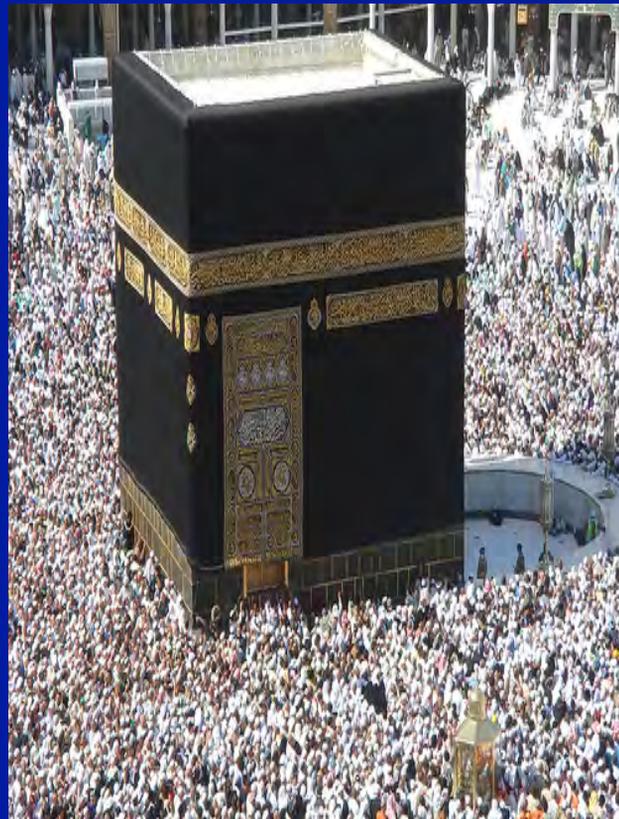
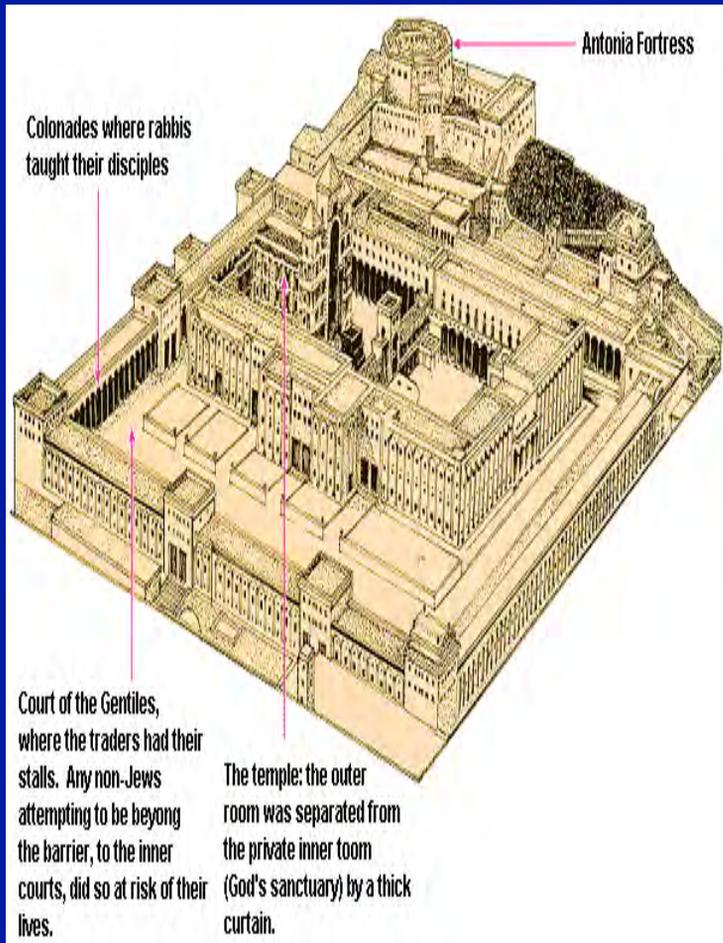




