

## JUDAISM

Judaism is the world's oldest monotheistic religion, approximately 4,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent. With its rejection of polytheism and insistence on social justice and law, Judaism marked a significant change from the religions of other Middle Eastern cultures. The religious literature of Judaism, especially the Ten Commandments and the Torah, influenced the two other major monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam. All three religions trace their lineage and belief back to Abraham's acceptance of monotheism in a covenant ("agreement") with God or Yahweh. And are therefore referred to in common as "Abrahamic" religions.

### A BRIEF History of the Jewish People

As an ethnic religion the origins of Judaism are unclear. Although the existence of a historical "Abraham" is debated, Jews (as well as Muslims) trace their lineage to him. He was born in the city of Ur in the Sumerian civilization in the eastern Fertile Crescent (modern-day Iraq). Abraham migrated across the region in acceptance of Yahweh's offer of the "promised land" or "land of milk and honey" in return for singular belief in Him. The biblical interpretation of "promised land" places it along the Mediterranean coast in the location of modern-day Israel. In ancient sources and in modern times the region has been referred to by a variety of names including Canaan, the Levant, Palestine and Israel.

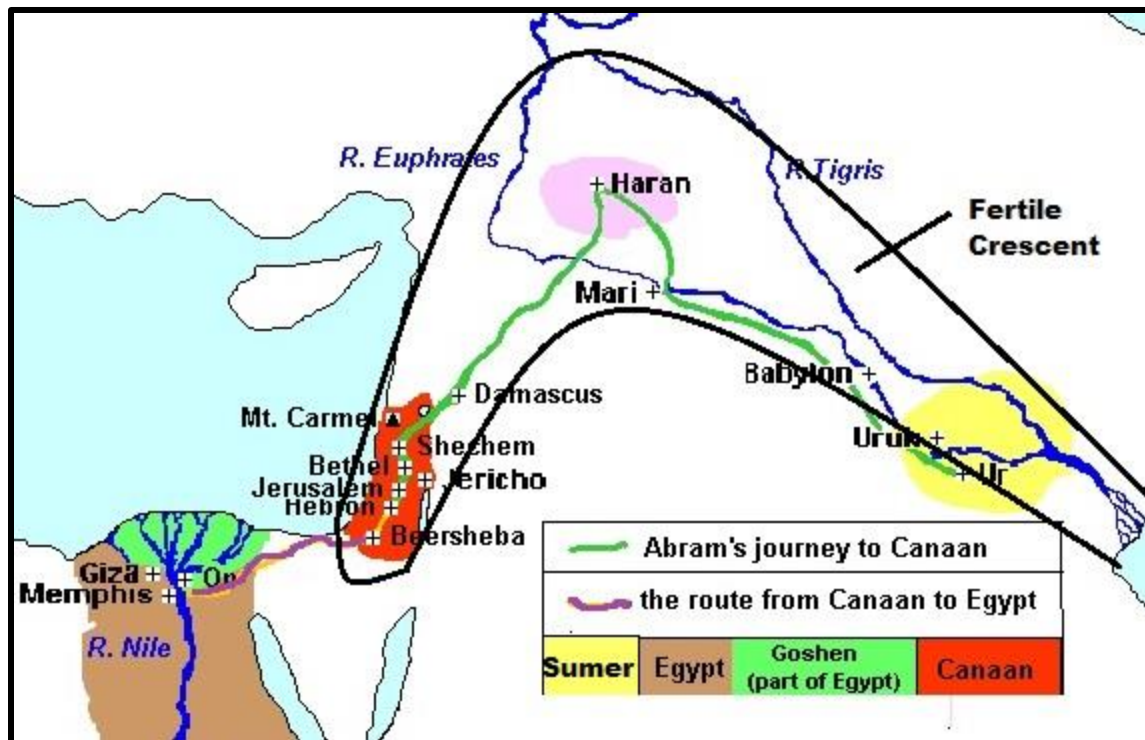


Figure 1: Migration of Abraham

Canaan's location put it at a crossroads between the mighty empires in Egypt and those of the Fertile Crescent. It, therefore, became subject to many invasions and subjugations (control by others). According to the Torah (the Jewish Holy Scripture referred to as the Old Testament by Christians), the Jews were enslaved in Egypt and then led by a prophet named Moses back to Canaan in what is called the Exodus. Moses gave to his people the Ten Commandments from Yahweh. Jews believe that these laws formed part of the covenant, or solemn agreement, with Yahweh.

