

JEW ARE INDIGENOUS TO ISRAEL:

The Jewish People's Connection
To Their Ancestral Homeland



*The gold medallion
(7th century CE) from
the "Ophel Treasure"
discovered at the foot
of the Temple Mount
in Jerusalem.*

Produced by:

StandWithUs



1949: Jews walk through the desert in Yemen on their way to be airlifted home to Israel.

Over 3,000 years ago, the Jewish people developed a thriving civilization and culture in the Land of Israel.

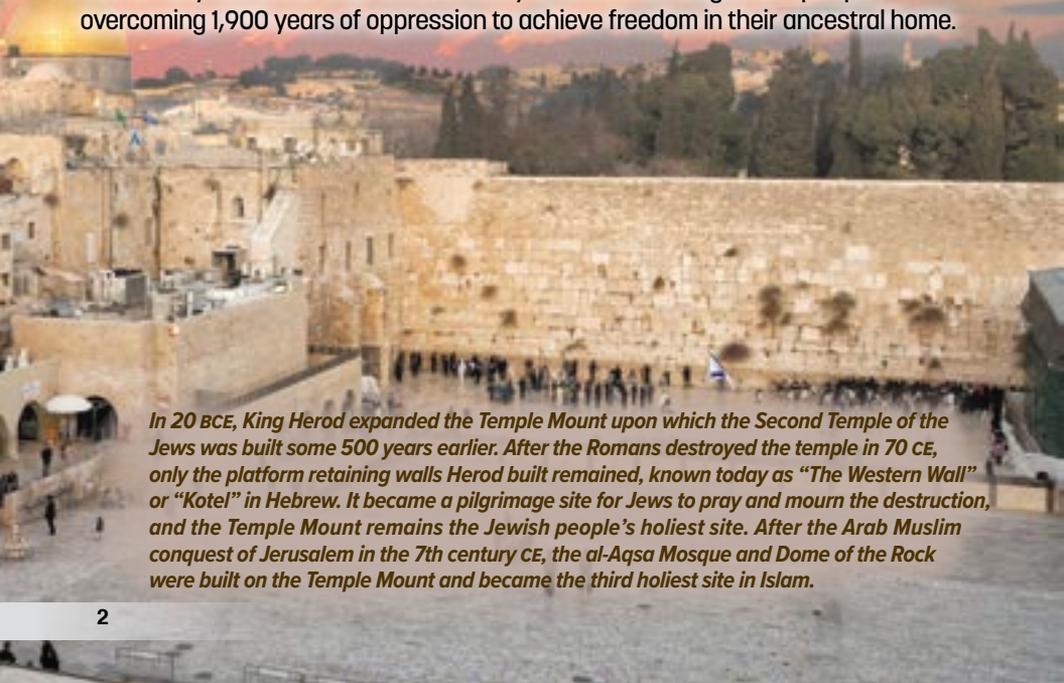
Over time, they were conquered by a series of aggressive foreign empires. While some Jews remained in their homeland, most scattered across Europe, the Middle East, and beyond.

Although they flourished at times, for 1,900 years, Jews lived as an oppressed minority, suffering persecution, expulsions, and ultimately genocide.

They barely survived but never lost hope. They overcame, and managed to maintain their unique identity and connection to Israel.

They founded Zionism in the late 1800s as a liberation movement, went back to join Jews who were already in Israel, and built one of the most inspiring nations the world has ever seen.

This is why we teach that Israel's story is about an indigenous people overcoming 1,900 years of oppression to achieve freedom in their ancestral home.



In 20 BCE, King Herod expanded the Temple Mount upon which the Second Temple of the Jews was built some 500 years earlier. After the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 CE, only the platform retaining walls Herod built remained, known today as “The Western Wall” or “Kotel” in Hebrew. It became a pilgrimage site for Jews to pray and mourn the destruction, and the Temple Mount remains the Jewish people’s holiest site. After the Arab Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in the 7th century CE, the al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock were built on the Temple Mount and became the third holiest site in Islam.