# The Jews, Arabs and Islam



# Dentwater Bible Church

## Israel; The Arabs and Islam

### LIFE FOR THE JEWS UNDER THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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Daniel E. Woodhead

OTTOMAN EMPIRE (1451-1922)



THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The Ottoman Empire grew out of the remnants of the Seljuk Turkish realm following the collapse of Mongol rule in Asia Minor in the late 13th century. The Seljuks were the first Turks to inhabit Asia Minor, as well as the first dynasty to unite the nomadic Turkish people under one leader.

Most Ottoman historians agree that Mehmed II was the true founder of the Ottoman Empire, not only for his military conquests, but for his work on the internal structure of the empire as well. The Ottoman Empire was an absolute monarchy, with the sultan assuming all powers over the realm. In the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire, the sultans believed that corruption weakened their power in the eyes of the people;

therefore the Ottoman Empire was intolerant toward corruption. The Ottoman Empire was by far the most powerful empire in the Islamic world in the 15th century. The Safavid Empire (Eastern Ottoman) was a short-lived one, particularly when compared to the long-lived Ottoman Empire. It established itself as one of Islam's greatest dynasties by its widespread conversion of the Persian people to Shiteism, and thus for the development of the Persian nationalism that remains strong today in Iran.

Jews in the Ottoman Empire had a status of *dhimmi*, in subjugation to Muslims. However, early on they allowed the Jews to freely practice their religion.<sup>1</sup>

The first case of blood libel in the Ottoman Empire was reported during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II in the 15th century. This is a false accusation that religious minorities murder their children and use their blood in rituals. This occurred periodically and usually was condemned early on by Ottoman authorities. In general, the authorities accepted the migration of Jews from Western Europe to Ottoman Empire.

The Spanish Inquisition principally drove this migration. In 1553, Sultan Suleiman I had a Jewish personal doctor and adviser. He also prohibited local courts from trying cases of Jewish blood libel. He also successfully helped the Jews avoid the Inquisition.

However, later the attitude of the authorities towards the Jews changed. In 1579 Sultan Murad III reportedly heard that Jewish women wore silk clothes decorated with precious stones, and ordered the destruction of all Jews in the Empire. Even though the decree was lifted, Jews were ordered to wear special clothing. Women were forbidden to wear silk, and men had to wear a special hat.

Other problems occurred under the Ottoman Empire. In the early seventeenth century an English visitor to Jerusalem, which was controlled by the Muslims, George Sandys commented on their *dhimmi* status.

“Here also be some Jews, yet inherit they no part of the land, but in their owne country do live as aliens, a people scattered throughout the whole world, and hated amongst whom they live; yet suffered, as a necessary mischief; subject to all wrongs and contumelies, which they support with and invincible patience. Many of them have I seene abused, some of them beaten; yet never saw I Jew with an angry countenance.”<sup>2</sup>

The Muslims also crushed a Jewish effort to cease paying the *Jizya* when they thought the Messiah had arrived. It was one twenty-nine year old Jew named Sabbatai Zevi who claimed messiahship. He was imprisoned and forced to convert to Islam. With these actions the thoughts of Ottoman tolerance of the Jews caused them to reevaluate their actual *dhimmi* status under the Muslims.

There were also a number of known cases of blood libel in the 19th century on the territory of the Ottoman Empire: Aleppo (1810), Beirut (1824), Antakya (Antioch, 1826), Hama (1829), Tripoli (1834), Jerusalem (1838), Rhodes and Damascus (1840), Marmora (1843), Izmir (Smyrna, 1864), Corfu (1894). The most famous of them were the Rhodes and Damascus affairs, both in 1840.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, Martin. In *Ishmael's House, A History of Jews in Muslim Lands*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. 2010 pg. 74

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 91

The Damascus affair was an 1840 incident in which the accusation of ritual murder was brought against members of the Jewish community of Damascus. Eight prominent Jews of Damascus were falsely accused of murdering a Christian monk, imprisoned and tortured. Several of the imprisoned died of torture, and another was forced to convert to Islam. In addition, the Muslim populace of Damascus attacked the Jewish synagogue in the suburb of Jobar, pillaged it, and destroyed the scrolls of the Law.

