Study Guide
The Emergence of Judaism: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective

Chapter 1 -- The Emergence of Judaism to 650 C.E.: A Narrative Overview

Summary

This chapter provides a narrative overview of the emergence of Judaism from the period of the Jews' earliest ancestors – the Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs and the Israelite tribes descended from the patriarch Jacob, known also as Israel -- to 650 C.E. Much of ancient Israel's sacred literature – the Hebrew Bible -- takes the form of a national "history" or myth of origins. These stories recount the deeds of the Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs and their covenant with God, the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt, the Exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, the conclusion of a bilateral covenant with the god Yahweh at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness, the journey to the Promised Land of Canaan, the conquest of the land and its allocation among the 12 tribes, the shift from a tribal confederacy ruled in times of trouble by Yahweh-appointed judges to a monarchy anointed by Yahweh, the construction of a Temple in Jerusalem, the division of the united Kingdom into two kingdoms (Israel and Judah), the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 and the southern kingdom of Judah in 586, the exile of the Judeans to Babylonia, the return of the exiles to "Yehud" (now a Persian province) in the late 6th century, the rebuilding of the Temple, the problems that beset the Restoration community, the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the organization of the community around the Torah of Moses. This chapter also describes the consequences of the Hellenization of the Ancient Near East after Alexander the Great's conquest in the late 4th c B.C.E. The influx of Hellenistic ideas and culture as well as political developments led to the formation of sectarian movements with diverse understandings of God's will for Israel. Following the Maccabean Revolt, Jews established an independent state under Hasmonean priest-kings from 167 B.C.E. to 63 B.C.E. at which time the Romans captured Jerusalem and established Roman hegemony. Jewish unrest under Roman rule led to full-scale war from 66-70 C.E. and resulted in the destruction of the Temple. The collapse of the community's central institutions, and further destruction following the Bar Kokhba Revolt in the early 2nd century brought an end to armed rebellion. The rise of Christianity presented new challenges to the Jewish community in Palestine. In the 2nd century, a group of scholars and sages with some connection to pre-destruction Pharisees, preserved and developed a Torah-centered Judaism that would eventually win broader influence. In the first 6 centuries of the Common Era, these rabbis produced massive collections of legal teachings, biblical exegesis, liturgical composition and even mystical writings that together comprised the writings of rabbinic Judaism, the dominant form of Judaism to emerge from antiquity. The main centers of rabbinic Judaism are Palestine (to the 4th c) and Babylonia where the eventual emergence of large-scale rabbinic academies (*yeshivot*) determined the distinctive character of rabbinic culture.

Key Terms
Ancient Near East
Canaan
586 B.C.E.
Fertile Crescent

Levant
patriarchs
matriarchs
covenant
Yahweh
sanctuary
Ark of the Covenant
judge
Saul
Samuel
David
Solomon
First Temple Period
Kingdom of Israel
Kingdom of Judah
722 B.C.E.
exile
Davidic Covenant
Second Temple Period
Persian Period
Cyrus
Yehud
Hellenistic Period
Maccabean Revolt
Hasmonean Period
Roman Period
messiah
Herod
Bar Kochba Revolt
rabbis
Patriarch
Christianity
Paul
Code of Justinian
Parthian period
Exilarch
Sassanian empire
Zoroastrianism
yeshivah

Study Questions

1. How do the stories of Genesis 1-11 differ from those of Genesis 12-50?
2. How do historians understand the relationship between the events narrated in Exodus and the historical experience of early Israelites?
3. Describe the reasons for and results of the transition of Israel's government from tribal confederacy to monarchy.

4. In the Second Temple period, how did the Jewish population of Palestine fare under the Persians? The Greeks? The Romans? In what way did the experience of Jews in Palestine resemble and differ from that of the Jewish population of Babylonia?
5. How did the relationship between Judaism and Christianity change from the time of Jesus to the Muslim Conquest?
6. Chart the major periods of Jewish history down to 650 C.E. and identify the characteristic features of each of these periods?

Additional Reading Lists

The following works are overviews or surveys of Jewish history that can add depth to the very brief narrative overview provided here in Chapter 1.

