

# The Evolution of The Old Testament into the Modern Jewish State

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_ancient\\_Israel\\_and\\_Judah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_ancient_Israel_and_Judah)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Palestine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Palestine)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_history)

This article is about the history of the **Old Testament** and its evolution to the **New Testament**. Since the Old Testament is really [Jewish history](#) and culture, we will focus on where they came from and their primary homeland which is Palestine.

Where possible we follow the biblical references of the evolution of the Jewish people and culture. The Old Testament covers from the **Beginning of Time** and the creation of the universe until sometime after **Pentecost** (the day that the holy spirit was poured out on all of humanity for all time). The last book of the Old Testament, **Malachi**, talks exclusively about Judgement Day, which is still yet to come. After this, the New Testament jumps from the birth of Jesus.

Because of the contemporary issues regarding the current Jewish country, Israel, we follow the evolution of Palestine to today. The bible stopped being a spiritual magnification when, according to Jewish tradition, [prophecy ceased during the early Second Temple period](#). The Bible thereafter became an **historical and cultural record of the evolution of Judaism** as well as **Christianity** and **Islam**. Since the majority of this text is taken from **Wikipedia** related articles, we have left the link in many words for further reading and for viewing the many maps and images.

## PERIODS

**BCE - Before the Common Era** (instead of BC) year one backwards

**CE - Common Era** (Instead of AD) year one forwards

To begin with In archaeological terms, the history covered in this article falls within the [Iron Age](#), which is commonly divided into two main phases (noting that precise dates are subject to scholarly debate):

**Bronze Age:** 3300 - 1200 BCE

**Iron Age:** 1200 - 550 BCE

**Iron Age I:** 1200–950 BCE

**Iron Age II:** 950–550 BCE

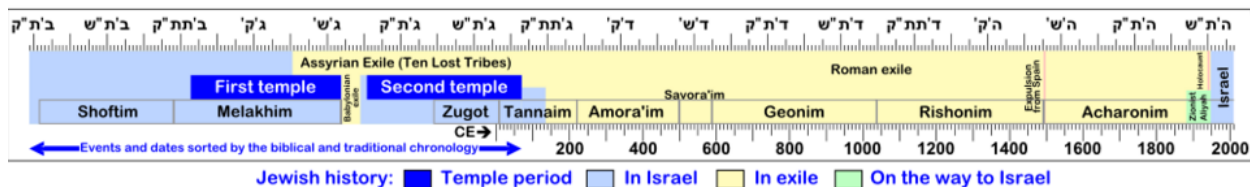
After the Iron Age, history transitions into different eras depending on the region, most commonly [Classical Antiquity](#) (Ancient Greece/Rome) in the Mediterranean, leading to the [Middle Ages](#).

## KEY SUCCESSORS TO THE IRON AGE:

- **Classical Antiquity** (c. 8th Century BCE - 5th Century CE): This era followed the **Iron Age** in many regions, characterized by the rise and fall of great empires like the Persian, Greek, and Roman civilizations, as detailed by [Study.com](#) and [Discover Magazine](#).
- **Hellenistic Period**: In **Southeastern Europe**, the Iron Age transitioned into the **Hellenistic Age** after **Alexander the Great**.
- **Roman Period**: In Western Europe, Roman conquests marked the end of the Iron Age.
- **Middle Ages** (c. 500 AD - 1500 AD): Following **Classical Antiquity in Europe**, this era saw significant cultural and societal changes, eventually leading to the Renaissance.
- **Early Modern Period** (c. 1500–1800), characterized by the **Renaissance, Age of Discovery, Reformation, and Enlightenment**, followed by the
- **Modern era** (c. 1800–present), encompassing the **Industrial Revolution, World Wars**, and the current **Information/Digital Age**.

Another Timeline of the history of the Jews and Judaism is often divided into seven periods:

1. **Ancient Israel and Judah** (c. 1500–586 BCE)
2. **Second Temple period** (c. 516 BCE – 70 CE)
3. **Rabbinic or Talmudic period** (70–640 CE)
4. **Middle Ages** (640–1492)
5. Early Modern period (1492–1750)
6. Modern period (1750–20th century)
7. **Zionism, the Holocaust** and the establishment of **Israel** (19th–21st centuries)



## **Ancient Israel and Judah** (c. 1500–586 BCE)

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES

Modern scholarship generally views **ancient Israel's origins** as emerging primarily from the **indigenous population of Canaan**. According to this view, the early Israelites likely consisted of diverse elements drawn from **Late Bronze Age society**, including **rural villagers, former settled**

peoples, displaced peasants, and pastoralist groups. These were joined by marginal segments of society, such as the ['Apiru](#) and [Shasu](#), who lived on the **fringes of settled areas**. Additional external elements may have included **fugitive or runaway Semitic slaves from Egypt**, who likely constituted at least part of the **emerging Israelite population**.

**Jews** originated from the [Israelites](#) and [Hebrews](#) of historical [Israel and Judah](#), two related kingdoms that emerged in the [Levant](#) during the [Iron Age](#). The earliest mention of [Israelites](#) is inscribed on the [Merneptah Stele](#) c. 1213–1203 BCE; later religious literature tells the story of Israelites going back at least as far as c. 1500 BCE.

[Merneptah Stele](#) c. 1213–1203 BCE;

Traditionally, the name Israel is said to originate with the **Hebrew patriarch [Jacob](#)**, who provides a narrative [etiology](#) for the name – after wrestling with an angel, Jacob is renamed Israel, meaning "**he who struggles with God**".

At the same time, scholars argue that **the Exodus story** may preserve a **kernel of historical truth**, though it has been reshaped over time. **Various Semitic peoples** lived in Egypt at different periods, and **the biblical narrative** could reflect the experiences of a particular group which was **later expanded into a national saga**. The Egyptian origin of **Moses's name**, as well as the presence of other Egyptian names within the [Levite tribe](#), **suggests an authentic Egyptian connection**. Additionally, the story's **references to brickmaking**, the mention of the **city of [Ramesses](#)** (linked to [Ramesses II](#)) and the route taken by the Israelites align with the reality of the Late Bronze Age.

Some scholars propose that **multiple groups left Egypt at different times**, while others suggest the **Exodus traditions** reflect the **memories of refugees** displaced during **Egypt's withdrawal from Canaan**. The **conquest story** under [Joshua](#), particularly regarding [Jericho](#), [et-Tell](#) (identified with the biblical [Ai](#)), and **Gibeon**, is often described as being **contradicted by archaeological evidence**, as **these cities were unoccupied** during the relevant periods, though **Hazor's destruction layer does align with the biblical account**.

While **biblical texts often portray Israel as opponents of the Canaanites**, scholars note that **much of Israel's heritage was deeply Canaanite** in character—culturally, linguistically, and religiously. Some of the **Bible's earliest compositions**, such as the [Song of the Sea](#) and the [Song of Deborah](#), seem to have **Canaanite roots**. The **Hebrew language** is referred to in the [Book of Isaiah](#) as the "**lip of Canaan**," and was **closely related to neighboring dialects** like [Phoenician](#) and [Moabite](#). Alongside **material continuity with Late Bronze Age Canaan** - albeit with some distinctive developments—the **early Israelite religion** also mirrored [typical Canaanite traditions](#).



Other scholars **dispute the idea of a purely Canaanite origin** for the **Israelites**, pointing to distinctive practices that set them apart. These include **the settlement of small, unwalled hill villages**, in **contrast to the larger, walled towns typically found in the plains during the Canaanite period**. The **Israelites** also displayed **unique pottery styles**, characterized by the **absence of painted or imported pottery** in the hills. Additionally, the **Israelites avoided consuming pig meat**, unlike the Canaanites and Philistines, and **their religious practices lacked Canaanite-style temples**, with limited evidence of **organized cultic activity**.

## **IRON AGE I - the 13th (1300 to 1201 BCE) to the 11th (1100 to 1001 BCE) Centuries BCE**

### **HIGHLAND SETTLEMENT AND MATERIAL CULTURE**

**By the 13th–12th centuries BCE, new villages began to appear in the central hill country**, particularly in the region between **Jerusalem and Shechem**, which scholars identify as the **earliest Israelite settlements**. These villages were **typically unwalled**, and **contained only a few hundred inhabitants each**. The sites exhibit continuity with Late Bronze Age culture, including in most pottery forms, while also displaying changes: the usage of collared-rim jars, the **absence of pig bones** (possibly reflecting dietary practices), and the **development of [four-room house architecture](#)**, a **feature unique to Israelite settlements**. Many of these settlements were **established on hilltops**, with economies based on **terraced agriculture** adapted to the slopes.

According to the Bible, **prior to the rise of the Israelite monarchy the early Israelites were led by the [Biblical judges](#)**, or **chieftains** who served as **military leaders in times of crisis**. Scholars are divided over the historicity of this account. However, it is likely that **regional chiefdoms and polities provided security**. The **small villages were unwalled** but were **likely subjects of the major towns in the area**. **Writing was known and available for recording**, even at small sites.

### **EARLY ISRAELITE ORGANIZATION**

**Unlike the city-state model, Israelite society was organized around kinship-based tribes that controlled parcels of land and operated independently**, though **they could unite when faced with external threats**. Early biblical texts, such as the **[Song of Deborah](#)**, indeed depict Israel as a **confederation of loosely allied tribes**. The **tribal structure appears fluid**, with varying lists of tribes and occasional absences—**most notably Judah**, which seems to have maintained a **distinct identity** at this time. A **shared sense of kinship** among the tribes appears to have shaped how they **related to others** and likely served as one **motivating force behind their eventual unification**. In parallel, **clashes with the Philistines may have pushed the tribes to cooperate more closely**, contributing to the **formation of a collective identity** and **ultimately a state**.

The history of the early Jews, and their neighbours, centres on western area (also known as the [Levant](#)) of the [Fertile Crescent](#) and east coast of the [Mediterranean Sea](#). It begins among those people who occupied the area lying between the [Nile](#) and [Mesopotamia](#). Surrounded by ancient seats of culture in [Egypt](#) and [Babylonia](#), by the deserts of [Arabia](#), and by the highlands of [Asia Minor](#), the land of [Canaan](#).

Map Israel Judea 926 BC-fr.svg

## PALESTINE

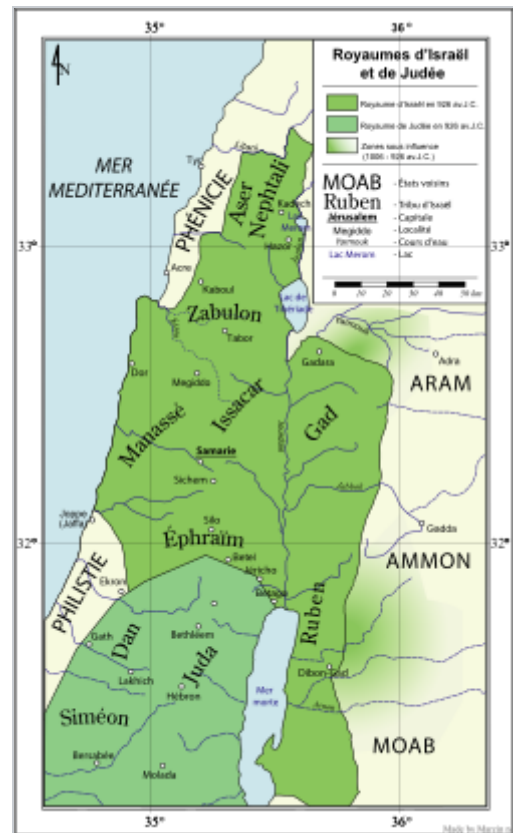
The region of [Palestine](#) is part of the wider region of the [Levant](#), which represents the [land bridge](#) between [Africa](#) and [Eurasia](#). The areas of the Levant traditionally serve as the "crossroads of [Western Asia](#), the [Eastern Mediterranean](#), and [Northeast Africa](#)," and in [tectonic](#) terms are located in the "northwest of the [Arabian Plate](#)." The location and geographical characteristics of the narrow Levant made the area a battleground among the powerful entities that surrounded it.

Palestine itself was among the earliest regions to see human habitation, agricultural communities and [civilization](#). Because of its location, it has historically been seen as a [crossroads](#) for religion, culture, commerce, and politics. In the [Bronze Age](#), the [Canaanites](#) established [city-states](#) influenced by surrounding civilizations, among them Egypt, which ruled the area in the Late Bronze Age.

During the [Iron Age](#), two related [Israelite](#) kingdoms, [Israel](#) and [Judah](#), controlled much of Palestine, while the [Philistines](#) occupied its southern coast.

