

SEVENTH EDITION

A HISTORY OF THE
ARAB-ISRAELI
CONFLICT

IAN J. BICKERTON CARLA L. KLAUSNER

Seventh Edition

A History of the Arab–Israeli Conflict

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PREFACE

The dramatic events of the last few years in the Middle East continue to hold, even demand, our attention. They threaten not only the stability of the region and perhaps much of the wider world but also have implications for the future shape and direction of the Arab–Israeli and Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The as yet unknown, unpredictable and far-reaching consequences of the changes in the area that have occurred since the last edition of this book make it even more important that we keep ourselves informed as to what has taken place in the Arab–Israeli conflict. We hope this edition will assist in that process.

In the twenty-three years since we wrote the first edition of this book, there have been far-reaching changes in the Arab–Israeli conflict and significant shifts in the way about which it has been written. Relations between Israel and neighboring states have altered; the dynamic between Israel and the Palestinians has been in constant flux, alternating between periods of relative calm and outbreaks of explosive bitterness and intense hostility, and, at present, the entire Middle East appears to be in the midst of major political and religious upheaval and uncertainty.

The way the participants, including their respective historians, view, speak, and write about themselves and each other has also significantly shifted in the last several decades. The discourse between Palestinians/Arabs and Israelis and within each group—especially among Israelis—has matured and moderated with the passage of time, and we still believe, perhaps optimistically, that a majority on both sides recognizes that specific goals are more attainable through peaceful means than by warfare. We acknowledge that there are extremists on both sides. Nevertheless, Israel is now recognized and accepted as a reality by most Arabs and Palestinians, and most Israelis appear ready to accept the possibility of a Palestinian state. In addition, the world as a whole is paying greater attention to the Arab–Israeli conflict. With this enhanced awareness, new questions have arisen, new frameworks through which the past and present can be viewed have been constructed, and new histories have been written.

Of course, the circumstances that produced the Arab–Israeli conflict have not changed, nor have old enmities disappeared. Historians cannot ignore or change past events or sentiments. We simply see things differently in the twenty-first century than we did in earlier years. Time provides alternative perspectives with which to interpret events. The Arab–Israeli conflict continues to surprise pundits and commentators, however. It even appears to defy the participants themselves.

The genesis of this book was a history colloquium we team-taught on the Arab–Israeli conflict at the University of Missouri–Kansas City. We discovered that, like the general public, our students had lots of opinions but only fragmentary knowledge. They lacked background information and approached the subject with preconceptions and emotional biases. Our students required knowledge of the events, but they also needed ready access to the documents most relevant to the issues, they needed maps, and they needed guidance as to their further reading. We found no single book that met these requirements, so we decided to write this text to fulfil that need. The book is basically a chronological narrative; however, within that framework, we have tried to highlight certain themes that we regard as central to the conflict.

New to This Edition

In the sixth edition of this book, we examined the victory of Hamas in Palestinian elections in 2006, the Israeli–Hizbullah conflict in July of that year, the victory of Hamas over Fatah in the Gaza Strip in mid-2007, and Israel’s invasion of Gaza in late 2008.

In this, the seventh edition of *A History of the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, we outline developments since 2009. Our narrative and chronologies have been updated, and we have reviewed how we interpret many of the events preceding these startling, rapidly changing, and somewhat unpredictable happenings. We have considered new accounts and interpretations and have included recently published books in the bibliographies at the end of each chapter. We have also updated several maps and tables. In the new chapters of this edition we explore the Arab Spring and its repercussions, and describe the hopes and initiatives of President Barack Obama to achieve peace. We relate the reluctance of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (P.A.) to negotiate directly, and outline the actions of the P.A. in the United Nations General Assembly. In addition we have attempted to present and explore the meaning of recent frenzied and chaotic events through the summer of 2014, as conflict engulfed the Middle East, including Israel and the Palestinians.