Scheindlin, Raymond P. *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Seltzer, Robert. *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History.* New York: Macmillan, 1980. An excellent and comprehensive review of Jewish civilization, history, and thought. An indispensable guide to every period of Jewish social and political history, culture, and religious and intellectual developments.

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Judaism: History, Belief and Practice.* New York: Routledge, 2003. A basic introduction presented in 90 units, with discussion questions and further readings after each unit, as well as links to a free companion website that provides further activities, teaching tips and additional on-line resources.

Relevant websites

a. Companion website for *Judaism: History, Belief and Practice* (see above) with downloadable maps, resources, teaching tips, suggested activities, etc. http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/0415236614/default.asp
b. *Internet Jewish History Sourcebook* (site maintained and edited by Paul Halsall) at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jewishsbook.html
c. *Jewish History.com* (Center for Online Judaic Studies) at http://jewishhistory.com/
d. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (see above) is available on line at http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/index.jsp
e. *Academic Guide to Jewish History* at the University of Toronto. A database of links to Jewish history resources in libraries and on the web. http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/jewishhistory.
f. *Judaica Libraries and Archives on the Web.* A guide to research-level Judaica collections in libraries and archives worldwide. http://www.bibliomaven.com.

Chapter 2 -- Biblical Israel: Many Voices

Summary

This chapter begins to consider the ideas, traditions, and practices of the ancient Israelites in their Ancient Near Eastern context as they are made available primarily through the library of writings known as the Hebrew Bible. This survey is preceded by a presentation of the conclusions of modern biblical scholarship concerning the nature and manner of composition of the Hebrew

Bible. Literary analysis suggests that the Pentateuch is a redacted work that draws on four primary sources or strands of tradition each with its own interests, ideas and emphases, which sometimes differ from the interests, ideas and emphases of the text's final redactor. Readers of the Bible must be sensitive to the distinction between Israelite-Judean religion (the actual religious practices and ideas of the historical inhabitants of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as attested by biblical sources and archaeological evidence) on the one hand and biblical religion (the monotheism promoted by the biblical redactors and imposed upon older sources) on the other. While Israelite-Judean religion shared many points of contact with Canaanite religion -- including its characterization of Israel's god Yahweh in terms reminiscent of El and Baal – biblical religion breaks with Ancient Near Eastern and even Israelite-Judean religion in its strong tendency towards monotheism. Biblical religion finds expression in the Deuteronomic tradition and the Priestly cultic tradition. The Deuteronomic tradition emphasizes the worship of one God in one central sanctuary, the bi-lateral covenant (the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant) concluded between Yahweh and Israel at Sinai, the election of Israel to be a holy people (set apart from other nations to God's service through obedience to his laws), the blessings that attend obedience and the curses that attend disobedience to the covenant. The Priestly cultic tradition constructs Israelite cultic and purity practices to express certain monotheistic ideas. The ritual impurity of physical substances associated with death and sexuality symbolizes the non-divine nature of both death and sexuality. The impurity that arises from the commission of moral misdeeds and that pollutes the holy sanctuary of God symbolizes the incompatibility of sinfulness and Israel's deity, and expresses God's demand for moral purity and holiness.

Key Terms
Hebrew Bible
Tanakh
Torah (Instruction)
Nevi'im (Prophets)
Ketuvim (Writings)
Pentateuch
Septuagint
Baruch Spinoza
Richard Simon
Julius Wellhausen
Documentary Hypothesis
J, E, P, D
monolatry
monotheism
El
Asherah
Baal
Elijah
Josiah
Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant
purity
ritual impurity
moral impurity

holiness

Study Questions

1. Why is the Hebrew Bible best described as an anthology? What challenges does the compilation history of the Hebrew Bible pose for modern biblical readers?
2. What are the four main sources of the Pentateuch as proposed in the Documentary Hypothesis? What are the characteristics and concerns of each of these sources?
3. What are the similarities and differences between Israelite religion, Deuteronomic biblical religion, and Priestly cultic biblical religion?
4. Compare and contrast ritual impurity and moral impurity. How is the Israelite conception of impurity similar to and different from those of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures?