The history of ancient Israel and Judah spans from the [early appearance](#) of the [Israelites](#) in [Canaan's](#) hill country during the late second millennium BCE (2000 BC to 1001 BC), to the establishment and subsequent downfall of the two Israelite kingdoms in the mid-first millennium BCE. 700 BCE to 300 BCE, the middle portion of the 1st Millennium BCE (1000-1 BCE),

This history unfolds within the [Southern Levant](#) ([Israel](#), [Palestine](#), [Jordan](#); [Lebanon](#), [Syria](#) and the [Sinai Peninsula](#)). during the [Iron Age](#) (1200-550 BCE). The earliest documented mention of "Israel" as a people appears on the [Merneptah Stele](#), an [ancient Egyptian](#) inscription dating back to around 1208 BCE. Archaeological evidence suggests that ancient Israelite culture evolved from the pre-existing [Canaanite civilization](#). During the Iron Age II period, two



Israelite kingdoms emerged, covering much of Canaan: the [Kingdom of Israel](#) in the north and the [Kingdom of Judah](#) in the south.

## LATE BRONZE AGE CANAAN

Ancient Israel emerged during the late second millennium BCE. [Canaan](#), as the region was known in the [Late Bronze Age](#) (c. 1500–1200 BCE), was then a patchwork of [city-states](#) under the imperial domination of the [New Kingdom of Egypt](#). During this period, Canaan was a shadow of what it had been centuries earlier: many cities were abandoned, others shrank in size, and the total settled population was probably not much more than a hundred thousand.

Settlement was concentrated in cities along the coastal plain and along major communication routes; the central and northern hill country which would later become the biblical kingdom of Israel was only sparsely inhabited. The [Amarna letters](#), discovered in Egypt, offer insight into regional politics and mention cities such as [Ashkelon](#), [Hazor](#), [Gezer](#), [Shechem](#), [Jerusalem](#), and [Megiddo](#). Several of these city-states were embroiled in rivalries and territorial disputes, with local rulers like [Abdi-Heba](#) of Jerusalem and [Lab'ayu](#) of Shechem appealing to the pharaoh for assistance against neighboring leaders.

Alongside the city-states, Late Bronze Age texts mention other groups inhabiting the region. The ['Apiru](#) were a marginalized [social class](#) that included migrants, mercenaries, and others living on the fringes of society. As the word 'Apiru is possibly related linguistically to the term ["Hebrew"](#), early scholars equated them with the Israelites, but most now view any connection as indirect: while some early Israelites may have come from Apiru-like backgrounds, the term "Hebrew" later developed into a distinct ethnic identity.

The [Shasu](#), often associated with pastoralist groups east of the [Dead Sea](#), are sometimes linked to early Israel - particularly due to an Egyptian reference that names them alongside a term resembling [Yahweh](#) which some scholars see as a reference to the Israelite deity. Some texts describe these groups as tribal or settled communities, possibly indicating ethnic identities and suggesting that the Egyptians may have grouped diverse populations under a single label.

## LATE BRONZE AGE COLLAPSE

Around 1200 BCE, the entire [Eastern Mediterranean](#) was impacted by the [Late Bronze Age collapse](#), a period of widespread upheaval marked by population movements, invasions, urban destruction, and the fall of major powers, including the [Mycenaean kingdoms](#), the [Hittite Empire](#), and Egypt's [New Kingdom](#). Scholars attribute these disruptions to war, famine, plague, climate change, invasions, or a combination of factors. Canaan was affected too, its large cities were devastated, setting the stage for a new era in the region's history. The process was gradual, and some Canaanite cities survived into Iron Age I.

Around 1140 BCE, Egypt lost control over Canaan, and various groups of [Sea Peoples](#) settled along its coastal regions. Among them were the [Peleset](#), who are widely considered to be the biblical [Philistines](#), settling in the southern coastal plain, west of Judah. Their material culture, genetic evidence, and the biblical narrative all point to an [Aegean](#) or [Cypriot](#) origin. It is in this later part of the Late Bronze Age that a people called Israel are first attested.

## ORIGINS OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

### Biblical account

The territories of the [twelve tribes of Israel](#) according to the [Book of Joshua](#)

The Hebrew Bible chronicles the descent of the Israelites from the Patriarchs. The [Book of Genesis](#) describes how [Abraham](#) (and Sarah), under God's guidance, migrated from the town of Haran in [Mesopotamia](#) (modern day Syria) to Canaan and entered into a [covenant](#) with God, who promised to make his descendants a [chosen people](#) and grant them the land of Canaan as an [eternal inheritance](#).

The narrative continues with the lives of Abrams's (Abraham's) son [Isaac](#) and grandson [Jacob](#), who was renamed Israel after [wrestling with an angel](#). The twelve sons of Israel moved to Egypt during a famine, and their descendants, the [Twelve Tribes of Israel](#), were enslaved by the pharaoh. After generations of bondage, [Moses](#), an Israelite from the [Tribe of Levi](#) and raised in the Egyptian court, led the Israelites out during [The Exodus](#)—their deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

Following a miraculous [crossing of the Red Sea](#), the giving of the Law (The Ten Commandments) at [Mount Sinai](#), and forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses died as the Israelites reached the threshold of Canaan. Under his successor [Joshua](#), the Israelites crossed the [Jordan River](#) and began the conquest of Canaan. The land was allotted among the tribes and distributed to families as inheritance, but in the absence of centralized authority, the tribes were left to confront local populations on their own. During the era of the [Judges](#) (as the Bible calls it), the Israelites existed as a loose tribal confederation in the hill country, without a centralized government, but with judges. The [Book of Judges](#) is thought to reflect early Israelite tribal society.



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### KINGDOMS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH IN 926 BCE

A stamped bulla ([LMLK seal](#)) of [Hezekiah](#), "Of Hezekiah (son of) Ahaz King of Judah", [Israel Museum](#)

Two Israelite kingdoms emerged during Iron Age II: [Israel and Judah](#). The Bible portrays **Israel and Judah as the successors of an earlier [United Kingdom of Israel](#)**, although **its historicity is disputed**. Historians and archaeologists agree that the northern [Kingdom of Israel](#) existed from c. 900 BC and that the [Kingdom of Judah](#) existed from ca. 700 BCE.



The [Tel Dan Stele](#), discovered in 1993, shows that the kingdom, at least in some form, existed by the middle of the **9th century BCE**, but it does not indicate the extent of its power.

Biblical tradition tells that the Israelite monarchy was established in 1037 BCE under [Saul](#), who was anointed by the prophet [Samuel](#), and continued under [David](#) and his son, [Solomon](#). David greatly expanded the kingdom's borders and [conquered Jerusalem](#) from the [Jebusites](#), turning it into **the national, political and religious capital of the kingdom**. [Solomon](#), his son, later built the [First Temple on Mount Moriah](#) in [Jerusalem](#). Upon his death, traditionally dated to **c. 930 BCE**, a **civil war erupted** between the **ten northern Israelite tribes**, and the tribes of [Judah](#) ([Simeon](#) was absorbed into Judah) and [Benjamin](#) in the south. The kingdom then split into the Kingdom of Israel in the north, and the Kingdom of Judah in the south.

The [Kingdom of Israel](#) was the **more prosperous of the two kingdoms** and soon developed into a regional power. During the days of the [Omride dynasty](#), it controlled [Samaria](#), [Galilee](#), the upper [Jordan Valley](#), the [Sharon](#) and large parts of the [Transjordan](#). [Samaria](#), the capital, was home to one of the largest Iron Age palaces in the [Levant](#). The kingdom of Israel was **destroyed c. 720 BCE**, when it was conquered by the [Neo-Assyrian Empire](#).

The [Kingdom of Judah](#), with its capital in [Jerusalem](#), controlled the [Judean Mountains](#), the [Shephelah](#), the [Judean Desert](#) and parts of the [Negev](#).

The [Kingdom of Israel](#) based in [Samaria](#) fell to the [Neo-Assyrian Empire](#) c. **720 BCE**, and the [Kingdom of Judah](#) to the [Neo-Babylonian Empire](#) in **586 BCE**. Part of the **Judean population was exiled** to [Babylon](#). The [Assyrian](#) and [Babylonian captivities](#) are regarded as representing the start of the [Jewish diaspora](#).

**After the [Achaemenid Empire](#) conquered the region**, the exiled Jews were [allowed to return and rebuild the temple](#); these events mark the beginning of the [Second Temple period](#). After several centuries of foreign rule, the [Maccabean Revolt](#) against the [Seleucid Empire](#) led to an [independent Hasmonean kingdom](#), but it was gradually incorporated into the [Roman](#) imperial system.

The [Jewish–Roman wars](#), a series of unsuccessful revolts against the Romans in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, resulted in the [destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple](#), and the expulsion of many Jews. The Jewish population in [Syria Palaestina](#) gradually decreased during the following centuries, enhancing the role of the Jewish diaspora and shifting the spiritual and demographic centre from the depopulated [Judea](#) to [Galilee](#) and then to [Babylon](#), with smaller communities spread out across the [Roman Empire](#).

During the same period, the [Mishnah](#) and the [Talmud](#), central Jewish texts, were composed. In the following millennia, the diaspora communities [coalesced](#) into three major [ethnic subdivisions](#) according to where their ancestors settled: the [Ashkenazim](#) in [Central](#) and [Eastern](#)

[Europe](#), the [Sephardim](#) initially in [Iberia](#), and the [Mizrahim](#) in the [Middle East](#) and [North Africa](#).

The [early Muslim conquests](#) ended [Byzantine](#) control over the [Eastern Mediterranean](#), with the newly established [Rashidun Caliphate](#) taking over the [Levant](#), [Mesopotamia](#), and North Africa during the 7th century, and the [Iberian Peninsula](#) during the 8th century. [Jewish culture enjoyed a golden age in Spain](#), with Jews becoming widely accepted in society and their religious, cultural, and economic life blossomed before the arrival of the intolerant [Almohades](#).

In 1492 the [Jews were forced to leave Spain](#) and migrated in great numbers to the [Ottoman Empire](#) and [Italy](#). Between the 12th and 15th centuries, **Ashkenazi Jews** experienced extreme persecution in Central Europe, which prompted their mass migration to [Poland](#). The 18th century saw the rise of the [Haskalah](#) intellectual movement. Also starting in the 18th century, Jews began to campaign for [Jewish emancipation](#) from restrictive laws and integration into the wider European society.

In the 19th century, when Jews in [Western Europe](#) were increasingly granted equality before the law, Jews in the [Pale of Settlement](#) faced growing persecution, legal restrictions and widespread [pogroms](#). During the 1870s and 1880s, the Jewish population in Europe began to more actively discuss emigration to [Ottoman Syria](#) with the aim of re-establishing a Jewish polity in [Palestine](#).

The [Zionist movement](#) was officially founded in 1897. The pogroms also triggered a mass exodus of more than two million Jews to the **United States** between 1881 and 1924. The Jews of Europe and the **United States** gained success in the fields of science, culture and the economy. Among those generally considered the most famous were [Albert Einstein](#) and [Ludwig Wittgenstein](#). Many [Nobel Prize](#) winners at this time were Jewish, as is still the case.

In 1933, with the rise to power of [Adolf Hitler](#) and the [Nazi Party](#) in [Germany](#), the situation for Jews became severe. Economic crises, racial [antisemitic laws](#), and a fear of an upcoming war led many to flee from Europe to [Mandatory Palestine](#), to the United States and to the [Soviet Union](#). In 1939, [World War II](#) began and until 1941 Germany [occupied almost all of Europe](#).

In 1941, following the [invasion](#) of the Soviet Union, the [Final Solution](#) began, an extensive organized operation on an unprecedented scale, aimed at the annihilation of the Jewish people, and resulting in the persecution and murder of Jews in Europe and **North Africa**. In **Poland**, three million were murdered in [gas chambers](#) in all concentration camps combined, with one million at the [Auschwitz](#) camp complex alone. This [genocide](#), in which approximately six million Jews were methodically exterminated, is known as [the Holocaust](#).

Before and during the Holocaust, enormous numbers of Jews immigrated to **Mandatory Palestine**. On May 14, 1948, upon the termination of the **British Mandate**, [David Ben-Gurion](#) declared the creation of the [State of Israel](#), a [Jewish and democratic state](#) in [Eretz Israel](#) (Land of Israel). Immediately afterwards, all neighbouring Arab states invaded, yet the newly formed

**IDF** resisted. In 1949, the war ended and Israel started building the state and absorbing massive waves of [Aliyah](#) from all over Europe and [Middle Eastern countries](#). As of 2022, Israel is a [parliamentary democracy](#) with a population of 9.6 million people, of whom 7 million are [Jewish](#). The largest Jewish community outside Israel is the [United States](#), while large communities also exist in **France, Canada, Argentina, Russia, United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany**.

