

# The Messiah משיח

## 1. History of Judaism



Scene from the Arch of Titus in Rome, picturing the Roman soldiers with Temple Treasures after destroying the Temple in A.D.70

### *A Chosen People*

In order to help Jewish people understand Jesus, we should understand the unique history of God's chosen people. What is meant by the term, Chosen people? Scripture tells us, God has chosen the descendants of Abraham Isaac and Jacob for a unique purpose and plan. The Jewish people were to be a light to the nations, a unique and peculiar people who would demonstrate the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to the world.

5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." Exodus 19:5-6

Through them, the Lord would bring redemption to the world in the person of the Messiah, who would as a descendent of King David, one day rule the earth. The Messiah would establish righteousness in the world and correct all wrongs. The Jewish people were chosen for this task, to bring

redemption to the world.

### *A Suffering People*

Being Chosen, is not always the easiest thing. One Jewish commentator said regarding being the chosen people, "why doesn't God choose someone else for a change". The last two thousand years of Jewish history has been filled with tragedy and suffering. As a result of the Holocaust in the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the hands of the Nazi's many Jews, have lost faith in the God of Abraham. Even today, as the nation Israel enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, countries such as Iran threaten to rid the world of Jews. Will there ever be peace for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

### *When Messiah comes*

Israel and the Jewish people wait for the same hope Christianity waits for, the coming of the Messiah. The word Christ is actually the Greek word for Messiah (משיח *Mashiyach*), meaning to anoint or rub with oil, thus "to choose". Although the Judaism sees a different Messiah, then Christianity, Judaism along with Christianity believes when Messiah comes and reigns there will be peace on the earth amongst the nations.

### Biblical Period

#### **Patriarchs**

God created the heavens and the earth and mankind in 6-days and rested on the 7th day. God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. They had "Free Will" to obey or disobey God. They choose to reject God's command and listen to Satan, a fallen angel. By rejecting God's command, mankind became fallen and corrupt. God however promised a *Messiah* who would redeem man and restore him. (Genesis 3:15). Man's corrupt nature caused God to bring judgment on the whole human race, causing a flood to kill human and animal life. Noah, his family and all

<p><b>Egyptian Captivity</b> 1800-1400 B.C.</p>	<p>the living animals who entered the arc (the boat Noah built) were spared from God's judgment. Everybody alive today is a descendent of Noah and his family. Following the flood, The arc landed in the mountains of Ararat (Armenia), from there, man as one tribe traveled to the lands of the future Babylon,( Shunar, Summer). As one people, humanity again began to rebel against God, building the tower of Babel, so God caused a confusion in language between Noah's descendents. This confusion caused humanity to be dispersed over the earth forming the different nations.</p> <p>Abraham, a descendent of Shem, the second son of Noah, left Ur, a city in Babylon, for Mt. Moriah (Jerusalem) at God's instruction. God promised Abraham, to make him into a great nation. Isaac, Abraham's son, had two sons Jacob and Esau. Jacob had 12 sons, who would later become the nation of Israel. Jacob lived in the land of current day Israel, but would live in Egypt for a time, before being buried in Hebron with Abraham and Issac.</p> <p>Joseph, Jacob's second youngest son was sold by his brothers into Egypt. In Egypt, he became prime minister. Famine struck the land of Canaan (Israel) forcing his brothers to come to Egypt for food. There, they met their brother who was sold as a slave years earlier. Joseph forgave his brothers and they settled in the land of Egypt in an area known as Goshen with Joseph.</p> <p>Over the next 400 years they multiplied to over 1,000,000 souls and subsequently became oppressed in the land of Egypt as slaves of a new Pharaoh. They cried out to God for rescue, and God sent them Moses, a Hebrew raised in Pharaoh house.</p> <p>Moses, representing God to Pharaoh, delivered plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh agreed to release Israel from Egyptian slavery. Moses led the descendents of Jacob (Israel) back to the land of Canaan. On the way, Israel rebelled against Moses and wanted to return to Egypt. For rejecting God's leadership at the hand of Moses, Israel was forced to wander in the wilderness of Sinai. Under Moses' leadership for the next 40 years, the descendents of Jacob lived in the wilderness of Sinai, until the rebellious generation died.</p>
<p><b>Period of Judges</b> 1400-1000 B.C.</p>	<p>Joshua, would succeed Moses and lead Israel into Canaan. Israel conquered and settled a portion of land and established a confederacy of tribes after the 12 sons of Jacob. God ruled the tribes through judges. Over the next 400 years judges such as Samson, Gideon, , Jephthah, and Deborah would come to lead the tribes of Israel against their enemies.</p> <p>The people requested a king like the other nations, and God gave them Saul as their first king, followed by David. David conquered the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites, making it the City of David. Through prophets, God established David's throne as an eternal throne later to be ruled by his descendent, <i>the Messiah</i>, who would one day rule the world with Jerusalem as the capital city of the earth. Solomon, David's son would build the Temple on Mt. Moriah, becoming known as <i>Solomon's Temple</i></p>
<p><b>First Temple</b> 960- 586 B.C.</p>	<p>Eventually Israel turned away from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and started worshipping the idols in the land of Canaan, Baal, Ashtorah, Chemosh, etc. God warned Israel through prophets, letting Israel know these practices would result in destruction. The people rejected these messages through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Micah and others, and continued their idol worship.</p> <p>God responded by sending the armies of Assyria in 722 B.C. to take the northern part of Israel captive to the lands of Assyria. From 605-586 B.C. the Babylonians, destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple taking those who were left into Babylon for a period of 70 years. At the end of 70 years, the Persians defeated Babylon under Cyrus the Great, he allowed the Jews to return to the land of Israel.</p>
<p><b>Second Temple</b> 516-70 A.D.</p>	<p>In Babylon, Israel was humbled becoming servants of the Babylonians. However in Babylon, God raised up prophets like Daniel who became the prime minister of Babylon under king Nebuchadnezzar. Through Daniel, God revealed his future plans for Israel and the world, and the coming of His <i>Messiah</i>. Giving the exact month, year and day of his death (Daniel 9:24-27)</p> <p>In 539 B.C. Cyrus the Great, head of a Persian-Median kingdom defeated Babylon. He allowed the Jews to return to the land of Israel and rebuild their Temple. In 516 B.C., seventy years after the Temple was destroyed, <i>the Second Temple</i> was completed. During this period God spoke through the prophets, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi to encourage Israel about the coming plan of redemption through the <i>Messiah</i>. Malachi was the last prophet of the age, writing about 425 B.C.</p>

