

HERITAGE

Civilization and the Jews

§ The Shaping of Tradition §

Session 5

Episode 3 § Lesson 1

Judaism and Early Christianity—The Parting of the Ways

The first century of the Common Era was a time of incredible change for the Jewish people. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple at the hands of the Roman legions in 70 deprived the Jews of their physical and spiritual center, and shattered most of the institutions that had dominated and driven Judaism's development for centuries.

With the last vestiges of Jewish sovereignty in Judea destroyed, and with the central Temple and its priestly leadership and sacrificial worship a thing of the past, a part of the lay leadership of Judaism, the Pharisees (proto-rabbis), worked on reconstituting the religion and the peoplehood of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

Meanwhile, a dissident sect within Judaism, the Nazarenes, developed an alternative concept of the covenant between God and humanity. With the missionary activity of Paul the apostle in pagan cities around the empire, this sect gradually evolved from a Judean/Galilean sect into a separate world religion in its own right: Christianity.

Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity developed – and competed with each other – through the first few centuries of the Common Era. The fraternal but sharp competition took on another nature altogether when

LESSON OUTLINE

Download the HERITAGE DVD-ROM bookmarks for this lesson:

For Windows users

For Macintosh users

The Emergence of Rabbinic Leadership

- A** Atlas: Israel-Palestine: 30
- V** Video: Show 3: Jewish Sects, The Temple Destroyed
- M** Multimedia: Roman Tolerance, Jewish Converts
 - > Tacitus Complains
 - > Juvenal Satirizes

The Early Growth of Christianity

- V** Video: Show 3: Jewish Sects, Nazarenes
- V** Video: Show 3: Jewish Sects, Jews vs. Christians (part 1) (*Bookmarked as "Paul"*)
- M** Multimedia: Reshaping Judaism, Early Synagogues
 - > Uses: Paul Visits a Synagogue
 - > Leaders: Inscription

From Jewish Sect to New Religion

- V** Video: Show 3: Jewish Sects, Jews vs. Christians (part 2)
- A** Atlas: Israel-Palestine: 135
- D** Historical Document: A Roman View of Judaism

The Christianization of Rome

- V** Video: Show 3: The Fall of Rome, Christian Rome

M Multimedia: Christian Rome, Jews and Roman Law

- On the Legality of Judaism: Theodosian Code & Bishop of Milan
- On Jews in Civil Service
- On Jewish Wills and Testaments

A Atlas: World: 330

Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. Thereafter, Judaism became a barely tolerated minority religion, and the center of Jewish development shifted from its homeland to the Jewish community and leadership in Babylonia, beyond the reach of Rome and the eastern imperial capital, Constantinople.

Oppressive laws through the remainder of the fourth and fifth centuries marginalized and threatened Jewish continuity in Christian Rome.

PART 1

Rabbinic Leadership Emerges

In the year 70, aspirations of Judean independence from Rome were shattered, and messianic notions of a successful overthrow of the ruling world order were exposed as the utopian dreams that they were. Judea and its environs were decimated by the legions of Vespasian and Titus, and Jerusalem and its Temple were reduced to rubble.

But a cadre of the rabbinic leadership negotiated its way out of the doomed city and headed for a small village just south of modern Tel Aviv – Jabneh. The goal: to perpetuate Judaism in the absence of a priestly Temple, and amid Roman hostility to Jewish leadership that might harbor aspirations of sovereignty.

Atlas: Israel-Palestine: 30

In the next one hundred and fifty turbulent years, in response to Roman oppression and domestic turmoil, the rabbis would move their headquarters from Jabneh progressively northward into and through the Galilee. Their crowning achievement, the legal compilation known as the Mishnah, would be compiled at Sepphoris (Tzipori) – just a few miles from the Galilean town of Nazareth.

- ◆ Point out Jerusalem, and the outpost of Masada.
- ◆ Point out Jabneh, where, after the Second Temple's destruction, the rabbis established their headquarters and began their leadership of the remnants of their people.
- ◆ Point out Sepphoris, home of Judah Ha-Nasi and site of development of the Mishnah in the early third century.

