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Extension

Who was Maimonides?

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Maimonides was born in Cordoba, Spain. His father, Maimon, was the dayyan (rabbinical judge) of Cordoba and a scholar. He was born on 14 Nisan 4895 (6 April 1135) at 2.20 p.m. The date and time are recorded.

When Cordoba fell to the Almohads in May 1148 the Jews were persecuted and for the next 8 years Maimon and his family wandered through Spain.

During the period, from age 13–21, Maimonides wrote:

- a paper on the Jewish calendar (*Ma'amar ha-Ibbur*)
- a paper on logic (*Millot Higgayon*)
- notes for a commentary on the Babylonian Talmud
- another work that sought to extract the halakhah from the Jerusalem Talmud

He began the *Siraj*, a commentary on the *Mishnah*.

There are Muslim sources which claim that Maimon and his family converted to Islam between 1150 and 1160.

In 1160 Maimon, with sons Moses and David and a daughter settled in Fez, Morocco. Maimonides studied with Rabbi Judah ha-Kohen ibn Susan.

To avoid persecution many Jews had, indeed, converted to Islam. Maimon wrote the *Iggeret ha-Nehamah* 'Letter of Consolation' to assure them that, as long as they continued to pray and do good works, they remained Jews. Maimonides continued his commentary on the *Mishnah* and also studied medicine.

In 1165 Maimonides left Fez after Rabbi Judah ibn Susan was executed rather than disowning his religion. With his family he moved to Acre. They stayed for 5 months with the dayyan, Japheth ben Ali and then toured the Holy Land.

When he visited Jerusalem, Maimonides wrote: 'I entered the [site of the] Great and Holy House and prayed there on Thursday the 6th day of Marheshvan.' (21 October 1165).

The family eventually left Israel and travelled to Egypt. They first stayed at Alexandria and then continued on to Cairo and lived in the old city, Fostat where Maimon died.

David, who traded in precious stones, now supported the family. In 1168 Maimonides completed the *Siraj*. In 1169 David drowned on a business trip and Maimonides had to support the family. However, he refused to make a living from the Torah.

As he had studied medicine earlier, in 1185 he became physician to al-Fadil, the de facto ruler of Egypt. In 1177 he was officially recognised as the head of the community in Fostat.

Maimonides' wife died and he remarried. His second wife was the sister of one of the royal secretaries, Ibn Almalī, who subsequently married Maimonides' sister. Maimonides' son was Abraham and he now devoted himself to his education.

It was at this time that he wrote the *Mishneh Torah* (1180), *Guide for the Perplexed* (1190), the *Iggeret Teiman*, the *Ma'amar Tehiyat ha-Metim* and also a *Treatise on Asthma* in 1190.

Maimonides still wrote many letters, including a large correspondence with Jonathan of Lunel in Provence who was one of his greatest supporters.

Maimonides died on December 13, 1204. A public fast in Fostat to mark his demise ended with the words:

“The glory is gone from Israel,” she said, “for the Ark of God has been captured.” (*I Samuel 4:22*)