I. Introduction

In order to reach a certain people group, the first thing that one must do is to be very familiar with that very group. We must know the language, the culture, customs, and history. Only when we are familiar enough with those different aspects, can we relate to that group in a genuine and caring way.

When it comes to the Jewish people and their language, it is a little bit different because since the beginning of the Diaspora, Jewish people have been spread out all over the globe. Even though today the official language of Israel and the Jewish people is Hebrew, only half of all Jewish people live in Israel (about 6,000,000).

On the other hand, we have a lot to learn about Jewish culture, customs and especially history. Especially when we consider that some of the Jewish traditions practiced today are over 5,000 years old and often just slightly adjusted from the original practice.

One very important component in our approach to learning about the Jewish people is their history. We must be familiar with what the Jewish people have gone through over the centuries in order to understand where they are coming from, where they are today as a people and where they are going.

There are several ways one can approach a study of Jewish history. No matter what, the timeline remains the same: It starts with the commissioning of Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and continues all the way to today with Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jews. As we move along the timeline of Jewish history, we will also discover customs, habits, traditions and beliefs as they evolved through the ages.

We need to recognize that Jewish people, while they have a lot in common, also have much that differentiate them from one country to the next. You cannot
relate to a French Jew the way you relate to a North African Jew, an Israeli or even an American Jew. Since most of us will mostly interact with American Jews, this class will focus on them, understanding that even within American Jewry we deal within a wide spectrum of beliefs, practices and customs.

When it comes to the history of the Jewish people, much of it can be done by doing a parallel study of anti-Semitism. There is no other people group in the history of mankind that has been more harassed, tortured, humiliated, expelled and decimated than the Jewish people. Jewish people shouldn’t exist today, yet defying human logic and only by the grace of God, do the Jews still exist.

The following timeline is not meant to be exhaustive but to be used as a general guideline of Jewish history with markers that are relevant to the development of the Jewish people and their customs.

II. **Ancient History from the Chaldeans to Rome**

1. **2000 BC–Ur of the Chaldeans: Abraham, father of the Jewish people**

2. **1446 BC–Egypt to Sinai: Moses, the people, the land and the law**

3. **605-586 BC–Babylonian Captivity (writing of the Babylonian Talmud)**

   This marks the beginning of the Diaspora (dispersion) or Galut (exile) for the Jewish People. This dispersion is still going on today.

   605 BC: First captivity with Daniel
   597 BC: Second captivity
   586 BC: Jerusalem & Temple are destroyed

4. **539 BC–National Restoration**

   King Cyrus allowed the exiles to return to the land (many stayed behind).

   Nehemiah rebuilds the walls in 52 days in 444 BC. (Ezra 4, Neh. 7)
5. 312-142 BC–Religious Repression

Alexander the Great dies and leaves his kingdom to his four generals. The Septuagint (LXX) was translated under the commissioning of Ptolemy Philadelphius for the great library of Alexandria. Two of Alexander’s generals fight for power

**Ptolemy:** Ptolemies = Egypt (323-198 BC) Tolerance of Jewish people.

**Seleucus:** Seleucids = Syria (198-142 BC) Repression & Persecution of Jewish people.

Both groups fought for power; Israel was in the middle. Seleucid leader Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175 BC) wanted money to support war and a buffer zone against the Ptolemies.

Maccabees obtain religious freedom in 164 BC by defeating the Syrians with Rome’s assistance (the story of Hanukkah). Rome intervened to broaden the empire, but not to help the Jews.

5. 142-63 BC–The Hasmonean House: Political Expansion

The Hasmoneans were the ruling dynasty of the Hasmonean Kingdom of Israel (140–37 BC). The Hasmonean dynasty was established under the leadership of Simon Maccabaeus, two decades after his brother Judah the Maccabee defeated the Seleucid army during the Maccabean Revolt in 165 BC. The Hasmonean Kingdom survived for 103 years before being taken over by the Herodian Dynasty in 37 BC.