It is difficult to know what to make of it all, and events unfold so quickly as we write that, at times, we ourselves have not always agreed on how to interpret them. We fluctuate between optimism and despair. (Students and professors will no doubt be pleased to know, however, that while reviewing these shifting sands we are still talking to each other!) As in past editions, we have attempted to achieve some balance and objectivity about a subject upon which most people feel it necessary to adopt a partisan point of view. Throughout the narrative, we have tried to present both sides of the issues, although we realize that even the selection of material to be included reveals some subjective judgment on our part. If the book succeeds in provoking thoughtful discussion of the Arab–Israeli conflict, we will have achieved our goal.

We hope the additions and revisions in this edition will enhance the book’s timeliness and usefulness, and that this updated account will be of interest to a wide audience, since the Middle East is an area of significance and importance not only to students but also to an educated public.

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*Ian J. Bickerton
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What is new in the 7th edition

In this, the seventh edition of *A History of the Arab–Israeli Conflict*, updates include:

- In-depth coverage of developments since 2009.
- Updated maps and tables
- New Chapter 15 covering 2010–2013
- New Chapter 16 describing events through the Summer of 2014, and covering outstanding issues in the conflict
- Updated interpretations of past events based upon new research and recent developments
- Updated bibliographies at the end of each chapter

A Note on Transliteration: It is difficult to be accurate or consistent in the transliteration of names from the original languages. In most cases, we have adopted the spellings used most commonly by the media. Hence, as examples, we use Hussein instead of Husayn, and although Mursi might be the preferred transliteration of the last name of Egypt’s former president, we use Morsi. In this edition, since almost all sources now use Yasir instead of Yasser Arafat, we have also followed this practice.

A Note on Web Sources: There is such a plethora of sources available on the World Wide Web that it is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of sites that students would find helpful in gaining further insights into the Arab–Israeli conflict. Students and readers are encouraged to use Web resources, but we recommend that they do so with great care. This is a topic that invites extremist views on both sides. There are also, of course, several academic, peer-reviewed journals that contain excellent and relevant articles that can be utilized.

And, Finally, a Note on the Cover: The photograph on the cover of this book, by Jerusalem photographer Raffi Safieh Garabedian, shows the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock, symbols of the religious and nationalist dimensions of the conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is a puzzle to most people, and the Arab–Israeli conflict is perhaps the most confusing dimension of the modern history of the area. Almost daily, television news projects into our living rooms images of Israelis and Palestinians engaged in a futile, seemingly out-of-control cycle of terror raids, suicide bombings, assassinations, rocket attacks, and brutal repression and retaliatory air strikes that leads to despair and plays into the hands of extremists on both sides.

This constant reportage and the seemingly never-ending violence make understanding the conflict involving Israel, Palestinians, and neighboring states more urgent than ever. The situation is becoming even more confusing and alarming, if that is possible. Just what is going on, however, is hard to fathom in the short sound bites that commercial TV imposes on daily news coverage. And much of what the viewer sees appears at odds with what the participants say about the events. Using increasingly bitter and hard-line rhetoric, Israeli and Palestinian spokespersons blame the other side for every escalation of violence that occurs and refuse to accept any responsibility themselves. The “peace process” that held out such hope only a decade ago seems to have been forgotten or abandoned. Even the “Two State” solution appears in danger of being lost. Can these and the other apparent inconsistencies be explained, and what do they reveal about the conflict and the prospects for its peaceful resolution? Attitudes on both sides appear to have hardened, and the path toward peace is strewn with more fatalities and casualties, making reconciliation even more difficult.

We should begin by making it clear that the term *Arab–Israeli conflict* used throughout this text is the generic label most people apply to the struggle centered on the area of the Middle East that in the years prior to the establishment of Israel was known as Palestine. For a period of around seventy-five years before May 1948, the confrontation was essentially one between Palestinian Arabs and Jews over the future disposition of that territory. After the creation of the state of Israel, however, the localized dispute widened to include many other nations both inside and outside the Middle East. The Arab states saw the Jewish state as an enemy to be destroyed. However, although they provided economic and moral support for the Palestinian cause, the majority engaged only indirectly in military operations against Israel. The major protagonists in the six or so major wars or confrontations between 1948 and now were limited to Israel and

the contiguous states of Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as Iraq. During the period called the Cold War, both sides received military and economic assistance from the major world powers. As Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties recognizing the Jewish state, the conflict again began to focus more narrowly on the disputes between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. Thus, while Israelis describe themselves as involved in an “Arab–Israeli conflict,” Palestinians regard the term as quite inappropriate. They see themselves as involved in a “*Palestinian*–Israeli conflict,” in which Israel is supported against them by Jews worldwide.

