

Episode 1: A People is Born

1) First Cities: Nippur, Mesopotamian Menus – Timeline 3800 BCE

This presentation features a description of a key Mesopotamian city, Nippur, along with an explorable graphic of an ancient map of the city. It also includes graphics of the Mesopotamian diet. See what Abraham might have had for dinner! Click “Close Media Presentations” to access historical documents that contextualize Mesopotamian civilization.

2) Gods and Kings/Cylinder Seals – Timeline 3800 BCE

Click the Play button to access a presentation on Gods and Kings. It provides insights into the political and religious life of Sumeria. There is also a presentation on personal seals, and some legal historical documents, including some of the Code of Hammurabi.

3) Writing - Timeline 3800 BCE

The presentation and panels that follow show the development of alphabets and writing in the Ancient Near East. An interesting Sumerian school historical document is also available.

4) Archaeology and the Bible - Timeline 2000 BCE-

This presentation reflects some of the controversies and findings of Biblical archaeology. The excellent multimedia presentation is followed by four panels discussing important finds in more depth. There are also several historical documents from the Bible and other ancient writings of archaeological interest.

5) Canaanite Civilization/Art Gallery - Timeline 1500 BCE

This feature provides an excellent background for understanding the land in which Israel was to settle. Note the piece on Ancient Music, which includes an audio clip of a 4000 year old song! The presentation features the alphabet evolution. There’s also a Canaanite art gallery video and historical documents related to Canaan and its culture.

6) Greek Civilization/Greece and the Near East - Timeline 1400 BCE

This presentation focuses on early Greek influence around the world, including an interesting historical document about Aristotle.

7) Pharaohs and Gods: Akhenaten - Timeline 1353 BCE

A peculiar religious revolution in Egypt, and its possible relationship to the development of Judaism, is the topic of this presentation. Following the presentation, users will see a piece on the modern debate about this subject, along with an Egyptian hymn similar to an Old Testament psalm. The presentation also includes some interesting historical documents on Egyptian religion and kings.

8) Rameses II - Timeline 1279 BCE

This presentation argues that Rameses II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The presentation also includes good historical documents about disgruntled workers and military campaigns, along with an early mention of the “Apiru,” believed by many to be a reference to “Hebrews.”

9) Exodus/Images of the Exodus - Timeline 1270 BCE

A presentation on theories of the exodus is followed by some beautiful depictions of the story, accompanied by biblical texts.

10) “Israel Laid Waste” - Timeline 1207 BCE

Go to this multimedia presentation to find information about the victories of Rameses II’s son, Merneptah, and his favorite hymn.

11) Settlement in Canaan - Timeline 1200 BCE

This begins with a video presenting theories of how Israel came to be in Canaan, and four panels that provide more detail on the theories, along with interesting audio clips and some animation. The presentation also includes relevant biblical and other historical documents, including rhetorically-charged writing from the Pharaoh.

12) King David/Images of David through the Ages - Timeline 1004 BCE

An opening video confronts the controversies surrounding the history of David. The presentation also includes some beautiful artworks and important historical documents about the emergence of monarchy in Israel.

13) Conquest and Exile - Timeline 841 BCE

This presentation portrays the military destruction of the first Jewish Commonwealth, with stunning graphics from antiquity. It is followed by four panels depicting aspects of the destruction of Jerusalem, along with biblical and Mesopotamian accounts of the devastation.

14) The Babylonian World/Voices of Babylon - Timeline 605 BCE

Click the Voices button to hear a presentation about ancient Babylonia (perpetrator of the Exile), and choose from four panels including audio readings of ancient letters. The presentation also includes good historical documents about power, politics and religion in Babylon.

15) Judean Life in Babylon/The Jewish Calendar - Timeline 597 BCE

This multimedia grouping discusses the evolution of the Jewish calendar and its reflection of Jewish life and history. After the introduction, a lovely graphic lets users pick additional video presentations on aspects of the calendar. A few historical documents provide information about life in Exile.

Episode 2: The Power of the Word

1) The Jewish Diaspora in the Greek World - Timeline 586 BCE

This extremely rich feature narratively presents seven centuries of the development of the Judean diaspora in the ancient world, century by century, complete with maps of developing communities. It closes with a startling assertion that in 1st-century Rome, Jews comprised 10% of the empire's populace, and a sequence of panels that summarize briefly each century's developments in the diaspora.

Eight interesting documents are also included, ranging from the story of the translation of the Torah into Greek in Egypt, to examples of early anti-Semitic and philo-Semitic thought, to descriptions of incidents such as the creation of a "rump" temple in Egypt and an early expulsion of the Jews of Rome.

2) Rebuilding Judah/Persian Judah - Timeline 538 BCE

This brief presentation describes the paucity of archaeological evidence in reconstructing Judean life in the Persian period. It is followed by five panels displaying lovely cult, coins, seals and household objects, plus a discussion of the divided region. Four documents are biblical excerpts from the post-exilic books of Ezra and Nehemiah, discussing the religious reconstitution of post-exilic Jerusalem.

