

HISTORY OF ISRAEL

Quote from Charles Krauthammer - The Weekly Standard, May 11, 1998

"Israel is the very embodiment of Jewish continuity: It is the only nation on earth that inhabits the same land, bears the same name, speaks the same language, and worships the same God that it did 3,000 years ago. You dig the soil and you find pottery from Davidic times, coins from Bar Kokhba, and 2,000-year-old scrolls written in a script remarkably like the one that today advertises ice cream at the corner candy store."

The people of Israel (also called the "Jewish People") trace their origin to Abraham, who established the belief that there is only one God, the creator of the universe. Abraham, his son Yitshak (Isaac), and grandson Jacob (Israel), are referred to as the patriarchs of the Israelites. All three patriarchs lived in the Land of Canaan, that later came to be known as the Land of Israel. They and their wives are buried in the Ma'arat HaMachpela, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, in Hebron.

The name Israel derives from the name given to Jacob (see Old Testament). His 12 sons were the kernels of 12 tribes that later developed into the Jewish nation. The name Jew derives from Yehuda (Judah) one of the 12 sons of Jacob (Reuben, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Yisachar, Zevulun, Yosef, Binyamin). So, the names Israel, Israeli or Jewish refer to people of the same origin.

The descendants of Abraham crystallized into a nation at about 1300 BCE after their Exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses (Moshe in Hebrew). Soon after the Exodus, Moses transmitted to the people of this new emerging nation, the Torah, and the Ten Commandments. After 40 years in the Sinai desert, Moses led them to the Land of Israel, that is cited in The Bible as the land promised by G-d to the descendants of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The people of modern day Israel share the same language and culture shaped by the Jewish heritage and religion passed through generations starting with the founding father Abraham (ca. 1800 BCE). Thus, Jews have had continuous presence in the land of Israel for the past 3,300 years.

The rule of Israelites in the land of Israel starts with the conquests of Joshua (ca. 1250 BCE). The period from 1000-587 BCE is known as the "Period of the Kings". The most noteworthy kings were King David (1010-970 BCE), who made Jerusalem the Capital of Israel, and his son Solomon (Shlomo, 970-931 BCE), who built the first Temple in Jerusalem as prescribed in the Tanach (Old Testament).

In 587 BCE, Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar's army captured Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and exiled the Jews to Babylon (modern day Iraq).

The year 587 BCE marks a turning point in the history of the region. From this year onwards, the region was ruled or controlled by a succession of superpower empires of the time in the following order: Babylonian, Persian, Greek Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Empires, Islamic and Christian crusaders, Ottoman Empire, and the British Empire.

Foreign Empires that ruled in Israel

Period	Empire	Major Events
587 BCE	Babylonia	Destruction of the first Temple.
538-333 BCE	Persian	Return of the exiled Jews from Babylon and construction of the second Temple (520-515 BCE).
333-63 BCE	Hellenistic	Conquest of the region by the army of Alexander the Great (333 BCE). The Greeks generally allowed the Jews to run their state. But, during the rule of the king Antiochus IV, the Temple was desecrated. This brought about the revolt of the Maccabees, who established an independent rule. The related events are celebrated during the Hanukah holiday.
63 BCE-313 CE	Roman	The Roman army led by Titus conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple at 70 CE. Jewish people were then exiled and dispersed to the Diaspora. In 132, Bar Kokhba organized a revolt against Roman rule, but was killed in a battle in Bethar in Judean Hills. Subsequently the Romans decimated the Jewish community, renamed Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina and Judea as Palaestina to obliterate Jewish identification with the Land of Israel (the word Palestine, and the Arabic word Filastin originate from this Latin name). The remaining Jewish community moved to northern towns in the Galilee. Around 200 CE the Sanhedrin was moved to Tsippori (Zippori, Sepphoris) . The Head of Sanhedrin, Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi (Judah the Prince), compiled the Jewish oral law, Mishna.
313-636	Byzantine	
636-1099	Arab	Dome of the Rock was built by Caliph Abd el-Malik on the grounds of the destroyed Jewish Temple.
1099-1291	Crusaders	The crusaders came from Europe to capture the Holy Land following an appeal by Pope Urban II, and massacred the non-Christian population. Later Jewish community in Jerusalem expanded by immigration of Jews from Europe.
1291-1516	Mamluk	
1516-1917	Ottoman	During the reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem were rebuilt. Population of the Jewish community in Jerusalem increased.
1917-1948	British	Great Britain recognized the rights of the Jewish people to establish a " national home in Palestine ". Yet they greatly curtailed entry of Jewish refugees into Israel even after World War II. They split Palestine mandate into an Arab state which has become the modern day Jordan, and Israel.

After the exile by the Romans, the Jewish people migrated to Europe and North Africa. In the Diaspora (scattered outside of the Land of Israel), they established rich cultural and economic lives, and contributed greatly to the societies where they lived. Yet, they continued their national attachments and prayed to return to Israel through centuries. In the first half of the 20th century there were major waves of immigration of Jews back to Israel from Arab countries and from Europe. During the British rule in Palestine, the Jewish people were subject to great violence and massacres directed by Arab civilians or forces of the neighboring Arab states. During World War II, the Nazi regime in Germany decimated about 6 million Jews creating the great tragedy of The Holocaust.

In 1948, Jewish Community in Israel under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion reestablished sovereignty over their ancient homeland. [Declaration of independence](#) of the modern State of Israel was announced on the day that the last British forces left Israel (May 14, 1948).

Arab-Israeli wars

A day after the declaration of independence of the State of Israel, armies of five Arab countries, Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon and Iraq, invaded Israel. This marked the beginning of the War of Independence. Arab states have jointly waged four full scale wars against Israel:

1948 War of Independence

1956 Sinai War

1967 Six Day War

1973 Yom Kippur War

Despite the numerical superiority of the Arab armies, Israel defended itself each time and won. After each war Israeli army withdrew from most of the areas it captured ([see maps](#)). This is unprecedented in World history and shows Israel's willingness to reach peace even at the risk of fighting for its very existence each time anew.

Note that with Judea and Samaria Israel is only 40 miles wide. Thus, Israel can be crossed from the Mediterranean coast to the Eastern border at Jordan river within one hour of driving.