Video: Show 3: Jewish Sects, The Temple Destroyed

The self-appointed goal of the rabbinic leadership was ensuring the perpetuation of Judaism and the continuity of the Jewish people in the wake of the convulsive events of the first century. As the default leaders of the shattered nation, they developed structures to ensure their own continuity, even reconstituting the Sanhedrin (supreme court) at their headquarters.

In truth, the proto-rabbinic party, the Pharisees, had long exercised considerable political clout in the religious and political governance of Judea, and their rabbinic metamorphosis amounted to, in effect, the establishment of a “government-in-exile.”

A Israel-Palestine: 30

Atlas > 586 BCE – 72 CE > 30 >
Mediterranean

V Jewish Sects, The Temple Destroyed

Video > The Shaping of Traditions >
Jewish Sects > The Temple
Destroyed

- ◆ Play this video segment until "...master or teacher."

Review and Discussion Questions

- By what right did the rabbis assert their leadership in the post-revolutionary milieu?
- Why would the majority of the Jewish people in Judea and abroad acknowledge this ad hoc leadership group?
- Was the rabbinic focus on developing new generations of rabbis based on an assumption that rabbinic leadership would continue indefinitely, or based on their expectation that – in a soon-to-come restoration of Jewish sovereignty – they would be well-positioned to assume political leadership? (Consider in this regard that the Patriarch of the Rabbinic/Pharisaic leadership, since early in the first century, was a hereditary scion of the Davidic house...but also note that R. Yohanan ben Zakkai did not have such ancestry, and seemed to have established his leadership through charisma, spirituality, and learning.)

M Roman Tolerance, Jewish Converts

Video > The Shaping of Traditions > Roman Empire > Roman Tolerance > Explore Topic > Jewish Converts

Multimedia: Roman Tolerance, Jewish Converts

One might expect that the violent crushing of the Great Jewish Revolt in 70 could have made Jews and Judaism unpopular throughout the Roman Empire. In fact, the attractiveness of Judaism to pagans throughout the empire seems to have gained momentum. Whether Judaism was actively proselytizing in this era is uncertain, but the widespread adoption of Judaism is indisputable.

This meant that there was also a large Judeophilic, but unconverted, populace, perhaps numbering in the millions, scattered throughout major imperial cities in this era. Separated from Jerusalem (as was the Jewish Diaspora population), these converts and potential converts were known as Godfearers.

- ◆ Play the Autoplay, by clicking the **Jewish Converts** button.

Review and Discussion Questions

- What might account for the popularity of Judaism both before and after the Revolt?
- Many reports indicate that women, in particular, were converting in large numbers and were, even while remaining pagans, enthusiasts of the Jewish way of life. Why?

M Tacitus Complains

Video > The Shaping of Traditions > Roman Empire > Roman Tolerance > Explore Topic > Jewish Converts > Tacitus complains

Multimedia Panel: Tacitus Complains

Roman historians often commented on the seductiveness of Judaism in places far removed from Judea. The historians whose works we have inherited were generally financially supported by the imperial authorities, and so reflect the

M Juvenal Satirizes

Video > The Shaping of Traditions >
Roman Empire > Roman Tolerance >
Explore Topic > Jewish Converts >
Juvenal Satirizes

concerns of the aristocracy of Rome about political, economic, and social developments in the empire. Tacitus, writing just decades after the Great Revolt, is typical of the Roman pagan historians of the era.

- ◆ Click the button for **Tacitus Complains**. Immediately hit the spacebar. A new screen will appear with a sidebar about Tacitus, along with his text. Click the **Tacitus** button on this screen to hear the narration and read the text.
- ◆ After discussion, click the **Back** key to return to the previous screen.

