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978-0-521-70562-2 - An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations

Edward Kessler

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH–CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

Relations between Christians and Jews over the past 2000 years have been characterised to a great extent by mutual distrust and by Christian discrimination and violence against Jews. In recent decades, however, a new spirit of dialogue has been emerging, beginning with an awakening among Christians to the Jewish origins of Christianity, and encouraging scholars of both traditions to work together.

*An Introduction to Jewish–Christian Relations* sheds fresh light on this ongoing interfaith encounter, exploring key writings and themes in Jewish–Christian history, from the Jewish context of the New Testament to major events of modern times, including the rise of ecumenism, the horrors of the Holocaust and the creation of the state of Israel. This accessible theological and historical study also touches on numerous related areas such as Jewish and interfaith studies, philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, international relations and the political sciences.

EDWARD KESSLER is Founder and Executive Director of the Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths and Fellow of St Edmund's College, Cambridge. His books include *A Dictionary of Jewish–Christian Relations* (Cambridge, 2005) and *Bound by the Bible* (Cambridge, 2004).

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## NEW TESTAMENT

BCE	
200	LXX Translation of Hebrew Bible
63	Judea becomes Roman province
37	Herod becomes King of Judea
c. 6–4	Jesus born
4	Herod dies and Antipas becomes Tetrarch of Galilee
CE	
c. 10	Hillel dies (c. 60 BCE–10 CE)
18	Caiphas appointed High Priest (dismissed in 37)
19	Jews expelled from Rome
26	Pontius Pilate becomes Roman Governor of Judea (dismissed in 36)
28	John the Baptist begins ministry
30	Shammai dies (c. 50 BCE–30 CE)
30–3	Ministry of Jesus
33	Crucifixion of Jesus
35	Conversion of Paul
44	James, brother of Jesus, dies Herod Agrippa dies
48	First Jerusalem Council
49	Jews and Christians expelled from Rome
50	Philo dies (c. 25 BCE–c. 50 CE) Rabban Gamaliel dies
58	Paul writes his final letter to Romans
64	Persecution of Christians under Nero
66–70	Jewish Revolt against Rome
70	Destruction of Jerusalem Temple by Titus Gospels of Mark composed

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*Timeline*

- 73 Masada conquered  
 80–90 Gospels of Matthew and Luke composed  
 81 Persecution of Christians and Jews initiated under Domitian  
 90 Council of Jamnia (Yavneh) meets  
 90–100 Gospel of John and Epistle to Hebrews composed  
*Birkat Ha-Minim* ('curse of heretics') composed  
 100 Flavius Josephus dies (37/38 – c. 100)

## CHURCH FATHERS

- 70 Destruction of Temple by Titus  
 100 Flavius Josephus dies (37/38–?100)  
 c. 125 Aquila's translation of Bible  
*Peshitta* translation of Bible  
 Oldest extant NT fragment, in Rylands library, parts of John 18  
 c. 130 Hadrian builds *Aelia Capitolina* on site of Jerusalem Temple  
 132 Epistle of Barnabas, first *Adversus Iudaeos* text, composed  
 132–5 Bar Kokhba revolt  
 144 Marcion (c. 90–155 CE) excommunicated  
 160 Justin Martyr (c. 100–65 CE) composes *Dialogue with Trypho*  
 Death of Valentinus, Gnostic teacher  
 c. 180 Celsus writes *The True Word*  
 Melito (c. 140–85 CE) composes *Peri Pascha*  
 c. 190 Pope Victor I (r. 189–198 CE) excommunicates Eastern churches observing Easter on Nisan 14  
 c. 200 Theodotion's translation of Bible  
 Mishnah compiled  
 245 Origen (185–253) completes Hexapla  
 256 Dura-Europos synagogue destroyed by Persians  
 303–12 Persecution of Christians under Diocletian  
 306 Council of Elvira  
 312 Constantine (r. 306–37) converts to Christianity  
 313 Edict of Milan marks Roman tolerance of Christianity  
 325 Helena (c. 250–330) begins building campaign in Land of Israel  
 First Council of Nicaea  
 330 Constantine moves capital of Roman Empire to Constantinople  
 335 Church of Holy Sepulchre completed

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[More information](#)*Timeline*

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- 361–3      Reign of Julian, last pagan emperor  
 380      Christianity becomes official religion of Roman Empire  
 c. 381      Egeria makes pilgrimage to Israel  
             Nicene creed agreed  
 382      Jerome (c. 342–420) starts Vulgate Translation  
 386      John Chrysostom (c. 350–407) writes *Adversus Iudaeos*  
 373      Ephrem the Syrian dies  
 c. 400      Jerusalem Talmud redacted  
 412      Rome sacked by Visigoths  
 416      Cyril (c. 375/80–444) expels Jews from Alexandria  
 429      Augustine of Hippo (354–430) writes *Adversus Iudaeos*  
 438      Theodosian Code  
 c. 500      Babylonian Talmud redacted  
 535–53      Justinian Code composed  
 c. 555      Romanos Melodos dies  
 598      Pope Gregory I (540–604) issues *Sicut Iudaeis*