Grandson of Simon the Maccabee, John Hyrcanus forced Gentiles to convert to Judaism under penalty of death (*counter argument to the Crusades*). ¹

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¹ While forced conversions are rare within Judaism, they did happen under the leadership and after the conquests of John Hyrcanus. Gentile Galileans, Samaritans and Edomites were forced to convert to Judaism. They are reported in Josephus *Antiquities* 13.257-258, 13.319 and 13.15.4.
Various parties start to form.

The Hassidim (righteous) who wanted to stop the fight against Antiochus Epiphanes IV. They gave birth to Torah observant Jews known later as the **PHARISEES**.

The Maccabees (means hammers in Hebrew) wanted to keep fighting and did. They gave birth to the aristocratic party, more Temple oriented known today as the **SADDUCEES**.

**5. 63 BC-135 AD–Rome: Further Jewish Sectarism**

A. Essenes - (Monastic)
B. Pharisees - (Separatists and forefathers of the rabbis)
C. Nazarenes - (Jewish Believers) came out of the Hassidim.
D. Sadducees - (Temple oriented religious Jews)
E. Qumran Community – (Monastic)

During the Roman period, the Jewish people attempted two failed rebellions against Rome. These two unsuccessful rebellions left the Jewish people decimated & determined not to rebel against the authorities anymore. This behavioral change remained for 1800 years until the 1940s and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

**66-73 AD**: Revolt against gentile domination; originally successful ends at Massada when the last Jewish defense fell in 73AD (God’s discipline per Luke 19:41-44). The effect of this was another dispersion.

**132-135 AD**: Messianic expectations of Bar Kochba “son of a star” linked with Jewish upset over Emperor Adrian forbidding practice of Judaism. Rabbi Akiba approved of Bar Kochbas’ messianic claim, and even though proven wrong, he is still considered one of history’s greatest Rabbis.

**III. The Patristic Period – 1st-5th Centuries: Anti-Semitic words/theory**
Judaism is self contained and led by *Rosh Galuta* (Head of the Exile Exilarch). Controlled by the Rabbis; Rabbinic literature started to develop.

- *Mishnah* (Hebrew for “Study and Review”) (200 AD)
- *Gemara* (Aramaic for “Learning by tradition”) (500 AD)

Together the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara* make the *Talmud*. The *Talmud* was finished by the 8th Century. In modern Judaism, the *Talmud* is the most important body of writings after the Tenach or Jewish Bible. Additionally, to most modern religious Jews, and even though they might not admit it, the Talmud actually supersedes the Tenach most of the time.

As it starts to interact with Christianity and as early as the 2nd Century AD, Judaism will clash theologically and experience an almost relentless oppression stemming from Christian anti-Semitism through the ages.

During the first Century, the biggest threat to a Jew was to be expelled from the synagogue and thus ostracized from the community for believing and following Yeshua.

**Anti-Semitism: A Definition**

“*Anti-Semitism is the hatred of the Jewish people as such characterized by destructive thoughts, words and/or actions against them*.”

By the Second Century, most believers are Gentiles and are becoming increasingly unable or unwilling to relate to Judaism. The issue becomes the validity of Judaism. Many of the early Church Fathers will take a stab at establishing dialogue with the Jewish community. Though they will learn Hebrew and some of the Jewish traditions, ultimately, they only succeed in widening the gap.

As the Early Church Fathers desired to seriously study the Tanach (Old Testament), they quickly realized that they could benefit from studying with Rabbis who spoke and read Hebrew fluently. As a result many of them studied with Jewish scholars and received invaluable knowledge of the
Hebrew Scriptures. Along with that knowledge, came some unavoidable exegetical influence from their Jewish counterparts.

There are four approaches to rabbinic exegesis known as Peshat, Remez, Derash and Sod. (they make the acronym PaRDeS).

- **Peshat** is the "plain" ("simple") or the direct meaning
- **Remez** means "hints" or the deep allegoric (hidden or symbolic meaning beyond just the literal sense).
- **Derash** from Hebrew darash: "inquire" ("seek") — the comparative meaning as given through similar occurrences.
- **Sod** "secret" or "mystery" is the mystical meaning as given through inspiration or revelation.