Review and Discussion Questions

- What is Tacitus's general view of Judaism? What prompted him to write with such passion?
- Examine his indictments of Judaism and Jewish converts, some of which are somewhat peculiar. Does ignorance or bias shape his objections...or is this accurate and factual reporting from his perspective?

Multimedia Panel: Juvenal Satirizes

Juvenal was a populist writer of often-hilarious satires of the foibles of Roman society. More than once, he turned his sardonic pen on the strange phenomenon of "good" Romans dabbling in Judaism. Clearly, the average literate Roman was quite familiar with the social phenomena being satirized, indicating the breadth of the Jewish-conversion syndrome in the early second century.

- ◆ Click the button for **Juvenal Satirizes**. Immediately hit the spacebar. A new screen will appear with a sidebar about **Juvenal**, and his text. Click the **Juvenal** button on this screen to hear the narration and read the text.

Review and Discussion Questions

- What is Juvenal's general view of Judaism? What is the basis for his satire of Jews and Jewish sympathizers?
- Examine his indictments of Judaism and the Godfearers. How much does he actually know about Judaism?
- Why did he write this?

PART 2

The Early Growth of Christianity

Four decades before the Temple's destruction, the Galilean preacher Jesus of Nazareth had been a popular religious leader of a Jewish sectarian group. With his death at the hands of Romans, his followers in Galilee and Judea preserved his message of religious reform and messianism. But the limited success this sect had in the holy land would be as nothing compared to the success of its apostles in the Roman Diaspora.

Paul and his followers formulated a version of this thoroughly Jewish movement that enabled pagans to embrace the God of Israel without subscribing to the religious practices and restrictions that characterized other forms of Judaism. In so doing, Paul and his ideas moved Christianity further and further to – and ultimately across – the border of Judaism.

First-century Judaism – even when the grand Temple in Jerusalem still stood – was, increasingly, a synagogue-based religion. This was particularly true in the enormous Jewish Diaspora, where vibrant and diverse Judaisms were practiced in cities remote from Jerusalem.

With many pagans aspiring to become part of (or at least affiliate with) these Jewish Diaspora communities, Paul and his aides had a clear target audience for the message of Jesus that he formulated.

V Jewish Sects, Nazarenes

Video > The Shaping of Traditions >
Jewish Sects > Nazarenes

Video: Show 3: Jewish Sects, Nazarenes

The Nazarene sect of Judaism developed after the crucifixion of Jesus, and was, initially, simply a realized-messianism version of the sort of Judaism that would later come to predominate in the Jewish world. It is important to remember that, in its early years and in the Judean/Galilean matrix, Nazarene Judaism was just one other “flavor” of Judaism.

◆ Play this video segment until “...limits of this small land.”

Review and Discussion Questions

- In what ways would the Nazarenes be identified as Jews by other Jews? By outsiders? In what ways would they be perceived as “other”?
- Did their basic belief – that the messiah had come in the person of Jesus – necessarily marginalize the Nazarenes from mainstream Judaism?
- In what ways is the nomination of Jesus as the messiah unusual in the context of Jewish messianism as we

V Jewish Sects, Jews vs. Christians, Part 1

Bookmark: "Paul"

Video > The Shaping of Traditions > Jewish Sects > Nazarenes > Play from previously paused location

M Reshaping Judaism, Early Synagogues

Video > The Shaping of Traditions > Jewish Sects > Reshaping Judaism > Explore Topic > Early Synagogues

understand it today?

Video: Show 3: Jewish Sects, Jews vs. Christians

The process by which Nazarene Judaism became increasingly distinctive was guided by Paul of Tarsus, an aristocratic Diaspora Jew. His development of a distinctive Christian message – and his tireless promulgation of it throughout the Diaspora – wound up defining Christianity for all future generations.

- ◆ Play this video segment until "...worship of the one God."

Review and Discussion Questions

- Why was the spreading of the Christian message more successful in the Diaspora than in Jesus's own homeland?
- Paul claims to have been raised in an observant Jewish home, and yet his message to Gentile converts is that adherence to Jewish law is unnecessary...even a hindrance to salvation. How would Paul have squared his own heritage with his message to potential converts?
- Is "personal salvation" a Jewish concept?