In Canaan, the Jewish people would eventually unify under kings such as David and Solomon into a political entity known as the Kingdom of Israel. King Solomon would build the First Jewish Temple, which housed the Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments, in Jerusalem.

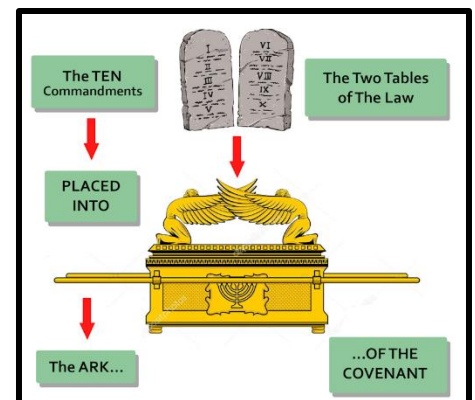


Figure 2: The Ark of Covenant contained the Ten Commandments

In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, the kingdom of Israel was conquered first by the Assyrians and then by Babylonians. The Babylonians would destroy the temple and take the Jewish educated class into captivity. This is known as the Babylonian Captivity. It is at this time that the Ark of Covenant becomes lost to history. Later (under the more tolerant Persian Empire) the Jews would be freed and allowed to return to Jerusalem where they would rebuild the temple.

The Jews lived during the next 500 years under various foreign rulers like the Persians and Greeks until, in the First Century BC, the Romans conquered the area. Because the basic idea of Judaism is monotheism, Jews refused to worship the emperor as a God which was expected of Roman subjects. This, therefore, made them seem to be rebellious and disloyal to Roman rule. Jews believed that a messiah would arise who would free them from foreign domination. This period corresponds with the ministry and crucifixion of Jesus. Eventually, in the First and Second Centuries AD, the Romans would tire of Jewish revolts and perceived disloyalty and lay siege to Jerusalem, destroying the Second Temple and eventually forcing the Jewish people into exile. The forced migration of Jewish people out of Jerusalem and across the Roman Empire is known as the diaspora or “scattering”.

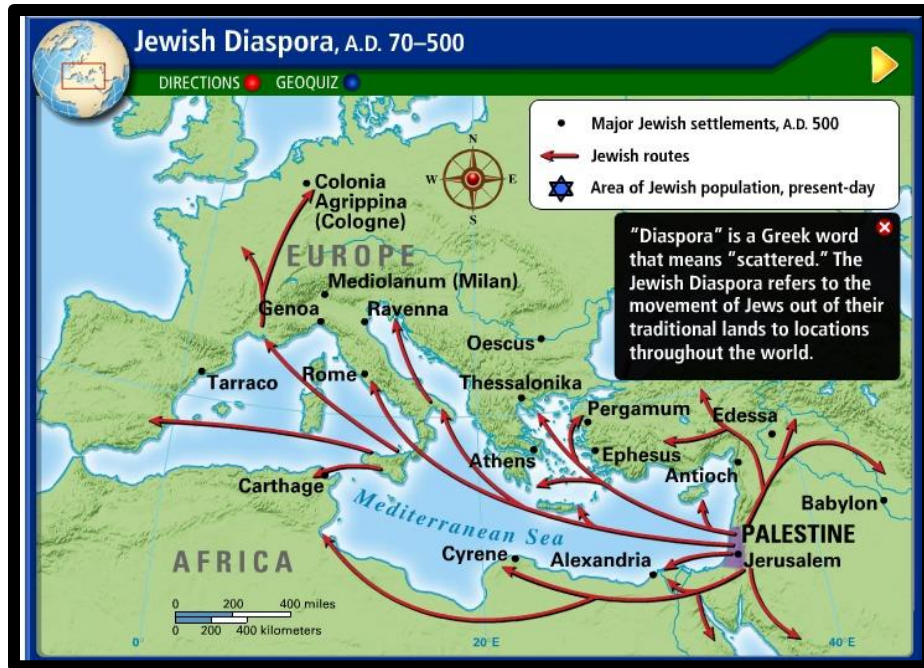


Figure 3: The diffusion of the Jewish people after the Siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the Second Temple.