Additional Reading Lists

Recommended translations of the Hebrew Bible (with commentary) include:

Berlin, Adele; Brettler, Marc and Fishbane, Michael, eds. *The Jewish Study Bible featuring the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. A superb study Bible based on the translation of the Jewish Publication Society with excellent introductions to each book and a running sidebar commentary that incorporates both ancient and modern scholarship on the Bible. Includes excellent scholarly articles on a wide array of topics. See especially, Stephen Geller's "The Religion of the Bible" and Jonathan Klawans's "Concepts of Purity in the Bible."

Sarna, Nahum M. and Potok, Chaim, eds. *The JPS Torah Commentary Set*. 5 Volumes. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1996. Hebrew text, English translation, extensive commentary. An excellent resource for the study of the Hebrew Bible and its place in the development of later Jewish tradition.

The Anchor Bible. Garden City, N.Y.; Doubleday, 1964-. A multi-volume series of book-by-book translations of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament and Apocrypha, with extensive commentary drawing on archaeology, linguistics, comparative religion and Ancient Near Eastern sources.

Recommended reference tool for in-depth study of specific topics:

Freedman, Noel, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 1992. An essential reference for biblical studies, this six-volume state-of-the-art dictionary provides comprehensive accounts of biblical subjects informed by the most up-to-date scholarship.

For the Hebrew Bible in its Ancient Near Eastern context:

Arnold, Bill T. and Beyers, Bryan, eds. *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002.

Gordon, Cyrus H. and Rendsburg, Gary A. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*. 4th edition. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998.

Recommended introductions to the History and Literature of Ancient Israel:

Matthews, Victor H. *A Brief History of Ancient Israel*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. Information on the major events in Israelite history, a basic chronology, and a consideration of extrabiblical data.

Coogan, Michael. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. This introduction is organized historically and includes consideration of archaeological evidence in its discussion of the history of the Old Testament.

Habel, Norman. *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971. A clear introduction to the method of literary criticism in which considerations of structure, style and form enable the scholar to identify biblical sources. Concrete examples illustrate the methodology beautifully.

General:

Holtz, Barry. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. New York: Summit Books, 1984. Contains excellent chapters on the Hebrew Bible with suggestions for future study. Aimed at the non-expert.

Kugel, James. "The Rise of Modern Biblical scholarship" in *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*. Free Press, 2008, pp. 1-46.

Relevant websites

a. 24 lectures on the Hebrew Bible by the author are available at http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/introduction-to-the-old-testament-hebrew-bible/

Chapter 3 -- Themes of Biblical Literature

Summary

This chapter continues the consideration of the ideas, traditions, and practices of the ancient Israelites in their Ancient Near Eastern context as expressed in the Hebrew Bible. Biblical authors and editors drew upon a common Near Eastern literary heritage but transformed it in order to express distinctive Israelite conceptions of the divine, the natural world and humankind. The most strongly monotheistic biblical sources present Israel's God as qualitatively different from the gods of surrounding mythologies in that he does not himself emerge from any prior realm, has no divine equals or antagonists, utterly transcends nature and is utterly distinct from humankind. Themes of the opening chapters of Genesis include the following: humans are created in the divine image and appear to be the purpose, or *telos*, of God's creating activity; the principle of the essential goodness of the world at creation is a rejection of the concept of an inherent evil built into the structure of the universe; evil is a moral reality that results from humankind exercising its moral freedom in defiance of God's will; moral corruption endangers the very existence of human society. The patriarchal stories (Gen 12-50) focus on divine promise and blessing, the patriarchal covenant, and circumcision. Themes of the Exodus story include: God's sovereignty over history; God's redemption of his people from slavery as a paradigm for future redemptions; the revelation of God's name (Yahweh); the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant and the introduction of divine law. Themes of the Deuteronomistic History (stretching from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings) include: the institution of monarchy and the idea of a messiah-king, the establishment of a royal capital in Jerusalem and the construction of a sacred Temple, the explanation of the destructions of 722 and 586 B.C.E. as divine punishment for the sin of idolatry. The works of the literary prophets are characterized by aggressive denunciation of social injustice and immorality, an emphasis on the centrality of morality to the covenant with

God, an interpretation of the destructions of 722 and 586 as divine punishment for all violations of the covenant, and the promise of a future restoration of a righteous remnant. The biblical books of the Wisdom tradition (Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes) are concerned with questions pertaining to divine justice and governance of the world.