Multimedia: Reshaping Judaism, Early Synagogues

To understand the missionary activity of Paul, one must examine the nature of Jewish religious life, especially in the Diaspora. At most places where Paul established churches, there was a substantial Jewish community with many pagan friends of the synagogue community. Some of these would eventually convert, while others would progressively attach themselves to and support the community without undergoing actual conversion. As we have seen earlier, this group is known as the Godfearers.

- ◆ Play the Autoplay by clicking the **Ancient Synagogues** button. At its completion, there will be a panel displayed with five selections.

Review and Discussion Questions

- The synagogue ruins shown in the Autoplay segment are located in northern Israel, but, in the early first century, there were also dozens of synagogues in Jerusalem itself, even within a short walking distance of the thriving Temple. Why would this be?
- What would you look for, as an archaeologist, in order to conclude that an ancient structure was in fact the ruin of a synagogue, either in Israel or the Diaspora?

M Paul Visits a Synagogue

Video > The Shaping of Traditions >
Jewish Sects > Reshaping Judaism >
Explore Topic > Early Synagogues >
Uses > Paul Visits a Synagogue

M Inscription

Video > The Shaping of Traditions >
Jewish Sects > Reshaping Judaism >
Explore Topic > Early Synagogues >
Leaders > Inscription

Multimedia Panel: Uses: Paul Visits a Synagogue

- ◆ Click the **Uses** button. Then, click the audio button **Paul Visits a Synagogue** for the audio presentation. The text will automatically be displayed as well. At the conclusion of the audio, the screen will revert to the “Uses” screen depicting the ruins of the Delos synagogue. After discussion about the audio, click **Back** to return to the screen with five buttons from which you departed.

Review and Discussion Questions

- Why would Paul have immediately sought out a synagogue for his preaching? Why would this missionary approach have been so divisive?

Multimedia Panel: Leaders: Inscription

- ◆ Click the **Leaders** button. Then, click the audio button **Inscription (2 or 3 CE)** for the audio presentation. The text will automatically be displayed as well. At the conclusion of the audio, the screen will revert to the “Leaders” screen depicting the ruins of the Ostia synagogue.

Review and Discussion Questions

- What is startling in this graveyard inscription, relative to our conventional understandings of “traditional Judaism”?

PART 3

From Jewish Sect to New Religion

Christianity would remain a Jewish sect for almost a century after the time of Jesus, but the revolutionary innovations of the Pauline churches in the Diaspora would progressively attenuate the links between Jewish and Christian theology and practice.

In the decades following Paul, the “Jewish border” would be crossed, and Christianity would be recognized by all as a distinctive and different religion, albeit sharing an ancient heritage with Judaism.

Christianity would develop its own empire-wide infrastructure, as the Christian message was embraced by large segments of the Roman population. The empire, alarmed by the explosive growth of this new religious movement, and suspicious of the de facto authority exercised by the church hierarchy, unleashed numerous persecutions of the Christian movement in the second and third centuries.

Likewise, the rabbinic leadership of Judaism, concerned about the Christian impact upon Jewish communities, developed a hostile relationship with Christianity. By the middle of the second century, the rabbis had, for religious and political reasons, defined Christianity as a heretical movement that lay outside of Judaism.

V Jewish Sects, Jews vs. Christians, Part 2

Video > The Shaping of Traditions > Jewish Sects > Jews vs. Christians

Video: Show 3: Jewish Sects, Jews vs. Christians

The Jewish populations in Judea, Galilee, and elsewhere were interested in Christianity, but did not form the critical mass for that movement. Rather, it was the pagan (also called “Greek” or “Gentile”) populations that embraced this new version of a covenant between Israel’s God and humanity. In constant competition, the rabbinic Jewish community and the increasingly Jewish-marginalized Christians developed contentious feelings and theories that would, ultimately, have tragic consequences.