*Herod's Temple
(The Second Jewish
Temple 538 BCE)*

Definition of indigenous people:

José Martínez Cobo, U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, created a working definition for the international community:

“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct... [They] are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples...”

This historical continuity may consist of the continuation, for an extended period reaching into the present of one or more of the following factors:

- **Occupation of ancestral lands**, or at least of part of them
- **Common ancestry** with the original occupants of these lands
- **Culture in general**, or in specific manifestations (such as religion, living under a tribal system, membership of an indigenous community, dress, means of livelihood, lifestyle, etc.)
- **Language** (whether used as the only language, as mother-tongue, as the habitual means of communication at home or in the family, or as the main, preferred, habitual, general or normal language).”

Let's look at how this definition applies to Jews in Israel:

Historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies in the Land of Israel.

Jewish culture, language, religion, and identity originated in the Land of Israel over 3,000 years ago. As colonial powers conquered Israel and Jews scattered around the world, Jewish identity evolved, and Jewish communities became diverse. However, living in Israel or longing to return remained central to Jewish identity. That is why Jews around the world came back to Israel in waves and built a modern Jewish state there.



A coin in ancient Hebrew from the first Jewish Revolt against Rome (66–70 CE)



Detail of the Arch of Titus in Rome, constructed in 71 CE depicting the fall of Jerusalem and looting of artifacts.

TIMELINE OVER 3,000 YEARS OF JEWISH HISTORY IN ISRAEL

1300–1200 BCE: Israelite communities grow in the hills of Canaan.

1000–960 BCE: King David makes Jerusalem the capital of the Israelite kingdom and King Solomon builds the First Temple there.

586 BCE: The First Temple is destroyed by the Babylonian empire.

538 BCE: Jews return and begin to rebuild the temple (Second Temple).

166–63 BCE: Judah Maccabee leads a Jewish revolt against the Macedonian (Greek) empire, reestablishing Jewish independence. Today, we commemorate this victory with the holiday of Chanukah.

20 CE: The city of Tiberias is founded and becomes a center of Jewish life for 1,300 years.

70 CE: The Roman Empire, led by Titus, destroys the Second Temple. Most Jews gradually scatter across Europe and the Middle East.

The Romans squash the Bar Kokhba revolt. Seeking to destroy the memory of the Jewish nation, Romans rename the land “Palestine,” after the Jews’ ancient enemy, a people of Greek origin called the Philistines. But the Jews continue to call it the Land of Israel.

132–135 CE:

1211: A wave of Jews, led by 300 European rabbis, returns to the Land of Israel.

1481–1492: Many Jews flee Spain to the Land of Israel during the Spanish Inquisition.

1500: The town of Safed becomes a thriving center of Jewish life and mysticism.

1860–1864: Jews become the majority again in Jerusalem.

1882–1903: Waves of Jews return to Israel with the modern Zionist movement. Hebrew is revived as a spoken language.

1909: The city of Tel Aviv is founded.

1920: The League of Nations establishes the Palestine Mandate, recognizing it as the Jewish homeland under international law.

1939–1945: As the Holocaust rages, the British prevent countless Jews from escaping to the Palestine Mandate.

1948: Israel declares independence as a Jewish and democratic state.



250 – 65 BCE: Dead Sea Scrolls were written in Hebrew and later hidden. They were discovered in 1947 by three Bedouin shepherds in the caves near the Dead Sea.

Occupation of ancestral lands

Jews have had a continuous presence in Israel for over 3,000 years. Archaeologists have uncovered Jewish artifacts in Jerusalem from as early as the 9th to 10th centuries BCE. Jews also maintained a constant presence in Israel, despite different empires conquering, colonizing, massacring, and/or expelling them multiple times. Those who remained were joined by small waves returning throughout history. They lived as an oppressed minority in the Land of Israel for 1,900 years until the Zionist movement inspired many more Jews around the world to come home starting in the late 19th century.

