

# An Overview of Israelite and Jewish History

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## Main Stages of Israelite & Jewish History: 4000 Years of Development

(Adapted from the *Encyclopedia of Religion*)

0. **Pre-Historic Period** (begins 3760 BCE, acc. to traditional Jewish calendar)
  - o Creation of the World; Adam & Eve; Cain & Abel; Noah & the Flood; Tower of Babel (factual history or mythical stories?)
- I. **Hebrew/Israelite Period** (Second Millennium to 539 BCE)
  - o *Abraham* & the Israelite Patriarchs; *Moses* & the Exodus
  - o *Joshua* & the Conquest; Era of *Judges* (Confederation of 12 Tribes)
  - o United Monarchy (Saul, *David*, Solomon)
  - o Divided Monarchies (N: Israel; S: Judah); Destruction of 1st Temple; Babylonian Exile
- II. **Second Temple Period** (ca. 539 BCE - 70 CE)
  - o *Persian* Era (Jews return from exile, rebuild Jerusalem & Temple)
  - o *Hellenistic/Greek* Era (Alexander the Great; Ptolemies & Seleucids)
  - o *Maccabean/Hasmonean* Era (desecration & rededication of Temple)
  - o *Roman* Era (Herod the Great; Jesus; Destruction of 2nd Temple)
- III. **Rabbinic Period** (ca. 70 CE - 6th Century)
  - o Leading rabbis adapt Judaism for the post-Temple era; focus on reinterpreting & applying the Torah (both written & oral)
  - o Canonization of the *Hebrew Bible*; Codification of the *Mishnah*; Compilation of the *Talmuds*; other rabbinic literature
- IV. **Medieval Period** (6th - 16th Centuries)
  - o Solidification of Jewish life & culture & literature; Persecution/Expulsion of Jews from various countries at various times
  - o Division of Jews into various cultural/geographical groups: *Ashkenazi* Jews, *Sephardic* Jews, *Yemeni* Jews, etc.
- V. **Early Modern & Modern Period** (17th - 21st Centuries)
  - o Division of Judaism into more branches: Hasidic, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Restorationist, Humanist, Non-Religious, etc.
  - o Rise of Zionist Movements (late 1800's); Nazi-era Holocaust / Shoah (1933-1945); modern State of Israel established (1948)

## MAIN POINTS: Domination & Independence

1. For most of **biblical** history, the land known as *Canaan*, *Israel*, and/or *Palestine* was ruled by six major empires:
    - o ***Egyptians*, *Assyrians*, *Babylonians*, *Persians*, *Greeks*, *Romans*.**
    - o **Mnemonic Aid** for remembering these empires: "Eat At Bob's, Pasadena's Great Restaurant."
    - o From the mid-7th to mid-20th centuries CE, Palestine was ruled mostly by **Muslims** (with some Christian control during the Crusades).
  2. Before the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, there were only two relatively short periods of **independence** for the people of ancient Israel in a unified kingdom:
    - o **The Golden Age of the Israelite Monarchy**, under Kings Saul, David, and Solomon (ca. 1030 - 930 BCE) between the weakening of the *Egyptian* Empire and the rise of the *Assyrian* Empire.
    - o **The Restoration of Jewish Independence** under the Maccabean / Hasmonean Dynasty (ca. 164 - 63 BCE) between the weakening of the *Greek* Empire and the rise of the *Roman* Empire.
    - o **The Establishment of the Modern State of Israel**, by mandate of the United Nations (1948 CE - present) after the Second World War and the Shoah, in which ca. 6 million Jews were killed.
  3. Before the Nazi-era Holocaust/Shoah, the two most traumatic events in the history of the people of Israel involved the total destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews from the Holy Land:
    - o **587 BCE**: total destruction of Jerusalem and the *First Temple* ("Solomon's Temple") by the *Babylonian* army, beginning the "Babylonian Exile" (until ca. 539 BCE).
    - o **70 CE**: total destruction of Jerusalem and the *Second Temple* ("Herod's Temple") by the *Roman* army, causing the Jews to lose the Holy Land (until 1948 CE!).
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## Historical Highlights (and Literary Activity):

## O) PRE-HISTORIC PERIOD:

3760 BCE - the traditional date of the creation of the world; Year 1 in the Orthodox Jewish calendar, based on chronological calculations from numerous genealogies in the Book of Genesis; see Genesis 1-11 for stories of the Creation of the World, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah and the Flood, the Tower of Babel, etc.

