

TEMPLESS JUDAISM: TEXT AND TRADITION

Impact of Events in 70 CE

The role of the Temple and its sacrificial system as the centre of Jewish piety was replaced by:

- Synagogues
- Rabbis
- A religion centred on Torah
- Tradition

Jewish Synagogues



- A meeting house for study and instruction.
- Becomes a place of worship after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- Probably already an important place of prayer before 70 CE.

Jewish Rabbis



- The earliest group of rabbis probably included Pharisees, scribes and priests.
- Rabbis were certainly interested in Pharisaic issues (belief in resurrection, purity laws, focus on Torah).
- After 135 CE the centre of rabbinic Judaism moves from Jamnia to Galilee.

Torah

- Judaism shifts from being Temple-centred to a **Torah-centred religion**.
- The rabbi replaces the priest: emphasis on learning rather than on priestly pedigree.
- Holiness is expressed by the **study of the Torah**.

How can there be forgiveness for sin without the Temple?
Yohanan ben Zakkai:
‘We have another form of forgiveness as effective as this, and what is it?
Acts of loving kindness, as it is written, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6)
(*The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* 4).

Torah



- Rabbis (ancient and modern) dedicate themselves to studying the practical application of the Torah.
- *Halakhah*: from the Hebrew verb *halakh* ('to go, follow'): interpretation of the biblical laws that one 'follows'.

Tradition: a 'Pillar' of Judaism (1)

Unbroken chain of tradition
from Moses to the rabbis.

Moses received Torah from
Sinai and handed it over to
Joshua, Joshua to the
elders, the elders to the
prophets, and the prophets
handed it over to the
members of the great
Assembly (Mishnah *Abot*
1:1-2).

Tradition: a 'Pillar' of Judaism (2)

When confronted with new ideas and situations, why was it important to look for guidance from the past?

No creed or canon of faith
(as in Christianity)

No central human authority

Jewish tradition is flexible and ever-growing; it adapts to changing needs.

Traditions often take the form of disputes and different opinions.

The Judaism of the Dual Torah



- **The Written Torah:** is not a complete explanation of God's will.
- **The Oral Torah:** interpretation of the written Torah based on oral debate.
- The rabbi who studies the written Torah contributes to the oral Torah. God's revelation of the Torah continues.

How far do the Torah laws extend?

‘But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work’ (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14 - the fourth commandment).



The main classes of work are forty save one: sowing, ploughing, kneading, baking, washing wool, spinning, weaving two threads, tying a knot, writing two letters, lighting a fire.... These are the main classes of work, forty save one (m. Shabbat 7:2).

The Mishnah

- The Mishnah (literally, 'repetition') ca. 220 CE as a way of expressing holiness.
- Edited by Rabbi Judah the Patriarch (ca. 135- 220), who collected the sayings of the rabbis covering 300 years.
- The Mishnah seeks to offer a 'completion' because it represents the oral Torah.

[illegible]

The Mishnah: Divisions

- The Mishnah does *not* form a book-by-book commentary on the biblical laws (five books of Moses).
- It is rather a systematic exposition of the law based on six different 'divisions'.
- These divisions or orders cover many aspects of Jewish domestic and public life.
- **Seeds:** agricultural commandments because the land is sacred and owned by God.
- **Seasons:** how and when to keep festivals and fasts.
- **Women:** Male-female relationships - marriage, divorce, adultery, property.
- **Damages:** society governed by Jewish law - buying, selling, courts, punishments.
- **Holy things:** practices of the temple - sacrifices.
- **Purities:** purity in religion and sources of impurity.

Writing down the Oral Torah: Mishnah (1)

- Idealized image of Judaism: More than half of its rules could not be practiced (no Temple, no Jewish state, civil law could not be enforced). (Optimistic) expression of faith in the future.
- Educational: Written down in order to inspire debate and further study.