## OVERVIEW

See also: [Modern Jewish historiography](#)

Ancient Jewish history is known from the [Bible](#), extra-biblical sources, [apocrypha](#) and [pseudepigrapha](#), the writings of [Josephus](#), [Greco-Roman](#) authors and [Church Fathers](#), as well as archaeological finds, inscriptions, ancient documents (such as the [Papyri from Elephantine](#) and the [Fayyum](#), the [Dead Sea scrolls](#), the [Bar Kokhba letters](#), the [Babatha Archives](#) and the [Cairo Genizah](#) documents) supplemented by [oral history](#) and the collection of commentaries in the [Midrash](#) and [Talmud](#).

With the advent of the [printing press](#) in the [early modern period](#), Jewish histories and [early editions of the Hebrew Bible](#) were published which dealt with the history of the Jewish religion, and increasingly, [national histories](#) of the Jews, [Jewish peoplehood](#) and [identity](#). This was a move from a [manuscript or scribal culture](#) to a [printing culture](#). Jewish historians wrote accounts of their collective experiences, but also increasingly used history for political, cultural, and scientific or philosophical exploration. Writers drew upon a corpus of culturally inherited text in seeking to construct a logical narrative to critique or advance the state of the art.

Modern Jewish historiography intertwines with intellectual movements such as the European [Renaissance](#) and the [Age of Enlightenment](#) but drew upon earlier works in the [Late Middle Ages](#) and into diverse sources in antiquity.

After the fall of Israel, Judah became a [client state](#) of the **Neo-Assyrian Empire**. In the 7th century BCE, the kingdom's population increased greatly, prospering under [Assyrian vassalage](#), despite [Hezekiah's revolt](#) against the Assyrian king [Sennacherib](#)

Large parts of the Hebrew Bible were written during this period. This includes the earliest portions of [Hosea](#), [Isaiah](#), [Amos](#), and [Micah](#), along with [Nahum](#), [Zephaniah](#), most of [Deuteronomy](#), the first edition of Deuteronomistic [history](#) (the books of [Joshua](#), [Judges](#), [Samuel](#), [Kings](#)), and [Habakkuk](#).

With the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 605 BCE, a power struggle emerged between [Egypt](#) and the [Neo-Babylonian Empire](#) for control of the [Levant](#), leading to Judah's rapid decline. In 601 BCE, King [Jehoiakim](#) of Judah, who had recently submitted to Babylon, rebelled against the empire. He was soon succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin, who continued his father's policy and faced a Babylonian invasion. In March 597 BCE, Jehoiachin surrendered to the

Babylonians and was taken captive to Babylon. This defeat is documented in the [Babylonian Chronicles](#). [Zedekiah](#), Jehoiachin's uncle, was then installed as king by the Babylonians.

In 587 or 586 BCE, [Nebuchadnezzar II](#), responding to a second revolt in Judah, [besieged and destroyed Jerusalem](#). The [First Temple](#) was razed, and its sacred vessels were seized as spoils. The destruction was followed by a mass exile: the surviving inhabitants of the city, including other segments of the population, were carried off to Mesopotamia, marking the onset of the era known in Jewish history as the "[Babylonian Captivity](#)". Zedekiah himself was captured, blinded, and transported to Babylon. Others [fled to Egypt](#). The people of Judah lost their statehood, and, for those in exile, their homeland. Following the dissolution of the monarchy, the former kingdom was annexed as a province of the Babylonian Empire.

### [BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY](#) (c. 587–538 BCE)

Main article: [Babylonian captivity](#)

Deportation and exile of the ancient [Judeans](#) to [Babylon](#) and the destruction of Jerusalem and [Solomon's temple](#)

During the several decades between the fall of Judah and their [return to Zion](#) under Persian rule, Jewish history enters an obscure phase. Many Jews were exiled across [Babylonia](#), [Flam](#), and [Egypt](#), while others remained in [Judea](#). [Jeremiah](#) refers to communities in Egypt, including settlements in [Migdol](#), [Tahpanhes](#), [Noph](#), and [Pathros](#). Moreover, a Jewish military colony existed at [Elephantine](#), established before the exile, where they built their own shrine. Deuteronomy was expanded and earlier scriptures were edited during the exilic period. The first edition of [Jeremiah](#), the [Book of Ezekiel](#), the majority of [Obadiah](#), and what is referred to in research as "[Second Isaiah](#)" were all written during this time period as well.



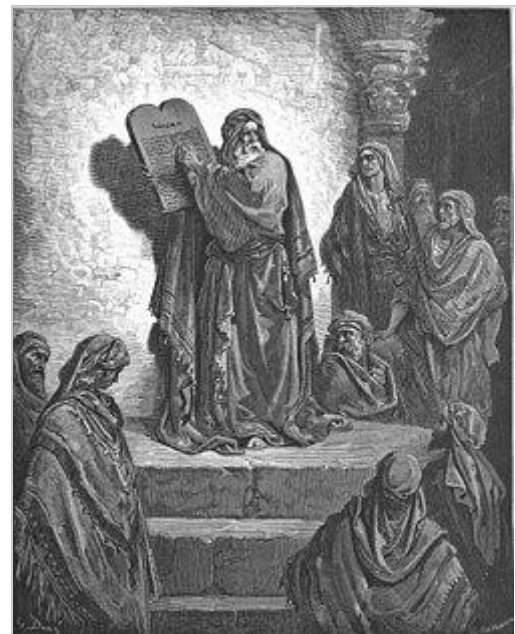
### [SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD](#) (538 BCE – 70 CE)

Main articles: [Second Temple period](#) and [Second Temple Judaism](#)

### [PERSIAN PERIOD](#) (C. 538–332 BCE)

Main articles: [Return to Zion](#) and [Yehud \(Persian province\)](#)

[Ezra](#) Reads the **Law to the People**, Gustav Dore



According to the **Book of Ezra**, Persian [Cyrus the Great](#), king of the [Achaemenid Empire](#), brought an end to the [Babylonian exile](#) in 538 BCE, a year after his conquest of **Babylon**. The return from exile was led by [Zerubbabel](#), a prince from the royal line of **David**, and **Joshua** the Priest, descended from former **High Priests of the Temple**. They oversaw the construction of the [Second Temple](#), completed between 521 and 516 BCE. As part of the [Persian Empire](#), the former Kingdom of Judah became the province of Judah ([Yehud Medinata](#)) with different borders, covering a smaller territory. Contemporary scholars point to a gradual return process that extended into the late 6th and early 5th centuries BCE. The population of Persian Judah was greatly reduced from that of the kingdom, archaeological surveys showing a population of around 30,000 during the 5th—4th centuries BCE.

The final Torah is widely seen as a product of the [Persian period](#) (539–333 BCE, probably 450–350 BCE). This consensus echoes a traditional Jewish view which gives [Ezra](#), the leader of the Jewish community on its return from Babylon, a pivotal role in its promulgation.<sup>[67]</sup>

Three prophets, considered the last in Jewish tradition, were active during this period: [Haggai](#), [Zechariah](#), and [Malachi](#). After the death of the last Jewish prophet and while still under Persian rule, the leadership of the [Jewish people](#) passed into the hands of five successive generations of [Zugot](#) (pairs) of leaders. They flourished first [under the Persians](#) and then under the Greeks. As a result, the [Pharisees](#) and [Sadducees](#) were formed. Under the Persians then under the Greeks, Jewish coins were minted in Judea as [Yehud coinage](#)

## HELLENISTIC PERIOD (c. 332–110 BCE)

Main article: [Hellenistic Judaism](#)

[Alexander the Great](#), clad as a [Byzantine emperor](#), receives a delegation of Jewish [rabbis](#). Miniature from the 14th-century Alexander Romance



In 332 BCE, [Alexander the Great](#) of [Macedon](#) defeated the Persians. After Alexander's death and the division of his empire among his generals, the [Seleucid Kingdom](#) was formed.

The Alexandrian conquests spread Greek culture to the Levant. During this time, currents of Judaism were influenced by [Hellenistic philosophy](#) developed from the 3rd century BCE, notably the [Jewish diaspora](#) in [Alexandria](#), culminating in the compilation of the [Septuagint](#). An important advocate of the symbiosis of Jewish theology and Hellenistic thought is [Philo](#).

## HASMONEAN DYNASTY (110–63 BCE)

Main article: [Hasmonean dynasty](#)

**JUDAEA, Hasmoneans. John Hyrcanus I (Yehohanan). 135–104 BCE. Æ Prutah (13mm, 2.02 gm, 12h). "Yehohanan the High Priest and the Council of the Jews" (in Hebrew) in five lines within the wreath / Double cornucopiae adorned with ribbons; pomegranate between horns; small A to lower left. Meshorer Group B, 11; Hendin 457.**



Triggered by anti-Jewish decrees from Seleucid king [Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#) and tensions between Hellenized and conservative Jews, the [Maccabean Revolt](#) erupted in Judea in 167 BCE under the leadership of [Mattathias](#). His son, [Judas Maccabeus](#), recaptured Jerusalem in 164 BCE, purifying the Second Temple and reinstating sacrificial worship. The successful revolt eventually led to the formation of an independent Jewish state under the [Hasmonean dynasty](#), which lasted from 165 to 63 BCE.

Initially governing as both political leaders and High Priests, the [Hasmoneans](#) later assumed the title of kings. They employed military campaigns and diplomacy to consolidate power.<sup>[69]</sup> Under the rule of [Alexander Jannaeus](#) and [Salome Alexandra](#), the kingdom reached its zenith in size and influence. However, internal strife erupted between Salome Alexandra's sons, [Hyrcanus II](#) and [Aristobulus II](#), leading to civil war and appeals to Roman authorities for intervention. Responding to these appeals, Pompey led a Roman campaign of conquest and annexation, which marked the end of Hasmonean sovereignty and ushered in Roman rule over Judea.

## ROMAN PERIOD (63 BCE – 135 CE)

Main articles: [Herodian dynasty](#), [History of the Jews in the Roman Empire](#), [Roman Palestine](#), [Judaea \(Roman province\)](#), and [Jewish–Roman wars](#)

Reconstruction of the [Second Temple](#), following renovations by [Herod](#) in the 1st century CE



Judea had been an independent Jewish kingdom under the Hasmoneans, but it was [conquered and reorganized as a client state by the Roman general Pompey in 63 BCE](#). [Roman expansion](#) was going on in other areas as well, and it would continue for more than a hundred and fifty years. Later, [Herod the Great](#) was appointed "King of the Jews" by the [Roman Senate](#), supplanting the Hasmonean dynasty. Some of his offspring held various positions after him, known as the [Herodian dynasty](#). Briefly, from 4 BCE to 6 CE, [Herod Archelaus](#) ruled the [tetrarchy of Judea](#) as [ethnarch](#), the Romans denying him the title of King.

After the [Census of Quirinius](#) in 6 CE, the [Roman province of Judaea](#) was formed as a satellite of [Roman Syria](#) under the rule of a [prefect](#) (as was [Roman Egypt](#)) until 41 CE, then [procurators](#) after 44 CE. The empire was often callous and brutal in its treatment of its Jewish subjects, (see [Anti-Judaism in the pre-Christian Roman Empire](#)). In 30 CE (or 33 CE), [Jesus of Nazareth](#), an itinerant [rabbi](#) from [Galilee](#), and the central figure of [Christianity](#), was put to death by [crucifixion](#) in Jerusalem under the Roman prefect of [Judaea](#), [Pontius Pilate](#):

### [Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans](#) (1850 painting by [David Roberts](#))

For a short time Judea was reunited and semi-independent under [Agrippa the Great](#) who had good relations with both the Roman aristocracy and local Jewish citizens. After his death Judea was again annexed by Rome and his less popular son [Herod Agrippa II](#) was made ethnarch.



Roman oppressive rule, combined with economic, religious, and ethnic tensions, eventually led to the outbreak of the [First Jewish–Roman War](#), also known as the **Great Revolt, in 66 CE**. Future emperor [Vespasian](#) quelled the rebellion in [Galilee](#) by 67 CE, capturing key strongholds. He was succeeded by his son [Titus](#), who led the brutal [siege of Jerusalem](#), culminating in the city's fall in 70 CE. The Romans burned Jerusalem and destroyed the **Second Temple**. The Roman victory was celebrated with a [triumph](#) in Rome, showcasing Jewish artefacts like the [menorah](#), which were then put on display in the new [Temple of Peace](#). The **Flavian dynasty** leveraged this victory for political gain, erecting monuments in Rome and minting [Judaea Capta coins](#). The war concluded with the [siege of Masada](#) (73–74 CE). The Jewish population suffered widespread devastation, with displacement, enslavement, and Roman confiscation of Jewish-owned land.