Key Terms
polytheism
monotheism
Enuma Elish
theogony
mythology
myth
Noahide covenant
blood prohibition
Abrahamic covenant
Patriarchal promise
circumcision
Binding of Isaac
patriarchs
matriarchs
Abraham
Sarah
Isaac
Rebekah
Jacob
Rachel
Leah
Judah
Joseph
The Exodus
Sinai
Moses
Ten Commandments/Decalogue
Mosaic or Sinaitic Covenant
judge
messiah
apostolic prophecy
literary prophets
eschatology
remnant
Wisdom

Study Questions
1. How does ethical monotheism differ from the mythologies of polytheistic religions in its conception of the divine, of humans, of the natural world, of evil?

2. Why are myths included in the Hebrew Bible? How are these myths similar to and different from those of surrounding cultures?
3. Compare and contrast the different promises (or covenants) made by God to Abraham, Moses, and David. How did the events of 722 B.C.E. and 586 B.C.E. challenge Israel's faith in these promises and how did the Deuteronomistic school respond to this challenge?
4. What was the main role of the prophet in later biblical religion? How do the prophets differ from the Deuteronomistic school in their interpretation of the events of 722 B.C.E. and 586 B.C.E.?
5. How does the book of Proverbs differ from the books of Job and Ecclesiastes in its ideas about suffering, sin, and righteousness?

Additional Reading Lists

Arnold, Bill T. and Beyers, Bryan, eds. *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002.

Gordon, Cyrus H. and Rendsburg, Gary A. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*. 4th edition. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998.

Coogan, Michael. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. This introduction is organized historically and includes consideration of archaeological evidence in its discussion of the history of the Old Testament.

Sarna, Nahum M. *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel*. New York: Schocken Books, 1966. Reprint Random House, Inc., 1988. A comprehensive interpretation of the book of Genesis in light of extra-biblical sources.

Sarna, Nahum M. *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel*. New York: Schocken Books, 1986. Reprint Random House, Inc., 1988. A comprehensive interpretation of the book of Exodus in light of extra-biblical sources.

Relevant websites

a. 24 lectures on the Hebrew Bible by the author are available at http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/introduction-to-the-old-testament-hebrew-bible/

Chapter 4 -- From Biblical Israel to Second Temple Judaism

Summary

This chapter describes six centuries of dramatic political, social, cultural and religious changes that transformed biblical Israel into Second Temple Judaism (520 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.). In the period of the Restoration, the Judean exiles returned to Yehud (now under Persian hegemony), rebuilt the Temple and eventually, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, sought to organize Jewish life around the Torah of Moses. Ezra and Nehemiah attempted to enforce strict barriers of separation between the returning "children of the exile" and the "peoples of the land" but their insistence on a strictly genealogical standard for Jewish identity ultimately did not prevail. Indeed, in the Hellenistic period, many Jews negotiated the claims of Jewish identity and Greek culture comfortably. Philo is an exemplary representative of Hellenistic Judaism. His synthesis of biblical tradition and Greek philosophy was facilitated by allegorical interpretation

of Scripture. Standing alongside the covenantal nomism that infused much of Jewish society at the time, and arising from a sense of despair over the continued subjugation of the Jewish people, was apocalypticism. The apocalyptic worldview addressesd the problem of evil and the delayed justice of God by promising an imminent catastrophic end to historic time. In a final global battle between the forces of good and evil, God would ensure that the wicked are annihilated, the righteous saved and a new "kingdom of God" ushered in. The Second Temple Period also saw the formation of a number of distinct groups that differed on key issues and institutions including the Hasmonean dynasty and proper performance of Temple ritual and purity practices. Historical reconstruction of some of these groups – Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes in particular – and the ideas and practices that distinguished them is possible, but complicated by the nature of the sources at our disposal. In addition to these groups, charismatic figures opposed to Roman rule stirred unrest, provoking violent repression from the Romans. Judaism in the Second Temple period was clearly a complex and variegated phenomenon that developed in active conversation with many different cultural influences.