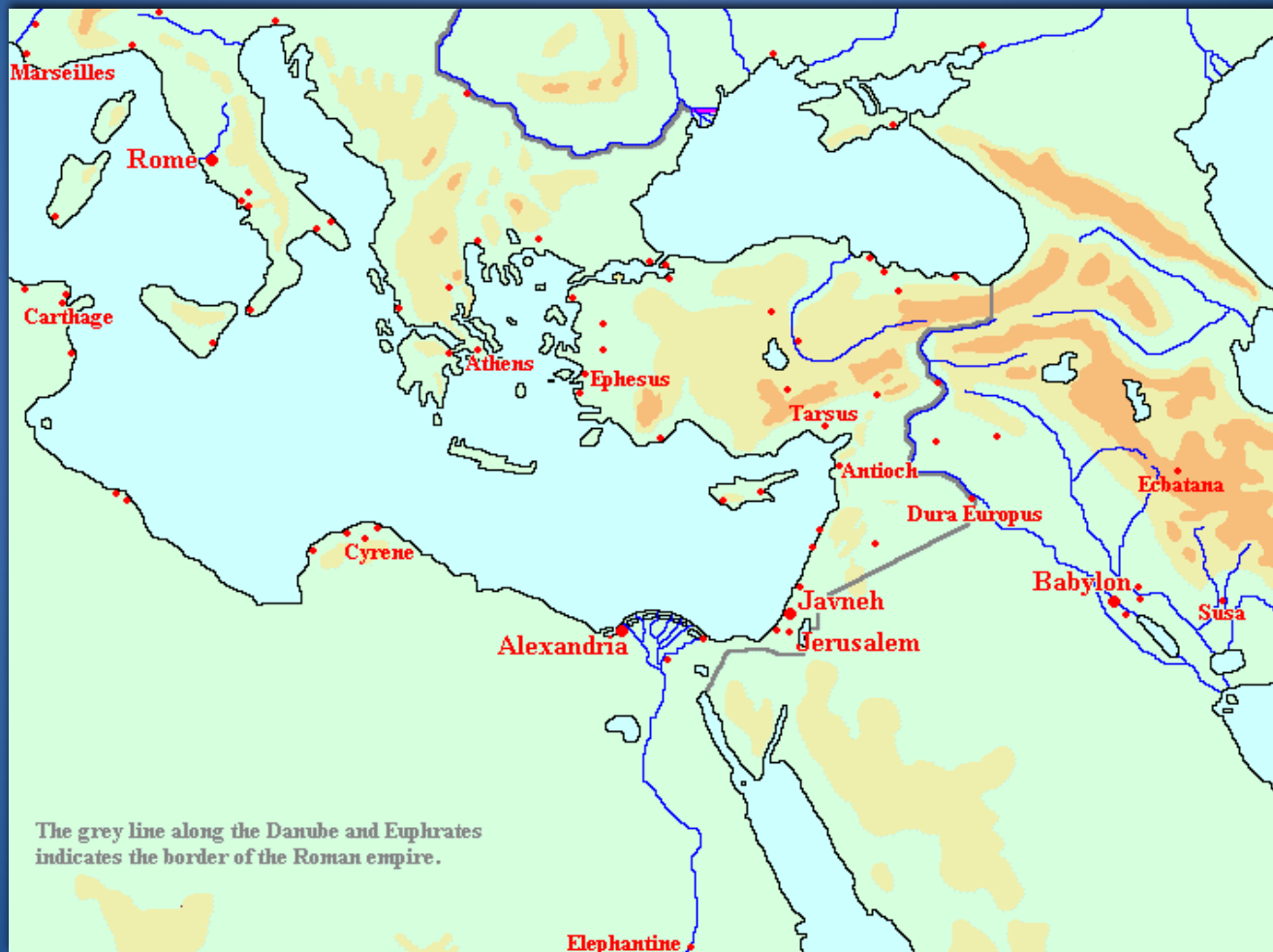
Writing down the Oral Torah: Mishnah (2)

- Law Code: It is not an all-encompassing law; much is taken for granted. It deals with the 'fuzzy edges' and extremes of the law's definitions.
- Authority: Why was it 'codified'? Rabbi Judah, its editor, wanted to assert its authority as the only collection of laws.

What is the Talmud?

- **Talmud** (Hebrew word for 'instruction') is an authoritative commentary by the rabbis which includes the **Mishnah and the Gemara**.
- **Gemara** ('teaching') - a record of the discussions of the rabbis about the Mishnah (between 200 and 500 CE).
- **Mishnah + Gemara = Talmud**

Palestinian and Babylonian Jewish Communities



The Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds

- Much communication between the rabbinic scholars of Babylonia and Palestine.
- Babylonian rabbis had more influence over the daily life of the Jewish people; they attempted to adapt Palestinian traditions to their own customs, regional laws, different economic conditions.
- Due to the decline of Jewish spiritual life in Palestine, the Babylonian Talmud became more authoritative.

Assessing the Significance of the Talmud

- Judaism can adapt to any time and place.
- Most important Jewish text after the Tanakh; authoritative for orthodox and conservative Jews.
- A storehouse of history, legend, practices and beliefs.
- Concise style (very short sentences) lends itself to ambiguity.
- Emphasis on debate as a means to discover truth.
- Does not claim to offer 'the last word' : different rabbinic opinions are recorded without indicating which is the most authoritative.

Jewish Denominations/Movements

- **Orthodox Judaism:** both written and oral Torah were given to Moses by God; it remains authoritative and is subject to literal interpretation.
- **Conservative Judaism:** maintains that the truths in the Torah and later Jewish writings come from God, but were transmitted and shaped by human authors; accepts that the Torah should be observed but that it can be adapted.
- **Reform Judaism:** the Torah can be traced to different sources from different periods; focus on the 'spirit' rather than the 'letter' of the Law.