The destruction of the **Second Temple** marked a cataclysmic event in Jewish history, triggering far-reaching transformations within Judaism. With the central role of sacrificial worship obliterated, religious practices shifted towards [prayer](#), [Torah study](#), and communal gatherings in [synagogues](#). According to Rabbinic tradition, Yohanan ben Zakkai secured permission from the Romans to establish a center for Torah study in [Yavneh](#), which then served as a focal point for Jewish religious and cultural life for a generation. Judaism also underwent a significant shift away from its sectarian divisions.<sup>1</sup> The [Sadducees](#) and [Essenes](#), two prominent sects in the late Second Temple period, faded into obscurity, while the traditions of the [Pharisees](#), including their halakhic interpretations, the centrality of the [Oral Torah](#), and [belief in resurrection](#) became the foundation of [Rabbinic Judaism](#).

## DIASPORA DURING THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

Main article: [Jewish diaspora](#)

The sack of Jerusalem depicted on the inside wall of the [Arch of Titus](#) in [Rome](#)



The [Jewish diaspora](#) existed well before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and had been ongoing for centuries, with the dispersal driven by both forced expulsions and voluntary migrations. In Mesopotamia, a testimony to the beginnings of the Jewish community can be found in [Joachim's ration tablets](#), listing provisions allotted to the exiled Judean king and his family by [Nebuchadnezzar II](#), and further evidence are the [Al-Yahudu tablets](#), dated to the 6th-5th centuries BCE and related to the exiles from Judea arriving after the destruction of the [First Temple](#), though there is ample evidence for the presence of Jews in Babylonia even from 626 BCE.

In Egypt, the [documents from Elephantine](#) reveal the trials of a community founded by a Persian Jewish garrison at two fortresses on the frontier during the 5th-4th centuries BCE, and according to [Josephus](#) the Jewish community in Alexandria existed since the founding of the city in the 4th century BCE by [Alexander the Great](#). By 200 BCE, there were well established Jewish communities both in Egypt and Mesopotamia ("[Babylonia](#)" in Jewish sources) and in the two centuries that followed, Jewish populations were also present in [Asia Minor](#), [Greece](#), [Macedonia](#), [Cyrene](#), and, beginning in the middle of the 1st century BCE, in the city of [Rome](#)

In the first centuries CE, as a result of the [Jewish–Roman wars](#), a large number of Jews were taken as captives, sold into slavery, or compelled to flee from the regions affected by the wars, contributing to the formation and expansion of Jewish communities across the [Roman Empire](#) as well as in Arabia and Mesopotamia. Jewish communities across Cyrenaica, Cyprus, and Egypt were almost entirely obliterated due to the harsh Roman response to the **Diaspora Revolt**.

The [New Testament Book of Acts](#), as well as other [Pauline](#) texts, make frequent reference to the large populations of [Hellenized Jews](#) in the cities of the Roman world. These Hellenized Jews were affected by the diaspora only in its spiritual sense, absorbing the feeling of loss and homelessness that became a cornerstone of the Jewish creed, much supported by persecutions in various parts of the world. Of critical importance to the reshaping of Jewish tradition from the Temple-based religion to the rabbinic traditions of the Diaspora, was the development of the interpretations of the Torah found in the [Mishnah](#) and [Talmud](#).

## TALMUDIC PERIOD (70–640 CE)

Main article: [Rabbinic period](#)

## DIASPORA REVOLT (115–117 CE)

Main article: [Diaspora Revolt](#)

During the [Diaspora Revolt](#) (115–117 CE), [Jewish diaspora](#) communities across several eastern provinces of the [Roman Empire](#) engaged in widespread rebellion.<sup>[97]</sup> Driven by messianic fervor and hopes for the [ingathering of exiles](#) and the [reconstruction of the Temple](#), these communities may have sought to spark a broader movement possibly aimed at returning to [Judea](#) and rebuilding Jerusalem. Ancient sources describe the revolt as extremely brutal, with cases of cannibalism and mutilation, though modern scholars often consider these accounts to be exaggerated. The Roman suppression of the revolt was marked by severe measures, including [ethnic cleansing](#), leading to the near-total destruction of Jewish diaspora communities in [Libya](#), [Cyprus](#) and [Egypt](#), including the significant and influential community in [Alexandria](#).

## BAR KOKHBA REVOLT (132–136 CE)

Main article: [Bar Kokhba revolt](#)

A tetradrachm minted during the [Bar Kokhba revolt](#), featuring the former **Second Temple**, a **lulav**, and the slogan 'to the freedom of Jerusalem'



From 132 to 136 CE, **Judaea** was the center of the [Bar Kokhba revolt](#), triggered by **Hadrian's** decision to establish the **pagan colony** of [Aelia Capitolina](#) on the ruins of **Jerusalem**. Early successes led to the establishment of a short-lived **Jewish state** in Judea under the leadership of [Simon Bar Kokhba](#), styled as **nasi** or prince of Israel. The [rebel state's coinage](#) proclaimed "Freedom of Israel" and "For the Freedom of Jerusalem", using [ancient Hebrew script](#) for nationalistic symbolism. However, the Romans soon amassed six legions and additional auxiliaries under [Julius Severus](#), who then brutally crushed the uprising. Historical accounts report the destruction of fifty major strongholds and 985 villages, resulting in 580,000 Jewish deaths and widespread famine and disease.

Archaeological research confirms the widespread destruction and depopulation of the Jewish heartland in [Judea](#) proper, where most of the Jewish population was either killed, sold into slavery, expelled, or forced to flee. **The Romans** also suffered heavy losses. Post-revolt, Jews were prohibited from entering **Jerusalem**, and **Hadrian** issued religious edicts, including a ban on circumcision, later repealed by [Antoninus Pius](#). The province of Judaea was renamed [Syria Palaestina](#) as a punitive act against the Jews, aimed at placating non-Jewish residents and erasing Jewish historical ties to the land. **Christians** refused to participate in the revolt and from this point the Jews regarded Christianity as a separate religion. The Jewish defeat marked the termination of efforts to reestablish a Jewish state until the modern era.

A rabbi of this period, [Simeon bar Yochai](#), is regarded as the author of the [Zohar](#), the foundational text for **Kabbalistic** thought. However, modern scholars believe it was written in **Medieval Spain**.

## LATE ROMAN PERIOD IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

The relations of the Jews with the Roman Empire in the region continued to be complicated. [Constantine I](#) allowed Jews to mourn their defeat and humiliation once a year on [Tisha B'Av](#) at the [Western Wall](#). In 351–352 CE, the Jews of Galilee launched [yet another revolt](#), provoking heavy retribution. The Gallus revolt came during the rising influence of early Christians in the Eastern Roman Empire, under the [Constantinian dynasty](#). In 355, however, the relations with the Roman rulers improved, upon the rise of Emperor [Julian](#), the last of the Constantinian dynasty, who unlike his predecessors defied Christianity. In 363, not long before Julian left Antioch to launch his campaign against **Sasanian Persia**, in keeping with his effort to foster religions other than Christianity, he ordered the Jewish Temple rebuilt.

The failure to rebuild the Temple has mostly been ascribed to the dramatic [Galilee earthquake of 363](#) and traditionally also to the Jews' ambivalence about the project. Sabotage is a possibility, as is an accidental fire. Divine intervention was the common view among Christian historians of the time. Julian's support of Jews caused Jews to call him "**Julian the Hellene**". Julian's fatal wound in the Persian campaign and his consequent death had put an end to Jewish aspirations, and Julian's successors embraced Christianity through the entire timeline of **Byzantine** rule of Jerusalem, preventing any Jewish claims.

In 438 CE, when the **Empress** [Eudocia](#) removed the ban on Jews' praying at the [Temple site](#), the heads of the Community in **Galilee** issued a call "to the great and mighty people of the Jews" which began: "Know that the end of the exile of our people has come!" However, the Christian population of the city, who saw this as a threat to their primacy, did not allow it and a riot erupted after which they chased away the Jews from the city.

During the 5th and the 6th centuries, a series of [Samaritan insurrections](#) broke out across the [Palaestina Prima](#) province. Especially violent were the third and the fourth revolts, which resulted in almost the entire annihilation of the Samaritan community. It is likely that the [Samaritan Revolt of 556](#) was joined by the Jewish community, which had also suffered a brutal suppression of Israelite religion.

In the belief of restoration to come, in the early 7th century the Jews made an [alliance](#) with the [Persians](#), who invaded **Palaestina Prima** in 614, fought at their side, overwhelmed the [Byzantine](#) garrison in Jerusalem, and were given Jerusalem to be governed as an autonomy. However, their autonomy was brief: the [Jewish leader](#) in Jerusalem was shortly assassinated during a Christian revolt and though Jerusalem was reconquered by Persians and Jews within 3 weeks, it fell into anarchy. With the consequent withdrawal of Persian forces, Jews surrendered

to **Byzantines** in 625 or 628 CE, but were massacred by Christian radicals in 629 CE, with the survivors fleeing to **Egypt**. The Byzantine (Eastern Roman Empire) control of the region was finally lost to the **Muslim Arab** armies in 637 CE, when [Umar ibn al-Khattab](#) completed the conquest of **Akko**.

## **JEWS OF PRE-MUSLIM BABYLONIA (219–638 CE)**

Main article: [History of the Jews in Iraq](#)

After the fall of Jerusalem, **Babylonia** would become the focus of Judaism for more than a thousand years. The first Jewish communities in Babylonia started with the exile of the **Tribe of Judah** to Babylon by [Jehoiachin](#) in 597 BCE as well as after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE. Many more Jews migrated to Babylon in 135 CE after the [Bar Kokhba revolt](#) and in the centuries after. Babylonia, where some of the largest and most prominent Jewish cities and communities were established, became the centre of Jewish life up to the 13th century.

By the 1st century, Babylonia already held a speedily growing population of an estimated 1,000,000 Jews, which increased to an estimated 2 million between the years 200 CE and 500 CE, both by natural growth and by immigration of more Jews from Judea, making up about 1/6 of the world Jewish population at that era. It was there that they would write the **Babylonian Talmud** in the languages used by the Jews of ancient Babylonia: [Hebrew](#) and [Aramaic](#).

The Jews established [Talmudic Academies in Babylonia](#), also known as the Geonic Academies (from "Geonim", meaning "splendour" in Biblical Hebrew or "geniuses"), which became the centre for Jewish scholarship and the development of Jewish law in Babylonia from roughly 500 CE to 1038 CE. The two most famous academies were the [Pumbedita Academy](#) and the [Sura Academy](#). Major yeshivot were also located at [Nehardea](#) and Mahuza.

The **Talmudic Yeshiva Academies** became a main part of Jewish culture and education, and Jews continued establishing Yeshiva Academies in **Western and Eastern Europe, North Africa**, and in later centuries, in America and other countries around the world where Jews lived in the **Diaspora**. Talmudic study in Yeshiva academies, most of them located in The **United States** and **Israel**, continues today.

These **Talmudic Yeshiva** academies of **Babylonia** followed the era of the [Amoraim](#) (expounders)—the sages of the Talmud who were active (both in Judah and in Babylon) during the end of the era of the sealing of the [Mishnah](#) and until the times of the sealing of the Talmud (220–500 CE), and following the [Savoraim](#) (reasoners)—the sages of **beth midrash** (Torah study places) in Babylon from the end of the era of the Amoraim (5th century) and until the beginning of the era of the [Geonim](#).

The **Geonim** were the presidents of the two great **rabbinical colleges** of **Sura** and **Pumbedita**, and were the generally accepted spiritual leaders of the worldwide Jewish community in the early medieval era, in contrast to the [Resh Galuta](#) (Exilarch) who wielded secular authority over the Jews in Islamic lands. According to traditions, the [Resh Galuta](#) were descendants of Judean kings, which is why the kings of [Parthia](#) would treat them with much honour.

For the **Jews of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages**, the **yeshivot of Babylonia** served much the same function as the ancient [Sanhedrin](#)—that is, as a council of Jewish religious authorities. The academies were founded in pre-Islamic Babylonia under the **Zoroastrian Sassanid dynasty** and were located not far from the Sassanid capital of **Ctesiphon**, which at that time was the largest city in the world. After the conquest of Persia in the 7th century, the academies subsequently operated for four hundred years under the Islamic caliphate. The first gaon of Sura, according to [Sherira Gaon](#), was **Mar bar Rab Chanan**, who assumed office in 609. The last gaon of [Sura](#) was [Samuel ben Hofni](#), who died in 1034; the last gaon of Pumbedita was [Hezekiah Gaon](#), who was tortured to death in 1040; hence the activity of the Geonim covers a period of nearly 450 years.

One of the principal seats of Babylonian Judaism was [Nehardea](#), which was then a very large city made up mostly of Jews. A very ancient synagogue, built, it was believed, by **King Jehoiachin**, existed in Nehardea. At **Huzal**, near Nehardea, there was another synagogue, not far from which could be seen the ruins of **Ezra's academy**. In the period before **Hadrian**, **Akiba**, on his arrival at Nehardea on a mission from the Sanhedrin, entered into a discussion with a resident scholar on a point of **matrimonial law (Mishnah Yeb., end)**. At the same time there was at Nisibis (northern [Mesopotamia](#)), an excellent Jewish college, at the head of which stood [Judah ben Bathyra](#), and in which many Judean scholars found refuge at the time of the persecutions. A certain temporary importance was also attained by a school at [Nehar-Pekod](#), founded by the Judean immigrant Hananiah, nephew of [Joshua ben Hananiah](#), which school might have been the cause of a schism between the Jews of Babylonia and those of Judea-Israel, had not the Judean authorities promptly checked Hananiah's ambition.

