of Jews, totally obliterate many communities in Rhineland and France.
1290 CE	Expulsion of Jews from England, accompanied by pogroms and confiscation of books and property.
1492 CE	Inquisition in Spain and Portugal culminates in the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. Families separated, many die by drowning, massive loss of property.
1914 CE	Britain and Russia declare war on Germany. First World War begins. World War I issues are left unresolved, ultimately causing Second World War and Holocaust. 75% of all Jews in war zones. Jews in armies of all sides - 120,000 Jewish casualties in armies. Over 400 pogroms immediately following war in Hungary, Ukraine, Poland and Russia.
1942 CE	Deportations from Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka concentration camp begin.
1994 CE	The deadly bombing the building of the AMIA (the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina) which killed 86 people and wounded some 300 others.

Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

Unit 6

The Second Temple Period

This unit focuses on:

- *A New Temple*
- *The Story of Chanukah*
- *Rome*
- *The Destruction of the Second Temple*

Unit 6: The Second Temple Period

Outline:

1. A New Temple
2. The Story of Chanukah
3. Rome
4. The Destruction of the Second Temple

1. A New Temple

We came out of Egypt. We came to Eretz Yisrael. We lived under the Judges and then through the greatness and ultimate destruction of the First Temple. We were exiled to Babylon. Yet our dream of return to Israel began to be realized quite soon:

Source 1

<p>1 Now in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia... G-d stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying:</p> <p>2 'Thus saith Cyrus King of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord, the G-d of heaven, given me; and He hath charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.</p> <p>3 Whoever there is among you of all His people ... let him go up to Jerusalem ... and build the house of the Lord, G-d of Israel...</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ezra Chapter 1</p>	<p>א ובשנת אחת, לכורש מלך פרס... העיר יהנה,</p> <p>ב כה אמר, כרש מלך פרס--כל ממלכות הארץ,</p> <p>ג מי-בכם מפל-עמו... ויעל, לירושלם ... ויבן,</p> <p>עזרא פרק א</p>
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The passage above happened BEFORE the Purim story occurred.

*Unfortunately, the Temple did **not** actually get built then. For a variety of reasons, Cyrus eventually halted permission to proceed.*

After the salvation of Purim, the Jews were in a very good position. Esther and Mordechai were two of the most powerful people in the Kingdom. The enemies of the Jews had been killed. And Darius, son of Esther and Ahausuerus^{viii}, next became King. He gave permission for the Temple to be rebuilt and it was, although slowly.

So the Temple is rebuilt. But it is not quite the same Temple as before.

The second Temple is much smaller than the original (although hundreds of years later Herod rebuilds it into a magnificent building). Relatively few Jews leave comfortable Babylon to return to Israel^{viii}, so the Jewish community in Israel is quite small initially...

Furthermore, aside from the physical differences, there are great spiritual differences between the First and Second Temple:

Source 2

<p>Since the First Temple was destroyed...the Urim and Tumim ceased and there is no longer a King from the House of David</p>	<p>משחרב בהמ"ק ראשון ... ופסקו אורים ותומים</p>
<p>...Since the death of Chagai, Zechariah and Malachi, the Divine Spirit left the Jewish People</p>	<p>... משמתו חגי זכריה ומלאכי נסתלקה רוח סוטה דף מח,ב</p>
<p>Sotah 48b</p>	

The Second Temple lacked the Holy Ark (it was either hidden away or stolen). The special fire no longer came down from Heaven to burn the offerings. Chagai, Zechariah and Malachi died at the beginning of the Second Temple period and they were the last prophets. In essence, the Second Temple was on a much lower level than the First Temple.

But we had a Temple, and some form of autonomy.

2. The Story of Chanukah

Throughout Jewish history, we have had many enemies. They really fall into two major categories.

One group is comprised of those who want to kill us no matter what we say or do or think. What is the paradigm example of these enemies? The Nazis of course. They wanted every Jew dead, no matter what.^{viii}

There have been many other enemies – a second group - who weren't trying to kill all the Jews. They just wanted to change us, to get us to stop being Jewish. To drop our religion and adopt their worldview. What is the paradigm example of this group? The Greeks.

When Alexander the Great conquered Israel – he did not start killing people. Personally, he was quite good to the Jews^{viii}. But his successors weren't, and Greek culture felt it was its mission to 'civilize' any non-Greeks, Jews included. Eventually, the Greeks began forcing us to drop Judaism and live as Greeks. Consider this account from the Book of Maccabees:

Source 3

43	And King Antiochus wrote to all his kingdom, that all the people should be one: and every one should leave his own law.
44	And all nations consented according to the word of king Antiochus.
45	And many of Israel consented to his service, and they sacrificed to idols, and profaned the Sabbath.
46	And the king sent letters by the hands of messengers to Jerusalem, and to all the cities of Judah: that they should follow the law ...
47	And should forbid ... sacrifices ...
48	And should prohibit the Sabbath and the festival days to be celebrated.
49	And he commanded the holy places to be profaned ...
50	And he commanded altars to be built, and temples, and idols, and swine's flesh to be offered [in the Temple] ...
51	And that they [the Jews] should leave their children uncircumcised ...
52	And that whosoever would not do according to the word of king Antiochus should be put to death ...
53	...and he appointed rulers over the people that should force them to do these things.
	Book of Maccabees, First Chapter

These weren't just threats. Greeks and their Hellenist collaborators actively tried to stamp out any vestige of Jewish life and learning:

Source 4

Women who allowed their sons to be circumcised were killed with their sons tied around their necks. The scholars of Israel were hounded, hunted down and killed. Jews who refused to eat pork or sacrifice hogs were tortured to death ... Even the smallest hamlet in Judah was not safe from the oppression of the Hellenists. The altars to Zeus and other pagan deities were erected in every village, and Jews of every area were forced to participate in the sacrificial services.

Rabbi Berel Wein, *Echoes of Glory*, p. 63

Eventually, the Maccabees (otherwise known as the Chashmonaim) stood up for Judaism and led a rebellion against the Greeks. Incredibly, though they were a small band of Jews against the mightiest army in the world, they prevailed.

To commemorate this great victory, during the eight days of Chanukah we add in a paragraph to our prayers:

Source 5

<p>In the days of Mattisyahu son of Yochanan, High Priest, the Hasmonean and his sons, when the evil Greek Empire stood against Israel, trying to cause them to forget Your Torah and take them away from Your Will.</p> <p>You in Your great mercy stood up for them during their hardships. You fought for them, judged for them, and took revenge for them. You gave over the strong to the few, the many to the weak, the impure to the pure, the evil to the good, the malicious to those who toil in Your Torah, and made for Yourself a great and holy name in Your world.</p> <p>And for Your nation, Israel, you brought a great salvation and rescue until this day. Later, You brought Your children to Your habitation and they cleansed your Sanctuary, purified your Holy Place and kindled lights in the courtyards of Your Holy Place. And they established these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your holy name.</p>	<p>בימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול, חשמונאי</p>
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Initially, the victory was great. Jews gained autonomy, had complete religious freedom, etc. But within a couple of generations, the Priests got corrupted and ally themselves with the Hellenists. The Romans initially come in to keep the peace and eventually start exerting control.

3. Rome

Rome eventually replaced Greece as the world superpower. In many ways, Roman ideology was not markedly different from that of the Greeks. The Romans certainly held themselves to be the inheritors of Greek philosophy and culture, etc. And yet, with all of its roads, theaters, and emphasis on cultural and technological advancement, Roman society did not impress our Sages.

The sages understood very well what Rome stood for and how it promoted values that were the antitheses of Judaism.

What was so bad about Roman culture? Ken Spiro's WorldPerfect (in book form or as a special seminar on Aish.com) describes it amazingly well. In short, the Romans^{viii} were incredibly cruel. The great Coliseum of Rome – one of the greatest feats of engineering of the day – was a place where thousands of people (slaves, captured prisoners, etc) were killed by animals daily. Roman life was about conquest. Torture and executions were commonplace.

Furthermore, there was no respect for life, the weak, the defenseless, etc. Children were murdered for a variety of reasons such as (a) birth control^{viii}; (b) wanting male heirs; (c) deformities – even minor ones – any many more:

Source 6

"Infanticide during antiquity has usually been played down despite literally hundreds of clear references by ancient writers that it was an accepted, everyday occurrence. Children were thrown into rivers, flung into dung-heaps and cess trenches, 'potted' in jars to starve to death, and exposed in every hill and roadside, 'a prey for birds, food for wild beasts to rend.' (Euripides, *Ion*, 504)"

Lloyd DeMause, The Evolution of Childhood (pp. 25-26)

Sexual relationships between men and young boys were highly valued (even by such luminaries as Plato). No wonder the Rabbis saw the Romans as their polar opposites. When we consider Judaism's teaching that every life is precious, that every human being is created in the Divine Image, and that we are forbidden to unnecessarily hurt each other, we **were** their polar opposites.