Key Terms

scribe
Judea
Cyrus of Persia
Cyrus Cylinder
children of the exile
peoples of the land
Restoration
Ezra
Nehemiah
Hellenization
Septuagint
Philo
allegory
covenantal nomism
apocalypticism
Daniel
Sect
Sadducees
Pharisees
Essenes
Josephus
Qumran
Dead Sea Scrolls
John the Baptist
Jesus

Study Questions

1. Compare and contrast the views of Jewish intermarriage presented in the books of Ezra and Ruth. How can the presence of both viewpoints in the Hebrew Bible be understood?
2. What is Hellenization? In what ways is Philo of Alexandria an exemplar of this phenomenon?
3. What is apocalypticism? What historical and cultural features of the Second Temple period contributed to its popularity?
4. Compare and contrast the views and practices of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. How do the available sources complicate scholars' investigation of these Second Temple period Jewish movements?
5. How does the early Jesus movement fit into the religious and cultural environment of first century C.E. Jewish Palestine?

Additional Reading Lists

Recommended works on the History, Literature, Religion and Culture of Second Temple Judaism.

Cohen, Shaye J. D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987. An essential and easy-to-read interpretation of the shift from Biblical Israel to late antique Judaism identifying major ideas, salient practices, and unifying patterns.

Nickelsburg, George W.E. *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah, with CD-ROM*. 2nd edition. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981. An excellent introduction to extra-biblical, non-rabbinic Jewish writings with a CD-ROM containing hyperlinks to the biblical text, web links, and discussion questions.

Sanders, E. P. *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-66 CE*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1992. An important presentation of Judaism as a functioning religion in the late Second Temple period that serves as an important corrective to the distortions of earlier scholarship.

-------. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1983. A pathbreaking study of Judaism in first-century Palestine that profoundly affected scholarly understandings of the relationship between early Christianity and Judaism.

Vanderkam, James. *An Introduction to Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2001. An accessible survey of Jewish history from the Persian period to the Bar Kokhba revolt.

Chapter 5 -- From Second Temple Judaism to Rabbinic Judaism

Summary

This chapter describes the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism from Second Temple Judaism over the course of five and a half centuries (from 70 to 640 C.E.) known as the Talmudic period. While several Second Temple groups lost visibility, prestige or influence after the Roman war and the Bar Kokhba revolt, a group of scholars and sages with some connection to pre-70 Pharisees, preserved and developed a Torah-centered Judaism. Initially peripheral and organized around teacher-disciple relationships, the rabbinic movement would eventually win broader influence particularly with the backing of the Patriarch, the chief representative of the Jews to the Romans. The Patriarch R. Judah ha-Nasi is credited with the promulgation of *The Mishnah*, a

collection of rabbinic teachings on matters of agricultural, festival, civil, criminal, personal status and ritual law that formed the central curriculum of the rabbinic movement. The Christianization of the empire led to a deterioration in the situation of the Jews of Palestine. Yet despite this increased marginalization, the 4th-6th centuries saw an increase in the construction of synagogues, the formation of local and religiously significant Jewish communities, and an expanded role and influence for the rabbinic movement. In Babylonia, which lay outside the Roman Empire and the predominantly Hellenistic culture of that empire, several centers of Jewish life and rabbinic activity sprang up. With the eventual establishment of formal rabbinic academies (*yeshivot*), Babylonia would emerge as the intellectual and spiritual center of rabbinic Judaism in the 5th-7th centuries C.E.. This chapter also explores the rabbinic "myth of origins" according to which it was the rabbinic movement that led the reconstruction of Jewish life around the Torah after the destruction wrought by Rome in the 1st century. The rabbinic concept of "Torah" is a complex one, eventually signaling not merely the Pentateuch or the Hebrew Scriptures more generally (the Written Torah), but the entire body of interpretation and learning arising from meditation upon the revealed word of God, transmitted from master to disciple over generations and continuing even in the present (the Oral Torah). Thus, the scribe replaces the prophet as the one who provides access to God's teachings through Scriptural interpretation and argumentation rather than charismatic illumination. The literary output of the rabbinic movement includes the Mishnah, the Palestinian Talmud, the Babylonian Talmud and various works of midrash. The study and interpretation of Torah was an intense and deeply religious expression.