Common ancestry with the original occupants of these lands

Multiple scientific studies have shown that most Jews around the world share ancestry with each other and with those who lived in Israel thousands of years ago. Additionally, archaeological findings suggest that early Israelites developed from Canaanite tribes who lived in the region before Jews became a distinct people.

Culture in general, or in specific manifestations

(such as religion, living under a tribal system, etc.)

For generations, Jews around the world have organized their communities and observed their religion in ways that are deeply connected to Israel. This includes:

- **Using a calendar**, celebrating holidays, and following rules tied to the seasons, agriculture, food, and environment of ancient Israel.
- **Repeating the prayer, “Next Year in Jerusalem,”** during holidays and religious rituals for thousands of years.
- **Visiting the Jewish people’s holiest sites**, all located in the Land of Israel.
- **Having rabbis act as religious and community leaders.** The title and role of the rabbi have their roots in ancient Israel.



Letter written by Simon Bar Kokhba, leader of the Jewish Revolt against the Emperor Hadrian in 132–135 CE.

Language

The written and spoken language of the Jewish people is Hebrew, which comes from the Land of Israel. Even after spoken Hebrew gradually declined, Jews continued using it for religious and other purposes. That is why the Zionist movement was able to revive it as a modern language beginning in the late 19th century. Today, Israelis can fluently read both an ancient Hebrew text and an essay discussing cutting-edge, high-tech developments.

Two of the Four Ancient Jewish Cities In Israel*:

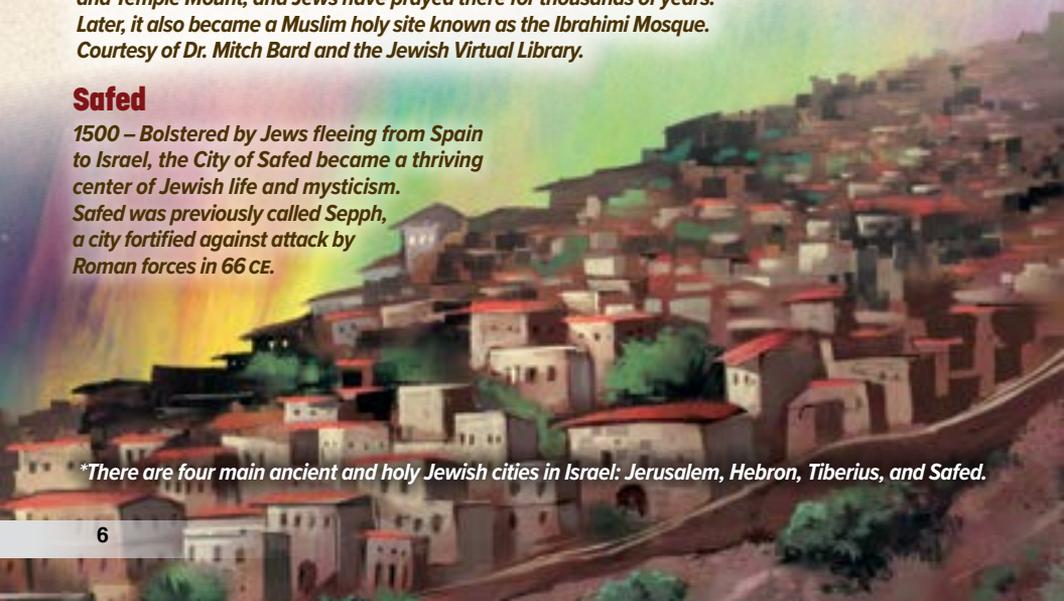
Hebron



Cave of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs in Hebron: According to Jewish tradition, the Hebrew patriarch Abraham bought the cave and surrounding land from a local tribal chief. It is believed that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their wives are buried here. The cave is Judaism's second holiest site after the Western Wall and Temple Mount, and Jews have prayed there for thousands of years. Later, it also became a Muslim holy site known as the Ibrahimi Mosque. Courtesy of Dr. Mitch Bard and the Jewish Virtual Library.