3) Qumran - Timeline 150 BCE

This multi-layered presentation begins with a brief narration of the discovery and sources of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Three panels offer further material: a video exploring who lived at Qumran, another that provides clickable narrations about archaeological findings at Qumran, and one that provides a simple but fascinating inventory of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Seven documents provide fascinating texts from the Scrolls and ancient descriptions of the Essenes, believed by many to be the Scroll authors.

4) Judea Resplendent - Timeline 37 BCE

This feature discusses the development of Judea – and its capital, Jerusalem – into an important eastern Mediterranean state under the Hasmoneans and the Roman-era leader, Herod. Five panels offer interesting material on the Jerusalem Temple, Herod’s fortress at Herodium, priestly mansions, the seaport of Caesarea, and the Hellenistic city of Scythopolis, built on the ruins of Biblical Beth She’an. Three of the panels include slideable graphics which allow users to scan a larger image. The presentation also includes three stylistically ornate excerpts from Josephus about Herodian projects.

5) Roman Tolerance/Jewish Converts - Timeline 1 CE

The opening video of this feature discusses “Godfearers,” gentile Romans who developed an affinity for -- and sometimes converted to -- Judaism. Learning the story of the Godfearers is very important for understanding the demographic bulge of Judaism in this era and the eventual rise of Christianity. The presentation is followed by four “speech” buttons, which are narrated documents from early sources, including Tacitus, Juvenal, Josephus and Ptolemy. Then, six documents present socio-historical perspectives, including a couple of moving epitaphs from tombstones, and a synagogue inscription.

6) Reshaping Judaism/Ancient Synagogues - Timeline 72 CE

In this presentation, users will find a brief introduction to early synagogues in Turkey and Israel, followed by five panels of information. These explore locations, excavations, uses, decor, and leaders (which reveals the gender equality in these communities, and has some good narrative portions). This is accompanied by three Talmudic documents about rabbinic ideology and synagogues.

Episode 3: The Shaping of Traditions

1) Reshaping Judaism/Ancient Synagogues - Timeline 72 CE

In this presentation, users will find a brief introduction to early synagogues in Turkey and Israel, followed by five panels of information. These explore locations, excavations, uses, decor, and leaders (which reveals the gender equality in these communities, and has some good narrative portions). This is accompanied by three Talmudic documents about rabbinic ideology and synagogues.

2) Christian Rome/Jews and Roman Law - Timeline 300

Beginning with a caption about the Christianization of Rome, this presentation takes the viewer to a narrated presentation about Jews and Roman law, depicting the empire's treatment of Jews from the 4th century onward. Users can then select among five buttons that provide narrations of some of these laws concerning circumcision, intermarriage, the legality of Judaism, Jews in the civil service, and Jewish wills. The documents that follow show the decrees giving Christians progressively more legitimacy and Jews less.

3) Words of the Rabbis/A Page of Talmud - Timeline 395

This feature begins with a wonderful narrated guide to a page of Talmud, including a narrated explorable graphic of the page. The documents that follow provide passages from the Talmud and midrash concerning the Sanhedrin, lost goods, treatment of parents, and murder.

4) Muhammad - Timeline 60

This narrated segment traces the outline of Muhammad's life and inspiration, as well as his challenging interactions with the Jews of Medina. Then, four narrated panels discuss the Jews of Medina, a Quranic verse, Ishmael's children, and Muhammad's debates with Jews, using excerpts from the Quran, hadith and the Bible. Then, numerous documents present aspects of Muhammad's interactions with Jews, as well as information about the fundamentals of Muslim belief from the hadith literature.

5) Islamic Civilization/Islamic Innovation - Timeline 650

This wonderful narration of beautiful Islamic achievements discusses the centrality of Arabic to Islam while it integrated the numerous cultures, east and west, that comprised the Islamic empire of the Middle Ages. Then, five buttons let users see Islamic innovations in many disciplines, ranging from calligraphy to ophthalmology. Then, two documents quote the philosopher Avicenna and offer a poem lauding warships.

6) Jews in Muslim Lands/Jewish Leaders in Babylon/The Cairo Geniza - Timeline 700

This presentation begins with a brief narration about the sociology and status of Jews in Islamic lands. Then two panels are presented. One describes the evolution in leadership in the post-Talmudic period, with four buttons of narrated texts about the Geonim, the Exilarch, the Caliphate of Baghdad, and Jewish traders and bankers. The other provides a narrated segment about the trove of documents found in an 800-year-old synagogue in Cairo, with five buttons giving narrations of texts related to daily life and the relationships of Jews in Islamic lands. Finally, two documents describe international Jewish merchants and life at a Babylonian Talmudic academy. (Note that this multimedia presentation, though it is displayed with episode three in the Timeline, really largely pertains to the beginning of the next episode.)

Note: On the timeline, many of historical documents included in the various multimedia presentations are separately indicated. Remember also to search the index to find out more on any topic from the Concise Encyclopedia Judaica, the maps, and Abba Eban, guide to the video series.