Key Terms

rabbi
Yohanan ben Zakkai
Gamliel II
Patriarch
R. Judah haNasi
The Mishnah
bet midrash (study house)
synagogue
midrash
Rav
yeshiva
exilarch
Hillel
Shammai
Yavneh
halakhah
aggadah
R. Akiva
R. Yishmael
Written Torah
Oral Torah
tanna
tannaitic period

amora
amoraic period
gemara
talmud
Palestinian Talmud
Babylonian Talmud

Study Questions

1. What effects did the two revolts against Rome have on the Jewish population of Palestine?
2. Describe the rise and fall of the office of the Jewish Patriarch. In what ways did the Patriarchate help shape post-Temple Judaism?
3. What is the rabbinic 'myth of origins'? How does this myth both illuminate an dobscure knowledge of Judaism in the post-Temple period?
4. How did the rabbis understand revelation from God to occur in their own time?
5. What literary works resulted from the rabbis' understanding of revelation and how did these works help transform Second Temple Judaism into Rabbinic Judaism?

Additional Reading Lists

Holtz, Barry. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. New York: Summit Books, 1984. An essential and superb introduction to the classic texts of Jewish tradition: Rabbinic literature, Aimed at the non-expert with excellent suggestions for future study.

Strack, H. L. and Stemberger, Günther. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Trans. Markus Bockmuehl. Reprint. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. A comprehensive work of reference essential for the serious student.

Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, Culture*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. A brilliant study of six narratives from the Babylonian Talmud that illuminates fundamental tensions in rabbinic culture and the complex composition and function of talmudic stories.

Chapter 6 -- Topics in Rabbinic Judaism

Summary

This chapter describes the major features of rabbinic Judaism as it developed in the talmudic period. While rabbinic texts are not primarily theological in character and contain multiple views and voices, it is possible to trace the general contours of a rabbinic worldview or religious outlook even if complex and variegated. Rabbinic notions of faith focus less on belief and creed than on observance of the commandments, and a heretic is one who denies God by breaking the commandments. The notion of God's "in-dwelling" or *shekinah* serves to ensure intimacy with the transcendent deity. As for humankind, rabbinic conceptions of the human being resist a body-soul dualism. In combination with the idea of the creation of humans in the divine image, rabbinic anthropological monism supports a generally positive view of sexuality and marriage, an ambivalence towards asceticism and a rejection of celibacy. Nevertheless, the rabbis

struggled to meet the demands of both family life and Torah study. The human capacity for evil is often discussed as a function of the human *yetzer* (urge) or *yetzer hara* (evil urge). The ethical life centers on the fulfillment of the divine commandments (*mitzvot*) which are greatly enlarged and elaborated in the rabbinic period. Concerning the afterlife, rabbinic Judaism posits a world-to-come as a place of eternal reward for the pious. Nevertheless, the rabbis also struggle to make sense of premature death and undeserved suffering in this life. In general, the rabbis adopt the biblical view that death entered the world following the sin of Adam, and do not ascribe to a doctrine of original sin. The sages acknowledge that not all suffering is punishment for sin and some attempt to explain the suffering of the innocent as religiously meaningful ("chastenings of love"). As regards the promised redemption of Israel, the rabbis hoped for the rebuilding of the Temple, the ingathering of the exiles and the advent of a messianic king, but they understood the messianic redemption to be conditioned on the moral life and thus focused their energies on observance of the commandments. As a social group, the rabbis embodied a new form of leadership combining numerous functions. They were an elite, but eventually their norms, values, and emphasis on Torah study, would be more widely accepted. Attitudes towards non-rabbinic Jews are rather negative in later Babylonian texts, and interactions with Gentiles are the subject of much deliberation and regulation in order to ensure that one does not unintentionally violate Jewish law, or derive benefit from or contribute to idolatry. The assimilation of Gentiles through conversion and marriage is possible and while attitudes to converts vary, overall they are viewed positively.