The Talmud refers to the Roman city of Caesarea^{viii} to express the essential difference and incompatibility of the two worldviews:

Source 7

<p>Caesarea and Jerusalem:</p> <p>If someone will tell you, "both are destroyed," do not believe it;</p> <p>If someone will tell you, "both are standing," do not believe it.</p> <p>But if someone will tell you, "Caesarea is destroyed and Jerusalem is standing," or "Jerusalem is destroyed and Caesarea is standing" that you can believe.</p> <p>Megillah 6a</p>	<p>קסרי וירושלים אם יאמר לך אדם חרבו שתיהן אל תאמן ישבו שתיהן אל תאמן חרבה קסרי וישבה ירושלים חרבה ירושלים מגילה דף ו,א</p>
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Question: How do you understand this Talmudic statement?

Answer: The Talmud is not referring to the physical destruction of the cities. Indeed both cities were indeed destroyed for over a thousand years! Rather the Talmud is describing the ideological struggle between Judaism and Roman-ism. Are our goals material or spiritual? They can't be both. Do we strive for G-dliness and goodness^{viii} on the one hand, or for mindless entertainment and hedonism on the other? Basically, the Talmud is saying that if Roman values are on the rise, Jewish values are on the decline. And vice-versa.

So it is important to understand what kind of societies Greek and Roman societies were. Advanced in many ways, but lacking any basic morality. This was the world our ancestors lived in and these were the empires that we miraculously survived.

4) The Destruction of the Second Temple

Historians will tell you why the Second Temple was destroyed, they will discuss Roman oppression, and Jewish rebellion to Roman rule. The Romans were exceedingly frustrated by this little people being unwilling to submit and setting a bad example. They eventually crushed the Jews completely. Josephus, the famous historian wrote extensively about the details of the fighting. How many men, how many catapults, etc. [Josephus was a Jewish general who abandoned the fight and joined Roman society, and yet often defended the Jews to his Roman masters.]

The Talmud is not particularly interested in the how the Temple was destroyed or even in the particular steps along the way that seemed to be the causes and effects. The Talmud is more interested in the underlying truths. The following quote is very much in line with Jewish thinking:

Source 8

"A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within."

American historian Will Durant

So when the Talmud asks why the Temple was destroyed, as we will see, it means to ask:

What were the main failures within the Jewish People that eventually led to its spiritual and moral decline, which inevitably led to the Roman destruction.

Source 9

<p>Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three things that existed then: Idol worship, Immorality, and the Spilling of Blood...</p>	<p>מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב מפני ג' דברים שהיו מקדש שני ... מפני מה חרב מפני שהיתה בו ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות</p>
<p>Why was the ... Second Temple destroyed? Because of Baseless Hatred^{viii}</p>	<p>מסכת יומא דף ט,ב</p>
<p>This teaches that Baseless Hatred is as bad as the three sins of Idol worship, Immorality, and the Spilling of Blood Talmud Yoma 9b</p>	

This is an amazing Gemara. We think that the Romans destroyed the Temple, and on a physical level they certainly did. But in a sense, the Jews had already destroyed it from the inside. Because even though they considered themselves 'religious' and kept Shabbos and kosher, etc, their attitude was wrong. They hated each other in their hearts, they didn't judge favorably and make peace. They spoke Lashon Hara.

This is a great lesson for today. The Chafetz Chaim is famous for emphasizing^{viii} that since the exile was caused by Sinas Chinam, we cannot fully be redeemed until we fix that sin. And so the fact that the Temple is still in ruins indicates that we as a people and each of us as individuals each has a lot of work to do in getting rid of Sinas Chinam, baseless hatred.

Summary

This session covered the Second Temple Era. We saw four main points.

1. The Temple was built soon after the Purim story which happened in Persia. Only a minority of Jews returned to Israel, and the Temple itself was not initially an impressive structure (but towards the end of the Second Temple period it was renovated by Herod and was physically magnificent)
2. The Greek conquest and eventual oppression brought on the successful Maccabean revolt and another era of Jewish autonomy.
3. The Greeks were replaced by the Romans as the world superpower. Roman culture was obsessed by sex and violence, and was very cruel. We were their polar opposites.
4. Unfortunately, some Jews were negatively influenced and they slid. There was baseless hatred, gossip and slander. Almost 2000 years ago, the Romans destroyed the Temple. It has yet to be rebuilt.

Appendix

One additional point about the end of the Second Temple period. You may have heard of references to 'the scribes' or the 'pharisees', as well as the Sadducees, and the Essenes.

- *The Essenes were a strange group (probably the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls) who lived in the desert and adapted celibate, monastic ways of life. They certainly weren't listening to the Torah or the Sages and no surprise that they didn't last.*
- *The Sadducees were the Priests of the Temple who became very corrupted and Hellenized. They rejected the Oral Torah and allied themselves with Greek ideas and then with Rome.*
- *The Pharisees – often derided by Christian texts and even in contemporary references – **well, that is us!** Any Jew alive today is a descendant of the Pharisees. The vast majority of the Jews were loyal to the Torah and to the traditions and to the Sages. If you have heard any negative slants on them, don't believe it. The Pharisees – the bulk of the Jewish people - were the ones who were loyal to Judaism*

Unit 7

The Development of the Mishna and Gemara

In this unit we deal with the fall of the Temple &
the establishment of Yavneh
and then focus on the importance and place of the Oral Torah

Unit 7: Development of the Mishna & Gemara

Outline

- Fall of Temple & Establishment of Yavneh
- The Oral Torah

Rome had become the only superpower, with its Empire covering almost the entire known world. Its power was felt in Israel as well. Eventually, the Romans went on the attack.

The massive Roman attack on Jerusalem and the Temple was unrelenting, and, from Jewish view, unstoppable. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was the leading Torah authority in those days. He and the other sages favored ending the war in order to save whatever was left of Jewish life and autonomy. Not all Jews followed their leaders. There were extremists who refused any compromise and wouldn't allow any Jews to leave Jerusalem. With this background let us learn about a famous episode that occurred.

Source 1

Abba Sikra, the head of the biryoni (bandits) in Jerusalem, was the nephew of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. He (R. Yochanan) sent to him saying, Come to visit me privately. When [Abba Sikra] came, [Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai] said to him: How long are you going to carry on in this way and kill all the people with starvation?"

He replied: "What can I do? If I say a word to them, they will kill me."

He said: "Devise some plan for me to escape. Perhaps I shall be able to save a little." [Abba Sikra] said to him: "Pretend to be ill, and let everyone come to inquire about you. Bring something evil-smelling and put it by you so that they will say you are dead..."

[Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai escaped and approached the Roman commander]

When he reached the Romans, he said: "Peace to you, O King. Peace to you, O King."^{viii}

...

He [Vespasian] said: "Your life is forfeit ... because I am not a king and you call me king ... At this point a messenger came to him from Rome saying: "...the Emperor is dead, and the notables of Rome have decided to make you king."

... He [Vespasian] said: "I am now going and will send someone to take my place. You can, however, make a request of me and I will grant it."

He said to him: "Give me Yavneh and its scschowise men..."^{viii}

Talmud Gittin 56a-b

אבא סקרא ריש בריוני דירושלים בר אחתיה

הוה שלח ליה תא בצנינעא לגבאי אתא א"ל עד

א"ל מאי איעביד דאי אמינא להו מידי קטלו לי

א"ל חזי לי תקנתא לדידי דאיפוק אפשר דהוי

א"ל נקוט נפשך בקצירי וליתי כולי עלמא

כי מטא להתם אמר שלמא עלך מלכא שלמא עלך

...אמר ליה מיזל אזילנא ואינש אחרינא משדרנא

This encounter was one of the most important in post-Biblical Jewish history. The Romans had been persecuting the Jews horribly and outlawing all forms of Jewish practice and learning. They had killed hundreds of thousands of Jews and enslaved many more. Hope was lost. The Temple was gone. They were destroying the country.

Rabbi Yochanan asked to be granted the one thing^{viii} that would ensure Jewish survival – the study of Torah. The Temple and the Temple service had always been of central importance to Judaism and now they were gone. The local synagogue and prayer hall existed before but with the Temple's destruction, their importance increased.

It was during this period – ie in the 500 or so years following the destruction of the Temple – that the Mishna and Gemara were fully developed. The Mishna and Yerushalmi Gemara were codified in Israel and then as Jewish life there ended, the more famous Babylonian Talmud in what is now Iraq.

Although they are the main examples (others include the Tosefta, Midrashim and Mystical works) of what is called the Oral Torah (or Oral Law), it was in this period that they were written down. In order to understand this period – and in fact to really understand any period of Jewish history or any part of Judaism, it is crucial that we understand what the Oral Torah was and is.

The Oral Law

Answer: Many verses themselves indicate clearly the existence of a separate body of oral explanations, traditions and laws. Consider the following:

Source 2

<p>... you may kill of your herd and flock, which the LORD gave you, <i>as I have commanded you</i>^{viii}, and you may eat within your gates, after all the desire of your soul.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Deuteronomy Chapter 12</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">... וְזָבַחַת מִבְּקָרְךָ וּמִצֹּאֲנֵן אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' לְךָ, כַּאֲשֶׁר דברים פרק יב</p>
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Question: How does this verse indicate the existence of the Oral Torah already at Mount Sinai?