Jews have frequently faced discrimination in the societies to which they were exiled, especially in Europe. They were often scapegoated (“blamed”) for problems in society, exiled by European monarchs after the seizure of their property, segregated into ghettos within cities and forced into certain agricultural regions. For example, in the Russian Empire, Jews were mandated to live in the Pale of Settlement. They were restricted into what economic activities they could engage, sometimes forced to convert (Spanish Inquisition) and frequently subjected to violence (example: the “pogroms”). The irrational hatred or fear of Jewish people is known as “antisemitism.”

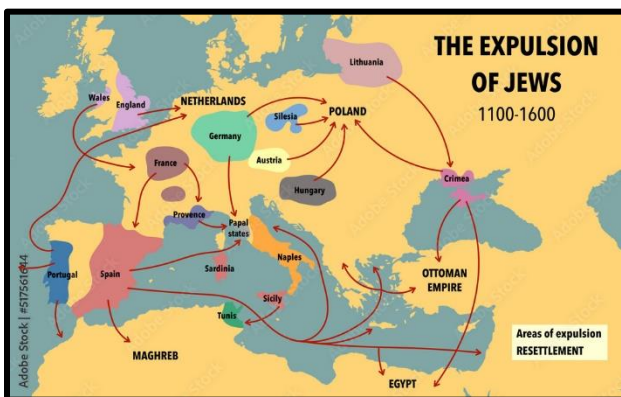


Figure 4: Jews were subject to expulsions from European kingdoms

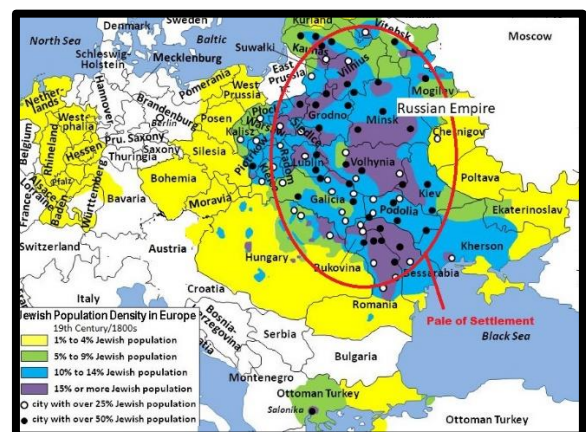


Figure 5: 40% of all Jews lived in the Pale of Settlement

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe, the Jewish minority achieved some long-sought after rights due to the Enlightenment (an intellectual and philosophical movement stressing reason and tolerance). They were able to freely practice their religion and most economic restrictions and political restrictions were removed.

However, an undercurrent of antisemitism remained. It became clear to Jewish intellectuals that their acceptance was not complete. As a result, in the late 1800s, the political ideology of Zionism evolved. Under Zionism, Jews would establish their own political state where they would be free from persecution. Some Jews began to migrate back to Palestine (then a predominately Muslim Arab territory controlled by the Ottoman Turks.)

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (1900s), following the awful tradition of medieval monarchs, Hitler (the fascist leader of Nazi Germany) used Jews as scapegoats for Germany's loss in WWI. He targeted them through vitriolic (hate-filled) speeches that accused them of being a minority that was defiling the German nation. Jews were stripped of their political rights and were subjected to violent repression often being forced to wear the Star of David identifying them as Jewish. His irrational hatred of Jews led him to launch the Final Solution. This was a genocidal attempt to eliminate the Jewish people. At the time he militarily controlled the Pale of Settlement, the largest clustering of Jewish population. His regime established concentration camps which industrialized the killing of Jews. During this period, known as the Holocaust, 6 million European Jews were murdered.



Figure 6: In Nazi Germany and occupied areas, Jews were forced to wear the Star of David as an identifier



Figure 7: During the Holocaust six million Jews were murdered at the hands of the Nazis. Many Jews were killed systematically in concentration camps.

After WWII, many European Jews who survived the Holocaust emigrated either to the United States or to Palestine where they advocated for the establishment of a Jewish state. The establishment of that state, Israel, in 1948 and the reaction to it has been a controversial issue ever since (as you can see when you watch the news.) We will be dealing with this topic in a separate assignment regarding religious conflict.