Hellenistic Judaism	
<p><b>Greek Period</b></p> <p>331-63 BC</p>	<p>Alexander the Great, as foretold in the book of Daniel, conquered the Persian kingdom in 331 B.C., the Greeks took control of Israel. After Alexander death, his kingdom was divided between his 4 generals. The generals Ptolemy and Seleucid became the progenitors of two kingdoms which fought for control of Israel, the Selucids and Ptolemies. The Ptolemies gave the Jews freedom to worship as they like.</p> <p>In 198 B.C. Antiochus III, defeated the Ptolemies and allowed the Jews even more liberty. The Greek culture and influence in Jerusalem started to grow amongst the people of Israel. In 175 B.C. a Hellenizing Jew named Jason came in control of the High-Priesthood. An even more extreme Hellenizer named Menelaus ousted him causing a civil war. Antiochus IV Epiphanies intervened on Menelaus side, and tried to set up an image of Zeus in the Second Temple.</p> <p>Antiochus Epiphanies, a Seleucid, sacrificed a pig in the Second Temple on Mt. Moriah, he forced the Jews to adopt Greek customs, hoping to unify his kingdom as a Greek Kingdom to stop the Roman armies. This caused an old priest, Mattathias, and his five sons—the so-called Maccabees or Hasmoneans to revolt. They defeated the Greek forces and rededicated the Temple in Jerusalem. This event is celebrated at Hanukkah every year.</p> <p>The Jews had an independent Jewish state for about 100-years, the Maccabean Kingdom. Feuding between Jewish rulers caused them to invite Roman arbitration, General Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 B.C.</p> <p>During this period we see the rise in the groups known as the Pharisaic and Sadducees. These two groups were at odds with each other. The Pharisees maintained an oral tradition and were loyal to the Torah and the prophets. The Sadducees were allied with the pro-Greek Jews and were in control of the High-Priest.</p>
<p><b>Roman Period</b></p> <p>63 BC- A.D. 135</p>	<p>When Pompey entered the Temple in 63 BCE as an arbiter both in the civil war between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus and in the struggle of the Pharisees against both Jewish rulers, Judea in effect became a puppet state of the Romans. This would lead to the destruction of the Temple, which was completed in 516 B.C., by the Romans in A.D. 70.</p> <p>When Civil war erupted between Ceasar and Pompey, Antipater the Edomite, supported Julius Ceasar. He was rewarded by being appointed governor of Judea. His son Herod the Great would succeed him. In 37 B.C., Herod became ruler of Judea, he was a friend of Augustus received numerous favors. Herod later in life was a paranoid ruler, who would kill his wife Mariamne and his own children.</p> <p>After his death, the Romans divided his kingdom among his sons: Archelaus should be king of Judaea and Samaria, with Philip and Antipas sharing the remainder as tetrarchs. It's at this point Joseph returned from Egypt with Mary and the young child Jesus.</p> <p>After Herod's sons died, Pontius Pilate (26-36 A.D.) would be appointed procurator in Jerusalem. In A.D. 37 Roman Emperor Caligula attempted to have his statue put in the Temple, this was delayed until he died in 41 A.D. Jews vowed to die to prevent his statue from being placed in the Temple. As animosity with Rome grew, rebellion against Rome would lead to civil war and the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. The walls and Temple in Jerusalem were destroyed. Titus as general left for Rome and celebrated the destruction of Jerusalem along with his father the Emperor Vespasian. The Arch of Titus was built to celebrate the victory of the Roman armies over Jerusalem. According to Josephus over 1,000,000 Jews were killed in this battle for Jerusalem.</p> <p>In 131 A.D., the Emperor Hadrian built a Temple to Jupiter on the Temple Mount, this caused the Jews again to Rebel against Rome. Simeon bar Kosba, later hailed as the Messiah, defeated the Roman Egyptian Legion. The greatest Rabbi of the day, Akiva ben Yosef, also gave him the title Bar Kokhba ("Son of the Star"), a messianic allusion. Bar Kokhba took the title nasi ("prince") and struck his own coins, with the legend "Year 1 of the liberty of Jerusalem." The Emperor Hadrian took charge of the battle and defeated <i>Bar Kokhba</i>, after a bloody fight. According to records 580,000 Jews were killed following the Roman victory. Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Capitolina and the land name was changed to Palestine to erase the memory of Judea. Jews were forbidden to enter the new city.</p> <p>The defeat of Jewish resistance to Rome led to the next period of Judaism, Rabbinical Judaism and the progenitors of Modern Judaism.</p>