## RABBINIC WRITINGS

- c. 10      Hillel dies (c. 60 BCE–10 CE)  
 30      Shammai dies (c. 50 BCE–30 CE)  
 c. 50      Philo dies (c. 25 BCE–c. 50 CE)  
             Rabban Gamaliel dies  
 66–70      Jewish Revolt against Rome  
 70      Destruction of Jerusalem Temple by Titus  
 70–200      Period of the *tannaim* and compilations of Mishnah,  
             Tosefta, and various midrashim (e.g., *Mekhilta*)  
 73      Masada conquered  
 90      Council of Jamnia (Yavneh) meets  
 c. 100      *Birkat Ha-Minim* ('curse of heretics') composed  
 c. 125      Aquila's translation of Bible  
 c. 130      Hadrian builds *Aelia Capitolina* on site of  
             Jerusalem Temple  
 132–5      Bar Kochba Revolt  
 c. 200      Mishnah compiled by Judah ha-Nasi (late 2nd–early 3rd  
             centuries CE)  
 220–500      Period of the *amoraim* and emergence of rabbinic  
             academies in Babylon  
             Compilation of Talmud, and various midrashim (e.g.,  
             Genesis, Lamentations and Leviticus Rabbah, *Pesikta*  
             *de-Rav Kahana*, *Tanhuma*)



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*Timeline*

- 361–3 Reign of Julian, last pagan emperor. Preparations for rebuilding Temple curtailed
- 380 Christianity becomes official religion of Roman Empire
- c. 400 Jerusalem Talmud redacted
- c. 500 Babylonian Talmud redacted by Rabbi Ashi (352–427)
- 550–700 Period of the *savoraim*, Persian rabbis who put the Talmud in its final form
- c. 600 *Toledot Yeshu* composed
- 638 Islamic conquest of Jerusalem  
Pact of Umar
- 700–1250 Period of the gaonim (the gaonic era)
- c. 750 Rabbinic academies move to Baghdad, new Islamic capital
- c. 800 Karaites reject authority of oral law
- 846 Amram Gaon (d. 875) compiles first Jewish prayerbook, *Siddur Rab Amram*
- 871 Marriage contract (6 October) the earliest dated document in Cairo Geniza
- c. 930 Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible established
- 933 Sa'adia Gaon (882–942) publishes *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*

## MEDIEVAL PERIOD

- 1095 First Crusade
- 1141 Death of Judah ha-Levi, author of *Sefer ha-Kuzari*
- 1142 Death of Hugh of St. Victor. Victorine School established. Promotes study of Scripture, using Jewish exegesis, notably Rashi (1040–1105)
- 1144 Death of William of Norwich. First blood libel charge
- 1146 Second Crusade. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) condemns anti-Jewish attacks
- 1179 Third Lateran Council. Jews forbidden to witness against Christians in court
- 1187 Saladin conquers Jerusalem from crusaders
- 1189 Jews attend coronation of Richard the Lionheart and are attacked, followed by attacks elsewhere in England.
- 1190 Massacre of Jews of York
- 1215 Fourth Lateran Council. Jews required to wear identifying symbols

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- 1222 Council of Oxford. Jews forbidden to build synagogues and mix with Christians
- 1232 Henry III (r. 1216–72) establishes *Domus Conversorum* in London
- 1235 Emperor Frederick II (r. 1215–50) and Pope Innocent IV (c. 1200–54) denounce accusations of ritual murder
- 1236 Crusaders attack Jewish communities of Anjou and Poitou
- 1240 Paris Disputation. Gregory IX (r. 1227–41) puts Talmud on trial  
24 cart-loads of Talmud manuscripts burned in Paris  
James I (1204–76) of Aragon orders Jews to attend conversionist sermons
- 1255 Jews of Lincoln accused of killing ‘Little St Hugh’
- 1260 Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74), whose writings are influenced by Maimonides (1135–1204), publishes *Summa Contra Gentiles*
- 1263 Barcelona Disputation
- 1280 Raymond Martini (c. 1220–85) writes *Pugio Fidei*
- 1290 Edward I (r. 1272–1307) expels Jews from England
- 1306 Jews expelled from France
- 1348 Jews blamed for Black Death
- 1349 Death of Nicholas Lyra (c. 1270–1349), who compiled biblical commentary, *Postillae*, explicitly quoting Rashi
- c. 1375 Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1342–1400) writes *The Prioress’s Tale*
- 1391 Attacks on Jews throughout Spain
- 1413 Tortosa Disputation
- 1421 Jews expelled from Austria
- 1447 Casimir IV (r. 1447–92) renews the rights of Jews of Poland
- 1478 Pope Sixtus IV (1471–84) establishes the Inquisition
- 1492 Ferdinand (1452–1516) and Isabella expel Jews from Spain
- 1496 Jews expelled from Portugal
- 1516 First ghetto established in Venice
- 1523 Luther (1483–1546) writes *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*
- 1543 Luther writes *On the Jews and Their Lies*
- 1559 Dominicans burn all copies of Talmud in Italy
- 1567 Jews allowed to return to France
- 1648–55 Chmielnicki Massacres by Ukrainian Cossacks
- 1656 Oliver Cromwell readmits Jews to England
- 1665 Shabbetai Zvi (1626–76) declared Messiah