In the same year, the Damascus affair took place; Jews were accused of ritual murder of father Thomas, a Capuchin monk from the Island of Sardinia and his Greek servant, Ibrahim Amarah. Four members of the Jewish community died under torture, and the matter resulted in international outrage. British politician Sir Moses Montefiore intervened to clear the remaining imprisoned Jews and persuaded Sultan Abdulmecid I to issue a decree on November 6, 1840, declaring that blood libel accusations is a slander against Jews and to be prohibited throughout the Ottoman Empire. The decree read:

"We cannot permit the Jewish nation... to be vexed and tormented upon accusations, which have not the least foundation in truth..."

In 1866, with the resumption of cases of blood libel, the Sultan Abdul-Aziz issued an Islamic royal mandate (firman), according to which the Jews were declared to be under his protection. Orthodox clergy in the Ottoman Empire then abandoned the spreading of such accusations.

Another accusation was raised against the Jews in 1875 in Aleppo, but the alleged victim of the murder - the Armenian boy - was soon found alive and healthy.

Most of the conflicts and persecutions of Jews in the Empire was initiated by Christians, and specially by Greeks and Armenians. The motive for persecution was often rooted in a commercial rivalry among the ethnic communities. Those initiating the persecutions knew the Muslims would easily carry out a resolution on the *dhimmis*.

In the second half of the 19th century (from 1839 until 1870) Ottoman Empire initiated Tanzimat (state reforms) aimed at aligning the rights among its subjects regardless of ethnic origin and religion. These transformations positively affected the Jews, who finally acquired equal rights.

The English Zionist Federation (EZF) was founded on July 22, 1897. Its task was not so much to negotiate with the British government but to mobilize the institutions of organized Jewry in the cause of achieving the Jewish national home.

This resulted in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which was an influential British Governmental edict whereby the Jews moved closer to having their own national homeland.

As a result of the Zionist movement the beginning of 20th century, saw the Jewish population in the Empire reaching about 400-500,000 people. In 1887 there were five Jewish members in the Ottoman Parliament. However, Jews did not achieve actual equality until much later. Other positive efforts saw different Jewish organizations uniting Jews through out the world including those under Islamic rule to protect them from atrocities. The Alliance Israelite Universelle was established in Paris to respond to the Jews need for emancipation. In spite of all their positive efforts Jewish persecution continued.

An Arab mob in Morocco in 1862 broke into the Jewish Quarter near Tangier and desecrated Synagogues. Some Jews were tortured as a result of false accusations. The Jews protested and the protests did not stop the executions.

In 1892 the Persian Jews were given an updated set of “rules for living” under Islamic rule in the city of Hamadan. This gave additional clarification to their status as dhimmi. There were twenty-two rules.