Do these stories contain factual history (Orthodox/Fundamentalist view) or are they foundational myths conveying theological truths (Liberal/Progressive view)?

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## I) HEBREW / ISRAELITE PERIOD (Second Millennium to ca. 539 BCE):

ca. 3000 - ca. 1000 BCE - **EGYPTIAN ERA** - the Egyptians are overlords of the Levant, a.k.a. land of Canaan, later Israel and/or Palestine:

ca. **1800-1700?** - *Foundations of the People of Israel under the Patriarchs/Ancestors* - God promises to give the Holy Land to the descendants of Abraham (see Genesis 12-50); the first four generations of patriarchs & matriarchs include the following main characters (see my chart of Abraham's family):

- 1) **ABRAHAM** & Sarah (also her handmaid Hagar)
- 2) **Isaac** & Rebekah (also Isaac's elder half-brother Ishmael, son of Hagar)
- 3) **Jacob = Israel** (with two wives, Leah & Rachel, and two handmaids, Zilpah & Bilhah)
- 4) **Twelve Sons of Jacob = Twelve Tribes of Israel** (Judah becomes the "Royal Tribe"; Levi the "Priestly Tribe"; Joseph; etc.)

ca. 1700-1300? - Israelites (a.k.a. Hebrews) in Egypt (since the time of Joseph, the "dreamer"); they were welcome at first, but later endure worsening conditions and slavery (see Genesis 46-50; Exodus 1-2)

ca. **1270?** - *MOSES and the Exodus* - Plagues; Passover; Exodus from Egypt (possibly during reign of Pharaoh Rameses II, 1279-1213); Torah/Covenant on Mount Sinai; Wandering in the Desert for 40 years (see Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy)

ca. 1200-1030 - *Joshua* and the *Judges* - the conquest of Promised Land led by Joshua; loose confederation of the tribes of Israel (see Joshua, Judges, Ruth; see *HCSB* map 3); military/political leaders called "Judges," incl. Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, **Deborah**, **Gideon**, Abimelech, Tola, Yair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and **Samson**; rulers at end: Eli (priest) and **Samuel** (prophet).

ca. **1030-930 BCE** - *UNITED KINGDOM OF ISRAEL* - the "Golden Age" of the Israelite Monarchy, as Egypt's power declines and before Assyria's empire rises

ca. 1030 - twelve tribes of Israel united more closely under a monarchy; first ruler is **King Saul**; continual war with Philistines (see 1 Samuel; also *HCSB* map 4)

ca. **1000** - *conquest of the Jebusite city of Jerusalem by the army of King DAVID*; Jerusalem becomes the capital of all Israel; David consolidates his rule and expands the kingdom; God promises that the *House of David* (his descendants) will rule over Israel forever (see 1 & 2 Samuel)

ca. **970** - *Building of the first Temple of Jerusalem by King Solomon* (i.e. Solomon's Temple); centralization of Jewish worship in Jerusalem; further expansion of land and influence (see 1 Kings 1-11)

ca. 930 - death of Solomon; struggles for the throne succession for several years; the kingdom soon divides into two parts:

**922-587 BCE** - *DIVIDED MONARCHIES: ISRAEL & JUDAH* (see 1 & 2 Kings; 1 & 2 Chronicles; also *HCSB* maps 5-9), during the rise of the ASSYRIAN empire (9<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> cent.) and later of the BABYLONIAN empire (6<sup>th</sup> cent.)

922-721 - *Northern Kingdom*, called "*Kingdom of Israel*"; ruled by several series of corrupt kings; much political intrigue and challenges by prophets, e.g. Elijah & Elisha (see a list of all Kings of Israel - offsite)

**722 or 721** - *fall of the Northern Kingdom and its capital city Samaria to the ASSYRIANS*; deportation of most Israelites to places unknown; importation of foreigners into the territories of Northern Israel

922-587 - **Southern Kingdom**, called "*Kingdom of Judah*"; ruled continuously by descendants of David: some bad, some good; some early books of the HB written during these centuries, esp. some prophetic books and royal historical annals (see a list of [Kings of Judah](#) - offsite)

720's - religious reforms of King Hezekiah; building of Hezekiah's tunnel; successful resistance against Assyrian takeover

620's - religious reforms of King Josiah (reigned 640-609); writing or "discovery" of book of Deuteronomy