## **BYZANTINE PERIOD (324–638 CE)**

Main article: [History of the Jews in the Byzantine Empire](#)

Jews were also widespread throughout the **Roman Empire**, and this carried on to a lesser extent in the period of **Byzantine** rule in the **central and eastern Mediterranean**. The militant and exclusive Christianity and [caesaropapism](#) of the [Byzantine Empire](#) did not treat Jews well, and the condition and influence of **diaspora Jews** in the Empire declined dramatically.

It was official Christian policy to **convert Jews to Christianity**, and the Christian leadership used the official power of Rome in their attempts. In 351 CE the Jews revolted against the added pressures of their governor, [Constantius Gallus](#). Gallus put down the revolt and destroyed the

major cities in the **Galilee** area where the revolt had started. **Tzippori** and **Lydda** (site of two of the major legal academies) never recovered.

In this period, the **Nasi in Tiberias**, [Hillel II](#), created an **official calendar**, which needed no monthly sightings of the moon. The months were set, and the calendar needed no further authority from Judea. At about the same time, the Jewish academy at Tiberias began to collate the combined **Mishnah**, [braitot](#), explanations, and interpretations developed by generations of scholars who studied after the death of [Judah HaNasi](#). The text was organized according to the order of the Mishnah: each paragraph of Mishnah was followed by a compilation of all of the interpretations, stories, and responses associated with that Mishnah. This text is called the [Jerusalem Talmud](#).

The Jews of Judea received a brief respite from official persecution during the rule of the Emperor [Julian the Apostate](#). Julian's policy was to return the **Roman Empire to Hellenism**, and he encouraged the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem. As Julian's rule lasted only from 361 to 363, the Jews could not rebuild sufficiently before **Roman Christian rule** was restored over the Empire.

Beginning in 398 with the consecration of [St. John Chrysostom](#) as [Patriarch](#), **Christian rhetoric against Jews grew sharper**; he preached sermons with titles such as "**Against the Jews**" and "**On the Statues, Homily 17**", in which John preaches against "**the Jewish sickness**." Such heated language contributed to a climate of **Christian distrust and hate** toward the large **Jewish settlements**, such as those in [Antioch](#) and [Constantinople](#).

In the beginning of the **5th century**, the [Emperor Theodosius](#) issued a set of **decrees establishing official persecution of Jews**. Jews were **not allowed to own slaves, build new synagogues, hold public office or try cases between a Jew and a non-Jew**. Intermarriage between **Jew and non-Jew** was made a **capital offence**, as was the **conversion of Christians to Judaism**. Theodosius **did away with** the [Sanhedrin](#) and abolished the post of [Nasi](#).

Under the [Emperor Justinian](#), the authorities further **restricted the civil rights of Jews**, and **threatened their religious privileges**. The emperor **interfered in the internal affairs** of the **synagogue**, and **forbade**, for instance, **the use of the Hebrew language in divine worship**. Those who **disobeyed** the restrictions were threatened with **corporal penalties, exile, and loss of property**. The Jews at **Borium**, not far from **Syrtis Major**, who **resisted** the Byzantine general [Belisarius](#) in his campaign against the [Vandals](#), were forced to embrace Christianity, and their **synagogue was converted to a church**.

**Justinian** and his **successors** had **concerns outside the province** of Judea, and he had **insufficient troops** to enforce these **regulations**. As a result, **the 5th century was a period** when a wave of **new synagogues were built**, many with beautiful mosaic floors. **Jews adopted the rich art forms of the Byzantine culture**. Jewish **mosaics** of the period portray **people, animals, menorahs, zodiacs, and Biblical characters**. Excellent **examples of these synagogue floors** have been found at Beit **Alpha** (which includes the scene of Abraham sacrificing a ram instead of his son Isaac along with a zodiac), **Tiberius, Beit Shean, and Tzippori**.

The precarious existence of Jews under Byzantine rule did not long endure, largely due to the explosion of the Muslim religion out of the remote Arabian peninsula (where large populations of Jews resided, see [History of the Jews under Muslim Rule](#) for more). The [Muslim Caliphate](#) ejected the Byzantines from the Holy Land (or the Levant, defined as modern Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) within a few years of their victory at the [Battle of Yarmouk](#) in 636. Numerous Jews fled the remaining Byzantine territories in favour of residence in the Caliphate over the subsequent centuries.

The size of the Jewish community in the Byzantine Empire was not affected by attempts by some emperors to forcibly convert the Jews of Anatolia to Christianity, as these attempts met with very little success. Historians continue to research the status of the Jews in Asia Minor under Byzantine rule. (for a sample of views, see, for instance, J. Starr *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire, 641–1204*; S. Bowman, *The Jews of Byzantium*; R. Jenkins *Byzantium*; Averil Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews: Recent Work on Early Byzantium", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996)). No systematic persecution of the type endemic at that time in Western Europe (pogroms, the stake, mass [expulsions](#), etc.) has been recorded in Byzantium. Much of the Jewish population of Constantinople remained in place after the conquest of the city by [Mehmet II](#)



**Mosaic of Menorah with Lulav and Ethrog**, 6th century [Brooklyn Museum](#); Mosaic pavement of a synagogue at [Beit Alpha](#) (5th century); Mosaic in the [Tzippori Synagogue](#) (5th century); Mosaic pavement recovered from the [Hamat Gader](#) synagogue (5th or 6th century)

## DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

Arrival of the Jewish pilgrims at **Cochin**, 68 CE

**Cochin Jewish tradition** holds that the roots of their community go back to the arrival of Jews at [Shingly](#) in 72 CE, after the [Destruction of the Second Temple](#). It also states that a **Jewish kingdom**, understood to mean the granting of autonomy by a local king, **Cheraman Perumal**, to the community, under their leader **Joseph Rabban**, in 379 CE. The **first synagogue** there was built in 1568. The legend of the founding of Indian [Christianity in Kerala](#) by [Thomas the Apostle](#) relates that on his arrival there, he encountered a local girl who understood Hebrew.

Perhaps in the **4th century**, the [Kingdom of Semien](#), a Jewish nation in modern [Ethiopia](#) was established, lasting until the **17th century**.

## MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC PERIOD (638–1099)

Main article: [History of the Jews under Muslim rule](#)

[Cairo Geniza](#) fragment, [Cambridge University Library](#)



In **638 CE** the **Byzantine Empire** lost control of the **Levant**. The Arab [Islamic Empire](#) under [Caliph Umar](#) conquered Jerusalem and the lands of [Mesopotamia](#), [Syria](#), **Palestine** and **Egypt**. As a **political system**, Islam created **radically new conditions** for Jewish economic, social, and intellectual development. **Umar permitted the Jews to reestablish their presence in Jerusalem—after a lapse of 500 years.** Jewish tradition regards Umar as a benevolent ruler and the **Midrash (Nistarot de-Rav Shimon bar Yoḥai)** refers to him as a "friend of Israel."

According to the Arab geographer [al-Maqdisi](#), the Jews worked as "the assayers of coins, the dyers, the tanners and the bankers in the community."<sup>1</sup> During the [Fatimid](#) period, many Jewish officials served in the regime. Professor [Moshe Gil](#) believes that at the time of the Arab conquest in the **7th century**, the **majority of the population was Christian and Jewish.**

During this time **Jews lived in thriving communities** all across ancient **Babylonia**. In the **Geonic period (650–1250 CE)**, the **Babylonian Yeshiva Academies** were the chief centres of Jewish learning; the [Geonim](#) (meaning either "Splendor" or "Geniuses"), who were the **heads of these schools**, were recognized as the **highest authorities in Jewish law.**

In the 7th century, the new Muslim rulers instituted the [kharaj](#) land tax, which led to **mass migration of Babylonian Jews** from the countryside to cities like [Baghdad](#). This in turn led to **greater wealth and international influence**, as well as a more cosmopolitan outlook from Jewish thinkers such as [Saadiah Gaon](#), who now deeply engaged with Western philosophy for the first time. When the [Abbasid Caliphate](#) and the city of **Baghdad declined** in the **10th century**, many **Babylonian Jews migrated to the Mediterranean region**, contributing to the spread of **Babylonian Jewish customs** throughout the Jewish world.

## GOLDEN AGE OF JEWISH CULTURE IN SPAIN (711–1031)

Main article: [Golden age of Jewish culture in Spain](#)

The golden age of Jewish culture in Spain coincided with the [Middle Ages](#) in Europe, a period of [Muslim rule](#) throughout much of the [Iberian Peninsula](#). During that time, **Jews were generally accepted in society** and Jewish religious, cultural, and economic life blossomed.

**A period of tolerance** thus dawned for the Jews of the [Iberian Peninsula](#), whose number was considerably augmented by **immigration from Africa in the wake of the Muslim conquest**. Especially after 912, during the reign of [Abd-ar-Rahman III](#) and his son, [al-Hakam II](#), the **Jews prospered**, devoting themselves to the service of the [Caliphate of Córdoba](#), to the **study of the sciences**, and to **commerce and industry**, especially to **trading in silk and slaves**, in this way **promoting the prosperity of the country**.

**Jewish economic expansion was unparalleled**. In [Toledo](#), Jews were involved in **translating Arabic texts** to the [Romance languages](#), as well as translating **Greek and Hebrew texts** into **Arabic**. Jews also contributed to botany, geography, medicine, mathematics, poetry and philosophy. According to [Bernard Lewis](#):

Generally, the **Jewish people were allowed to practice their religion and live according to the laws and scriptures of their community**. Furthermore, the **restrictions** to which they were subject **were social and symbolic** rather than tangible and practical in character. That is to say, these **regulations served to define the relationship** between the two communities, and **not to oppress the Jewish population**.

'Abd al-Rahman's court physician and minister was **Hasdai ben Isaac ibn Shaprut**, the patron of **Menahem ben Saruq**, **Dunash ben Labrat**, and other Jewish scholars and poets. Jewish thought during this period **flourished under famous figures such as** Samuel Ha-Nagid, Moses ibn Ezra, Solomon ibn Gabirol [Judah Halevi](#) and [Moses Maimonides](#). During 'Abd al-Rahman's term of power, the scholar [Moses ben Enoch](#) was appointed **rabbi of Córdoba**, and as a consequence [al-Andalus](#) became the centre of **Talmudic study**, and [Córdoba](#) the meeting-place of Jewish savants.

**The Golden Age ended** with the **invasion** of al-Andalus by the [Almohads](#), a **conservative dynasty** originating in **North Africa**, who were **highly intolerant of religious minorities**.

## JEWES AND THE CRUSADES (1099–1260)

Main article: [History of the Jews and the Crusades](#)

See also: [Siege of Jerusalem \(1099\)](#)

[Capture of Jerusalem](#), 1099

**Sermonical messages to avenge the death of Jesus** encouraged **Christians to participate in the Crusades**. The **12th-century Jewish** narration from **R. Solomon ben Samson** records that crusaders en route to the Holy Land decided that **before combating the Ishmaelites** they would **massacre the Jews residing in their midst to avenge the crucifixion of Christ**. The massacres began at [Rouen](#) and Jewish communities in the [Rhine Valley](#) were seriously affected.

Crusading attacks were made upon Jews in the territory around **Heidelberg**. A **huge loss of Jewish life** took place. **Many were forcibly converted to Christianity** and many committed suicide to avoid baptism. A major driving factor behind the choice to commit suicide was the Jewish realisation that upon being slain their children could be taken to be raised as Christians. The Jews were living in the middle of Christian lands and felt this danger acutely. This massacre is seen as the first in a sequence of antisemitic events which culminated in the Holocaust, Jewish populations felt that they had been abandoned by their Christian neighbours and rulers during the massacres and lost faith in all promises and charters.



Many Jews chose self-defence. But their means of self-defence were limited and their casualties only increased. Most of the forced conversions proved ineffective. Many Jews reverted to their original faith later. The pope protested this but Emperor Henry IV agreed to permit these reversions. The massacres began a new epoch for Jewry in Christendom. The Jews had preserved their faith from social pressure, now they had to preserve it at sword point. The massacres during the crusades strengthened Jewry from within spiritually. The Jewish perspective was that their struggle was Israel's struggle to hallow the name of God.