Answer: It says that Jews cannot eat food that was not slaughtered 'in the way' G-d commanded. There is clearly a method that is permissible and a method that is not. Which is which? Where is this Kosher method of slaughter explained? Where is it taught? Does anyone know where in Tanakh^{viii} they are taught?

NOWHERE! Because it was part of the Oral Law. It was not written anywhere in the Written Law.

One more^{viii} example:

Source 3

<p>18 And you shall place these My words on your hearts and on your souls, and bind them for a sign on your hands, and they shall be frontlets between your eyes. 19 And you shall teach them your children, talking of them, when you sit in your house, and when you walk on the way, and when you lie down, and when you get up 20 And you shall write them upon the door-posts of your house and upon your gates;</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Deuteronomy Chapter 11</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">יח וְשִׂמְתֶם אֶת-דִּבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים, עַל-לִבְבְּכֶם וְעַל-</p> <p style="text-align: right;">דברים פרק יא</p>
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This passage may be familiar as part of the Shema prayer. Let us focus on the first part. What mitzvah is being referred to (Tefillin).

Question: What does it tell us about the mitzvah?

Answer: That they should be on hands and between the eyes.

Question: If you read the text and wanted to fulfill G-d's commandment, what else would you need to know?

Answer: Everything! What are they? What words? If in boxes, what kind? Maybe they should be red? Maybe round? How does one know?

Consider this quotation from Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan concerning Tefillin:

Source 4

There is no description of them^{viii} nor any hint as to how they must be made. The Torah merely outlines their contents and tells us nothing more. It is most important to realize that G-d gave us the Torah in two parts. There is the Written Torah (*Torah SheBeKesav*) which we keep in the ark. However, there is also the Unwritten or Oral Torah (*Torah SheBaal Peh*) consisting of the oral tradition handed down from Sinai.

The Torah was not meant to be a mere book, lying on the shelf. It was meant to be part of the everyday life of an entire people. As such, it could only be transmitted by word of mouth. The Oral Torah was handed down from teacher to disciple for almost 1500 years, until the harsh Roman persecutions finally threatened to extinguish it completely. Finally, some 1700 years ago, it was written down to form the Talmud. The Talmud itself cites Tefillin as a prime example of a case where the full description of a commandment is found only in the Oral Torah

“Tefillin”, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, NCSY publications 1973

The point is that two Torahs were given simultaneously. The Written one and the Oral one. One was not added later. The Written Torah is completely impossible to understand and implement without the Oral Torah as well. How do they work together? What is their relationship?

Source 5

The Written Torah (*Torah shebeKtav*) is to be to the (*Torah shebeAl Peh*) in the relation of short notes on a full and extensive lecture on any scientific subject. For the student who has heard the whole lecture, short notes are quite sufficient to bring back afresh to his mind at any time the whole subject of the lecture. For him, a word, an added mark of interrogation, or exclamation, a dot, the underlining of a word, etc., etc., is often quite sufficient to recall to his mind a whole series of thoughts, a remark, etc.

For those who had not heard the lecture from the Master, such notes would be completely useless. If they were to try and reconstruct the scientific contents of the lecture literally from such notes they would of necessity make many errors. Words, marks, etc which serve to those scholars who had heard the lecture as instructive guiding stars to the wisdom that had been taught and learnt, stare at the uninitiated as unmeaning sphinxes. The wisdom, the truths, which the initiated reproduce from them (but do not produce *out of them*) are sneered at by the uninitiated, as being merely a clever or witty play of words and empty dreams without any real foundation

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch

Commentary on Exodus 21:2

Summary: The Written Torah and the Oral Torah are inseparable and always were. The Written Torah tells us the story of the Jewish People and of our encounters with G-d, and tells us about the Mitzvahs. But an enormous number of details, explanations, etc are left to the Oral Law.

EDUCATOR: THE FOLLOWING IS AN IMPORTANT POINT TO EMPHASIZE:

This is a crucial point in order to understand Judaism and all Jewish history. Sometimes the period we are discussing (the 500 or so years following the destruction of the Second Temple) is called the Rabbinic Period, and there is an implication that a new form of Judaism was developed: ie first there was Temple Judaism and then, after it, Rabbinic Judaism with all its rules, additions, discussions, etc. This is NOT so. There were always Oral traditions, principles to be applied to new situations, rabbinic decrees, etc.

Question: so what was new to this period?

Answer: Many things

- *The destruction was complete and it was clear that the Temple would not be rebuilt. In order to de-judaize Jerusalem, the Romans built a busy market road through the heart (it was thus called "cardo" meaning heart) of Jerusalem. Ruins from the Temple was cleared and a Temple to the goddess Aphrodite was built. Jerusalem was renamed Aelo Capitalina and Israel was – for the first time – called Palestine^{viii}. Less than 70 years after the Temple's destruction there was a revolt – called the Bar Kochba revolt, after its leader^{viii}. The revolt ended in failure and even greater destruction and despair to the Jewish People. By the end of our period (6th century CE), few Jews lived in Israel. Most emigrated to Babylon.*
- *Understanding that the Jewish People were shattered and their institutions destroyed, the Sages of the time saw a great need to do everything possible to preserve our heritage.*
- *While our prayers originate with the Matriarchs and Patriarchs, and the wording goes back to the beginning of the 2nd Temple, after the destruction more prayers were formalized and standardized. Synagogues became more important.*
- *The Oral Traditions that were passed down from teacher to student were collected, codified and eventually written down in the Mishna at the end of the 2nd Century CE. Comments, explanations, arguments, additional information, etc was codified and written down in the Gemara in the 2-3 centuries that followed. This period which included the codifying and writing of the previously Oral traditions saved Judaism. It is highly unlikely any of us would be here today without it.*

Writing of the Mishna

In order to understand why the Oral Torah was eventually written down, let us first understand why it was not written down initially:

Source 6

The Oral Torah was originally meant to be transmitted by word of mouth. It was transmitted from master to student in such a manner that if the student had any question, he would be able to ask, and thus avoid ambiguity. A written text, on the other hand, no matter how perfect, is always subject to misinterpretation....

If the entire Torah would have been given in writing, everyone would be able to interpret it as he desired. This would lead to division and discord among people who followed the Torah in different ways. The Oral Torah, on the other hand, would require a central authority to preserve it, thus assuring the unity of Israel.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought,
Moznaim 1979, p.179

Question: *How do you understand this idea? Why was the Oral Torah kept Oral?*

Answer: *Students would study from their masters for many years before being judged qualified to teach themselves. Not just anyone could claim authority and legitimacy deciding on and passing on matters of the Oral Law. Keeping it Oral was an incredibly effective safeguard.*

So why was it written down? Maimonides explains:

Source 7

12 Our Holy Teacher wrote the Mishnah. From the time of Moshe to Our Holy Teacher, no one had written a work from which the Oral Law was publicly taught. Rather, in each generation, the head of the then existing court or the prophet of the time wrote down for his private use notes on the traditions he had heard from his teachers, and he taught in public from memory.

13 So too, everyone wrote down according to his ability parts of the explanation of the Torah and of its laws he heard, as well as the new matters that developed in each generation, which had not been received by oral tradition, but had been deduced by applying the Thirteen Principles for Interpreting the Torah, and had been agreed upon by the Great Rabbinical Court. Such had always been done, until the time of Our Holy Teacher.

14 He gathered together all the traditions, all the enactments, and all the explanations and interpretations that had been heard from Moshe Our Teacher or had been deduced by the courts of all the generations in all matters of the Torah; and he wrote the Book of the Mishnah from all of them. And he taught it in public, and it became known to all Israel; everyone wrote it down and taught it everywhere, so that the Oral Law would not be forgotten by Israel.

15 Why did Our Holy Teacher do so, and did not leave things as they were? Because he saw that the number of students was continuing to go down, calamities were continually happening, wicked government was extending its domain and increasing in power, and the Israelites were wandering and emigrating to remote places. He thus wrote a work to serve as a handbook for all, so that it could be rapidly studied and would not be forgotten ...

יב רבנו הקדוש חיבר המשנה. ומימות משה ועד

יג וכן כל אחד ואחד כותב לעצמו כפי כוחו,

יד והוא קיבץ כל השמועות וכל הדינין וכל

טו ולמה עשה רבנו הקדוש כך, ולא הניח הדבר

משנה תורה להרמב"ם

הקדמה

Chain and safeguards of transmission worked well as long as there was minimal stability. But with teachers being killed or on the run, there were few students who had the chance to adequately master enough of the Oral Tradition. In order to ensure its preservation an 'emergency decree' was passed, allowing it to be written down. This ensured the basic oral tradition was safeguarded.

Initially the Mishna was enough and students used it as a basis for their learning. But the Mishna is terse and quite cryptic. With the continued destruction, exile, and persecution, many of the explanations, discussions, additions, arguments etc had to be codified in the Talmud.

Question: If there was one Oral tradition passed on from teacher to student, why are there so many disagreements?