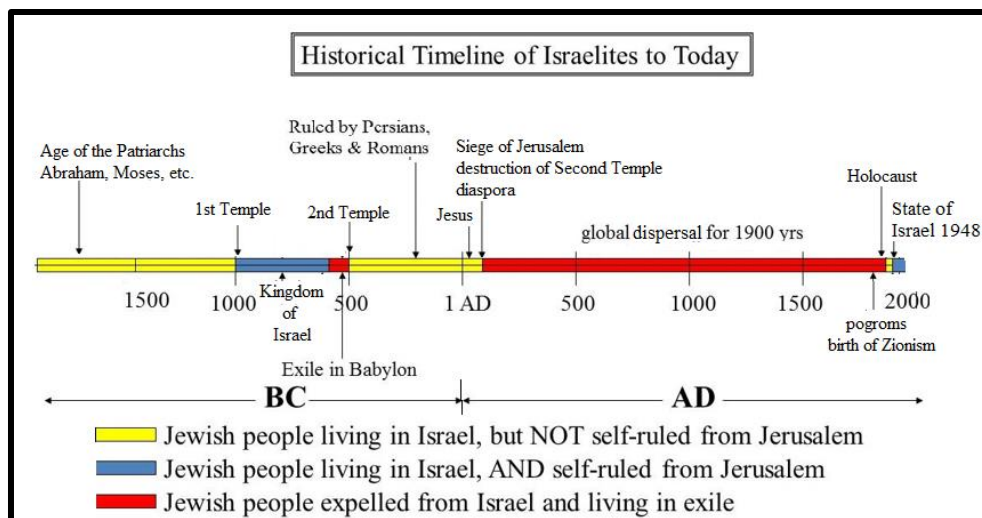


Figure 8: Summary Timeline of Jewish History

Today, there are about 15 – 20 million Jewish people globally. 40% reside in Israel, 40% reside in the United States and 20% are dispersed elsewhere, usually in major cities.

### How is Judaism reflected on the Cultural Landscape

Jewish people worship in synagogues. The architecture of synagogues is often adapted to the cultural style of the surrounding area but can be identified by the use of Jewish symbols. The symbols most associated with Judaism are: the **Torah scroll** representing their holy text, the **Star of David** which is related to the rule of King David during the Kingdom of Israel period, representations of the **Ten Commandments** which are part of the covenant between the Jews and Yahweh, and the **menorah** a seven-lamp candelabra used to light the inner areas of the Temple. It is also associated with the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah (Chanukah). According to the Torah, after a desecration of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, there was only enough oil left to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days.



Figure 9: Common Jewish symbols

Like Islam, Judaism can also be seen in clothing. Jewish law requires that Jewish cover their head while in synagogue. Non-orthodox Jewish men will wear the yarmulke during prayer while orthodox Jewish men will wear it at all times. Modern Judaism includes the Orthodox, the Conservative and the Reform branches, listed in order of intensity of traditional beliefs. In addition, in ultra-conservative Jewish communities, such as the Hasidic, men will wear distinctive garb consisting of large, brimmed hats, long black coats and wear thick beards with long curled sideburns. They will also often drape a prayer shawl across their shoulders. Ultra-conservative Jews believe that a women’s hair is an item of great beauty. Women will shave their heads before marriage as a sign of fidelity to their husbands and wear a wig as replacement.



Figure 10: Jewish men wearing the yarmulke at worship



Figure 11: Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn

Many Jews consider Jerusalem to be holiest site in Judaism. One of the biggest items of conflict between Jews and Muslims is the location and control of their respective holy sites in Jerusalem. After Muslims took control of Jerusalem, they built the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount. This was the original location of the Jewish temples and still contains the remnant of the Second Temple, the Western or “Wailing” Wall. Israel has controlled the area militarily since 1967 but has ceded administration of the mosque area to Muslim authorities. Due to conservative sensitivities worship at the Western Wall is segregated between male and female Jewish worshippers as most orthodox Jewish worship spaces are.