Safed

1500 – Bolstered by Jews fleeing from Spain to Israel, the City of Safed became a thriving center of Jewish life and mysticism. Safed was previously called Sepph, a city fortified against attack by Roman forces in 66 CE.



**There are four main ancient and holy Jewish cities in Israel: Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberius, and Safed.*

Common Arguments Against Jews Being Indigenous to Israel:

Didn't Jews come to Israel as colonizers from Europe?

Israel brought Jews together from all over the world, and none of them were colonizers. Those who arrived from Europe did not represent or identify with European colonial powers. They were idealists coming home to the birthplace of the Jewish people, joining Jews who were already there for generations and those who had returned to Israel over the years.

Didn't European colonial powers create Israel?

No, Israel was created by Jews who spent decades returning and building the foundations for a state. It is true that Jewish leaders fought for their people's freedom and self-determination however they could. Like many other liberation movements, this included efforts to garner support for their cause from world powers. While the British Empire initially supported the creation of a "Jewish national home," they quickly began to break their promises. The British government did not support the creation of a Jewish state when Israel declared independence in 1948.

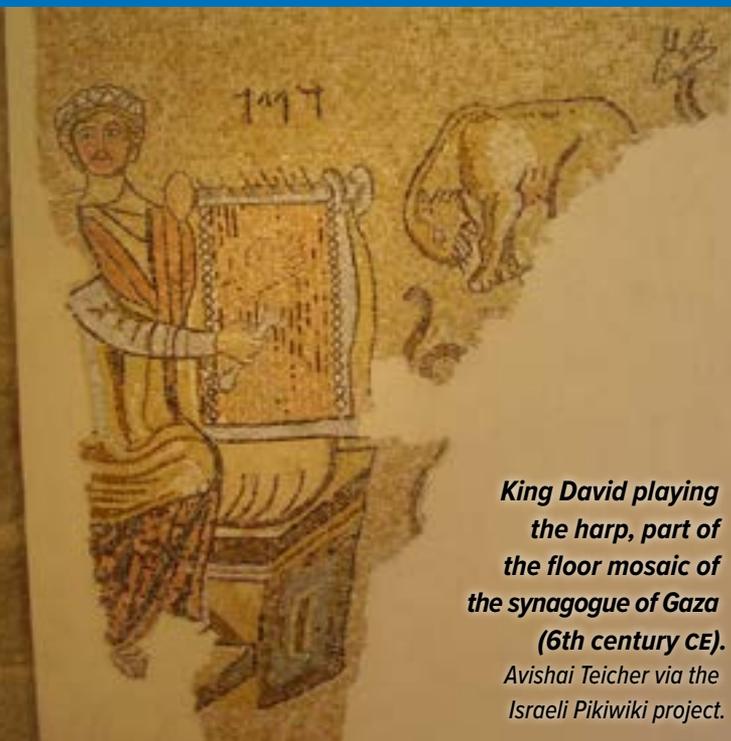
Didn't Zionist leaders call their own movement colonial?

Some did use terms like "colonial" and "colonize" in their writing. While this may be hard to imagine today, in 19th and early 20th century Europe, these words were often seen as positive and did not contradict the message that Jews were going home. The meaning and perception of these terms changed as the horrors of European colonialism came to light, and rightfully so. However, the underlying facts about Zionism did not change. It was, and is, a movement supporting the rights of Jewish people to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. In 1948, this was how Zionist leaders introduced Israel's Declaration of Independence:

"The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped... After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith connected to it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom."

Isn't this a bad-faith effort to attack Palestinian identity and rights?

No, it is simply the story of Israel and the Jewish people in modern terms. It is also a response to decades of Jews being dehumanized and smeared as foreign colonizers who have no right to self-determination in their homeland. Stating facts about Jewish history, identity, and rights does not negate Palestinian rights. There can not be justice or peace without mutual recognition and respect for both the Jewish people and the Palestinian people.



*King David playing
the harp, part of
the floor mosaic of
the synagogue of Gaza
(6th century CE).
Avishai Teicher via the
Israeli Pikiwiki project.*

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StandWithUs, PO Box 341069
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