Answer: It is important to realize that disagreements in the Gemara were never about the major questions. Everyone agrees you can't eat pork or steal. The disagreements were about details and points that were unclear. While everyone agreed on the principles, when new situations arose there were legitimate disagreements about which principles to apply and how. That is part of how we are involved in Torah. We do not memorize rote. We understand, compare, argue, and ask. That is Torah!

Summary

- The 500 years following the destruction of the Temple were years of great transition. The Temple, and Jerusalem, which had been the focal point and center of our religion and culture, was gone. We scattered into different parts of Israel and eventually Babylon.
- When The Temple was destroyed, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai asked for the one thing that would ensure Jewish survival – the learning of Torah, then centered in Yavneh. Great Torah academies – Yeshivas – were established to spread Torah knowledge.
- Although this is sometimes referred to as the Rabbinic period, it is crucial to know that there were always rabbis and Torah scholarship. Two Torahs were given at Sinai, and the Written is incomprehensible without the Oral.
- Eventually the Oral Torah was written down in the Mishna and Gemara.

Appendix 1

Source 8

<p>"Shimon HaTzadik (the Righteous) was of the last survivors of the Men of the Great Assembly. He used to say, the world is based upon three things: on (the study of) Torah, on service [of G-d], and on acts of kindness." Avos 1:2</p>	<p>שמעון הצדיק היה משיירי כנסת הגדולה. על שלושה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה מסכת אבות פרק א: ב</p>
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<p>And if a person wants to claim: “since the rabbis disagreed in several places, I cast doubt upon their statements”, you must rebuke him and explain to him ... that the sages never disagreed about the principles of the commandments, but only regarding the details of their application. The sages learned the principles from their rabbis, but neglected to inquire about some of the details...For example, the sages did not disagree about whether one should light candles for Shabbat; they were only divided in respect to the type of substances to be used in those candles</p> <p>Rabbi Avraham Ben David (Ravad) Sefer HaKabbalah</p>	<p>ואם לחשך אדם לומר מפני שנחלקו בכמה</p>
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Source 10

Our Rabbis taught: A certain heathen once came before Shammai and asked him, 'How many Torot (kinds of Torah) have you?'

'Two,' he replied: 'the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.'

'I believe you with respect to the Written, but not with respect to the Oral Torah; make me a proselyte on condition that you teach me the Written Torah [only].

[But] he scolded and repulsed him in anger.

When he went before Hillel, he accepted him as a proselyte. On the first day, he taught him, Alef, bet, gimmel, dalet (the first four letters of the Hebrew alphabet); the following day he reversed [them] to him.

'But yesterday you did not teach them to me thus,' he protested.

Talmud Shabbat 31a

ת"ר מעשה בנכרי אחד שבא לפני שמאי אמר לו

Source 11

1 All the commandments that were given to Moshe at Sinai were given together with their interpretation, as it is written "and I will give thee the Tables of Stone, and the Law, and the Commandment" (Exodus 24,12). "Law" is the Written Law; and "Commandment" is its interpretation: We were commanded to fulfill the Law, according to the Commandment, which is called the Oral Law.

2 The whole of the Law was written down by Moshe Our Teacher before his death, in his own hand. He gave a scroll of the Law to each tribe; and he put another scroll in the Ark for a witness, as it is written "take this book of the Law, and put it by the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee" (Deuteronomy 31,26).

3 But the Commandment, which is the interpretation of the Law--he did not write it down, but gave orders concerning it to the elders, to Yehoshua, and to all the rest of Israel, as it is written For this reason, it is called the Oral Law.

4 Although the Oral Law was not written down, Moshe Our Teacher taught all of it in his court to the 70 elders; and El'azar, Pinehas, and Yehoshua, all three received it from Moshe. And to his student Yehoshua, Moshe passed on the Oral Law and ordered him concerning it. And so Yehoshua throughout his life taught it orally.

5 Many elders received it from Yehoshua, and Eli received it from the elders and from Pinehas; Shmuel received it from Eli and his court, and David received it from Shmuel and his court ... [list goes on]

Maimonides, Introduction to Mishna Torah

א כל המצוות שניתנו לו למשה בסיני--בפירושן

ב כל התורה--כתבה משה רבנו קודם שימות,

ג והמצוה, שהיא פירוש התורה--לא כתבה; אלא

ד אף על פי שלא נכתבה תורה שבעל פה, לימדה

ה וזקנים רבים קיבלו מיהושוע, וקיבל עלי מן

משנה תורה להרמב"ם
הקדמה

Appendix 2

TALMUD

By Rabbi Berel Wein

Date: Dec 09 2005

Topic: Jerusalem Post

In its simplest form of definition, the Talmud is the record of centuries of discussion expounding the Oral Law of Judaism as it took place in the great Torah academies of the Land of Israel and Babylonia long ago. The Mishna, which is the basis of all talmudic discussions, was completed and edited at the beginning of the third century CE by Rabi Yehuda HaNassi in Tzipori in the Galilee. The Talmud was developed in two separate works: Talmud Yerushalmi (the Talmud of the Land of Israel) and Talmud Bavli (the Talmud of Babylonia.) The Talmud Yerushalmi was completed c.350CE when the Jewish community in the Land of Israel began to suffer genocidal persecution from the newly empowered Byzantine Christians. The demise of a vibrant Jewish community in the Land of Israel forced many of the Torah scholars living there to flee to Babylonia where Christian dominance did not hold sway. The Babylonian Talmud was not completed until the middle/end of the sixth century CE and became the definitive Talmud. Even though the Babylonian Talmud describes itself as being created in “darkness (of exile)” it remains the definitive Talmud. Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi, the great eleventh century codifier of Jewish law, explained that we follow the opinions of the Babylonian Talmud over those of the Talmud Yerushalmi because the Babylonian Talmud, which was edited two centuries later than the Talmud Yerushalmi, already took into consideration the opinions of the Talmud Yerushalmi when reaching its own stated halachic opinions and conclusions. Thus the Babylonian Talmud became and remains the main source for the definitive tradition of the Oral Law from Sinai.

Throughout Jewish history, the Jewish people in all of their lands of dispersion, basically lived a talmudic way of life, differing little from the way of the lives of their ancestors in Babylonia during the period of the compilation and editing of the Talmud. It was the Talmud, naturally based upon the sanctity and integrity of the Torah, the Written Law, that bound world Jewry together in spite of the enormous distances of space and society that exile imposed upon it. The names of the great men of the Talmud – Rabi Yochanan ben Zakai, Rabi Akiva, Rabi Yehuda HaNassi, Rav, Mar Shmuel, Rabah, Abayei, Ravah, Ravina, Rav Ashi, Mar bar Rav Ashi, etc. – were all household names and familiar “guests” in Jewish homes the world over. Even though the vast majority of Jews were hardly talmudic scholars – this field was pretty much reserved for the rabbis and judges of Israel – almost all Jews were aware of the Talmud, its values, messages, decisions and stories. It was the guiding book in their lives, not only in matters of ritual and law, but also in terms of personal behavior, societal goals and vision of the Jewish future. It was almost as through a process of osmosis that Jews absorbed within themselves an

appreciation and respect for the Talmud. Eventually it could be said that the book referred to in the phrase “people of the book” was the Talmud.

It is no surprise therefore that the Talmud became the target and flash point of opposition to Judaism, its values and practices as well as its practitioners. The burning of the Talmud was a regular part of Christian persecution of Jews throughout Europe from the time of Louis IX in the thirteenth century to Nazi Germany in the twentieth century. Again, all those dissident Jews who rejected the traditions of the Oral Law and sought to create “new” forms of Jewish life also attacked the Talmud bitterly and discredited its ideas and formulations. From the Karaites in the seventh century to the Yevsektzia (the Jewish section of the Bolshevik party that Stalin would later purge) in the twentieth century, the Talmud was vilified and its pages torn and destroyed by Jews who were bitterly opposed to its teachings and who recognized that no “new” form of Judaism could ever take hold as long as the Talmud was still studied, respected and loved within the Jewish world. Nevertheless, the Talmud, like the Jewish people that it protects, has weathered all storms. It is the main text and topic of study in all yeshivot throughout the Jewish world. Competence in its study is the first requirement for all rabbis and teachers who maintain and defend the veracity of Jewish tradition from Sinai until our day. The Talmud is old but it remains fresh and vital. Its study is complex, challenging, but it is a labor of love. For understanding the Talmud is the way to understanding the Jewish soul – the Jew that is within us all – and thus is our true connection to our past and our destiny.

Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

Unit 8

The Medieval Period

In this unit, we will discuss the Crusades, Expulsions, and other major events, and then focus on the Rishonim, with the work of Maimonides and Rashi a particular focus

Unit 8: Medieval Period – the Rishonim

Outline:

- Background

Background

By the turn of the millennium, however, the center of the Jewish world began spreading to Europe and North Africa's civilization picked up there. Jews lived under both Muslim and Christian rule during this period.

Spain was the great power. Over half of Jews alive today are “Sefardi” which literally means Spanish because their lineage traces back to Spain (most others Ashkenazim or Germans.) This was the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry.