In this competitive and antagonistic environment, the Christian scriptures were written, and Christianity developed its unique identity, asserting that it was the “True Israel,” displacing the old.

- ◆ Play this video segment until “....known as Christianoi - Christians.”

A Israel-Palestine: 135

Atlas > 30 CE- 732 CE > 135 >
Mediterranean

Review and Discussion Questions

- Summarize the profound differences that separated rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.
- The key New Testament texts, including the gospels which depict Jesus's life and death, were written in the late first century. Prior to their authorship, the Judean Revolt against Rome had been crushed, Jewish-Christian animosity had become intense, and Roman oppression of Christianity had become frequent. How might this have affected the nature of the narratives in the New Testament, particularly those that dealt with the death of Jesus?

Atlas: Israel-Palestine: 135

As has been true throughout history, the location of Judea was pivotal in the story of its people. When Judea rose in revolt against the brilliant and ruthless Roman emperor Hadrian in 132-135 under the leadership of Simeon Bar Kokhba, a warlord with messianic pretensions of his own, it made a horrific mistake. Judea was included in the crucial eastern front of the Roman Empire with Parthia. For Hadrian, the geopolitical stakes were too high, and it was “two strikes and you're out.”

Following Hadrian's murderous crushing of the rebellion, the remaining population was massacred or deported. Waging psychological warfare as well, Hadrian deprived Judea even of its name. He researched the name of the ancestral enemies of the Jews, the Philistines, and renamed the entire country “Palestine,” the Latin version of Philistia. Its vanquished and twice-destroyed capital Jerusalem he renamed “Aelia Capitolina,” after the names of his family and of his patron god, Jupiter Capitolina.

- ◆ Point out the map labels of “Syria Palestina” and “Aelia Capitolina.”
- ◆ Note also “Bethar” (just to the left and below Aelia Capitolina) as the place where Bar Kokhba's revolt was destroyed, and where Bar Kokhba met his own violent end.

Review and Discussion Questions

- Christians, already thoroughly alienated from mainstream Judaism by this time, refused to support the rebellion against Rome, and argued that the Hadrianic reprisals should not affect their communities. To what extent might this have sealed an enduring enmity between these religious communities?

D A Roman View of Judaism

Video > The Shaping of Traditions > Judea Lost > The Bar Kokhba Revolt > Explore Topic > Historical Documents > A Roman View of the Revolt

Historical Document: A Roman View of Judaism

A great Roman chronicler of the era of this violent Roman-Jewish era and second-century Roman developments in general was Dio Cassio. His ideas about Jews and Judaism, rooted in late-second-century thought, are summarized in this extract from his writings.

- ◆ Survey the first page of this document, noting his surprise at the fact that non-Judeans can still assert “Jewishness” and paying attention to the details of his description of what this Jewishness entails.
- ◆ Summarize the information in the sidebar about Dio Cassio.

Review and Discussion Question

- Writing in the late second century, why would Dio Cassio express surprise at the inclusion of non-Judeans in the ethnic group known as Jews?

PART 4

The Christianization of Rome

The intramural competition between Judaism and Christianity came to its conclusion in the early fourth century. A civil war was waged among aspirants to the throne of the Roman Empire. One claimant, Constantine, whose mother had become a passionately committed Christian, decided to use the cross as his standard in the wars of succession. He won, and Christianity later became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Christianity's inveterate enemy and competitor, rabbinic Judaism, would become the victim of imperial policy and legal persecution.

V The Fall of Rome, Christian Rome

Video > The Shaping of Tradition >
The Fall of Rome > Christian Rome

Video: Show 3: The Fall of Rome, Christian Rome

By the fourth century the Roman Empire encountered challenging times. Threats both foreign and domestic endangered the security of its Italian heartland. In the meantime, the Church had established a populist alternative to many crumbling imperial services, including public welfare, postal service and hierarchical governance.