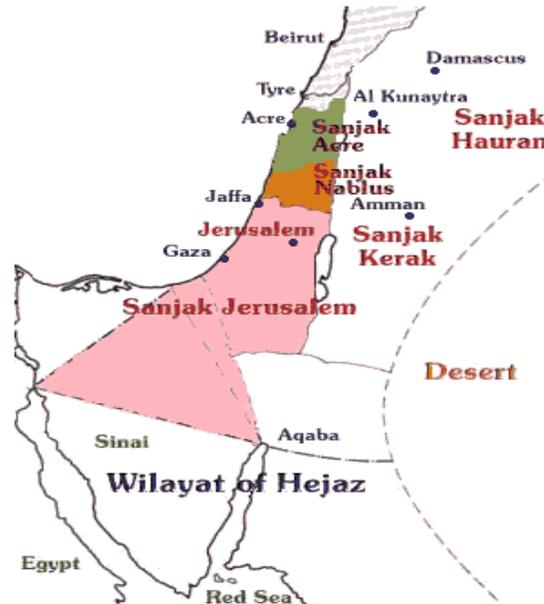
1. The Jews are forbidden to leave their houses when it rains or snows.
2. Jewish women are obliged to expose their faces in public.
3. They must cover themselves with a two-colored *izar* (large piece of material).
4. The men must not wear fine clothes; the only material permitted them being a blue cotton fabric.
5. They are forbidden to wear matching shoes.
6. Every Jew is obliged to wear a piece of red cloth on his chest.
7. A Jew must never overtake a Muslim on a public street.
8. He is forbidden to talk loudly to a Muslim.
9. A Jewish creditor of a Muslim must claim his debt in a quavering and respectful manner.
10. If a Muslim insults a Jew, the latter must drop his head and remain silent.
11. A Jew who buys meat must wrap and conceal it carefully from Muslims.
12. It is forbidden to build fine edifices.
13. It is forbidden for him to have a house higher than that of his Muslim neighbor.
14. Neither must he use plaster for whitewashing.
15. The entrance of his house must be low.
16. The Jew cannot put on his coat; he must be satisfied to carry it rolled under his arm.
17. It is forbidden for him to cut his beard, or even to trim it slightly with scissors.
18. It is forbidden for Jews to leave the town or enjoy the fresh air of the countryside.
19. It is forbidden for Jewish doctors to ride on horseback.
20. A Jew suspected of drinking spirits must not appear in the street; if he does he should be put to death immediately.
21. Weddings must be celebrated in the greatest secrecy.
22. Jews must not consume good fruit.<sup>3</sup>

There were also conflicts with Muslims, especially in the area of present-day Israel. Towards the end of the 19th century, with increases in populations of Jews and Muslims to Palestine, the Arab population protested the increasing Jewish presence, resulting in a ban in 1892 to all land sales to foreigners. Jews were forbidden to settle in Palestine or live in Jerusalem, regardless of whether they were subjects of the Empire or foreigners. As hostility to Jews increased with the increase in numbers of Jews in the region, and there was a major pogrom in Jaffa in March 1908. The Arab population participated

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid pg. 122

which resulted in thirteen people being seriously injured, several of whom died. The local government later was sacked.



Ottoman Rule on the Eve of WW I

Once British General Allenby's victory parade marched into Jerusalem in 1914 the British officially had control of Palestine and could exert substantial influence in the way it would be occupied and administered. Although ceremonial it signified the end of the Ottoman Empire.

It was only after World War I, at the Paris Peace Conference, that the name "Palestine" was applied to a clearly defined piece of territory - the area which today comprises Israel and Jordan. It was agreed that "Palestine" was to become a League of Nations Mandate, entrusted to Great Britain.

Under the terms of the Mandate, Britain's principal obligation was to facilitate the implementation of the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, which pledged "the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people. No territorial restrictions whatsoever - neither east nor west of the Jordan River were placed on the Jewish National Home. In fact, the Mandate stipulated that Britain was to "facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions and shall encourage close settlement by Jews on the land.



British Administration Division 1922-1946

Nevertheless, in July 1922, the British divided Palestine into two administrative districts. Jews would be permitted only west of the black line. To the east, in what became known as "Transjordan", the British installed a Hashemite ruler named Abdullah, who had been expelled from the Arabian Peninsula. By making this division, the British reduced the area available for the Jewish National Home to only 22% of the entire area of Palestine.

NEXT SESSION: CHANGING LAND MAPS OF ISRAEL AND THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

**Please Call or e-mail with any questions or comments.**

[Daniel.Woodhead@pentwaterbiblechurch.com](mailto:Daniel.Woodhead@pentwaterbiblechurch.com) Toll Free 877-706-2479