Key Terms

Shema prayer
apikoros
shekinah
yetzer hara
mitzvot
am ha'aretz

Study Questions

1. Describe the differences between religions based on creed and religions based on practice, and give an example of each type.
2. How does the twice-daily recitation of the Shema encapsulate the essence of rabbinic religion?
3. How does rabbinic Judaism address issues of suffering, sin, and righteousness?
4. Do the rabbis anticipate a messianic figure? How does their attitude differ from that of first century C.E. Jews and what factors contributed to this change?
5. What attitudes does rabbinic literature display towards non-Jews? How do these attitudes influence the possibility of conversion to Judaism?

Additional Reading Lists
Primary Sources – translations, introductions and guides

Bialik, Hayyim Nahman, ed. *The Book of Legends*: *Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*. Trans. by William G. Braude. New York: Schocken Books, 1992. English translation of a century-old classic anthology of rabbinic legends, topically arranged.
Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. and Cohen, Shaye J.D., *Rabbinic Stories*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2002. A selection of rabbinic stories, legends and traditions addressing historical and theological questions, topically arranged and accompanied by brief analysis of principal themes and literary features.
Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Essential Talmud*. New York: Basic Books, reprint 1984. A summary of the main principles of the Talmud as an expression and development of biblical law.

Recommended works dealing with central aspects of rabbinic culture:

Boyarin, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. An important study of ancient rabbinic constructions of the body, gender and sexuality in the context of competing Hellenistic constructions.
Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. *Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. A fascinating exploration of the cultural milieu of the late antique rabbinic academies that produced the Babylonian Talmud, through close readings of talmudic texts that reveal rabbinic values and practices.
Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, Culture*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. A brilliant study of six narratives from the Babylonian Talmud that illuminates fundamental tensions in rabbinic culture and the complex composition and function of talmudic stories.
Schechter, Solomon. *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998. A useful if dated presentation of central Jewish principles, concepts and ideas drawing on the classics of rabbinic literature.
Urbach, E. E. *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*. Trans. Israel Abrahams. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975. Reprint edition Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987. A comprehensive guide to classical rabbinic views on God, humankind, the people of Israel and a long list of other topics.

Chapter 7 -- Judaism Through the Ages

Summary

This chapter surveys major manifestations and transformations of Judaism down to the modern period. In the medieval period, Jewish life under Muslim rule and under Christian rule differed dramatically. Jews under Muslim rule were exposed to the revival of interest in Greek science, philosophy and secular literature spurring a new phase of Jewish intellectual creativity as exemplified by the 12th century Golden Age of Andalusian Jewry. By contrast, the very different social, political, economic and religious conditions of medieval Christian Europe, made Jewish life tenuous at best. Degrading legislation, anti-Jewish violence, expulsions and even massacres were part of Jewish life in Christian Europe until the modern period. The intellectual creativity of Ashkenazic Jews centered on the close study and analysis of traditional texts. The medieval period also saw the rise of "folk religious" practices and beliefs, as well as Jewish mysticism among the Hasidei Ashkenaz (in Germany) and followers of the Kabbalah (originally in Provence and Spain). The esoteric mystical teachings of the Kabbalah were combined with

