

# Persian Jewry

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# The Bible

- How Jews got to Persia
- 722 B.C.E. the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered
- 586 B.C.E. the Babylonian exile and captivity began
- 539 B.C.E. Cyrus unified Persian and Median kingdoms
- 538 B.C.E. Cyrus permitted Jews to return to Judaea and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem
- Since Biblical times, Persia has been ruled from within and without, with power changing hands through dynasty and conquest

# The Book of Esther as a Guide

- Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel also teach us about Jews in Persia
- Esther is the basis and justification for the Purim celebration
- A Diaspora story that needn't be "true" to be meaningful
- Events in the book are set sometime between 486 – 465 B.C.E.
- Interesting context for the experience of Jews in Persia throughout history – access to power, acquiescence and defiance, distinctiveness within the local population and amongst other Jews

# History

- The fortunes of Persia's Jews have depended on who is in charge
- Interactions with other religious minorities and with the majority
- An extraordinarily well-educated, creative, and successful community that maintained its distinctiveness locally and globally

# Persian Jews Today

- Diaspora after 1948 and 1979
  - Israel
  - Europe
  - United States – notably Los Angeles and New York
- Extant community of a few thousand in Iran
- Judaism as a minority within a minority – Iran is majority Shia Muslim
- Precarious position both of Jews with means and without
- Iran vs. Israel and Jewish vs. Zionist

# First-Hand Accounts

- Let's bring this off of the PowerPoint and hear directly from people who know this topic intimately