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*Timeline*

## ANTISEMITISM AND HOLOCAUST

- 1780s Anti-Jewish laws begin to be repealed after French Revolution, granting Jews citizenship as individuals while depriving rights as a community
- 1791 Catherine II of Russia (1729–96) confines Jews to the Pale of Settlement
- 1827 Law enacted requiring 25 years' military service for Russian Jews
- 1840 Damascus Blood Libel Affair
- 1858 Mortara Affair
- 1879 Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904) coins the term *antisemitism*
- 1881–4 Pogroms in Russia lead to mass Jewish emigration from Pale
- 1886 Edouard Drumont (1844–1917) publishes *La France juive*
- 1893–1903 Dreyfus Affair
- 1903 Kishinev pogrom  
Publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*
- 1904 Aliens Immigration Bill restricts immigration to UK
- 1921–5 Outbreak of antisemitism in USA, led by Ku Klux Klan
- 1924 US Immigration Act halts immigration from Eastern Europe and Russia
- 1925 Adolf Hitler's (1889–1945) *Mein Kampf* published
- 1933 Hitler appointed Chancellor and legislation enacted to strip Jews of their rights  
Boycott of Jewish businesses  
Concordat between Vatican and Third Reich  
Protestant Reich Church (*Reichskirche*) formed
- 1934 *Der Stürmer* revives blood libel accusations
- 1935 Nuremberg Laws introduced.
- 1937 Pius XI issues encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* condemning Nazi ideology
- 1938 Anschluss (unification of Germany and Austria)  
Deportations (of Polish Jews in Germany) to first concentration camps  
*Kristallnacht* (Night of the Broken Glass, 9–10 November)  
Jewish children expelled from German schools  
Evian Conference, July (6–15): 31 countries refuse to accept Jews trying to leave Germany (only the Dominican Republic will receive them)

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- 1939 Germany invades Poland. Outbreak of World War II  
SS *St. Louis*, carrying 907 Jewish refugees, turned back by  
Cuba and the USA
- 1941 Tests for gassing undertaken at Auschwitz (23 September)  
T4 euthanasia programme abandoned
- 1942 Wannsee Conference and 'Final Solution' agreed  
(20 January)  
First trains from Paris to Auschwitz (29 March)  
First gassings at Auschwitz (23 June)  
Allies receive details of about 'Final Solution'
- 1943 New crematorium opens at Auschwitz (13 March)  
Arrest of Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
First Deportation of Roman Jews (18 October)
- 1944 First Deportation of Athenian Jews (14 April)  
Warsaw Ghetto uprising (1 August–2 October)  
Himmler orders destruction of crematoria at Auschwitz  
(26 November)
- 1945 Auschwitz liberated by Red Army (27 January)  
Buchenwald liberated by US Army (10 April)  
Bergen Belsen liberated by British Army (15 April)  
Hitler commits suicide (30 April)  
Germany surrenders (8 May)

## ZIONISM

- 1862 Moses Hess (1812–75) writes *Rome and Jerusalem*
- 1870 *Hovevei-Zion* (Lovers of Zion) promotes agricultural  
settlement  
First Aliyah of immigrants, mainly from Russia, begins
- 1874–6 George Eliot (1819–80) publishes *Daniel Deronda*
- 1885 Nathan Birnbaum (1864–1937) coins the term 'Zionism'
- 1896 Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) writes *The Jewish State*
- 1897 First Zionist Congress. Herzl elected president
- 1902 Sixth Zionist Congress initially accepts British government's  
offer of Uganda
- 1904 Pope Pius X (1903–14) meets Herzl
- 1917 400 years of Ottoman rule ended by British; General Allenby  
enters Jerusalem  
Balfour Declaration issued