When a succession battle for Emperor broke out in the early fourth century, one aspirant, Constantine, allied himself with the vigorous Christian communities and hierarchy that pervaded the Empire. His tale of a cross-inspired vision of victory in the succession battle may be open to question, but his harnessing of the imperial throne in Constantinople to the Christian community is beyond question. This development had grave consequences for the Jewish community in the Roman world in Constantine's time, and in the centuries that followed.

◆ Play this video segment until "...punishable by death."

Review and Discussion Questions

- What were Constantine's motives in allying himself with the Christian church?
- Why would Judaism have been a target thereafter for Christian-influenced Roman legislation?

M On Jews in Civil Service

Video > The Shaping of Tradition > The Fall of Rome > Christian Rome > Explore Topic > Jews and Roman Law > On Jews in Civil Service > Theodosian Code

M On Jewish Wills and Testaments

Video > The Shaping of Tradition > The Fall of Rome > Christian Rome > Explore Topic > Jews and Roman Law > On Jewish Wills and Testaments > Theodosian Code

A World: 330

Atlas > 72 CE – 732 CE > 330 > World

- Explain the denouement of the situation. How might this illustrate the relationship between church and state in Byzantine Rome?

Multimedia Panel: On Jews in Civil Service

- ◆ Click the **On Jews in Civil Service** button. Then, immediately hit the space bar to jump to the next screen. There, click the audio button **Theodosian Code** for the audio presentation. The text will automatically be displayed as well.
- ◆ After discussion about the audio, click **Back** to return to the screen with five buttons from which you departed.

Review and Discussion Questions

- Why would Jewish rights to imperial civil offices be restricted? Why might tolerance be extended to Jewish lawyers?
- The text seems to concede that some Jews' credentials merited their participation in municipal service. Why do you imagine this concession was made?

Multimedia Panel: On Jewish Wills and Testaments

- ◆ Click the **On Jewish Wills and Testaments** button. Then, immediately hit the space bar to jump to the next screen. There, click the audio button **Theodosian Code** for the audio presentation. The text will automatically be displayed as well.

Review and Discussion Questions

- What practice is the statute legislating against?
- Usually, when legislation is passed, it implies that the prohibited conduct is fairly widespread. Why would Jewish conversions to Christianity throughout the Empire have been frequent in this period?

Atlas: World: 330

The Roman Empire in this era was extensive but increasingly fragile, due to pressures from European tribal invasions from the north and from Sassanid (Persian) aspirations in the east.

As Christianity solidified its grasp in southern and western Europe and in the Middle East in the ensuing centuries, Jewish presence declined, and the center of Jewish religious leadership shifted to the Sassanid Empire. By the sixth century, as the western portion of the empire succumbed to numerous European tribal invasions, the remainder of Roman power was centered in Byzantium.

- ◆ Indicate the extent of the Roman Empire in the age of Constantine. Moving the time-slider on the left to 468 and then 560, show the split and subsequent decline of the empire.
- ◆ Returning to 330 using the time-slider, Zoom In on the eastern Mediterranean. Point out the European tribal (Visigoths, Vandals, etc.) invasions of Italy, and, in the lower-right, point out the Byzantine city of Hierosolyma (Jerusalem).

Pointers to the Next Session:

The growth of Christianity and its domination of the Roman Empire made Judaism an increasingly marginalized religion and culture in the Mediterranean area, including in Palestine.

With the publication of great rabbinic works in the third through fifth centuries, the Judean rabbinic leadership was overtaken by the religious and political leadership in Babylonia. Eventually, the Babylonian academies' greatest literary project, the Babylonian Talmud, would emerge in the sixth/seventh century.

But a new religion, Islam, was incubating in the opening decades of the seventh century, and the imperial designs of its early Arab leadership would expand upon the world in the ensuing centuries.

In short order, the large majority of Jews in the world would find themselves living in Muslim environments, and the Christian Byzantine Empire would find itself struggling for survival before the Arab onslaught.