Another problem with the term *Arab–Israeli conflict* is that it is used inclusively to apply to larger ongoing conflicts, like those in the Persian Gulf, that are only peripherally related to the conflict between Israel and its neighbors. The term might suggest to some that Israel is part of the broader regional conflicts taking place. For at least the past half century, the countries of the Middle East have undergone tremendous changes, as they threw off their colonial pasts and tried to cope with the unimagined wealth that oil has brought to some of them. These changes have frequently resulted in wars over territory. By far, the greatest conflicts within the Middle East during this period centered on the Persian Gulf area: the horrendous eight-year-long war between Iran and Iraq, the extraordinary high-tech Gulf War following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and the 2003 U.S.-led war against Iraq. Although those wars were fought over resources (oil), over territorial boundaries, and for regime change, they were sustained by religious and ethnic hatreds as well. And now, in 2014, we see these sectarian, religious, and ethnic hatreds imploding, as illustrated by the civil war in Syria that started three years ago and by the Sunni-Shia violence in Iraq. Israel has figured in these events, but not as a central actor. Nevertheless, we find the term *Arab–Israeli conflict* the most usable term to apply to the events this book describes.

Many see the Arab–Israeli conflict as the present-day extension of enmity that has existed since biblical times. This is because the issues underlying the conflict strike at the very heart of the identity of the peoples involved. In the case of Israelis and Palestinians, both parties regard sovereignty over the same territory as essential to their existence as a people. It is a case of two peoples with common national aspirations vying for the same piece of land. While this, in itself, is not unique, the area of Israel/Palestine is geographically so small that how both sets of aspirations can be met has been impossible so far to resolve. As if that were not enough, much of the area is both resource-poor and water-poor; these scarcities have added to the intensity of the conflict.

In addition to being the contemporary expression of a historic territorial battle over Palestine between two traditional ethnic rivals, Jews and Arabs, the Arab–Israeli conflict involves three great world religions, and the outcome is of major concern to Jewish, Islamic, and Christian communities throughout the world. To Jews and Judaism, the establishment of Israel is the pivotal event of the past 2,000 years of Jewish history. To Islam and to Muslims, the existence of a Jewish state in the midst of the Muslim world poses a great challenge and is difficult to accept.

The Christian world is fascinated by the Arab–Israeli conflict for a number of reasons. The names and places in the land are familiar to most Christians through their reading of the Old Testament, and the fate of the Holy Land is a central issue

in Christian theology. Sites associated with the life of Jesus are especially significant to Christians, and some indication of the high value of the holy places for Christians can be seen in the importance placed on the visit to the area by Pope John Paul II in March 2000 and by the visit of Pope Francis in May 2014. The insistence that Christians have some say in the future of the holy places in and around Jerusalem has made resolution of the issues surrounding that city even more complex.

Also, Christians have had, and retain, a love–hate relationship with Jews. As we shall see, for most of its history, Christianity has persecuted and discriminated against Jews, but following the Holocaust, Christians now observe Jews working out their own destiny in a Jewish state. Christian attitudes toward Arabs and Muslims for the most part have been—and to a considerable degree remain—based on ignorance and fear.

If we add to these considerations the fact that the Middle East is the location of much of the world’s oil supplies and reserves, and that as a result the region became caught up in the great-power rivalries of the Cold War and continues to be an area of concern and contention, it is easy to see why the Arab–Israeli conflict has absorbed so much of the world’s attention in the past half-century.

