

Medieval Israel Class #3:

The Renegades: Karaites in Jerusalem

Timeline

130s CE Jews barred by the Romans from Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina founded

600 – 1000 Period of the Geonim

622 Beginning of Islam

638 Muslim conquest of Jerusalem, Jews allowed back under certain restrictions

691 Ummayyad caliph Abd el Malik builds the Dome of the Rock and expands al Aksa

Circa 750 Anan ben David creates a breakaway sect

9th century Daniel al Kumisi comes to Jerusalem

882-942 Rabbi Saadia Gaon

921 Calendar controversy between Babylonia and the Land of Israel

1099 Crusader conquest of Jerusalem, Karaite community there is destroyed

Dueling Authorities: Exilarch in Babylonia

The members of the two academies [Sura and Pumbedita], led by the two heads [the geonim] as well as by the leaders of the community, assemble in the house of an especially prominent man before the Sabbath on which the installation of the exilarch is to take place. The first homage is paid on Thursday in the synagogue, the event being announced by trumpets, and every one sends presents to the exilarch according to his means. The leaders of the community and the wealthy send handsome garments, jewelry, and gold and silver vessels. On Thursday and Friday the exilarch gives great banquets. On the morning of the Sabbath the nobles of the community call for him and accompany him to the synagogue. Here a wooden platform covered entirely with costly cloth has been erected, under which a picked choir of sweet-voiced youths well versed in the liturgy has been placed. This choir responds to the leader in [prayer](#), who begins the service with 'Baruk she-amar.' After the morning prayer the exilarch, who until now has been standing in a covered place, appears; the whole congregation rises and remains standing until he has taken his place on the platform, and the two geonim, the one from Sura preceding, have taken seats to his right and left, each making an obeisance. (Nathan the Babylonian, 10th century)

Gathering for Study, Sending Torah to the Exile

יקום פורקן מן שמיא חנא וחסדא ורחמי וחי אריכי ומזוני רויחי וסיעתא דשמיא ובריות גופא ונהורא מעליא. זרעא חיא וקיימא זרעא די לא יפסוק ודי לא יבטול מפתגמי אורייתא. למרנן ורבנן חבורתא קדישתא די בארעא ד'שראל ודי בבבל לרישי כלה ולרישי גלותא ולרישי מתיבתא ולדיני די בבא. לכל תלמידיהון ולכל תלמידי תלמידיהון ולכל מאן דעסקין באורייתא. מלכא דעלמא יברך יתהון יפיש חיייהון ויסגא יומיהון ויתן ארכא לשניהון. ויתפרקון וישתזבון מן כל עקא ומן כל מרעין בישין. מרן די בשמיא יהא בסעדהון כל זמן ועדן. ונאמר אמר

God has appointed the two academies ("[yeshivot](#)") for the good of Israel. In them day and night are devoted to the study of the [Torah](#); and to there come the scholars from all places twice a year, in [Adar](#) and [Elul](#), and associate with one another in discussions on the Torah." (Tanhuma Noach)

Jerusalem, Emptied of Jews in Roman Times

Until today it has been forbidden for those poisonous hypocrites to enter Jerusalem because of their murder of the prophets, including the last one, the son of God. They may come only to cry, because then they are permitted to mourn the ruins of the city in exchange for payment. Just as they once bought the blood of the Messiah, now they buy their own tears and even mourning is not given them for free.

On the day that the Romans conquered and destroyed Jerusalem you can see the members of this nation, women wearing rags and old men carrying a burden of rags and years, gathering to mourn and proving by their bodies and their clothes the meaning of "the anger of the Lord." A collection of miserable rabble appears while the cross of the Lord shines and celebrates its resurrection and on the Mount of Olives is raised a cross. Meanwhile, this pathetic nation cries over its destroyed Temple and they are not worthy of pity. (Jerome (4th century CE), commentary to Zephaniah)