## Rabbinic Judaism

### **The age of the Tannaim<sup>1</sup> (135–c. 200)**

Following the defeat of Bar Kokhba and the destruction of the Temple, the world of Judaism changed. Jews were forbidden to enter the city built on the ruined Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina. The area was called Palestine after the Philistines, the name Judea was banned. Hadrian's policy was to erase the history of the Jewish people. Entire Jewish populations were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Some Jews were allowed to remain. The Romans accepted the submissive Rabbi's who rejected the idea of rebellion and who could control the people. They were allowed to stay in Galilee area. There the *Oral Law*<sup>2</sup> was compiled as the *Mishna*.

### **The Making of the Talmuds**

#### **Palestine (c. 220–c. 400)**

Although the Jews were scattered throughout the Roman and Persian worlds, the need to have questioned answered required the Mishna. The area of Galilee and Babylon became centers of Jewish thought and learning. Jews remained in Babylon, from the time of the captivity and flourished under Persian rule (Sassanid Rule). The commentaries on the Mishna in Palestine became known as the *Palestine Talmud*. This was completed about 400 A.D.

#### **Babylonia (200–650)**

In the east, in Babylon another group of Rabbis and scholars completed the *Babylonian Talmud* about 100 years after the Palestinian Talmud. This was another commentary on the Mishna. The Babylonian Talmud was more extensive and through then the Palestinian, and more highly regarded.

These two works would give direction the *Diaspora*, the scattered Jewish community, over the coming centuries.

With the spread of Christianity, the Roman empire under Constantine in 325 declared itself as officially a Christian kingdom, resulting in periods of persecution for Jews. Jewish communities in the east under Persia fared better, in Arabia, the city of Yathrob, later called Medina was founded by three Jewish tribes. Here portions of the Talmud would find its way into the Quran as Mohammed interacted with these Jewish Tribes.

#### **The age of the geonim<sup>3</sup> (c. 640–1038)**

Talmudic schools became the center of focus in the Jewish world, especially in Babylon. The heads of the these schools were known as Geonim, they received questions from the Jewish community abroad and their comments were published as the *responsa*.

Some groups rejected the authority of the Rabbi's and the Talmud, one group became known as the Karaites (Scripturalists). They looked to the scripture alone the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) as their source of authority. The Karaites settled in Palestine, where they challenged the authority of the Rabbinical schools.