messianism by Isaac Luria (16th century). Another offshoot of the kabbalah was 18th century Eastern European Hasidism, founded by the Baal Shem Tov, an itinerant folk healer and teacher. In the modern period, the religious and national elements of Jewish identity were torn asunder, leading to a widening spectrum of Jewish ideologies, philosophies, and definitions of what it is to be Jewish. With Emancipation, Jews could become citizens of European nations. Some questioned the value of identifying with the Jewish *ethnos* and assimilated fully, while others acculturated to western society but retained Jewish identity as regards religion. At the same time, Enlightenment critiques of traditional religion sparked ideological controversies in mid-19th century Germany that led to the three modern forms of Judaism: Reform, Modern Orthodoxy and Positive-Historical (or Conservative) Judaism. A resurgence in anti-Semitism as well as pogroms in the late 19th century gave rise to a variety of parties and movements emphasizing Jewish nationalism in one way or another. Calls for the establishment of a separate Jewish homeland led ultimately to the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. During this period, Jewish philosophers such as Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber articulated demythologized understandings of revelation and commandment. After World War II, theologians like Richard Rubenstein and Emil Fackenheim struggled with the implications of the Holocaust (the extermination of 6 million Jews in the context of World War II) for Jewish faith in God. More recent Jewish thinkers and movements have emphasized those aspects of Judaism that facilitate living in a holy dimension and experiencing the divine on the one hand, or that create authentic Jewish community on the other.

Key Terms

gaon
Pact of Omar
Golden Age
Sefarad
Hisdai ibn Shaprut
Samuel ha-Nagid
Judah ha-Levi
Saadiah ben Joseph (Saadiah Gaon)
Karaites
Maimonides
Ashkenaz
charter
Rashi
Shulhan Aruch
Joseph Caro
Moses Isserles
Hasidei Ashkenaz
Kabbalah
sefirot
Ein sof
kavvanah
devekut
tikkun

The Zohar
Isaac Luria
Hasidism
Baal Shem Tov
rebbe
Lubavich Hasidism
Emancipation
Moses Mendelssohn
acculturation
assimilation
Reform
Abraham Geiger
Modern Orthodoxy
Samson Rafael Hirsch
Positive-Historical (Conservative) Judaism
Zecharias Frankel
Leon Pinsker
Theodor Herzl
Holocaust
Richard Rubenstein
Emil Fackenheim
Franz Rosenzweig
Martin Buber
Abraham Yehoshua Heschel
Mordechai Kaplan
Jewish Renewal

Study Questions

1. Compare and contrast the fortunes (economic, religious, political) of Jews under Islamic and Christian rule respectively.
2. What is the Kabbalah? How does the Judaism it promulgates differ from rabbinic Judaism?
3. What is the difference between a religion and an *ethnos*? Why do these categories complicate the question of modern Jewish identity?
4. What are the similarities and differences between Reform, modern Orthodoxy, and Conservative Judaism?
5. How do modern Jewish thinkers both utilize and expand upon the traditions of Israelite religion, Second Temple period Judaism, and rabbinic Judaism?

Additional Reading Lists

The following works are overviews or surveys of Jewish history or culture that can add depth to the very brief narrative overview provided here in Chapter 7.

Scheindlin, Raymond P. *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. An overview of Jewish history that focuses on the major geographical, cultural and political forces that have

shaped Jewish history and emphasizes the interaction of Jews with surrounding nations and cultures.

Seltzer, Robert. *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History.* New York: Macmillan, 1980. An excellent and comprehensive guide to every period of Jewish social and political history, culture, and religious and intellectual developments.

Recommended works on Jews and Judaism in the post-talmudic era:

Biale, David, ed. *Cultures of the Jews: A New History.* New York: Schocken Books, 2002. A collection of essays examining the question of Jewish identity and the construction of diverse Jewish cultures throughout history, from earliest times to modernity.

Cohen, Mark R. *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. An excellent comparative analysis of the legal, economic, social and religious position of Jews under medieval Islam and medieval Christianity.

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Jewish Mysticism: An Anthology*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1995. A brief introduction to Jewish mysticism that includes a historical overview of major events and figures in Jewish mysticism and excerpts from mystical writings, chronologically arranged on a wide range of topics.

Holtz, Barry. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. New York: Summit Books, 1984. Contains excellent chapters on Kabbalistic texts, Hasidic writings and the prayer book. Aimed at the non-expert with excellent suggestions for future study.

Raphael, Marc Lee. *Profiles in American Judaism: the Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Reconstructionist Traditions in Historical Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, Reprint 1988. Traces the emergence and development of the main branches of contemporary American Judaism from their European roots.

Unterman, Alan. *Jews: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Portland, Or.: Sussex University Press, 1996. A comprehensive introduction to Jewish belief and practice in the modern world.