

# The **JEWISH** **CONNECTION** to **ISRAEL**

The Ancestral Home of the Jewish People

Produced by:

**StandWithUs**



**O**ver 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 in the world.

In this booklet, we explore the Jewish connection to Israel and how it fits with a widely used international definition of indigenous peoples.

*The Western Wall or “Kotel” in Hebrew, is the only remaining part of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. The temple was built in 516 BCE, expanded by the Jewish King Herod in 20 BCE, and destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. The Kotel is a pilgrimage site where Jews pray and mourn the destruction of the temple. The Temple Mount (above and behind the Kotel in this photo) 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.*

## 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 were born 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).*

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





*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, the Middle East, and beyond.
- 132 – 135 CE:** The Romans squash the Bar Kokhba revolt. Seeking to destroy the memory of the Jewish kingdom, Romans rename the territory “Syria Palaestina.” Jews continue to call it the Land of Israel.
- 1211:** A wave of Jews, led by 300 European rabbis, returns to Israel.
- 1481 – 1492:** Many Jews flee to the Land of Israel from Spain and Portugal 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 British Mandate for Palestine, 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.

## Occupation of ancestral lands

Jews have lived in Israel for over 3,000 years. Jewish artifacts have been found by archeologists in Jerusalem from as early as the 9th to 10th centuries BCE. Jewish communities maintained a constant presence in their homeland, despite different empires conquering, colonizing, massacring, and/or expelling them multiple times. They lived as an oppressed minority, but were joined by small waves of Jews returning throughout history. This lasted for 1,900 years, until the modern 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.

## 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. It also became a Muslim holy site known as the Ibrahim Mosque after the 7th century CE.

*Photo courtesy of  
Dr. Mitch Bard and the  
Jewish Virtual Library.*



*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.*

## 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.

## 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 had already lived there for generations.

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





*Jewish children's procession on Lag BaOmer 1918. (Library of Congress).*

### **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 gather 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 rightfully changed as more people understood the horrors of European colonialism. 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 dehumanizing smears which paint Jews 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 cannot be justice or peace without mutual recognition and respect for both the Jewish people and the Palestinian people.



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