At this time also, the Masorites came into being. They were located in Tiberus and

<sup>1</sup> Tannaim; any of several hundred Jewish scholars who, over a period of some 200 years, compiled oral traditions related to religious law. Most tannaim lived and worked in Palestine. Their work was given final form early in the 3rd century AD by Judah ha-Nasi,

<sup>2</sup> The Oral Law was compiled in a work known as the Mishna, codification of Jewish oral laws, systematically compiled by numerous scholars (called tannaim) over a period of about two centuries. The codification was given final form early in the 3rd century AD by Judah ha-Nasi (The Prince). The Mishna supplements the written, or scriptural, laws found in the Pentateuch. It presents various interpretations of selective legal traditions that had been preserved orally since at least the time of Ezra (c. 450 BC).

<sup>3</sup> Geonim, (Excellency) the title accorded to the Jewish spiritual leaders and scholars who headed Talmudic academies that flourished, with lengthy interruptions, from the 7th to the 13th century in Babylonia and Palestine. The chief concern of the geonim was to interpret and develop Talmudic Law and to safeguard Jewish legal traditions by adjudicating points of legal controversy.

Babylon. They added vowel symbols to the Tanakh for proper transmission of scripture. Both the Karaites and Rabbinical Jews used their Bibles, for teaching and reference. All translations today of the Old Testament are based on the *Masoretic Texts*.

As time passed, the authority of the Babylonian Rabbi's became less and less as wealthy Jewish communities in North Africa and Spain established their own schools and relied less on Babylon.

### Medieval European Judaism (950–1750)

Two Rabbinic schools of thought developed in the Jewish world, one based in Babylon the other in Palestine and Europe. The Ashkenazic were had a Palestinian and Roman basis the Sefardic a Babylonian. The European Jews wrote mainly for internal use amongst themselves, while the Sefardic Jews engaged in Arabic writing, poetry and discourse.

The European Ashkenaz were less inclined to interact with European Christianity as the result of experiences with the Crusades and persecution. Hasidism (piety) started to emerge in German Jewish populations, stressing piety, holiness and martyrdom. Jews looked to the Bible, Talmud and Rabbinic commentators such as Rashi<sup>4</sup> (1040-1105 A.D.) who commented on faith and Messianic redemption.

In southern France, the area of Provence, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a new mystical study known as Kabbala (literally, "Tradition") was introduced, spreading to Northern Spain. Kabbala was a Gnostic type doctrine in rabbinic guise, they reinterpreted the Bible and rabbinic law as allegories in which God was manifested in a spiritual universe, only initiates into Kabbala had access. They used their own vocabulary which they devised to special dictionary, which they alone understood. The most renowned literary product of this new circle was the *Zohar* ("The Book of Splendour").

In 1391 there was a wave of anti-Jewish riots and the Pope issued a Bull forbidding the study of Talmud. In Spain, Jews were required to attend Christian sermons, causing Jews to outwardly convert to Christianity, but keep their Jewish identity a secret, the became known as Maranno Jews. In Europe the Jews faced persecution. In the 1300's, Edward I expelled the Jews from England, in 1492, Jews were expelled from Spain, in 1497 and 1506 they were expelled from Portugal.

With all these troubles, Jews looked for the coming of the Messiah. Inspired by the Jewish tradition that the messianic era—when the messiah would come to bring in the rule of God—would be preceded by horrendous catastrophes, a group of single-minded rabbis established a community in Zefat (Safed), Palestine. The group was largely Kabbalic in its nature.

Such phenomena, however, were decidedly in the minority and contrary to the dominant trend. Dogmatic Kabbalism spread progressively and finally came to social expression in 1666, with the widespread acceptance of the views of the pseudo-messiah Shabbetai Tzevi (Sabbatai Zevi). Most of European and Ottoman Jewry was swept into a hysterical pitch in the belief that the end was now finally at hand. This ended when Shabbetai was forced to convert to Islam and served as the doorman to the Ottoman Sultan. The reaction to Shabbetai forced Jews to seek out heretical elements within Judaism, and develop a more rigid view.

Massacres of Jews in Poland and persecutions caused more problems for Jews

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<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Solomon ben Issac of Troyes, known as Rashi, the acronym formed from the initials of his name in Hebrew. For the more advanced student, Rashi composed a succinct commentary on the Talmud that, unmatched for compact thoroughness and lucidity, achieved an authority approaching that of the text itself.