Jews were prominent in science, trade and of course scholarship

- Rabbi Abraham ibn (son of) Ezra was a famous commentator who was also a doctor, philosopher, and astronomer.
- Rabbi Bachya ibn (son of) Pakuda wrote *Chovot HaLevavot, Duties of the Heart* – a text that is popular to this day, guiding one's inner life and moral refinement.
- Rabbi Judah HaLevi wrote a famous philosophical work called the *Kuzari*. It is based on the historical Kingdom of Khazar, near the Black Sea where in the 8th century the king of Khazaria could not decide whether to adopt Christianity, Islam, or Judaism and so invited scholars to debate religious tenets. He and much of his country converted to Judaism, but the Kingdom was eventually conquered and wiped out. Rabbi Judah HaLevi used this as a backdrop and ‘reconstructed’ the debate. An amazing book to read.

Educator: Since our class focuses on the personalities of Rambam and Rashi, it is crucial to mention at the beginning and the end the main historical events that happened: (1) expulsions (2) Rise and Fall of Spanish Jewry and (3) the Crusades, among others.

Medieval times were a roller coaster. This was a period of great foment. The Crusades were launched by various Popes, to free the Holy Land from the Muslims, but of course Jewish communities were decimated along the way. The Black Death, the great Plague, decimated Europe's population and was often ridiculously blamed on the Jews leading to violence. Spanish Jewry went through a Golden Age, which eventually ended. Some Spanish Jews agreed to convert, and many were victims of the Inquisition. Hundreds of thousands refused to convert and were kicked out^{viii} of Spain, with the survivors of dangerous journeys eventually centering on Turkey and Poland.

It is important to know about these things. To know what the Crusades did to our people. To know about the expulsion from Spain. It is also important to know what was happening to Judaism during that time. We will focus on two great Rabbis, Rambam and Rashi, who have had an enormous impact on Judaism and Jewish life, to this very day.

The Rambam

His Name

The most famous Jew from the Middle Ages was the Rambam (1135-1204).

- His name was really Moshe Ben Maimon, son of Maimon.
- In most European languages he is known as **Maimonides** which means the same thing in Greek.
- In traditional circles, he known as the Rambam, Rav Moshe ben Maimon

His Life

Overall in history, life for Jews in Muslim countries was better than in Christian countries. With the Muslims there was a clear dhimmi – second class status, but fewer pogroms and expulsions.

There were exceptions to this rule: when a radical Muslim sect – the Almohades - came to power in the 12th century, they gave the Jews three choices: covert to Islam, leave, or die.

Maimonides was only 13 when his family was forced to leave Spain. After wandering homeless for many years -- wanderings during which his father died -- Maimonides and his brother David finally settled in Cairo, Egypt. His brother supported his studies. Maimonides did not want to get paid for his Torah knowledge and so in order to earn a living, he taught himself medicine, and soon became one of the most respected doctors in the world, including being personal physician to the Court of Sultan – the famous Saladin.

His works

Commentary on the Mishnah -- his explanation of the Mishnah
Mishneh Torah^{viii} -- his codification of Jewish law, based on the Talmud
Guide to the Perplexed^{viii} -- his explanation of how seemingly contradictory teachings of the Torah are in fact part of a complete unified whole. An amazing philosophical masterpiece.

Uniqueness of the Mishneh Torah

The Mishneh Torah was very unique – let us let Maimonides explain it himself:

Source 1

...At this time, the sufferings of our people have increased. The pressing need of the moment supersedes every other consideration. The wisdom of the wise has vanished, and the wisdom of our learned men is concealed.

Hence, the commentaries, compilations of laws and Response of the *Gaonim*, which they thought were easy to understand, have in our times become difficult to understand, and there are only a few individuals who are able to comprehend them properly...

For this reason, I, Moshe ben Maimon, the Sephardi, have girded my loins and relying on the help of the Almighty, blessed be He, have thoroughly studied all their works and decided to compile the results derived from them as to what is prohibited and what is permitted, what is clean and what is unclean, and all the other laws of the Torah, all in clear language and concise style, so that the entire oral Torah will be systematically arranged for all. [I shall not quote] the questions and answers or the differences of opinion discussed... but only the laws themselves in a clear and succinct manner, in accordance with the conclusions derived from all these treatises and compilations existing since the time of Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi until the present day – so that all the laws shall be accessible to young and old, whether they are Biblical precepts or enactments by the sages or Prophets^{viii}. ...

The Talmud is known as a Sea, the Sea of Talmud. Its tractates focus on specific subjects, but there are huge tangents, Jewish law mixed in with philosophy, stories, etc. Lengthy arguments which sometimes don't have a clear conclusion. Before Maimonides, the Rif had pared it down and dealt with conclusions but he kept it in the order of the Talmud. Hard to 'look something up'. Maimonides knew it all, explained it all, organized it all so that you and I could understand a subject clearly^{viii}.

Organization of Belief

Consistent with his desire to systematize Judaism to make it clear and understandable, Maimonides also formulated^{viii} his **13 principles of faith**. He didn't word them in the following way, but this is how they became famous:

Source 2

I believe with complete faith that the Creator, blessed be His name,

1. is the Creator and Guide of all the created beings, and that He alone has made, does make, and will make all that exists
2. is One and Alone; that there is no oneness in any way like Him; and that He alone is our G-d - was, is and will be.
3. has no body, that He is free from all anthropomorphic properties; and that He has no likeness at all.
4. is the first and the last.
5. is the only one to whom it is proper to pray, and that it is inappropriate to pray to anyone else.

I believe with complete faith that

6. all the words of the Prophets are true.
7. the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace unto him, was true; and that he was the father of the prophets, both of those who preceded and of those who followed him.
8. the whole Torah which we now possess was given to Moses, our teacher, peace unto him.
9. this Torah will not be changed, and that there will be no other Torah given by the Creator, blessed be His name.
10. the Creator, blessed be His name, knows all the deeds and thoughts of human beings...
11. the Creator, blessed be His name, rewards those who observe His commandments, and punishes those who transgress His commandments.
12. I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and although he may tarry, nevertheless, I wait every day for him to come.
13. I believe with complete faith that there will be resurrection of the dead at the time when it will be the will of the Creator, blessed be His name and exalted be His remembrance forever and ever.

Interestingly, these principles were quite controversial when he first published them. Some scholars disagreed^{viii} as to exactly what should be on the list, or even if there should be a list! Yet within a short amount of time, they became extremely widely accepted and were seen as fundamental to Jewish tradition^{viii} and belief.

Rashi

His Name and Impact

Rashi is a Hebrew acronym for **Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki**, (1040-1105). Rashi was a towering Torah commentator. His explanations on the Chumash & Talmud are the most famous and widely studied of all. No true student of Chumash or Talmud can say they understood the meaning of the text without first consulting Rashi! His commentaries are based on an incredible knowledge of Jewish sources, and his incredible talent was concisely giving explanations line by line, word by word. Without his commentaries, many passages are closed. With his help, the Torah is accessible to all students, laypeople or scholars.

Rashi's Birth

There is one story about Rashi's birth that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Source 3

Rashi's parents were childless for many years. One day, his father, a poor winemaker, found a rough stone and took it to an expert for appraisal. It was worth a fortune! Word spread and a messenger from a King arrived to bring the owner and the stone to the him in his Palace emperor. The King would pay an exorbitant price for the stone, which he wanted for one of the eyes of his giant idol.

R'Yitzchak, Rashi's father, did not want his stone to be used as part of idol worship. On the way, he thought of a plan as to how to avoid that happening. On the ship, he began boasting of his stone. The captain asked to see it. At first R'Yitzchak refused but one day, when it was stormy, he finally agreed. As he pulled it out, he lost his footing, and dropped the stone into the sea. Pretending to be upset, he cried and screamed and fainted.

When they arrived at the palace, the king felt sorry for the broken-hearted Jew and gave him money to make it home safely.

In truth, Yitzchak was happy that his gem would not be used for the idol. When he arrived at his home, an old man – Elijah the Prophet! - was waiting for him. "G-d is very happy with your actions, R'Yitzchak and knows what really happened. As a reward, you and your wife will be blessed with a son who will illuminate the world with his Torah."

The next year, they were blessed with a son. They named him Shlomo and we know him as Rashi.

Rashi Script

Note that when we learn Rashi, the text looks different from what we are used to. The letters are different. The script is called Rashi script – not that Rashi used it, because he didn't. But printers put his commentary in this form to distinguish it from the text of the Torah itself and the name stuck. You'll see that most of the letters look quite similar to the regular letters we know:

Source 4



Comparisons

As we've seen, the medieval age was a time of great upheaval. Pogroms, massacres, expulsions, yet also periods of growth. Incredible Torah leadership and scholarship from this period of time – known as the Rishonim. Let us take a practical look at how their works are different in style, using the Shema as an example:

Here is the beginning of Maimonides sections on the Laws of Shema Prayer.

