Mishnah

The Mishnah is a compilation of Jewish religious and cultural activity in Palestine over four centuries from the 2nd Century B.C.E. to 2nd Century C.E. The object was to preserve, cultivate, and apply the Law of the Torah to the lives of Jews throughout Palestine. Due to the many years of oppression before 70 C.E. and dispersion of the Jews after 70 C.E. at the hands of the Romans, the Jewish way of life was in a very precarious state. When it was compiled near the end of the 2nd Century C.E. by Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, it was given immediate authoritative status. However, while the material included was not questioned, some teachers were not convinced of the lack of value of material that had been excluded. They set about gathering this other material and combined it with Rabbi Judah the Patriarch's Mishnah to create Mishnayoth Gedoloth (Greater or Larger Mishnahs).

The leaders who developed most of the thoughts contained in the Mishnah were known in turn as the Soferim (Scribes) and Tannaim (Repeaters, or teachers of the Oral Law). Before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the Tannaim were a relatively insignificant school of thought in the Pharisaical arena. However, after the destruction, they quickly and naturally became the chief leaders of Jewish life. Their emergence may be loosely compared to that of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus although the latter already held a prominent place in Christianity before the death of Jesus. Despite the differences, such a comparison is helpful when it is considered that the Mishnah is the foundation for Judaism since the 2nd Century C.E., much like the New Testament is the foundation for Christianity since approximately the same time period. It is therefore the collective work of these two groups that serve as the departure point of these two religions.[1]

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[1] The ideas presented here are adapted from the introduction by Herbert Danby, D.D. in: *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933)