605 - Battle of Carchemish: BABYLONIANS (under King Nebuchadnezzar) defeat the Egyptians; territory of Judah becomes part of the Babylonian Empire

597 - first unsuccessful revolt of Judah (under King Jehoiakim) against Babylon; ruling elite of Judah exiled to Babylon; puppet king installed

**587** - another unsuccessful revolt of Judah (under King Zedekiah) against Babylon; ends in **Total Destruction of the City and Temple of Jerusalem by BABYLONIANS under King Nebuchadnezzar**; many more people exiled

**587-539 BCE - BABYLONIAN EXILE** - most upper-class Jews (officials, priests, artisans) deported to Babylon; others flee to Egypt, etc.; much of the HB written, esp. major prophets; final compilation of the Torah (Genesis to Deuteronomy) & the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua to 2 Kings) by Judean scribes living in exile.

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## II) SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD (539 BCE - 70 CE):

**539-332 BCE - PERSIAN ERA** - some (not all!) exiled Jews return to Judea & Galilee; limited local autonomy under Persian overlords ([see detailed chart](#))

**539** - after the Babylonian empire is conquered by the PERSIANS, King Cyrus allows all deported peoples to return to their homelands; in particular, the Jews are encouraged to rebuild the city and temple of Jerusalem

ca. **520-515** - *rebuilding of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* under Zerubbabel; but not as nice or large as Solomon's Temple!

ca. 458/445 - more exiles return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra & Nehemiah; religious and political reforms (see Ezra & Nehemiah)

other Jews remain living in various parts of the Middle East, sometimes encountering conflict with others (see e.g. Esther)

**332-141 BCE - HELLENISTIC/GREEK ERA** - conquest of the entire Persian Empire by a Macedonian general, **Alexander the Great** (*HCSB* map 10-11); establishment of Greek language, Hellenistic culture, religion, and government throughout the East; founding and/or reconstruction of many new Greek-style cities (e.g. anything named Alexandria, Antioch)

**323** - Alexander dies while still very young; entire empire divided among four of his generals, who fight each other for control in the "Wars of the Diadochi"; eventually two dynasties control most of the East: the Ptolemies & the Seleucids ([see detailed chart](#))

323-198 - *Ptolemaic* dynasty rulers in Egypt control Palestine (Judea, Samaria, etc.) - few historical records;

ca. 250 - Hebrew scriptures translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt; new writings added (LXX; the Septuagint Bible)

198-141 - *Seleucid* dynasty from Syria rules over Palestine; growing pressure on Jews to assimilate & accept Greek culture

**167** - *desecration of Jerusalem Temple* by **Antiochus IV Epiphanes**, i.e. statues of Greek gods put there, sparking a revolt by pious rural Jews led by Mattathias (an old priest) and carried on after his death by his sons, especially Judas "*Maccabeus*" (167-61) - eldest son, nicknamed "*the hammer*"

**164** - *Maccabean revolt* successful: most of Jerusalem retaken; "**rededication**" of the **Jerusalem Temple** (still celebrated by Jews in the Feast of Hanukkah!)

161-142 - *Jonathan* (another son of Mattathias), led the continued fight against the Seleucids to gain control gradually over more of Israel

**141-63 BCE - MACCABEAN ERA / Hasmonean Dynasty** - another short period of *Jewish independence* under various Maccabean/Hasmonean rulers ([see detailed chart](#)); Monastery of Qumran founded by Essenes; Pharisees and Sadducees become prominent; Samaria & Idumea conquered by Jews

141-134 - *Simon* (last surviving son of Mattathias) gains total independence for Israel; given titles "Ethnarch" (ruler of the people) and "High Priest"; since he was not of the "Zadokite" line of high priests, some Jews ("the Essenes") dispute his high priestly authority, form a separatist movement with a monastery at Qumran, where many "Dead Sea Scrolls" were found in 1948.