Source 5

The Laws of the Recital of the Shema	הלכות קרית שמע
<p><i>One positive commandment, which is to recite the Shema prayer twice a day. An explanation of this commandment is in these chapters</i></p>	<p>מצות עשה אחת, והיא לקרות קרית שמע פעמיים</p> <p>פרק א</p>
<p>Chapter 1</p> <p>1) Twice every day, we recite the Shema, in the evening and the morning: as it is said, “in your laying down and in your arising” (Deuteronomy 6:7) – at the time that people are laying down, that is night; and the time that people are arising, that is morning</p>	<p>א פעמיים בכל יום, קוראין קרית שמע--בערב</p> <p>ב ומה הוא קורא: שלוש פרשיות אלו--והן</p>
	<p>ג אף על פי שאין מצות ציצית נוהגת בלילה,</p> <p>...</p>
<p>3) Even though the mitzvah of Tzitzit is not at night, we still read it (ie the third paragraph, dealing with it) at night, because it mentions [also] the leaving of Egypt, and it is a mitzvah to remember the leaving of Egypt in the evening and the day...</p>	<p>ה כשהקורא קורא קרית שמע, מברך לפניה</p>
<p>5) When one is reading the Shema, one says blessings before and after it: in the day, two blessings before and one blessing after; and at night, two before and two after.</p> <p>...</p>	<p>ח ברכות אלו...--עזרא ובית דינו תיקנום; ואין</p> <p>ט הקדים ברכה שנייה לברכה ראשונה...</p>
<p>8) These blessings...[the Prophet] Ezra and his court enacted them and we are not allowed to subtract or add to them...</p>	<p>י איזה הוא זמן קרית שמע בלילה...</p> <p>י ואיזה הוא זמנה ביום...</p>
<p>9) If a person said the second blessing before the first blessing...</p>	
<p>10) What is the correct time for saying the Shema at night?... What is the correct time during the day?....</p>	

Now here is where Rashi addresses the Shema prayer:

Source 6

<p>Deuteronomy Chapter 6</p> <p>4: Hear, o Israel! The Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One.</p> <p>5: You are to love the Lord, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions.</p> <p>6: And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart.</p> <p>7: You are to teach them to your children and you are to discuss them, when you sit at home, and when you journey on the road, and when you lay down, and when you arise.</p> <p>[Rashi's commentary:]</p> <p>When you go to sleep.</p> <p>One might think that this means even if one goes to sleep in midday, it is therefore stated, "When you arise."</p> <p>I might then conclude that this means even if you arise at midnight, it is therefore stated, "When you sit at home and when you walk on the road" - the Torah speaks of the usual way of life, [indicating] the normal time for going to sleep and the normal time for arising.</p>	<p>ו יהיו הדברים האלה, אשר אנכי מצוה היום--על-</p> <p>ז ושננתם לבניך, ודברת בם, בשבתך בביתך</p> <p>פירוש רש"י:</p> <p>ובשכבך –</p>
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Answers: Rashi wanted laymen and scholars to have better access to the Chumash and Talmud, so drawing on his vast knowledge, he explained words, phrases, etc line by line. Maimonides was trying to do something vastly different – he was trying to help people learn in a systematic way what Jewish law was.^{viii}

Conclusions:

We've spent a lot of time understanding the greatness of the Rishonim, getting more familiar with their different styles, understanding the period in terms of Jewish learning and Judaism.

We should repeat though that in terms of classic history, without getting into dates, this was a period of great foment. The Crusades were launched by various Popes, to free the Holy Land from the Muslims, but of course Jewish communities were decimated along the way. The Black Death, the great Plague, decimated Europe's population and was often ridiculously blamed on the Jews leading to violence. The Golden Age of Spanish Jewry eventually ended. Some Spanish Jews agreed to convert, and many were victims of the Inquisition. Hundreds of thousands refused to convert and were kicked out^{viii} of Spain, with the survivors of dangerous journeys eventually centering on Turkey and Poland.

It is incumbent upon us to love and fear the glorious and awesome G-d, as it is written, "You shall love the L-rd your G-d" (Deut. 6:5), and "You shall fear the L-rd your G-d" (Deut. 6:13). How does one attain love and fear of G-d? When a person reflects upon His great, wondrous deeds and creatures, and from them perceives His infinite, unbounded wisdom, he will immediately be aroused to love, extol and glorify Him, and he will yearn with an exceeding yearning to know the Almighty G-d... By [further] meditating on these matters he will recoil, awe-stricken, resolving that he is a small, insignificant creature, endowed with limited, meager intelligence, who stands in the presence of the One who is perfect in knowledge...

Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah, 2:1-2

Truth does not become more true by virtue of the fact that the entire world agrees with it, nor less so even if the whole world disagrees with it.

Moreh Nevuchim 2:15

Each one of the six -hundred thirteen precepts serves either to inculcate proper attitudes or to remove some erroneous conceptions, to establish just legislation or to eliminate iniquity, to imbue one with exemplary virtues or to deter one from evil dispositions.

Moreh Nevuchim 3:31

Our Story: An Introductory Outline of Jewish History

Unit 9

Modernity and Movements

This unit will cover:

- *Flowering of Kabbalah*
- *Hasidism*
- *Development of Yeshivot*
- *Mussar Movement*
- *Non-Traditional movements*
- *Return to Israel*
- *The Holocaust*

Outline

Hasidism
Development of Yeshivot
Mussar Movement
Non-Traditional movements
Return to Israel
The Holocaust
Summary

Appendix: Four Entered the Pardes

Background

Last time we saw the Medieval Period including the Rishonim. We spoke about the great upheaval in the Jewish world, with the Crusades destroying Jewish communities, with Muslim fanatics kicking the Rambam and his family out of Spain, with the eventual expulsion from Spain ending the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry.

Historically, the great Jewish population centers started in Israel, then to Babylon, then to Spain and Germany (Sephardic and Ashkenaz) and then Eastward. Poland – a great country beginning to develop then – and Turkey opened their doors to the Jews.

Source 1

When in 1492 Spain's King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelled the Jews, Turkish Sultan Bayezid II was amazed:

"They tell me that Ferdinand of Spain is a wise man but he is a fool, for he takes his treasure and sends it all to me."

And indeed, as we see repeated throughout history, wise nations are good to the Jews and prosper because of it. Poland and Turkey became great powers for hundreds of years, and Jews played a significant role in their growth.

G-d had told Abraham:

Source 2

"I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you, and through you, will be blessed all the families of the earth."

(Genesis 12:3)

And it is incredible to follow the historical pattern. Nations rise and fall, and the correlation with how they treat their Jews is amazing. In any event, the Jews ended up in many places.

The Flowering of Kabbalah

Judaism includes many aspects. It has the legalistic. The philosophical. The rational explanations. The historical remembrances. The ethical self-improvement. All these appeal to different people at different stages of their lives. Together they form a whole. It also has the mystical aspects.

Kabbalah includes the understanding of the spiritual spheres in creation – the ways that G-d works in the universe. Because while we can never understand much about G-d Himself, we can understand aspects of the rules by which G-d runs everything. It is not random.

Some of the main parts of Kabbalah are:

- T'aamei Hamitzvot – the reasons of the commandments, the mystical, deeper level of the commandments and how they affect our lives and the world.

Kabbalah is not a new thing. Abraham – often called the First Jew, as we saw, wrote a book called the Sefer Yetzirah, the Book of Creation. Many of the secrets of Kabbalah were revealed to Moses in the desert. It is in the realm of the Oral Law – which we have already seen was given at Mount Sinai along with the written Torah. We also saw that the Written Torah was never meant to be separate, to be alone without the Oral Law. At a certain level, that is true for this as well.

About 2000 years ago, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai wrote the Zohar – which comes from the word for brilliant of shining. It was kept as a closely guarded secret for over a thousand years until published by R. Moshe de Leon^{viii}.

The period we are discussing, in Tsfat in Northern Israel, saw the great Kabbalists such as R. Moshe Kordovera, author of *Tomer Devorah*, and R. Shlomo Alkabetz, famous as the author of "Lecha Dodi" sung before Shabbat. The greatest of these was the Arizal, who in only a short time of teaching revealed incredible amounts of Kabbalah, which forms much of the basis of our understanding of Kabbalah today.

Great Kabbalists of Europe include Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid, author of *Sefer Chasidim*, and Rabbi Elazar of Germiza, author of *Rokeach*. The Vilna Gaon wrote extensively on the Kabbalah. Sefardi rabbis such as the Or HaChaim and The Ben Ish Chai were masters in Kabbalah and their commentaries on the Torah are filled with Jewish mysticism.

Traditionally, Kabbalah has been a closely guarded secret. See the Appendix for a Talmudic source on the subject. Today however, Kabbalah is everywhere. Or it seems to be. People calling themselves rabbis get rich selling ‘kabbalistic water’ and red strings to ward off evil spirits, all in the name of Kabbalah. Realize that this is all junk, a travesty.

We need to know that

1. Kabbalah is an authentic, respected part of Judaism. But Kabbalah divorced from Judaism is not Kabbalah. The greatest Kabbalists (Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the GRA, the Baal HaTanya, etc) were great halakhists as well. They go together.
2. If Jewish mysticism interests you, great. It is a core part of Judaism. But learn if from an authentic source, someone steeped in Talmud, a recognized and accepted teacher of Judaism.