In 1099, Jews helped the Arabs to defend Jerusalem against the [Crusaders](#). When the city fell, the Crusaders gathered many Jews in a synagogue and set it on fire. In Haifa, the Jews almost single-handedly defended the town against the Crusaders, holding out for a month, (June–July 1099). At this time there were Jewish communities scattered all over the country, including Jerusalem, Tiberias, Ramleh, Ashkelon, Caesarea, and [Gaza](#). As Jews were not allowed to hold land during the Crusader period, they worked at trades and commerce in the coastal towns

during times of quiescence. Most were artisans: glassblowers in [Sidon](#), furriers and dyers in Jerusalem.

During this period, the [Masoretes](#) of [Tiberias](#) established the [niqqud](#), a system of [diacritics](#) used to represent vowels or distinguish between alternative pronunciations of letters of the [Hebrew alphabet](#). Numerous [piyutim](#) and [midrashim](#) were recorded in [Palestine](#) at this time.

[Maimonides](#) wrote that in 1165 he visited [Jerusalem](#) and went to the [Temple Mount](#), where he prayed in the "great, holy house." Maimonides established a yearly holiday for himself and his sons, the 6th of [Cheshvan](#), commemorating the day he went up to pray on the Temple Mount, and another, the 9th of Cheshvan, commemorating the day he merited to pray at the [Cave of the Patriarchs](#) in [Hebron](#).

In 1141 [Yehuda Halevi](#) issued a call to **Jews to emigrate to Palestine** and took on the long journey himself. After a stormy passage from [Córdoba](#), he arrived in Egyptian [Alexandria](#), where he was enthusiastically greeted by friends and admirers. At [Damietta](#), he had to struggle against his heart, and the pleadings of his friend [Halfon ha-Levi](#), that he remain in [Egypt](#), where he would be free from intolerant oppression. He started on the rough route overland. He was met along the way by Jews in [Tyre](#) and [Damascus](#). Jewish legend relates that as he came near [Jerusalem](#), overpowered by the sight of the Holy City, he sang his most beautiful elegy, the celebrated "[Zionide](#)" ([Zion ha-lo Tish'ali](#)). At that instant, an Arab had galloped out of a gate and rode him down; **he was killed in the accident**.

## MAMLUK PERIOD (1260–1517)

[Nahmanides](#) is recorded as settling in the [Old City of Jerusalem](#) in 1267. He moved to [Acre](#), where he was active in **spreading Jewish learning**, which was at that time neglected in the [Holy Land](#). He gathered a circle of pupils around him, and people came in crowds, even from the district of the [Euphrates](#), to hear him. [Karaites](#) were said to have attended his lectures, among them [Aaron ben Joseph the Elder](#). He later became one of the greatest [Karaites](#) authorities.

Shortly after [Nahmanides'](#) arrival in Jerusalem, he addressed a letter to his son [Nahman](#), in which he described the **desolation of the Holy City**. At the time, it had only two Jewish inhabitants—two brothers, dyers by trade. In a later letter from [Acre](#), Nahmanides counsels his son to cultivate humility, which he considers to be the first of virtues. In another, addressed to his second son, who occupied an official position at the [Castilian](#) court, Nahmanides recommends the recitation of the daily prayers and warns above all against immorality. Nahmanides died after reaching seventy-six, and his remains were interred at [Haifa](#), by the grave of [Yechezkel of Paris](#).

Yechezkel had [emigrated](#) to Acre in 1260, along with his son and a large group of followers. There he established the **Talmudic academy Midrash haGadol d'Paris**. He is believed to have died

there between 1265 and 1268. In 1488 [Obadiah ben Abraham](#), commentator on the [Mishnah](#), arrived in Jerusalem; this marked a new period of return for the Jewish community in the land.

## SPAIN, NORTH AFRICA, and the MIDDLE EAST

Main article: [History of the Jews in Spain](#)

See also: [Islam and Judaism](#), [Mizrahi Jew](#), and [History of the Jews under Muslim rule](#)

### Sephardic Hebrew Bible from Spain, 1300

During the **Middle Ages**, Jews were generally **better treated by Islamic rulers than Christian ones**. Despite second-class citizenship, **Jews played prominent roles in Muslim courts**, and experienced a **Golden Age in Moorish Spain** about 900–1100, though **the situation deteriorated after that time**. **Riots resulting in the deaths of Jews** did however occur in **North Africa** through the centuries and especially in [Morocco](#), [Libya](#) and [Algeria](#), where eventually **Jews were forced to live in ghettos**.



During the **11th century**, **Muslims in Spain conducted pogroms against the Jews**; those occurred in **Cordoba in 1011** and in [Granada in 1066](#). During the **Middle Ages**, the governments of **Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Yemen** enacted **decrees ordering the destruction of synagogues**. At certain times, **Jews were forced to convert to Islam** or face death in some parts of Yemen, Morocco and [Baghdad](#). The [Almohads](#), who had taken control of much of **Islamic Iberia** by 1172, surpassed the [Almoravides](#) in fundamentalist outlook. They treated the [dhimmis](#) harshly. They **expelled both Jews and Christians from Morocco and Islamic Spain**. Faced with the choice of **death or conversion**, many **Jews emigrated**. Some, such as the family of [Maimonides](#), fled south and east to **more tolerant Muslim lands**, while others went **northward** to settle in the growing **Christian kingdoms**.

## EUROPE

Main article: [History of European Jews in the Middle Ages](#)

11th century [mishnah](#) codex from Italy, [Biblioteca Palatina, Parma](#)



According to [James P. Carroll](#), "Jews accounted for 10% of the total population of the Roman Empire. By that ratio, if other factors had not intervened, there would be 200 million Jews in the world today, instead of something like 13 million."

**Jewish populations have existed in Europe**, especially in the area of the **former Roman Empire**, from very **early times**. As **Jewish males** had **emigrated**, some sometimes **took wives from local populations**, as is shown by the various [MtDNA](#), compared to [Y-DNA](#) among Jewish populations. These groups were **joined by traders** and later on by **members of the diaspora**. **Records of Jewish communities in France** (see [History of the Jews in France](#)) and **Germany** (see [History of the Jews in Germany](#)) date from the **4th century**, and **substantial Jewish communities in Spain** were noted even earlier.

The historian [Norman Cantor](#) and other **20th-century scholars** dispute the tradition that the **Middle Ages** was a **uniformly difficult time for Jews**. Before the **Church became fully organized as an institution with an increasing array of rules**, **early medieval society was tolerant**. Between **800 and 1100**, an estimated **1.5 million Jews lived in Christian Europe**. As they were **not Christians**, they were **not included as a [division](#) of the feudal system of clergy, knights and serfs**.

This means that **they did not have to satisfy the oppressive demands for labour and military conscription that Christian commoners suffered**. In relations with the **Christian society**, the **Jews were protected by kings, princes and bishops**, because of the **crucial services they provided in three areas: finance, administration and medicine**. The **lack of political strengths did leave Jews vulnerable to exploitation through extreme taxation**.

**Christian scholars** interested in the **Bible** consulted with **Talmudic rabbis**. As the **Roman Catholic Church** strengthened as an **institution**, the **Franciscan and Dominican preaching orders** were founded, and there was a **rise of competitive middle-class, town-dwelling Christians**. By **1300**, the **friars and local priests** staged the **Passion Plays** during **Holy Week**, which **depicted Jews** (in contemporary dress) **killing Christ**, according to Gospel accounts. **From this period, persecution of Jews and deportations became endemic**. Around **1500**, **Jews found relative security and a renewal of prosperity** in present-day [Poland](#)

**After 1300**, **Jews suffered more discrimination and persecution in Christian Europe**. Europe's **Jewry** was mainly **urban and literate**. The **Christians** were inclined to **regard Jews as obstinate deniers of the truth** because in their view the **Jews were expected to know of the truth of the Christian doctrines from their knowledge of the Jewish scriptures**. **Jews were aware of the pressure to accept Christianity**.

**As Catholics were forbidden by the church to loan money for interest**, some **Jews became prominent moneylenders**, became rich and were persecuted for it.

**Christian rulers gradually saw the advantage** of having such a **class of people who could supply capital for their use without being liable to excommunication**. As a result, the **money trade of**

western Europe became a speciality of the Jews. But, in almost every instance when Jews acquired large amounts through banking transactions, during their lives or upon their deaths, the king would take it over. Jews became imperial "[servi cameræ](#)", the property of the King, who might present them and their possessions to princes or cities.

Jews were frequently massacred and exiled from various European countries. The persecution hit its first peak during the [Crusades](#). In the [People's Crusade](#) (1096) flourishing Jewish communities on the Rhine and the Danube were utterly destroyed. In the [Second Crusade](#) (1147) the Jews in France were subject to frequent massacres. They were also subjected to attacks by the [Shepherds' Crusades of 1251](#) and [1320](#). The Crusades were followed by massive expulsions, including the [expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290](#), in 1396 100,000 Jews were expelled from France; and in 1421, thousands were expelled from Austria. Over this time many Jews in Europe, either fleeing or being expelled, migrated to Poland, where they prospered into another [Golden Age](#).

In Italy, Jews were allowed to live in Venice but were required to live in a [ghetto](#), and the practice spread across Italy (see [Cum nimis absurdum](#)) and was adopted in many places in Catholic Europe. Jews outside the Ghetto often had to wear a yellow star.

#### EXPULSIONS OF THE JEWS OF SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

Further information: [Expulsion of Jews from Spain](#) and [Persecution of Jews and Muslims by Manuel I of Portugal](#)



At the Feet of the Saviour, massacre of Jews in [Toledo](#), oil on canvas by [Vicente Cutanda](#) (1887); Slaughter of Jews in Barcelona in 1391 by [Josep Segrelles](#), c. 1910; Expulsion of the Jews in 1497, in a 1917 watercolour by [Alfredo Roque Gameiro](#); Burning of Crypto-Jews in Lisbon, Portugal

Significant repression of Spain's numerous communities occurred during the 14th century, notably a [major pogrom in 1391](#) which resulted in the majority of Spain's 300,000 Jews converting to Catholicism. With the [conquest of the Muslim Kingdom of Granada](#) in 1492, the Catholic monarchs issued the [Alhambra Decree](#), and Spain's remaining 100,000 Jews were forced to choose between conversion and exile.

The expulsion of the Jews of Spain, is regarded by Jews as the worst catastrophe between the destruction of Jerusalem in 73 CE and the [Holocaust](#) of the 1940s.

As a result, an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 Jews left Spain, the remainder joining Spain's already numerous [Converso](#) community. Perhaps a quarter of a million Conversos thus were gradually absorbed by the dominant Catholic culture, although those among them who secretly practised Judaism were subject to 40 years of intense repression by the [Spanish Inquisition](#). This was particularly the case up until 1530, after which the trials of Conversos by the Inquisition dropped to 3% of the total. Similar expulsions of Sephardic Jews occurred 1493 in [Sicily](#) (37,000 Jews) and Portugal in 1496. The expelled Spanish Jews fled mainly to the Ottoman Empire and North Africa and Portugal. A small number also settled in Holland and England.

The expulsion followed a long process of expulsions and bans from what are now England, France, Germany, Austria, and Holland. In January 1492, the [last Muslim state](#) was defeated in Spain and six months later the Jews of Spain (the largest community in the world) were required to [convert or leave without their property](#). 100,000 converted with many continuing to [secretly practice Judaism](#), for which the Catholic church's inquisition (led by [Tomás de Torquemada](#)) now mandated a sentence of death by public burning. 175,000 left Spain.

Many [Spanish Jews](#) moved to North Africa, [Poland](#) and the Ottoman Empire, especially [Thessaloniki](#) (now in Greece) which became the world's largest Jewish city. Some groups headed to the Middle East and Palestine, within the domains of the Ottoman Empire. About 100,000 Spanish Jews were allowed into Portugal, however five years later, their children were seized and they were given the choice of conversion or departing without them.

## EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Historians who study modern Jewry have identified four different paths by which European Jews were "modernized" and thus integrated into the mainstream of European society. A common approach has been to view the process through the lens of the European [Enlightenment](#) as Jews faced the promise and the challenges posed by political emancipation. Scholars that use this approach have focused on two social types as paradigms for the decline of Jewish tradition and as agents of the sea changes in Jewish culture that led to the collapse of the [ghetto](#).

The first of these two social types is the [Court Jew](#) who is portrayed as a forerunner of the modern Jew, having achieved integration with and participation in the proto-capitalist economy and court society of central European states such as the [Habsburg Empire](#). In contrast to the cosmopolitan Court Jew, the second social type presented by historians of modern Jewry is the maskil, (learned person), a proponent of the [Haskalah](#) (Enlightenment).

This narrative sees the maskil's pursuit of secular scholarship and his rationalistic critiques of rabbinic tradition as laying a durable intellectual foundation for the secularization of Jewish society and culture. The established paradigm has been one in which Ashkenazic Jews entered modernity through a self-conscious process of westernization led by "highly atypical, Germanized Jewish intellectuals". Haskalah gave birth to the Reform and Conservative movements and planted the seeds of [Zionism](#) while at the same time encouraging cultural assimilation into the countries in which Jews resided. At around the same time that Haskalah was developing, [Hasidic Judaism](#) was spreading as a movement that preached a world view nearly opposed to Haskalah.