134-67 - the Hasmonean Dynasty continues ruling Israel for several more generations:

- *John Hyrcanus I* (134-104) - expands Israel; *conquers Samaritans & Idumeans, destroys city/temple of Samaria*; "Pharisees" & "Sadducees" first appear as rival Jewish groups, with different interpretations of Jewish Laws
- *Aristobulus I* (104-103) - cruel leader; imprisons and/or kills his mother and several brothers; soon dies of illness
- *Alexander Jannaeus* (103-76) - surviving brother, who marries *Aristobulus'* widow *Alexandra*
- *Alexandra* (76-67) - *rules as queen* after her second husband dies; appoints her son *Hyrcanus II* as high priest

67-63 - *Alexandra's* sons *Hyrcanus II* and *Aristobulus II* vie for power; each appeals for Roman help to become sole ruler

**63 BCE to ca. 650 CE - ROMAN ERA** of domination in Israel/Palestine (see chart of [Rulers in Israel in the Roman Era](#))

**63 BCE** - Roman army under **General Pompey** takes over much of Middle East, incl. Israel (see *HCSB*, maps 12-13)

- *Hyrcanus II* (63-40) - member of the Hasmonean family; remains as high priest, but not as king
- *Antipater* (from Idumea) and sons *Herod & Phasael* - very influential politically & militarily, with Roman support

**40-4 BCE - HEROD the Great**; Roman Senate names him "King" over Judea, Idumea, Perea, Samaria, Galilee

40-37 - Herod fights to gain sole control over Israel; defeats & executes *Antigonus II* (who was high priest 40-37)

37-7 - Herod consolidates his power, executes scores of enemies, and begins massive building/rebuilding projects, including cities with *Roman* temples (esp. *Caesarea Maritimae* - huge artificial harbor; *Sebaste* - formerly *Samaria*), fortresses (*Masada*, *Herodium*, *Hyrcania*, *Machaerus*, etc.), and esp. **rebuilds/expands the Jerusalem Temple**

7-4 - near the end of his reign, Herod is paranoid about losing power, so has several sons and wives executed!

**4 BCE - 66 CE** - when Herod the Great dies, his *kingdom is divided* between three surviving sons & one sister (see chart of [Herodian Dynasty](#)):

4 BCE - 6 CE - Herod *Archelaus* rules as "Ethnarch" of Judea, Idumea, Samaria

6-66 CE - Judea, Idumea, Samaria under direct rule of *Roman Procurators* (e.g. *Pontius Pilate*), responsible to the *Governors* in *Syria*; various political/resistance movements form (*Zealots*, *Sicarii*, etc.), with some small-scale revolts

4 BCE - 33 CE - Herod *Philip* rules as "Tetrarch" of regions North-East of the Sea of Galilee

4 BCE - 39 CE - **Herod Antipas** rules as "Tetrarch" of Galilee and Perea

ca. 27-30 CE - preaching of *John the Baptist* and public ministry of *Jesus*, both *mostly* in Galilee and Perea

ca. 29/30 CE - arrest, crucifixion & death of *Jesus*, while *Pontius Pilate* (26-36 CE) is

Procurator of Judea

37-44 CE - *Herod Agrippa I* (a grandson of Herod the Great) allowed by Romans to rule more of Palestine

50-70's - *Herod Agrippa II* rules parts of Palestine, esp. in Northeast

49-54 - "all Jews" (or only Jewish Christians?) expelled from Rome by "Edict of Claudius" (until his death)

**66-74 CE - FIRST JEWISH REVOLT / WAR against ROME**; begins in Galilee and Jerusalem (recorded in Josephus' *Jewish War*)

67-68 - Roman armies under General *Vespasian* retake Galilee, Samaria, Perea, and most of Judea; also destroy Qumran

68-70 - pause in war because Emperor Nero dies; 3 transitional emperors; then Vespasian himself becomes emperor

**70 - Jerusalem captured by General Titus; whole city burned; destruction of the Second Temple by the ROMAN army**

73/74 - Roman conquest of last Jewish holdouts in the desert fortress of Masada, overlooking the Dead Sea

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### III) RABBINIC PERIOD (ca. 70 CE - 6th Century):

**Land of Palestine/Israel:** domination by the ROMANS continues:

- 74-132 CE - after suppressing the revolt, Romans rule over Israel directly; Jews and Christians spread further outside of Judea
  - ca. **90 (or 85)** - "**Council of Jamnia**" - leading Jewish rabbis meet at Javneh/Jamnia to consolidate Judaism; expel "heretics" from synagogues, probably including those who believe Jesus is the Messiah; they also determine the "canon" of the Hebrew Bible
  - 90's - *Christianity gradually separates from Judaism* and emerges as independent religion
- 132-135 CE - *Second Jewish revolt*, led by Bar Kochba, put down by *Emperor Hadrian*; Jerusalem completely destroyed; all Jews banned from Judea after 135; Jerusalem rebuilt as Roman city called Aelia Capitolina; Israel renamed "Palestine"