The primary objective of this book is to make the Arab–Israeli conflict more intelligible without the distortions that result from oversimplification. This involves tracing the broad sweep of the history of the region and the perceptions both parties have of each other. Both the Arabs and the Israelis are locked into the histories they have created for themselves—into the dreams of their pasts. Both have sought and some still seek to set in our minds favorable cultural images and symbols of themselves and unfavorable ones of their opponents. Remember, legitimizing one’s position is an essential element in any international conflict, and that task sometimes results in intentional or unintentional falsification of the past, as well as vilification of one’s enemies. That is one reason why the Arab–Israeli conflict is so passionately argued over by participants and observers alike. The distinction between the past and the present, while real enough in one sense, is in part an artificial one. While we are aware of and conscious of the past, only the present exists in experiential terms. Constructing and controlling “the truth” about the past to justify one’s actions in the present is an important function of all states and all political activity. An important task of a student of history is to separate the rhetoric designed by both sides to create a usable, legitimizing, and heroic past from the reality of past events. The primary sources included in this book will provide the opportunity for readers to reach their own conclusions as to the issues involved and the way they are portrayed by both sides.

Neither side in the conflict should be seen as a monolith; there are divisions and tensions within both sides along ethnic, religious, class, and gender lines that lead to many different political attitudes. One aim of this book is to assist you in sorting out the various groups and their opinions and assessing which ones are more likely to lead to peaceful rather than violent solutions. As David K. Shipler points out in *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*, “The time has passed when Jews and Arabs could face each other in simple conflict. They live together now in rich variety. There is no single Arab–Jewish relationship; there are many, and they require an elusive tolerance that must somehow run against the forces of war, nationalism, terrorism and religious certainty.”

DEFINING THE QUESTION

How, then, can the Arab–Israeli conflict be explained? Is it a religious war between the followers of Islam and Judaism in which the protagonists are driven by deep-seated suspicions and hostilities concerning the divine instructions to each other? Is it an ethnic war between traditionally rival groups, reflecting changing demographic patterns? Is it a war of nationalist aspirations in which rival militant nationalisms are seeking to establish a state and thereby find their “place in the sun”? Is it a war of self-defense in which a newly established state is defending itself against the determination of its neighbors to destroy it? Is it a war of territorial expansion in which one state is attempting to expand its borders at the expense of its neighbors? Is it an imperial war reflecting the history of the rivalries and ambitions of the imperial states of Europe—and more recently the United States and the Soviet Union—in the Middle East? Is it the inevitable consequence of the disruptive process of transition from traditional society to modern state taking place in the Middle East? Or is it simply a series of random, unconnected events that have had tragic and unforeseen consequences for the people involved?

All these elements are present in the Arab–Israeli conflict, but to single out any one of them as the explanation for the events that make up the conflict is to oversimplify a situation that has developed over the past century. As we shall see, the tragedy of the Arab–Israeli conflict is that it is the collision of two sets of historic and moral rights of groups over the same land. Both portray themselves as victims—victims of outsiders as well as of each other’s violence. The opposing claims differ, of course. In Shipler’s words, “To draw the boldest outline of the past is to make Israel’s basic case. To sketch the present is to see the Arabs’ plight.”

WHO ARE THE ARABS AND JEWS?

We must begin with a definition of *Arabs* and *Jews*. Both terms have a historical and cultural meaning. Mythically, Arabs and Jews have a common origin. Thus, some regard Noah’s eldest son, Shem, as the ancestor of both Jews and Arabs. Arabs as well as Jews see themselves as descendants of the patriarch Abraham and, therefore, as inheritors of the Promised Land. Arabs trace their lineage to Ishmael, Abraham’s first son born of Hagar, Sarah’s handmaiden, while Jews trace themselves to Isaac, son of Abraham and his wife, Sarah. In the Hebrew Bible, known to Christians as the Old Testament, the term *Arab* referred to the nomadic inhabitants of the central and northern Arabian Peninsula. Over the centuries, these nomadic tribes, headed by a sheikh, who acted as a first among equals, developed a structure shaped by the harsh deserts and dependent on the camel. Survival depended upon the strength and solidarity of the tribe, and on obedience to custom and an unwritten code of honor called *muruwwa*. We can learn more about Arab values and the Arab experience during the period just before Muhammad through the heroic poetry they spoke and sang in the sixth and early seventh centuries. The greatest of these poems are the so-called “Suspended Poems” or *Mu’allaqat*, the most famous of which is that of Imru al-Qays, ruler of an ephemeral pre-Islamic desert kingdom in the sixth century. When the Arab conquest of the Middle East occurred in the seventh and