Educator: We suggest here, time permitting, that you have the class see the ‘Pardes’ source in the appendix.

Hasidism

Around 200 years after the flowering of Kabbalah in Tsfat, a new movement arose in Europe within Torah Judaism. The Hassidic movement (the word chasid literally means ‘pious’) was founded Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, who became known as the *Ba'al Shem Tov* (sometimes shortened to *Besht*), which means "Master of the Good Name."

He was born in 1698 CE and died in 1760 CE. When he was born, there was no such thing as Chasidism, no Breslov, Chabad, Satmar, whatever. He sowed the seeds, raised disciples, and within a few generations there were hundreds of Chasidic dynasties that comprised a large percentage of European Jewry. Kotzk, Sanz, Belz, Satmar, Skvar, Breslov, Chabad, Munkatch are just a few examples.

What is Chasidism? (cha-si-des / cha-si-doot)

Chadisim was a new approach within Judaism based on old principles. Hasidic masters felt that while the learned were succeeding in their Jewish lives, the poor and illiterate had been left out. It valued prayer and joy, rather than a focus on learning uniquely. It stressed that every Jew no matter how un-learned^{viii} can connect to G-d and is beloved unto G-d. And it incorporated the learning and teaching of Kabbalah to the masses, albeit in a watered-down form, which was a major new development.

Hasidism was controversial. The Gra was a great opponent of the development. Why? Many reasons. Some of them are perhaps:

- Similarly, Chassidism focused on connection to a Rebbe, a teacher or master. What if the person was not real?

We now see that the Hassidic movement helped to revitalize Eastern European Jewry in significant ways. Many un-learned Jews would have been lost if not for it.

And it added a dimension of spirituality to Judaism and a focus on prayer for many learned Jews as well. And yet, the opposition by the *misnagdim* against the *hassidim* was a blessing for the new movement, stopping it from leaving normative Judaism.

Development of Yeshivot

In Babylon there had been great academies of Jewish learning. Yet over time Jewish learning became a local thing, with students studying with the local Rabbi and the best ones traveling to study with other teachers in far away towns. There were certainly students who excelled in these conditions but they were few. It was disorganized. There was no set model, curriculum of studies, cycle, oversight. Little formal pedagogy.

In 1803, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, a student of the Vilna Ga'on, set up the first formalized Yeshiva in modern times. It was known as Volozhin and is known as the Mother of Yeshivas. This development in many ways saved Jewish learning and thus

Judaism as a whole. There was a well-thought out system of learning. A curriculum. A pace. Leadership and a teaching staff. And the system worked incredibly well.

Out of Volozhin eventually sprang the great Yeshivas of Mir^{viii}, Navardok^{viii}, Slobodka^{viii}, Telshe^{viii}, Slutzk^{viii}.

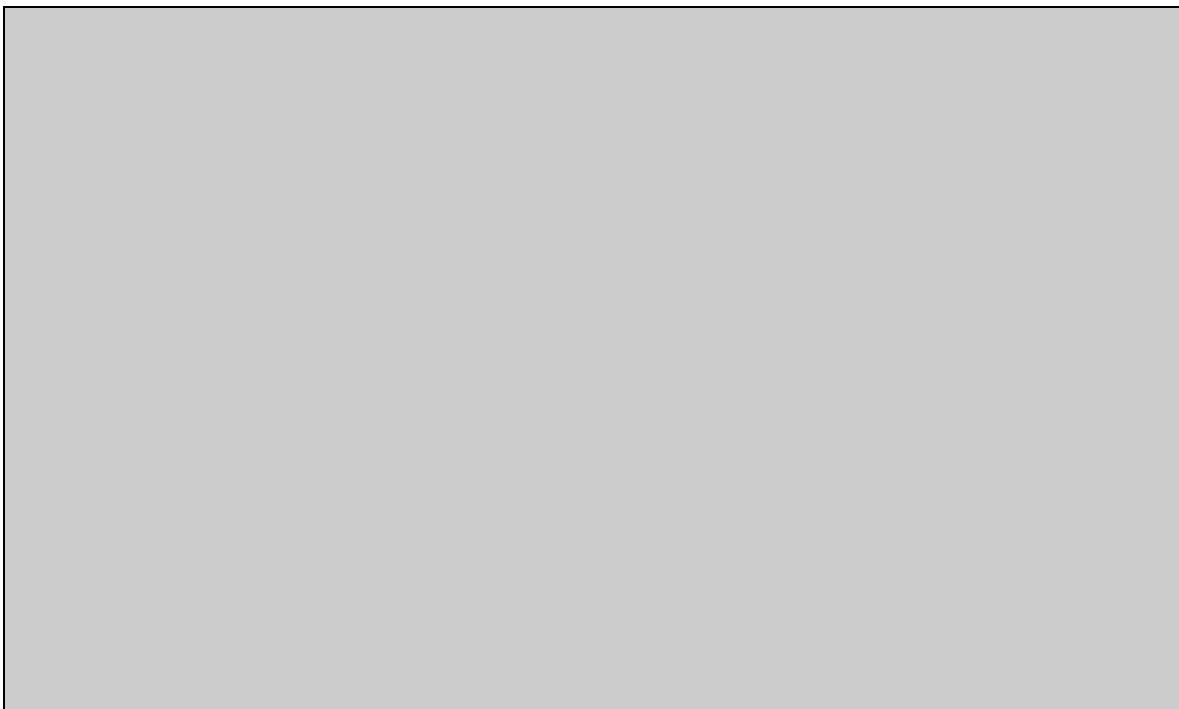
History has shown that wherever there was Jewish learning, Jewish life survived. Where Jewish learning was neglected, before too long Jewish communities perished. It is hard to imagine how we would even be here today if not for the development of the yeshivas in the modern times. They kept learning strong in their only circles and reminded the rest of the Jewish world, traditional or not, how central Jewish learning is to Jewish survival.

Mussar movement

In the mid 19th Century, an incredible leader and scholar came upon the Jewish scene. His name was Rabbi Israel Lipkin (1810-1883). He was from the town of Salant and is better known as Rabbi Israel Salanter.

His main contribution was the creation of the mussar – ethical – movement. He felt that certain core parts of Judaism – perhaps *the* core part of Judaism had been neglected. Rav Israel emphasized that our task was ethical self-refinement, self-change. Fulfilling the commandments without changing and improving our character traits was missing the boat, and in fact not fulfilling certain central commandments.

It should be clear that he was a Talmudic genius – a Torah scholar of great stature.



And by the way, don't think that he paused in order to think through the sources. No – he paused in order to decide whether he should show off his genius in such a way, and decided finally that he needed to do so for the sake of the Jewish People.

There are countless stories about him.

Source 4

One famous one concerns Yom Kippur, when he did not arrive for Kol Nidrei at the beginning of the holiday. Out of respect for the great rabbi and growing concern over his welfare, they waited for him. One young mother took the opportunity to rush back home to check on her baby, whom she had left alone, asleep.

There she found the rabbi, at the entry to her home near shul, rocking the cradle! Passing by, he had heard the baby cry and stopped to comfort it – because the needs of another human being came first!

Rav Israel set up Batei Mussar – Mussar Houses where people would congregate to learn mussar^{viii}, to work on self-improvement, etc.

Mussar groups exist to this day and the daily study of mussar has been incorporated into the schedule of most leading Yeshivas. While the Holocaust left few Mussar traditions strong, it has been making a comeback of late.

Non-Traditional Movements

Educator: Be Very Careful in this area.

This is a very sensitive issue and we don't want to be judgmental or make anything feel bad – we're just trying to put things in perspective and characterize the changes that occurred to the Jewish world. It is also important to note that many things have changed in the last 200 years, even within the Reform movement.

Tell this to the students clearly

The enlightenment represented major changes to European life. Religion was pushed away. Openness, reason, progress were the themes. As it moved away from oppression and dogma, there were advantages for the Jews. But there were also disadvantages: would Jews use their new freedoms to live Jewishly and yet share in a New World, or would they become an indistinguishable part of the New World, losing their identity?

We saw before various movements. Chassidus and Mussar were new approaches *within* Jewish tradition. They stuck to Jewish law and philosophy, but found new approaches and new points of emphasis. The traditional approach to learning was a third 'movement' or stream within the Torah world, revitalized and strengthened by the Yeshivas.

With the possibilities of the Enlightenment, there were also in modern times new *non-traditional* movements.

The Reform movement, called Liberal in some parts of the world, was the first and started in Germany in the early 19th century. The most radical reformers founded and stayed in the Reform movement. When it went too far for some more moderate reformers, they reacted against Reform to form the Conservative movement which is mostly in the USA. And eventually from that sprang the Reconstructionist movement, etc.

How did it start?

When the Enlightenment hit Europe, it meant many changes. Freedom. Reason. An escape from the corrupt Church. A whole new modern approach to civilization. This was very appealing to Jews who were historically very oppressed and persecuted.

After being excluded from mainstream society for so long, many Jews wanted in. Some felt the price of admission was conversion. For instance, Heinrich Heine^{viii}, one of the greatest figures in 19th century German literature was a Jew who converted to Christianity. He did so for entirely pragmatic reasons.