Figure 12: Segregated worship at the Western Wall

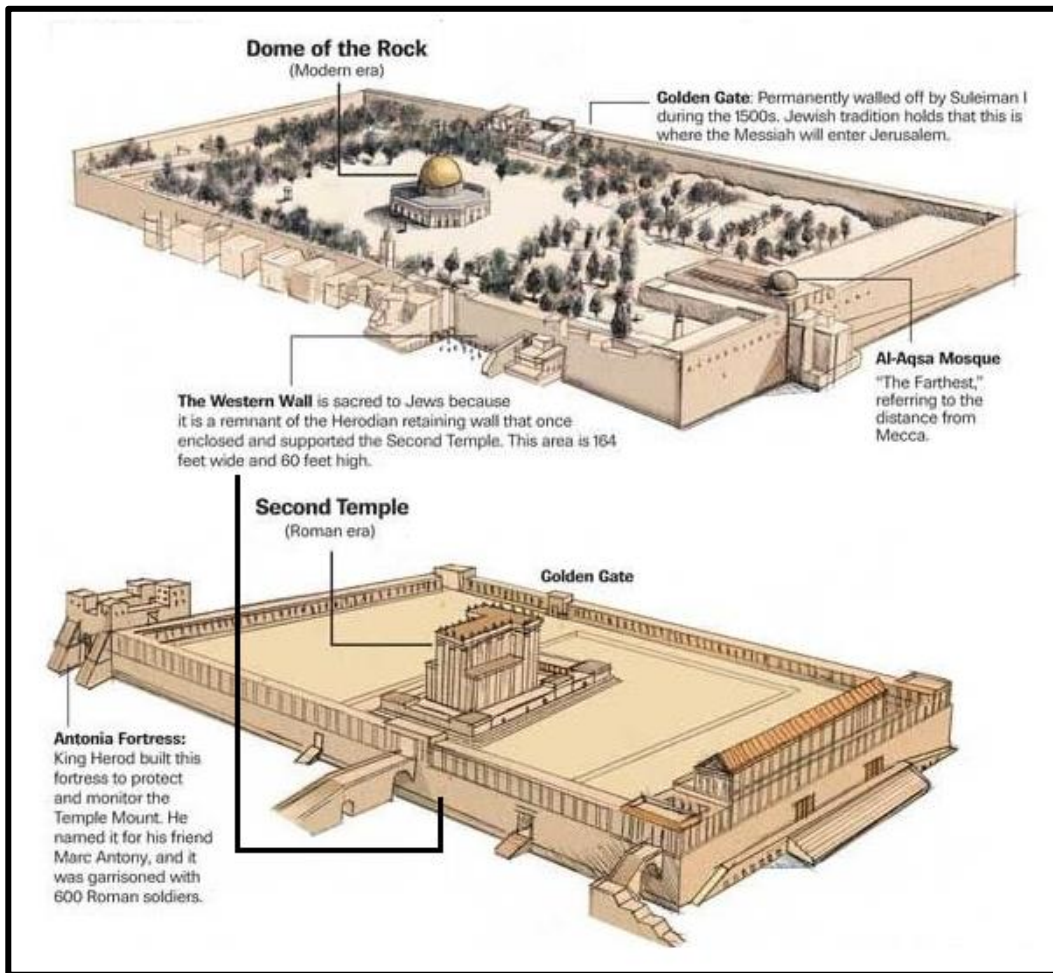


Figure 12: The third holiest site in Islam is built right over the holiest site in Judaism.

Since Judaism is an ethnic religion, its major holidays and calendar are mostly connected to the seasons. For example, Yom Kippur, celebrated in the autumn, is the holiest day in Judaism. Also known as the Day of Atonement, on this holiday Jews rid themselves of sin before commencing the fall planting. Because of its warm and arid climate, people in the Levant plant in the fall and hope that winter rains will sustain their crops.

If the winter rains came, Jews would then enjoy a more celebratory holiday in the Spring during Passover signifying a bountiful harvest. Passover also celebrated the Jews freeing themselves from Egyptian slavery. Moses called for a series of plagues to strike Egypt until they freed the Jews from bondage. One of the plagues called for the death of all firstborn children. Jewish slaves in Egypt were told to leave a mark of lamb's blood above their door so that the Angel of Death would "passover" their homes.

In Christianity, a universalizing religion, its calendar and holidays are associated with events in the life of the founder. But since Jesus was a Jew, he was in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover when he was arrested, put on trial and crucified. Therefore, Easter (celebrating a risen Christ) corresponds annually with the Jewish Passover holiday.

Followers of Judaism bury their dead like those of other Abrahamic religions. Also, they practice food taboos similar to Muslims in that they don't eat pork. This is because the raising of pigs takes a lot of water (pigs like to play in slop). This was difficult in the dry environment of the Middle East and the meat of pigs spoiled easily. Both religions having originated in this environment placed food taboos on pork. Interestingly, one of the appeals of early Christianity as it split from Judaism was the apostle Paul's instruction that new Christian converts did not have to follow Jewish kosher laws.