## Modern Judaism

### 1750 to Present

Following the depressing times of Shabbetai Tzevi, came the rise of what is modern Judaism. The rationalist Jewish philosopher Benedict de Spinoza, (1632-1677) a descendent of Morano<sup>5</sup> Jews, was born in Amsterdam. In Amsterdam, Spinoza was influenced by European philosophers, such as Descartes and others, and he introduced concepts contrary to historical Judaism. As a result, of his questioning rabbinical concepts; he was expelled from the Amsterdam Synagogue. European Jews along with the French Revolution, were gradually being accepted and integrated into European society, as monarchies started to weaken and democratic values began.

#### *Haskala (Reason)*

European Jews integration into European society gave rise to a movement that waited less for national redemption through the messiah and more towards European integration. Moses Mendelssohn ( 1729-1786), an orthodox Jew in Berlin, introduced into European Jewry, European Enlightenment and rationalism while still maintaining a Jewish identity. Naphtali Wessely rallied the Jewish community in 1781, establishing Jewish schools to teach secular subjects along with the Bible. German eventually replaced Hebrew in Jewish schools, and the Bible rather than the Talmud was taught.

In Russia, the Enlightenment focused on making Jews part of Russian society and being Jewish a matter of personal idiosyncrasy. The Russian pogroms (massacres) of 1881, was to prove how vain the hopes of the Haskala had been.

In France in 1807, Napoleon convoked a Sanhedrin (Jewish legislative council) to create a new, modern definition of Judaism. The new definition forced Judaism, to renounce a quest for nationhood, limited Rabbinic authority to spiritual issues, and to recognize civil authority over

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<sup>5</sup> Morrano: in Spanish history, a Jew who converted to the Christian faith to escape persecution but who continued to practice Judaism secretly. It was a term of abuse and also applies to any descendants of Marranos. The origin of the word marrano is uncertain. In the late 14th century, Spanish Jewry was threatened with extinction at the hands of mobs of fanatical Christians. Thousands of Jews accepted death, but tens of thousands found safety by ostensibly converting to Christianity. Encyclopedia Britannica 2004

religious, in matters of intermarriage.

#### Reform Judaism<sup>6</sup>

The modern Reform movement can trace its origins to Reform temple established in Seesen Brunswick (Germany), by the pioneer German reformer Israel Jacobson. In 1810, he introduced an organ, sermon, and prayers in German, in place of Hebrew, using the protestant churches as a template, his goal was to create an uplifting spiritual experience.

Changes included, men and women sitting together and the inclusion of organ and choir music . A confirmation service replaced the Bar Mitzvah ceremony for both boys and girls. The liturgy omitted all references to a personal messiah who would restore Israel as a nation. Reform services spread from Seesen to Berlin in 1815. From there Reform practices spread to Denmark, Hamburg, Leipzig, Vienna, and Prague.

Rabbi Abraham Geiger (1810–74) a the leading ideologists of the Reform movement, taught the essence of Judaism is belief in the one true God of all mankind, the practice of eternally valid ethical principles, and the communication of these truths to all nations of the world.

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise (1819– 1900), emigrated from Germany and established the first Reform Synagogue in 1841 in Charleston S.C. He also established the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873) and The Hebrew Union College in 1875, to educate Reform rabbis.

David Einhorn (1809-79) and Samuel Hirsch (1815-89) created the foundations of American Reform rabbis. In 1869, led by Samuel Hirsch, the conference of American Reform rabbis, declared Jews should no longer look forward to a return of Palestine and rejected a belief in bodily resurrection after death. By 1880 , there were almost 200 Reform synagogues in the Untied States. The issue of Zionism was a controversial issue in the Reform movement until the establishment of Israel in 1948.

#### Conservative Judaism

Zacharias Frankel (1801-75) broke with the Reform conferences in Germany (1844-46). He rejected the modernizing efforts, holding that Judaism is bound with Jewish culture and national identity. He refused to abandon traditions and customs as nonessentials.

Frankel taught historical studies could help update Written (Bible) and Oral Law (Mishna) for a more modern understanding.

Mirroring Orthodoxy, Conservative Judaism upholds the Sabbath and Dietary laws with modifications when needed.

In 1985, Conservative Judaism began to ordain women, causing a further break with Orthodox Judaism. Conservative Judaism stresses the study of Hebrew and Jewish nationalism as an inseparable part of Jewish culture.

Conservative views vary from liberal to orthodox regarding theology and various issues. They are represented in the United States by the United Synagogue of America, the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York City, which educates future rabbis for the Conservative movement.

