



## THE FOUR RABBIS OF PARDES

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## B. AZZAI

## בן עזאי

Also known as Simeon ben Azzai, was a tanna of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. He also was in the inner circle of Joshua ben Hananiah's disciples and remained a pupil until he died. That said, he is especially named as an eminent example of a pupil who is worthy of the right of independent judgment in questions of religious law. Ben Azzai's most prominent characteristics were the extraordinary assiduity with which he pursued his studies ("At the death of Ben Azzai the last industrious man died") as well as his great piety. He was engaged to R. Akiva's daughter, but never married her.

## B. ZOMA

## בן זומא

Also known as Simeon ben Zoma, was a tanna of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. His name is used without the title "Rabbi" probably because he died at a young age, remaining a pupil and never receiving semikhah (Rabbinical ordination). He seems to have belonged to the inner circle of Joshua ben Hananiah's disciples, and a halakhic controversy between them is reported in which Ben Zoma was the victor. He was specially noted as an interpreter of Scriptures, so that it was said, "With Ben Zoma died the last of the darshanim." He is probably most famous for his "Who is wise/strong/rich/honored?" teaching in Avot.

## ELISHA BEN ABUYAH

## אלישע בן אבויה

Born in Jerusalem sometime before 70 CE. After he adopted a worldview considered heretical (Epicurean? Sadducee?) by his fellow Tannaim and betrayed his people, the rabbis of the Talmud refrained from relating teachings in his name and referred to him as Aher (the Other). There are multiple reasons given for his apostasy. (1) He was a student of Greek; as the Talmud expresses it, "Acher's tongue was never tired of singing Greek songs" and while still in the study hall, he is said to have kept forbidden books hidden in his clothes. (2) When Elisha was circumcised as a baby, his father dedicated him to Torah study. But since the father did so with improper intentions, the dedication did not last. (3) Elisha saw a child lose his life while fulfilling two laws for which the observance of the Torah promised a "long life" - honoring one's father and mother, and sending away a mother bird - whereas a man who broke the same law was not hurt in the least. (4) When he was in the womb before birth, his mother would pass by houses of idolatry and inhale the scent; this scent remained in him to affect him "like the venom of a snake". (5) Adverse reaction to mystical speculation (Pardes).

## R. AKIBA B. JOSEPH

## ר' עקיבא בן יוסף

A Tanna of the latter part of the first century and the beginning of the second century. Despite his humble origins and his relatively late start, Rabbi Akiva was a leading contributor to the Mishnah and to Midrash halakha, and considered to be a great master and systematizer of law. He is also associated with various mystical traditions. Akiva is said to have participated in the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132–136, but his role cannot be historically determined. The only established fact concerning Akiva's connection with Bar Kochba is that he regarded Bar Kochba as the promised Messiah. He was martyred on account of his transgression of Hadrian's edicts against the practice and the teaching of Judaism. His death occurred after several years of imprisonment, which places it at about 132, before the suppression of the Bar Kochba revolution.