In the 1990s, the concept of the "[Port Jew](#)" was suggested as an "alternate path to modernity" that was distinct from the European [Haskalah](#). In contrast to the focus on Ashkenazic Germanized Jews, the concept of the [Port Jew](#) focused on the Sephardi conversos who fled the Inquisition and resettled in European port towns on the coast of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the Eastern seaboard of the United States.

## COURT JEWS

[Court Jews](#) were Jewish bankers or businessmen who lent money and handled the finances of some of the Christian European noble houses. Corresponding historical terms are Jewish bailiff and [shtadlan](#).

Examples of what would be later called court Jews emerged when local rulers used services of Jewish bankers for short-term loans. They lent money to nobles and in the process gained social influence. Noble patrons of court Jews employed them as financiers, suppliers, diplomats and [trade delegates](#). Court Jews could use their family connections, and connections between each other, to provision their sponsors with, among other things, food, arms, ammunition and precious metals.

In return for their services, court Jews gained social privileges, including up to noble status for themselves, and could live outside the Jewish ghettos. Some nobles wanted to keep their bankers in their own courts. And because they were under noble protection, they were exempted from rabbinical jurisdiction.

From medieval times, court Jews could amass personal fortunes and gained political and social influence. Sometimes they were also prominent people in the local Jewish community and could use their influence to protect and influence their brethren. Sometimes they were the only Jews who could interact with the local high society and present petitions of the Jews to the ruler. However, the court Jew had social connections and influence in the Christian world mainly through his Christian patrons. Due to the precarious position of Jews, some nobles could just ignore their debts. If the sponsoring noble died, his Jewish financier could face exile or execution.

## PORT JEWS

The [Port Jew](#) is a descriptive term for **Jews who were involved in the seafaring and maritime economy of Europe**, especially during the **17th and 18th centuries**. Helen Fry suggests that they can be considered "**the earliest modern Jews**". According to Fry, **Port Jews** frequently arrived as "**refugees from the Inquisition**" and the **expulsion of Jews from Iberia**. They were **allowed to settle in port cities because merchants granted them permission to trade in ports such as Amsterdam, London, Trieste and Hamburg**. Fry notes that their **connections to the Jewish Diaspora** and their **expertise in maritime trade** made them particularly **valuable to the mercantilist governments of Europe**. Lois Dubin describes Port Jews as Jewish merchants who were "**valued for their engagement in the international maritime trade upon which such cities thrived.**" Sorkin and others have characterized the **socio-cultural profile of these men** as marked by a **flexibility towards religion** and a "**reluctant cosmopolitanism that was alien to both traditional and 'enlightened' Jewish identities.**"

From the **16th to the 18th century**, **Jewish merchants dominated the chocolate and vanilla trade**, exporting to **Jewish centres** across Europe, mainly **Amsterdam, Bayonne, Bordeaux, Hamburg and Livorno**.

## OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Main article: [History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire](#)

During the **Classical Ottoman period (1300–1600)**, the **Jews, together with most other communities** of the empire, **enjoyed** a certain level of **prosperity**. Compared with other Ottoman subjects, **they were the predominant power in commerce and trade** as well in **diplomacy** and **other high offices**. In the **16th century especially**, the Jews were the **most prominent** under the **millet**'s, the **apogee of Jewish influence** could arguably be the appointment of [Joseph Nasi](#) to [Sanjak-bey](#) (governor, a rank usually only held by Muslims) of the island of [Naxos](#)

At the time of the [Battle of Yarmuk](#) when the **Levant** passed under **Muslim Rule**, **thirty Jewish communities** existed in **Haifa, Sh'chem, Hebron, Ramleh, Gaza, Jerusalem**, and many in the **north**. **Safed** became a spiritual centre for the Jews and the [Shulchan Aruch](#) was **compiled there** as well as many **Kabbalistic texts**. The **first Hebrew printing press**, and the first printing in **Western Asia** began in **1577**.

**Jews lived in the geographic area of Asia Minor** (modern **Turkey**, but more geographically either **Anatolia** or **Asia Minor**) for more than **2,400 years**. **Initial prosperity in Hellenistic times** had faded under **Christian Byzantine rule**, but **recovered somewhat under the rule of the various Muslim governments that displaced and succeeded rule from Constantinople**. For **much of the Ottoman period**, **Turkey was a safe haven** for Jews fleeing persecution, and it **continues to have a small Jewish population today**. The **situation where Jews both enjoyed**

cultural and economical prosperity at times but were widely persecuted at other times was summarised by G. E. Von Grunebaum:

“It would **not be difficult** to put together **the names of a very sizable number of Jewish subjects** or citizens of the **Islamic area** who have **attained to high rank, to power, to great financial influence, to significant and recognized intellectual attainment**; and the same could be **done for Christians**. But it would **again not be difficult to compile a lengthy list of persecutions, arbitrary confiscations, attempted forced conversions, or pogroms.**”

## **RUSSIA, POLAND, AND EASTERN EUROPE**

Further information: [History of the Jews in Poland](#), [History of the Jews in Russia](#), [History of the Jews in Ukraine](#), [History of the Jews in Lithuania](#), and [History of the Jews in Romania](#)

In the **17th century**, there were **many significant Jewish populations in Western and Central Europe**. The **relatively tolerant Poland** had the **largest Jewish population** in Europe that dated back to the **13th century**, and **enjoyed relative prosperity and freedom for nearly four hundred years**. However, **the calm situation ended** when **Polish and Lithuanian Jews of the [Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth](#)** were **slaughtered in the hundreds of thousands** by **Ukrainian Cossacks** during the [Khmelnytsky Uprising](#) (1648) and by the [Swedish wars](#) (1655).

Driven by these and other persecutions, some Jews moved back to Western Europe in the **17th century**, notably to [Amsterdam](#). The **last ban on Jewish residency in a European nation was revoked in 1654**, but **periodic expulsions from individual cities still occurred**, and Jews were **often restricted from land ownership**, or forced to live in [ghettos](#). With the [Partitions of Poland](#) in the **late 18th century**, the **Polish-Jewish population was split** between the [Russian Empire](#), [Austria-Hungary](#), and German [Prussia](#), which **divided Poland among themselves**.

## **EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT AND HASKALAH (18TH CENTURY)**

[Moses Mendelssohn](#) in an imaginary portrait by the Jewish artist [Moritz Daniel Oppenheim](#) (1856), [Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life](#)

During the period of the [European Renaissance](#) and **Enlightenment**, significant **changes occurred within the Jewish community**. The [Haskalah](#) movement paralleled the wider **Enlightenment**, as **Jews in the 18th century began to campaign for emancipation from restrictive laws and integration into the wider European society**. **Secular and scientific education was added to the traditional religious instruction** received by students, and **interest in a national Jewish identity, including a revival in the study of Jewish history and Hebrew, started to grow**. Among the **prominent Haskalah intellectuals** were [Moses Mendelssohn](#), [Naphtali Hirz Wessely](#), [Isaac Satanow](#) and [Isaac Euchel](#).

Haskalah gave birth to the [Reform](#) and [Conservative](#) movements in Judaism and planted the seeds of [Zionism](#) while at the same time encouraging cultural assimilation into the countries in which Jews resided.

At around the same time another movement was born, one preaching almost the opposite of Haskalah, [Hasidic Judaism](#). Hasidic Judaism began in the 18th century by [Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov](#), and quickly gained a following with its more exuberant, mystical approach to religion. These two movements, and the traditional orthodox approach to Judaism from which they spring, formed the basis for the modern divisions within Jewish observance.

At the same time, the outside world was changing, and debates began over the potential emancipation of the Jews (granting them equal rights). The first country to do so was France, during the [French Revolution](#) in 1789. Even so, Jews were expected to assimilate, not continue their traditions. This ambivalence is demonstrated in the famous speech of [Clermont-Tonnerre](#) before the [National Assembly](#) in 1789:

**We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. We must withdraw recognition from their judges; they should only have our judges. We must refuse legal protection to the maintenance of the so-called laws of their Judaic organization; they should not be allowed to form in the state either a political body or an order. They must be citizens individually. But, some will say to me, they do not want to be citizens. Well then! If they do not want to be citizens, they should say so, and then, we should banish them. It is repugnant to have in the state an association of non-citizens, and a nation within the nation...**

## HASIDIC JUDAISM

See also: [Mitnagdim](#)

Hasidic Jews praying in the synagogue on [Yom Kippur](#), by [Maurycy Gottlieb](#)

[Hasidic Judaism](#) is a branch of [Orthodox Judaism](#) that promotes spirituality and joy through the popularisation and internalization of [Jewish mysticism](#) as the fundamental aspects of the [Jewish faith](#). Hasidism comprises part of contemporary [Ultra-Orthodox](#) Judaism, alongside the previous Talmudic [Lithuanian-Yeshiva](#) approach and the Oriental [Sephardi](#) tradition. It was founded in 18th-century Eastern Europe by Rabbi Israel [Baal Shem Tov](#) as a reaction against overly [legalistic](#) Judaism. Opposite to this, Hasidic teachings cherished the sincerity and concealed holiness of the unlettered common folk, and their equality with the scholarly elite. The emphasis on the [Immanent](#) Divine presence in everything gave new value to prayer and



deeds of kindness, alongside Rabbinic supremacy of [study](#), and replaced historical [mystical \(kabbalistic\)](#) and [ethical \(musar\) asceticism](#) and [admonishment](#) with optimism, encouragement, and daily [fervour](#). This **populist emotional revival** accompanied the **elite ideal of nullification** to paradoxical Divine [Panentheism](#), through **intellectual articulation of inner dimensions of mystical thought**. The **adjustment of Jewish values** sought to **add to required standards of ritual observance**, while **relaxing others** where **inspiration predominated**. Its **communal gatherings** celebrate **soulful song and storytelling** as forms of mystical devotion.

## 19TH CENTURY

An 1806 French print depicts [Napoleon Bonaparte](#) emancipating the Jews.

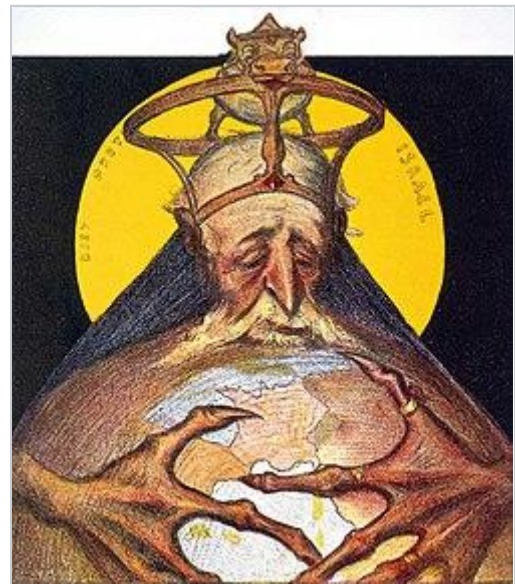
Though **persecution still existed**, [Jewish emancipation](#) spread throughout Europe in the 19th century. [Napoleon](#) invited Jews to **leave the Jewish ghettos in Europe** and seek refuge in the newly created **tolerant political regimes** that offered **equality under Napoleonic Law** (see [Napoleon and the Jews](#)). Gradually **all European nations established** in constitutions the principle of **equality under the law and abolished all restrictions for Jews**.

A caricature by [Charles Lucien Léandre](#) (France, 1898) showing [Rothschild](#) with the world in his hands

**Jews** now could **own land**, and **enter the civil servicy**. The **abolition of restraints on political activism** and the **broadening of the electoral franchise on the basis of citizenship, not religion, made Jews most visible** among [liberal](#), [radical](#), and [Marxist \(Social Democratic\)](#) political parties.

For **centuries**, so-called [court Jews](#) acted as the **principal financiers** for the **European aristocracy**. In the **1760s**, one of them, [Mayer Amschel Rothschild](#), established a **banking business in Germany** that eventually became a **vast international conglomerate** and **yielded one of the largest family fortunes** in world history. Thus the name of the [Rothschilds](#) became synonymous with **Jewish financial power**. Across Europe in the **18th and 19th centuries**, other Jews also created a number of **influential banks**.