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*Timeline*

- 1921 Chief Rabbinate instituted in Palestine, modelled on Archbishop of Canterbury
- 1922 White Paper published, restricting Jewish immigration
- 1937 Peel Commission recommends partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab
- 1939 White Paper published, restricting immigration and the sale of land to Jews
- 1942 SS *Struma* not allowed to dock in Palestine, sinks in Black Sea and 770 perish
- 1946 King David Hotel, the seat of the Mandate and British Army, is blown up
- 1947 UN establishes Jewish and Arab states, by 33 to 13 with 10 abstentions
- 1948 State of Israel proclaimed (14 May) by David Ben-Gurion, first Prime Minister  
War of Independence begins
- 1949 Armistice agreements are signed with Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon  
Jordan controls Old City of Jerusalem
- 1956 Sinai Campaign launched by Israel, Britain and France
- 1961 Adolf Eichmann captured, stands trial in Jerusalem and is sentenced to death
- 1962 Brother Daniel Affair
- 1964 Pope Paul VI visits Israel
- 1967 Six-Day War (6–11 June). Jerusalem, Golan Heights, West Bank and Sinai come under Israeli control
- 1972 *Neve Shalom* ('Oasis of Peace') founded by Fr. Bruno Hussar (1911–96)
- 1973 Yom Kippur War  
Tantur Ecumenical Institute founded
- 1977 Egyptian President Sadat (1918–81) visits Jerusalem
- 1978–9 Camp David Accords and signing of Peace Treaty with Egypt
- 1980 Synod of Protestant Churches of the Rhineland
- 1981 Anwar Sadat assassinated
- 1982 Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon
- 1987 First Intifada (Palestinian uprising)
- 1993 Vatican–Israel accords
- 1994 Peace Agreement between Israel and the PLO and Israel and Jordan
- 1995 Yitzhak Rabin assassinated

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- 2000 Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005) visits Israel  
Second Intifada
- 2002 Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land
- 2005 Israel leaves Gaza
- 2009 Pope Benedict XVI (r. 2005– ) visits Israel

MAJOR INSTITUTIONAL STATEMENTS SINCE 1945 RELEVANT TO MISSION, COVENANT AND DIALOGUE

- 1947 *The Ten Points of Seelisberg* (International Council of Christians and Jews)
- 1948 *Report on the Christian Approach to the Jews* (World Council of Churches (WCC))
- 1959 Pope John XXIII removes the word ‘perfidious’ from the ‘Good Friday Prayer for the Perfidious Jews’
- 1965 *Nostra Aetate* (Vatican II, published 28 October)
- 1967 *The Church and the Jewish People* (Commission on Faith and Order, WCC)
- 1970 English Catholic missal revises Good Friday Prayer into a prayer that Jews be deepened in the faith given to them by God
- 1975 *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate* (Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews)
- 1979 *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (WCC)
- 1980 *Towards a Renewal of the Relationship of Christians and Jews* (Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, Germany)
- 1982 *Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish–Christian Dialogue* (WCC)
- 1985 *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis* (Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews)
- 1988 *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue* (Anglican Communion)  
*Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion* (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, USA)
- 1996 *Building New Bridges in Hope* (United Methodist Church, USA)  
*Resolution on Jewish Evangelism* (Southern Baptist Convention)
- 1997 *Declaration of Repentance* (The Roman Catholic Bishops of France)

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- 1998 *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews)
- 2000 *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*  
*Universal prayer: confession of sins and asking for forgiveness* (millennium prayer of Pope John Paul II (r. 1978–2005))  
Central Conference of American Rabbis and Rabbinical Assembly Statement
- 2001 *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Pontifical Biblical Commission)  
*Church and Israel: A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews* (Leuvenberg Church Fellowship)
- 2002 *A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People* (Christian Scholars Group on Christian–Jewish Relations)  
*Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land*  
*Reflections on Covenant and Mission* (Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues and Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs)
- 2003 Declaration of Joint Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel with the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews  
*Bearing Faithful Witness: Statement on United Church–Jewish Relations Today*
- 2006 Joint Declaration by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbis of Israel  
*Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of Other Religions* (WCC)
- 2008 *Revision to Tridentine Rite Good Friday Prayer*, Pope Benedict XVI (r. 2005– )
- 2009 *Revision of 10 Points of Seelisberg* (International Council of Christians and Jews)

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## *Acknowledgements*

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My students represent the next generation of the encounter between Jews and Christians: they are the scholars and activists of tomorrow – lay and clerical, religious and secular – upon whose shoulders sit 2000 years of traumatic but vibrant history. May they remember that the past only provides a vote, not a veto on our future!

Since teaching is the greatest source of learning, I dedicate this book to all my students.

Much Torah have I learnt from my teachers, more from my colleagues, but from my students most of all. BT. Ta’anit 7a

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## *Abbreviations*

BT.	Babylonian Talmud
ENA	Elkan Nathan Adler Collection
JT.	Jerusalem Talmud
LXX	Septuagint
M.	Mishnah
Q.	Qur'an
Tos.	Toseftah