Source 5

<p>"...baptism is a matter of indifference to me and I do not regard it as important even symbolically. My becoming a Christian is the ticket of admission to European culture." Heinrich Heine</p>
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Estimates are that hundreds of thousands of Jews converted to Christianity. How could they? Remember that under the poverty and oppression, Jewish education – especially in Western Europe – had broken down. They didn't know Torah, or have any idea what they were giving up.

Still, many others were unwilling to take that fateful decision. Enlightenment ideas had affected them. Christian Biblical Scholarship – even though it was created by anti-Semites – influenced their ideas and created doubts as to the validity of the Torah. At a sociological level, they wanted entry into European salons and their solution was to make Judaism more externally acceptable and make Jews stand out less.

Outwardly, - and let us be clear that many of these things have changed – Reformers wanted to fit in, to be like everyone else in society. The Reform service had a choir, robes, and an organ. These were all imported from Christian services and had no Jewish sources. The service was in German with German songs and German prayers in an open attempt to emphasize German identity. Shabbat was switched from Saturday to Christian Sunday, and removed references to Israel since 'Berlin is our Jerusalem.' Many leading Reformers (and this became the norm in most Reform communities) opposed the wearing of skull caps or prayer shawls. Many opposed circumcision^{viii}, kosher slaughter, or

anything traditionally Jewish. A book by Eliahu Meir Klugman called Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Artscroll) outlines this period of history. There are many others.

Since they started calling themselves Reform Jews, there had to be a name for non-Reformers and they called us "Orthodox" - from the Greek words *orthos* meaning "straight" and *doxa* meaning "opinion. While this was a new name, it is crucial to note that what is now called Orthodox Judaism is really classical Judaism, the same Judaism as practiced and believed for thousands of years.

Our Desire to Return to Israel

Jews were forced to leave Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 CE and managed to stay in Israel for another 200 or so years until we were forced to leave the country as a whole. Though forced to leave, Israel was always uppermost in our thoughts, without interruption, for the entire exile of close to 2000 years. Some examples are:

- The importance of Israel and the desire to return there is a strong, consistent theme mentioned often in our daily prayers
- The Blessing After Meals is almost uniquely focused on the centrality and importance of Israel
- On Seder night of Passover we proclaim, "Next year in Jerusalem"
- Every year we mourn the destruction of the Temple (ie 9 of Av) and pray for its rebuilding
- Throughout history many individuals have tried to return to Israel
- Jews traditionally leave parts of their homes unfinished – to remind ourselves that we are not fully 'at home' in exile

A Land in Waiting

And, incredibly, just as we were always waiting to return, the Land itself was waiting for us to return!

The Land of Israel was always a very fertile land:

Source 6

<p>"I have come down to rescue them from Egypt's power. I will bring them out of that land, to a good, spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey..."</p>

Exodus 3:8

And over a thousand years later, it was still very fertile, around the time of the Destruction of the Temple:

Source 7

<p>For the whole area is excellent for crops or pasturage and rich in trees of every kind, so that by its fertility it invites even those least inclined to work on the land. In fact, every</p>
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inch of it has been cultivated by the inhabitants and not a parcel goes to waste. It is thickly covered with towns, and thanks to the natural abundance of the soil, the many villages are so densely populated that the smallest of them has more than fifteen thousand inhabitants.

Josephus^{viii}, The Jewish Wars; Book III 3:2 Penguin edition, p. 192

However, the Torah made it clear that the great abundance and fertility was not automatic and eternal. It depended on Jews being there. And once we were exiled, the Land would change dramatically:

"So devastated will I leave the land that your enemies who live there will be astonished... Your land will remain desolate, and your cities in ruins."

Similarly, that which He stated here, and your enemies that shall dwell therein shall be desolate in it, constitutes a good tidings, proclaiming that during all our exiles, our Land will not accept our enemies. This also is a great proof and assurance to us, for in the whole inhabited part of the world one cannot find such a good and large Land which was always lived in and yet is as ruined as it is [today], for since the time that we left it, it has not accepted any nation or people, they all try to settle it, but to no avail.

Ramban on Leviticus 26:32

And indeed, while the Jewish People was in exile, the Land was also seemingly in exile:

Source 10

Until today no people has succeeded in establishing national dominion in the land of Israel... No national unity or spirit of nationalism has acquired any hold there. The mixed multitude of itinerant tribes that managed to settle there did so on lease, as temporary residents. It seems that they await the return of the permanent residents of the land.

Professor Sir John William Dosson
in "Modern Science in Bible Lands"
London (1888) Pp. 449-450

Source 11

We traversed some miles of desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given wholly to weeds - a silent, mournful expanse... A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. We reached Tabor safely... We never saw a human being on the whole route. We pressed on toward the goal of our

crusade, renowned Jerusalem. The further we went the hotter the sun got and the more rocky and bare, repulsive and dreary the landscape became... There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country. No landscape exists that is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to Jerusalem... Jerusalem is mournful, dreary and lifeless. I would not desire to live here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land... Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes."

Mark Twain^{viii}, Innocents Abroad, 1867

In the 19th Century, things began to change. Due to the great persecutions in Europe, the re-emergence of nationalism around the world, movements began to bring Jews back to Israel. Most people have heard of the First Zionist aliyahs, etc.

- In fact, the Gra himself had sent students to Israel between 1808 and 1812. This immigration is considered to be the beginning of the modern settlement of Israel and their descendants are still around today.
- Russian pogroms spurred on the movement with large influxes of immigrants. The modern impetus, the Zionist movement really put its foundations here at the end of the 19th Century and beginning of the 20th Century.
- The Holocaust sent many more survivors to Israeli shores.
- When the State of Israel was founded in 1948, there were then 600 000 Israelis. Arab countries kicked out their Jewish populations (some who had been there for thousands of years!) and that is where Israel gets its large Sephardic population from.

Jews began returning and the land started blossoming, as it hadn't for 2000 years. Our return to Israel after 2000 years of exile has no precedent in world history. No nation has ever done anything remotely similar. And it was just as our religion said it would be:

Source 12

... Then the Almighty will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you; and He will return and gather you from among all of the nations where he has dispersed you. If your dispersed ones will be even at the ends of the heavens, from there God Almighty will gather you and from there He will take you. And God your Lord will bring you to the land that your fathers inherited and you shall inherit it and He will do good for you and make you more numerous than your forefathers. (Deuteronomy 30:1-5)

Source 13

As long as Israel does not dwell on its Land, the Land does not give of her produce as she is accustomed. When she will begin to flourish, however, and give of her fruits in abundance, this is a clear sign that the end -- the time of Redemption -- is approaching, when all Israel will return to their Land.

Maharsha, R. Shmuel Eliezer Aidels (1555-1631)

The Holocaust

There is so much to say about the Holocaust, yet words do not describe it. And one almost feels that it is better not to say 'a little'. Yet how can we talk about modern Jewish history without it?

Summary

In this class, we have basically covered the last five hundred years of Jewish history. We focused on:

1. *The Flowering of Kabbalah*
2. *The Development of Hasidism*
3. *The Development of Yeshivot*
4. *Rabbi Salanter and the Mussar Movement*

Note that these three 'streams' were all within Torah Judaism and Jewish Law. There were also other developments, notably the advent of

5. *Non-Traditional movements*

Furthermore, we focused on the miracle of

6. *Our Return to Israel*

And the tragedy of

7. *The Holocaust*

Educator:

Time permitting, we recommend that you use the Table of Contents to summarize the entire History Course.

Appendix: Four Entered the Pardes

We're going to see now a reference to something called the Pardes. Pardes – even today in modern Hebrew – means 'orchard'. But it is much more than that. Pardes is an acronym (the letters Peh, Resh, Dalet, Samech) for the four levels of Torah study

Pshat - "simple" interpretation of the Torah

Remez - "allusionary." interpretation of the Torah, hinted to in the text

Drush - "homiletical" interpretation of the Torah, based on exegesis

Sod - "secret/mystical" interpretation of the Torah. This is the highest level.

So when the Talmud speaks of sages entering the Pardes, it means they went deeper and deeper into the most mystical realms of Kabbalah:

Source 14

<p>"Four entered the Orchard (Pardes). They were: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, the Other, and Rabbi Akiba.</p> <p>Ben Azzai gazed and died. ...</p> <p>Ben Zoma gazed and was stricken [went insane]...</p> <p>The Other (Elisha ben Abuya) gazed and cut his plantings (became a heretic). Rabbi Akiba entered in peace and left in peace....</p> <p>- Babylonian Talmud <i>Hagigah</i> 14b</p>	<p>ת"ר ארבעה נכנסו בפרדס ואלו הן בן עזאי ובן זומא אחר ורבי עקיבא ...</p> <p>בן עזאי הציץ ומת... ..</p> <p>בן זומא הציץ ונפגע ... אחר קיצץ בנטיעות</p> <p>רבי עקיבא יצא בשלום</p>
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The obvious message of this passage is to be careful. Kabbalah sounds exciting, but is not for everyone. It is even dangerous for the greatest of scholars^{viii}.