Allowed to Return With the Muslim Conquest

All of the Muslims in the city and surrounding came, together with a group of Jews. Then they were ordered to sweep the site of the Temple and clean it. . . whenever they uncovered another layer, Omar would ask the Elders of the Jews if this was the stone known as the Foundation Stone . . . They [the Jews] gathered before Omar and said to him "How many of the Community of Jews will the Emir of the believers command to come to this city?". . . Omar decreed that seventy households should come.. . . So seventy households including women and children moved from Tiberias and established settlements in buildings whose foundations had stood many generations. (Letter found in the Cairo Genizah, unknown date)

Islam and Jerusalem

Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship to the furthest place of worship, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs. He alone is the All Hearing, the All Seeing (Koran Sura 17:60)

Who Are the Karaites/Bnei Mikra?

Anan and Saul his son – may the name of the wicked rot - lived in the days of Yehudai Gaon (Sura 760-764) This Anan was a descendant of the house of David and a scholar originally, but people discovered something wrong in him and for this reason he was not appointed Gaon and the fates decreed that he should not become Exilarch either. Because of the envy and chagrin in his heart he . . . pnticed the Jews away from the traditions of the Sages . . . He composed books and raised disciples and of his own accord devised statutes that are no good. . . (Abraham ibn Daud, 1161)

Anan of blessed memory lived in Bagdad and belonged to the party of the Zaddikim. Because of his great wisdom. . . the whole house of Israel chose him to be president of the court and exilarch. . . Anan desired to restore the crown of the Law to its pristine glory and began to preach in public and to argue against the Oral Law, the Mishnah, to deny it and repudiate it completely. . . The Anan rose and took with him his sons and disciples and they all went to Jerusalem the Holy City and settked there, There he built a synagogue . . . (Simhah Isaac Lutzki, a Karaite scholar, 1757)

Daniel al Kumisi and the Mourners of Zion

You should know that it is the villains of Israel who say to one another "We are not obliged to go to Jerusalem until He gathers us just as He has scattered us." These are the words of those who anger God and of fools. Even if God had not commanded us to go to Jerusalem from the countries of the Diaspora in lamentation and bitterness, we would nevertheless know, by virtue of our own intelligence, that there is an obligation upon all those who suffered from God's anger to come to the Gate of the Angry to supplicate Him, as I have written above...

You, God-fearers, must therefore come to Jerusalem, dwell there and become its guardians until the rebuilding of Jerusalem... One should not say: "How can I go up to Jerusalem for fear of bandits and robbers or for fear of not being able to earn a livelihood in Jerusalem?... " Are there not nations besides Israel who come from the four corners of the earth to Jerusalem every year to be in the awe of the Lord? Why is it that you, our brethren of Israel, do not do as the other nations of the world do and come and pray..? If you do not come because you covet and are obsessed

with your merchandise, then at least send five men from each city with enough money to support them, so that we can become a united group to supplicate our Lord continuously in the mountains of Jerusalem... You will have no excuse before God if you do not return to God's Torah and His commandments, as it is written in His Torah... (Daniel al-Kumisi, 9th century)

Rabbi Saadia Gaon Takes on the Karaites

עין. אמר רב סעדיה לא נוכל לפרש זה הפסוק כמשמעו. כי אם אדם הכה עין חבריו וסרה שלישיית אור עיניו איך יתכן שיוכה מכה כזאת בלי תוספת ומגרעת. אולי יחשיך אור עינו כולו ויותר קשה הכויה והפצע והחבורה כי אם היו במקום מסוכן אולי ימות ואין הדעת סובלת. . . והכלל לא נוכל לפרש על דרך מצות התורה פירש שלם אם לא נסמך על דברי חז"ל. כי כאשר קבלנו התורה מן האבות כן קבלנו תורה שבעל פה אין הפרש ביניהם. והנה יהיה פי' עין תחת עין. ראוי להיותו עינו תחת עינו אם לא יתן כפרו. (אבן עזרא מצטט את רס"ג, שמות כא:כד)

דת אלוקינו חלפו לנתר

המותר לאסור והאסור להתר

בלי יראה ובלי אימה. . .

לולי המשנה והתלמוד

אשר כל זה במ למוד

(אשא משלי)