

History of Judaism

Judaism is important not because it is so widely practiced (less than ¼ of 1% of the World is Jewish), but because of its enormous impact on other religions and on World affairs.

The Old Testament books of the Bible describe numerous struggles of the Jewish people. After their triumphant Exodus from Egyptian captivity following Moses, the books state that they wandered around in the desert for forty years before entering the Promised Land (Israel). They had many conflicts with neighboring societies, yet for several centuries were able to maintain a unified state centered in Jerusalem.

This occupation of the Promised Land was not to last, however. In 722 BC, the northern part of the Hebrew state fell to Assyrian raiders. By 586 BC, Jerusalem was conquered by Babylonians. The land of Israel was successively ruled by Persians, Macedonians, Greeks, Syrians, and Romans in the time that followed. As a result of the Syrian King Antiochus IV Epiphanes' attempt to suppress the Jewish religion, a rebellion led by Judas Maccabaeus in 167 BC resulted in the independence of the Jewish nation. This is celebrated today by the festival **Hanukkah**.

In 70 AD, the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem, and the Jews were forced out of the area and settled in Mediterranean countries and in other areas in southwest Asia. This migration of the Jewish population is known as **Diaspora**. Many of these Jews settled in Europe and became victims of persecution and poverty. Ghettos and slums became their homes and massacres were common through the centuries that followed. Many fled to the United States in the late 19th century like so many other poor and desperate people that immigrated to the USA. Immigration climbed after the **Holocaust**, the organized murder of Jews during World War II. Today the United States has the largest population of Jewish people with high concentration areas in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Miami, and Washington D.C.

In 1917, an attempt to reestablish Palestine as the Jewish homeland began. By 1948, after the Holocaust, the United States and Great Britain (and other countries) helped Jews create the State of Israel, which became an independent country out of what was Palestine. The Palestinian people, mainly Muslim, lost their country. Since then, the Islamic world, especially in the Middle East, have opposed Israel and often oppose those that support Israel. This is a source for much conflict in the region.

Basic Beliefs of Judaism

Judaism is a monotheistic religion which believes that the world was created by a single, all-knowing god (often called **Adonai** because the actual word for their god should not be spoken), and that all things within that world were designed to have meaning and purpose and that their god alone is to be worshiped. According to the teachings of Judaism, God's will for human behavior was revealed to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The **Torah** (their religious text), or commandments, which regulate how humans are to live their lives, were a gift from God so that they might live in according to His will. He monitors peoples' activities and rewards good deeds and punishes evil. Jews believe in the inherent goodness of the world and its inhabitants as creations of God and do not require a savior to save them from original sin. They believe they are God's chosen people and that the **Messiah** will arrive in the future, gather them into Israel, there will be a general resurrection of the dead, and the Jerusalem Temple destroyed in 70 CE will be rebuilt.