

# Mishnah

Contributed by Stephen Langfur

After the destruction of the Temple, the Rabbis began elaborating Jewish law until this covered the minute details of everyday life, with the result that Jews could maintain their identity as Jews even in dispersion and without the Temple.

At Sepphoris in 200 AD the elaborated law was committed to writing: the Mishnah. The word means "instruction handed down by word of mouth." Apparently, problems had arisen with the oral transmission, and it was necessary to provide judges and teachers with a written code. (According to one theory, many teachers had died in the Bar Kokhba Revolt, and a fear arose that the oral law, unless written down, might disappear.) The Mishnah became the basis of further discussion, which was written down in the form of a "Talmud" (from the word for "learning") by the rabbis of Tiberias ca. 400 AD (the "Palestinian" or "Jerusalem" Talmud), and in greater expansion by Babylonian sages ca. 500 AD (the "Babylonian" Talmud). These books of law and lore served to hold the Jewish people together in their Diaspora.