Rabbis would almost always favor one over the other, but at times, might even use more than one. Nevertheless, rabbinic schools of thought started to develop over the centuries and as a result, different interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures were made available.

Not only the Church Fathers received possibly different interpretations from literal to mystical, but inevitably, they also started to adopt some of the exegetical methods of their teachers and continued to interpret Scripture using their own most favored method of interpretation.

What had started as a rather literal approach to God’s Word by the followers of Messiah and the Apostolic Fathers was slowly going to morph into a more allegorical and even mystical approach, eventually opening the door for a first wave of anti-Judaism that we could label as THEOLOGICAL ANTI-SEMITISM or THEOLOGICAL ANTI-JUDAISM. These writings were mostly in response for the threat that the Church felt it was experiencing from the teaching of Judaism.

The following list of examples is a non-exhaustive list of many of the diatribes generated by the Church Fathers.

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2 Exegesis is the explanation or interpretation of a text. Hermeneutics is the study of the various principles of interpretation.
**Justin Martyr (103-165) Dialogue with Trypho**

Justin Martyr was an early Christian apologist who is still revered in Church circles today. He is the author of the most important and most complete Christian tract against Jewish people in the second century if not all of the early Church Fathers' writings titled *Dialogue with Trypho*.

He was also the first to introduce the idea that all the Jewish misfortunes were a deserved consequence for their deicide (murder of God, in particular Yeshua). Rabbi Tarphon (c. 46 - c. 117 AD) is believed to be the Trypho of Justin martyr's dialogue. He wrote:

> He said: “Tribulations were justly imposed upon you, for you have murdered the Just One.”

**Tertullian (160-220A.D.)**

He was a Christian author and apologist who produced a large body of Christian literature in Latin and taught against heresy. Tertullian has been called "the Father of Latin Christianity" and "the founder of Western theology." He was one of the first Church Father to formulate Trinitarian terminology.

In his work *De Adversus Judaeos*, “Against the Jews”, Tertullian’s theological anti-Judaism is purely ideological. He obviously got some of his inspiration from earlier works by Justin Martyr. He very methodically uses the Hebrew Scriptures to disprove the relevancy of the Mosaic Law and prove that all blessings to ethnic Israel are now passed on to the “other nation” of God: the Christians.

**John Chrysostom (344-407 A.D.)**

Chrysostom is still considered one of the "greatest" of all Church Fathers and was a famous preacher still known today as "The Golden Mouthed Orator." Much of what was written against the Jews by previous Church Fathers is dwarfed by Chrysostom's contribution. He hoped to show the Jews and the synagogue in
their true colors to discourage Christians from engaging in relationships with Jewish people or even attend synagogue services.

*The synagogue is worse than a brothel...it is the den of scoundrels and the repair of wild beasts...the temple of demons devoted to idolatrous cults...the refuge of brigands and debauchees, and the cavern of devils. It is a criminal assembly of Jews...a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ... a house worse than a drinking shop...a den of thieves, a house of ill fame, a dwelling of iniquity, the refuge of devils, a gulf and a abyss of perdition."..."I would say the same things about their souls... As for me, I hate the synagogue...I hate the Jews for the same reason. ... men who are lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits...inveterate murderers, destroyers, men possessed by the devil,... they have surpassed the ferocity of wild beasts, for they murder their offspring and immolate them to the devil.*

**Augustine (c. 354-430 A.D.)**

Augustine was a contemporary of John Chrysostom, and was unique in the fact that his treatment of the Jewish people reflected certain ambivalence. Augustine saw the Jewish people as a “witness-people”, which was a concept that he had come up with, to explain their survival through the ages, while suffering greatly. To him, they appeared to be both witnesses of evil AND of Christian truth. Of the Jewish people’s “alleged” treatment of Yeshua, he wrote:

*The Jews held him, the Jews insulted him, the Jews bound him, they crowned him with thorns, dishonored him by spitting upon him, they scourged him, they heaped abuses upon him, they hung him upon a tree, they pierced him with a*

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3 Bareille, J: Oeuvres Complètes de Saint Jean Chrysostome, Tome 1er (Librairie de Louis Vivès, Editeur, Paris, 1865) Pages 514-582.

http://ia700402.us.archive.org/20/items/ChrysostomeOeuvresCompltesT1/ChrysostomeT1.pdf
lance... because of the divine malediction they have called upon themselves, they are destined to be slaves.4

Furthermore, in “Confessions” he claims:

How hateful to me are the enemies of your Scripture! How I wish that you would slay them (the Jews) with your two-edged sword, so that there should be none to oppose your word! Gladly would I have them die to themselves and live to you!5

The unfortunate but logical progression from ideological and theological anti-Judaism to anti-Semitism is the passing of legislative measures against the Jews. The stage continues to be set for the greater destruction of the “scapegoats of humanity”.

The Roman Empire and Constantine (AD 272-337)

The Roman Empire began in early to mid-first century. During its peak, the Roman Empire controlled approximately 2.5 million square/miles of land surface and because of its spread and duration; it had a profound and lasting influence on the development of language, religion, architecture, philosophy and law. The Western Roman Empire collapsed in 476 and the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire ended in 1453.

Emperor Constantine was a great military achiever. He was able to reunite the Roman Empire under one emperor. In 315 Constantine published the Edict of Milan after publicly claiming to be a Christian. Until then, Christianity was the enemy of the State, but as it became one and the same with the state, the persecution of Christians by the state came to a stop. It was also during Constantine’s reign that the cross became the official Christian symbol.

After he came to power and made Christianity the State approved religion, he didn’t repressed heathen practices. His leanings for a more “pagan Christianity” are clearly showed in the results of the first ecumenical council at Nicæa (325).

4 Augustine: The Creed, 3:10 (FCCH, 27:301)
5 http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1101.htm
The Council was originally convened to fight the heresy, but they also decided to change the celebration of the Jewish Passover into the celebration of Easter (most likely from the fertility goddess Ishtar). Until that time, the Christian celebration of the death and resurrection of Messiah were closely related to the Jewish Passover celebration. After all, the Last Supper was Yeshua’s last Passover Seder of the three he performed in His public ministry (Matthew 26:1-5, 17-30; Mark 14:1-2, 12-26; Luke 22:1-2, 7-20; and John 13:1-30.). While the decision to no longer celebrate the Jewish Passover was made official in 325, it was not fully implemented until the Council of Antioch in 341. One more wedge was put in place to further separate Christians and Jews.

Under his rule, laws began to be passed against the Jews. They were only the starting point of a long strain of judicial streamlining aimed at controlling, ostracizing, and eventually annihilating them. A few are listed below:

- Death penalty for the circumcision of slaves.
- Jews were forbidden to own Christian slaves
- Death penalty for embracing the Jewish faith
- Death penalty for Jews versed in the Law who aided them.
- Death penalty for marriages between Jews and Christians
- Death penalty for attending Jewish religious assemblies

Constantine’s measures against the Jews were comparatively mild, yet they announced the end of the toleration that Jews had enjoyed under the Roman Empire. Until that time, The Jew was some sort of second-class citizen, somewhat protected by law, but merely tolerated. Their status was very similar to the one of the “dhimmis” who had been second-class citizens under Islam. Those somewhat “good old days” were about to come to an end.

Paul’s advice to gentiles in Romans 11 to provoke the Jews to jealousy was ignored, as the Jewish people were provoked to anger at best.

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6 A dhimmi "the people of the dhimma or people of the contract") is a non-Muslim subject of a state governed in accordance with sharia law. Linguistically, the word means "one whose responsibility has been taken.
Rom. 11:11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

The hostile attitude of the Christianized state would only get worse under Constantine's sons, but it owed its origin to Constantine.