#### Orthodox Judaism

The neo-orthodox movement responded to the Reform movement's challenge. Samson Raphael Hirsch, (1808-1881), an orthodox Rabbi led the challenge. First, he established the need for secular education along with Torah to withstand the Reform movement. Second, he established the need to break with Jewish movements, which deviated to far from Orthodoxy.

There are several branches of Orthodox Judaism, including the Hasidim, meaning "pious ones". Their Charismatic leaders known as Rebbe, serve as teacher, confessor, wonder-worker, God's vicar on earth, and occasionally as atoning sacrifice. The most famous of recent years, being the Lubavich sect headed (1950–94) by the Russian-born Menachem Mendel Schneerson. The sect numbers about 200,000 in the late 20th century, and some proclaimed Menachem Schneeron as messiah

While others in the Orthodox, movement denounced him as a false-Messiah.

<sup>6</sup> Reform Judaism: a religious movement that has modified or abandoned many traditional Jewish beliefs, laws, and practices in an effort to adapt Judaism to the changed social, political, and cultural conditions of the modern world. Reform Judaism sets itself at variance with Orthodox Judaism by challenging the binding force of ritual, laws, and customs set down in the Bible and in certain books of rabbinic origin (e.g., the Talmud). Encyclopedia Britannica 2004

## Sabbatai Zebi<sup>7</sup>



born July 23, 1626, Smyrna, Ottoman Turkey [now İzmir, Tur.] died 1676, Dulcigno, Alb. also spelled Sabbatai Zebi, or Zevi, a false messiah who developed a mass following and threatened rabbinical authority in Europe and the Middle East.

As a young man, Shabbetai steeped himself in the influential body of Jewish mystical writings known as the Kabbala. His extended periods of ecstasy and his strong personality combined to attract many disciples, and at the age of 22 he proclaimed himself the messiah.

Driven from Smyrna by the aroused rabbinate, he journeyed to Salonika (now Thessaloníki), an old Kabbalistic centre, and then to Constantinople (now Istanbul). There he encountered an esteemed and forceful Jewish preacher and Kabbalist, Abraham ha-Yakini, who possessed a false prophetic document affirming that Shabbetai was the messiah. Shabbetai then traveled to Palestine and after that to Cairo, where he won over to his cause Raphael Halebi, the wealthy and powerful treasurer of the Turkish

governor.

With a retinue of believers and assured of financial backing, Shabbetai triumphantly returned to Jerusalem. There, a 20-year-old student known as Nathan of Gaza assumed the role of a modern Elijah, in his traditional role of forerunner of the messiah. Nathan ecstatically prophesied the imminent restoration of Israel and world salvation through the bloodless victory of Shabbetai, riding on a lion with a seven-headed dragon in his jaws. In accordance with millenarian belief, he cited 1666 as the apocalyptic year.

Threatened with excommunication by the rabbis of Jerusalem, Shabbetai returned to Smyrna in the autumn of 1665, where he was wildly acclaimed. His movement spread to Venice, Amsterdam, Hamburg, London, and several other European and North African cities.

At the beginning of 1666, Shabbetai went to Constantinople and was imprisoned on his arrival. After a few months, he was transferred to the castle at Abydos, which became known to his followers as Migdal Oz, the Tower of Strength. In September, however, he was brought before the sultan in Adrianople and, having been previously threatened with torture, became converted to Islām. The placated sultan renamed him Mehmed Efendi, appointed him his personal doorkeeper, and provided him with a generous allowance. All but his most faithful or self-seeking disciples were disillusioned by his apostasy. Eventually, Shabbetai fell out of favour and was banished, dying in Albania.

The movement that developed around Shabbetai Tzevi became known as Shabbetaianism. It attempted to reconcile Shabbetai's grandiose claims of spiritual authority with his subsequent seeming betrayal of the Jewish faith. Faithful Shabbetaians interpreted Shabbetai's apostasy as a step toward ultimate fulfillment of his messiahship and attempted to follow their leader's example. They argued that such outward acts were irrelevant as long as one remains inwardly a Jew. Those who embraced the theory of "sacred sin" believed that the Torah could be fulfilled only by amoral acts representing its seeming annulment. Others felt they could remain faithful Shabbetaians without having to apostatize.

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<sup>7</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica 2004 Edition,



After Shabbetai's death in 1676, the sect continued to flourish. The nihilistic tendencies of Shabbetaianism reached a peak in the 18th century with Jacob Frank, whose followers reputedly sought redemption through orgies at mystical festivals.