**Jewish Life elsewhere:**

- Leading "Rabbis" (successors of the Pharisees) set the foundations of a "Rabbinic Judaism" that focuses on the Torah (both Written & Oral) and its interpretation & application to all aspects of life:
- Codification of the "*Oral Torah*": writing of the *Mishnah* (ca. 200 CE), by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (Judah the Prince)
- Other early Rabbinic Literature written, both legal codes and exegetical commentaries
- Compilation of the *Jerusalem Talmud* (late 4th Century) and *Babylonian Talmud* (6th Century CE)

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### IV) MEDIEVAL PERIOD (6th - 16th Centuries CE):

**Land of Palestine/Israel:**

- 630's CE - **Muslim Invasion** leads to *Islamic Rule* of Palestine and entire Middle East; only few Jews remain in Holy Land
  - ca. 800 - Pact of Omar regulates Jewish life within Islamic lands
- 1095 - 1240's - **Crusades**; control of Jerusalem goes back and forth several times between Muslims and Christians
- 1300's - 1917 - **Ottoman Turkish Empire** controls Palestine & the whole Middle East

**Jewish Life elsewhere:**

- Solidification of Jewish life & culture & literature:
    - biblical commentaries - esp. by Rashi (late 11th Century)
    - philosophical works & legal codes - esp. by Maimonides (mid-12th Century)
    - mystical works - esp. Zohar (late 13th Century)
  - Division of Jews into various cultural/geographical groups:
    - *Ashkenazi* Jews (Central & Eastern Europe);
    - *Sephardic* Jews (Spain & North Africa);
    - *Yemeni* Jews (southern Arabia)
  - Persecution and/or Expulsion of Jews in/from several countries at various times:
    - 1096 - massacre of Jews in Rhineland by Christians preparing to go on the First Crusade
    - 1144 - "blood libel" in Norwich, England; 1291 - expulsion of Jews from England
    - 13th Cent. - Jews protected in Poland
    - 1492 - all Jews expelled from Spain
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## V) EARLY MODERN & MODERN PERIODS (17th - 21st Centuries CE):

### Jewish Life outside of Palestine/Israel:

- Encounter with the Enlightenment: some Jews wish to adapt/assimilate; others resist/reject any modernization
  - Jews granted increasing civil rights in Western Europe
  - Moses Mendelsohn, most prominent Jewish enlightenment philosopher
- Division of Judaism into more & more branches:
  - Hasidic - begins early 18th century in Eastern Europe
  - Orthodox -
  - Conservative -
  - Reform - first Reform synagogue in Hamburg, Germany (1818); Hebrew Union College opens in Cincinnati (1875)
  - Restorationist -
  - Humanist -
  - Non-Religious, etc.
- Rise of *Zionist Movements* (with religious and non-religious segments) - political goal: re-establish a Jewish homeland/nation in Israel
  - 1897 - First Zionist Congress held in Basel, Switzerland; led by Theodor Herzl
- Persecutions of Jews continue in some places:
  - 1880's-1920's - Pogroms against Jews in Eastern Europe causes mass emigrations to the United States
  - **1933-1945 - Holocaust / Shoah** - ca. 6 million European Jews killed during Nazi era

### Within the Land of Palestine/Israel:

- 1919 - after World War I, the League of Nations authorizes Britain to administer Palestine
  - **1948 - Establishment of State of Israel by mandate of the United Nations** - followed immediately by a series of wars with its Arab neighbors:
    - 1948-49 - Israeli War of Independence
    - 1956 - Suez War
    - 1967 - Six Day War; Israelis take control of all of Jerusalem, West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights
    - 1973 - Yom Kippur War
    - 1982 - Lebanon War
    - 1987-93 - First Intifada: Palestinian uprising in occupied territories
    - 1993 - Oslo Accords: peace talks begin between Israel and PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization)
    - 2000-05 - Second Intifada, or al-Aqsa Intifada
    - 2006 - Israel-Lebanon Conflict
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### Abbreviations:

- **ca.** = *circa* = "approximately"; **cf.** = *confer* = "see and compare"
- **BCE** = "Before the Common Era" (same as **BC** = "Before Christ")
- **CE** = "Common Era" (same as **AD** = *Anno Domini* = "The Year of Our Lord")
- **HCSB** = see the charts and maps in the back of the *HarperCollins Study Bible*