The **most important branch of Jewish economic life in Eastern Europe** was **trade**. While **most remained small shopkeepers, stallholders, and peddlers**, others became owners of **department stores and shopping arcades**. During the **19th century Jews** began to **move from rural regions to cities**, **this contributed to the decline of traditional Jewish tavernkeeping**. **Jews** made up a **considerable proportion of all craftsmen** in the [Russian Empire](#) and [Galicia](#) during the **19th**



century, but with the spread of industrialization large factories tended to squeeze out small Jewish-run workshops, and only limited numbers of Jews became employees in these modern factories. Jews were considered less desirable employees since they did not want to work on Saturdays and tended to organize into unions to demand improved working conditions, the foundation of the [Bund](#) in the Russian Empire in 1897 strengthened this process

The economic achievements of Jews in the 19th century created the impression for some that Jews were being overrepresented in such lucrative occupations as finance, banking, trade, industry, medicine, law, journalism, art, music, literature, and theater. Despite increasing integration of the Jews with secular society, a new form of [antisemitism](#) emerged, [based on the ideas of race and nationhood](#) rather than the religious hatred of the Middle Ages. This form of antisemitism held that Jews were a separate and inferior race from the [Aryan](#) people of Western Europe, and led to the emergence of political parties in France, Germany, and [Austria-Hungary](#) that campaigned on a platform of rolling back emancipation. This form of antisemitism emerged frequently in European culture, most famously in the [Dreyfus Trial](#) in France.

During this period, Jewish migration to the United States (see [American Jews](#)) created a large new community mostly freed of the restrictions of Europe. Over 2 million Jews arrived in the United States between 1890 and 1924, most from the Russian Empire and Galicia. A similar case occurred in the southern tip of the continent, specifically in the countries of [Argentina](#) and [Uruguay](#).

## 20TH CENTURY - MODERN ZIONISM

Main articles: [Zionism](#), [History of Zionism](#), and [Proto-Zionism](#)

Theodor Herzl, visionary of the Jewish State, in Basel, photographed during [Fifth Zionist Congress](#) in December 1901, by [Ephraim Moses Lilien](#)

During the 1870s and 1880s, the Jewish population in Europe began to more actively discuss emigration to [Ottoman Syria](#) with the aim of re-establishing a Jewish polity in [Palestine](#) and fulfilling the biblical prophecies related to [Shivat Zion](#). In 1882 the first Zionist settlement—[Rishon LeZion](#)—was founded by immigrants who belonged to the "[Hovevei Zion](#)" movement. Later on, the "[Bilu](#)" movement established many other settlements in Palestine.

The Zionist movement was officially founded after the [Kattowitz convention](#) (1884) and the [World Zionist Congress](#) (1897), and it was [Theodor Herzl](#) who initiated the struggle to establish a state for the Jews.

After the [First World War](#), it seemed that the conditions that made it possible for the Jews to establish such a state had arrived: The United Kingdom captured [Palestine](#) from the Ottoman Empire, and the Jews received the promise of a "National Home" from the British in the form of the [Balfour Declaration](#) of 1917, given to [Chaim Weizmann](#).

In 1920, the British Mandate of Palestine was established and the pro-Jewish [Herbert Samuel](#) was appointed High Commissioner of Palestine, the [Hebrew University of Jerusalem](#) was established and several large Jewish immigration waves to Palestine occurred. The Arab inhabitants of Palestine grew hostile to increasing Jewish immigration, and as a result, they began to express their opposition to the establishment of Jewish settlements and the pro-Jewish policy of the British government.

New Jewish immigrants began to create militias and paramilitary groups such as the [Bar-Giora](#) and [Hashomer](#).

Clashes between Jews and Arabs became more frequent. After the [1920 Nebi Musa riots](#), the Jewish leadership in Palestine believed that the British had little desire to involve themselves in these clashes and maintain order. Believing that they could not rely on the British administration for protection, the Jewish leadership created the [Haganah](#) and [Irgun](#) paramilitary organizations in order to protect its community's farms and [Kibbutzim](#).

These paramilitary organizations were involved in major riots, such as the [Jaffa riots](#), [1929 Palestine riots](#) and the [1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine](#). Arabs, Jews and Britons suffered in this violence.

Due to the increasing violence, the United Kingdom gradually started to backtrack from its original idea of supporting the establishment of a Jewish homeland and it also started to speculate on a [binational solution](#) to the crisis or the establishment of an Arab state that would have a Jewish minority.

## JEWS IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES AFTER WORLD WAR I

Bilingual [Polish-Yiddish](#) poster for the [Warsaw Young Theater](#)'s production of [Mississippi in 1935](#), written by [Leib Malach](#)

World War I subsequent political changes, such as the [Russian Revolution](#) of 1917 and the establishment of new nation-states after 1918, led to far-reaching consequences for the Jews of Eastern Europe. The authorities of the [Soviet Union](#) viewed private commerce as negative and sought to bring all trade under the aegis of state enterprises. Therefore, many Jews, who had previously made their living from trade, were forced to find other occupations. In Poland, Hungary, and Romania, the authorities adopted policies aimed at ethnicizing their national economies, aiming to exclude Jews as far as possible from the marketplace.

Nevertheless, the Jews of Europe and the United States gained success in the fields of science, culture and the economy. In Austria in the years between the two World Wars, Jews were approximately 3.5% of the population but were 27.3% of university professors. In Germany between 1918 and 1933, Jews were 0.78% of the population but were 16% of the doctors,

15% of the dentists, 25% of the lawyers, 50% of the theatre directors and occupied 80% of the leading positions in the [Berlin stock exchange](#). In Poland in 1931 Jews were 10.2% of the population but were 56% of the doctors in private practice, 33% of the lawyers, and 24% of the pharmacists. In Russia during the period 1917–1939 Jews were approximately 1.8% of the population, while Jews were 9% of the officers in military academies, 15% of the university graduates, 11% of the doctors and 14% of the university professors.

Among those Jews who were generally considered the most famous were the scientist [Albert Einstein](#) and the philosopher [Ludwig Wittgenstein](#). At that time, a disproportionate number of [Nobel Prize](#) winners were Jewish, as is still the case.

## THE HOLOCAUST

Main articles: [History of the Jews during World War II](#) and [The Holocaust](#)

Bodies of inmates of the [Mittelbau-Dora](#) Nazi concentration camp who died during [Allied bombing raids](#) on April 3 and 4, 1945



In 1933, with [Adolf Hitler](#) and the [Nazi Party](#)'s rise to power in Germany, the Jewish situation became more severe. [Economic crises](#), [racial Anti-Jewish laws](#), and fear of an upcoming war led many Jews to flee from Europe and settle in [Palestine](#), the United States and the Soviet Union.

In 1939, [World War II](#) began and until 1945, [Germany occupied almost all of Europe](#), including [Poland](#)—where millions of Jews were living at that time—and [France](#). In 1941, following the [invasion of the Soviet Union](#), the [Final Solution](#) began, an extensive organized operation on an unprecedented scale, aimed at the annihilation of the Jewish people, and resulting in the persecution and murder of Jews in Europe, as well as Jews in European North Africa (pro-Nazi [Vichy-North Africa](#) and [Italian Libya](#)). This [genocide](#), in which approximately six million Jews were methodically murdered with horrifying cruelty, is known as [The Holocaust](#) or the Shoah (Hebrew term). In Poland, as many as one million Jews were murdered in [gas chambers](#) at the [Auschwitz camp complex](#).

The massive scale of the Holocaust, and the horrors that happened during it, were only understood after the war, and they heavily affected the Jewish nation and world public opinion. Efforts were then increased to establish a Jewish state in Palestine.



## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Main article: [History of Israel](#)

See also: [Israel](#) and [Declaration of Independence \(Israel\)](#)

In **1945** the **Jewish resistance organizations in Palestine** unified and established the **Jewish Resistance Movement**. The movement began guerrilla attacks against **Arab paramilitaries** and the **British authorities**. Following the [King David Hotel bombing](#), [Chaim Weizmann](#), president of the [WZO](#) appealed to the movement to **cease all further military activity until a decision would be reached** by the [Jewish Agency](#). The Jewish Agency backed Weizmann's recommendation to cease activities, a decision reluctantly accepted by the Haganah, but not by the [Irgun](#) and [Lehi](#). The JRM was dismantled and each of the founding groups continued operating according to their own policy.

The Jewish leadership decided to centre the struggle in the illegal immigration to Palestine and began organizing a massive number of Jewish war refugees from Europe, without the approval of the British authorities. This immigration contributed a great deal to the Jewish settlements in Israel in the world public opinion and the British authorities decided to let the United Nations decide upon the fate of Palestine.

On **November 29, 1947**, the [United Nations General Assembly](#) adopted [Resolution 181\(II\)](#) recommending partitioning Palestine into an Arab state, a Jewish state and the City of Jerusalem. The Jewish leadership accepted the decision but the Arab League and the leadership of Palestinian Arabs opposed it. Following a period of [civil war](#) the [1948 Arab–Israeli War](#) started.

In the middle of the war, after the last British soldiers of the Palestine Mandate left, **David Ben-Gurion** proclaimed on **May 14, 1948**, the establishment of a [Jewish state](#) in [Eretz Israel](#) to be known as the [State of Israel](#). The war ended in 1949 and Israel started building the state and absorbing massive waves of hundreds of thousands of Jews from all over the world, notably [Arab countries](#).

Since 1948, Israel has been involved in a series of major military conflicts, including the [1956 Suez Crisis](#), [1967 Six-Day War](#), [1973 Yom Kippur War](#), [1982 Lebanon War](#), and [2006 Lebanon War](#), as well as a nearly constant series of [ongoing minor conflicts](#).

Since 1977, an ongoing and largely unsuccessful series of diplomatic efforts have been initiated by Israel, Palestinian organizations, their neighbours, and other parties, including the United States and the European Union, to bring about a [peace process](#) to resolve conflicts between Israel and its neighbours, mostly over the fate of the Palestinian people.

## 21ST CENTURY

Israel is a [parliamentary democracy](#) with a **population of over 8 million people**, of whom about **6 million are Jewish**. The **largest Jewish communities** are in **Israel** and the [United States](#), with **major communities** in **France, Argentina, Russia, England, and Canada**.

The [Jewish Autonomous Oblast](#), created during the [Soviet](#) period, continues to be an [autonomous oblast](#) of the Russian state. The [Chief Rabbi of Birobidzhan, Mordechai Scheiner](#), says there are **4,000 Jews in the capital city**. [Governor Nikolay Mikhaylovich Volkov](#) has stated that he intends to, "**support every valuable initiative maintained by our local Jewish organizations.**" The [Birobidzhan Synagogue](#) opened in **2004** on the **70th anniversary** of the region's founding in **1934**.

The number of people who identified as Jews in [England and Wales](#) rose slightly between **2001 and 2011**, with the **growth being attributed** to the **higher birth rate** of the [Haredi](#) community. The estimated [British Jewish](#) population in [England](#) as of **2011** was **263,346**. As of **2021**, per the [British Census](#), the **Jewish population** of **England and Wales** was **271,327**.

On **October 7, 2023**, [Hamas](#), along with other [Palestinian militant groups](#), **attacked Israel** from the [Gaza Strip](#), **killing 1,139 people**. The day is considered the **deadliest day in Israel's history, and the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust**. The attack escalated into a [major war between Israel and Hamas](#). Hundreds of thousands of **civilians were displaced**, and more than **250 hostages, including Israelis and foreign nationals, were taken by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad**, and other **Gaza-based militant groups**.

### June 13, 2025

Beginning on **June 13, 2025**, Israel launched **major airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities and military infrastructure**, including sites in **Tehran, Fordow, and Natanz**. Following these initial attacks, the **United States joined the conflict**, with **President Donald Trump** confirming American involvement on **June 22, 2025**, utilizing **bunker-buster bombs** on Iranian nuclear sites under "**Operation Midnight Hammer**". The strikes aimed to **dismantle Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities**, with both **Israeli and American officials claiming major successes in degrading Tehran's advancements**. **Iran responded with missile and drone attacks, resulting in a tense, short-lived conflict** that concluded with a **U.S.-brokered ceasefire on June 24, 2025**. The incident **caused significant casualties and deepened regional instability**.

### February 28, 2026

On **February 28, 2026**, the joint **U.S.-Israeli military** Initiated under the **goal of eliminating Iran's nuclear capabilities and weakening its regime**, the strikes, named "**Operation Epic Fury**,"

**targeted key military, nuclear, and infrastructure. The immediate aftermath saw the death of supreme leader Ali Khamenei, triggering widespread chaos.**

**Iran's rapid retaliation against U.S. bases in the Gulf and targets in Israel led to a broader regional conflict, disrupting global oil supplies and causing massive civilian casualties. While supporters in Washington and Tel Aviv argued the pre-emptive actions were necessary to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, critics highlighted the high risk of escalation and humanitarian disasters, such as the bombing of a school in Minab. The conflict has created a volatile new status quo, fundamentally altering regional security, with long-term consequences for global power dynamics.**

**March 8, 2026**

**Iran named Mojtaba Khamenei, a son of the recently killed supreme leader, as his father's successor, according to a statement from top clerics published on state media early Monday local time, signaling the continuity of hard-line theocratic rule as Israeli and U.S. airstrikes continue to pound the country.**