eighth centuries of the common era (C.E.),* following the founding of Islam, Arabic became the language and Islam the religion of the region. The term *Arab* acquired a new cultural definition that lasted during the period of Arab hegemony until the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258. Not all the inhabitants adopted the new language and religion, however. Some remnants of early Christianity remained: Nestorians in Persia and Iraq, Maronite Christians in Mount Lebanon (who use Syriac in their liturgy but recognize Rome as the head of the Christian Church), and other Christian groups, including Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics, in Syria and elsewhere. And, of course, Jews resisted the religion of the new conquerors.

Arabs today do not form one nation-state although, like Jews, they consider themselves a people and national group. They constitute a majority in many modern nation-states (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, North Yemen, South Yemen). Today, there are close to 300 million in the region from Morocco to Iraq who consider themselves Arab. Nor are Arabs a race in the commonly understood sense. Neither are they a religion, for many Arabs—about 9 million in the Middle East and 30–35 million worldwide—are Christian. And only about one-fifth of the world's 1.2–1.4 billion Muslims are Arab. Indeed, the largest concentration of Muslims in the world is in Indonesia. In the final analysis, *Arab* can be applied to those who use Arabic as their language and identify with Arab culture and Arab causes.

The term *Jew* is as difficult to define as the term *Arab*. Jews trace their history to the Semitic tribe or groups of tribes known as Hebrews or Israelites who claimed descent from Abraham through his son Isaac. Although Jews consider themselves a people, as do the Arabs, Jews are not simply a nationality, are not a race, and are more than a religion. They are at once an ethnic group, a religious group, and a cultural group. Even identifying as Jews those who use Hebrew as a language does not help us much, as it is the spoken language of only about one-third of the inhabitants of Israel, and many who identify themselves as Jews have little or no familiarity with the language. According to *halacha*, Jewish religious law, the term *Jew* can be applied to those who have a Jewish mother or who have converted to Judaism.

One problem facing Europeans in discussing Arabs and Jews is to free themselves from the distorting lens of two destructive ideologies: anti-Semitism (in the sense of anti-Jewishness) and Orientalism. Irrational suspicion, fear, and hatred of Jews—as Jews—have characterized European history for centuries, leading to almost uninterrupted oppression and persecution of Jews throughout all the countries of Europe. Anti-Semitism—the term was first used by the German racist Wilhelm Marr in 1879—in its modern form defined and attacked Jews in terms of race rather than religion, and relied on pseudo-scientific Social Darwinist theories in attempting to prove the superiority of the “Aryan” race over the “inferior” Semitic Jews. These twisted ideas found their ultimate expression in the Holocaust—Hitler’s attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe.

Americans and western Europeans have also exhibited a contempt, disregard, and sense of arrogance toward Arabs and Muslims and have failed to recognize the

* The term “C.E.” (Common Era) is preferred by Muslims and Jews to the corresponding designation “A.D.” (the year of our Lord) used by Christians.

intrinsic value and contributions of Arabs and Muslims to history. These assumptions, or more correctly, limitations, were defined by one scholar, Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, in which he described Orientalism as the racist way the Western world views the inhabitants of the Orient, including the Middle East. The West, Said argued, tried to establish the idea that Europe—by defining the political, economic, and cultural characteristics of the people of the Orient as inferior to those of the West—had the right to hegemony, or dominance, over the Orient. Thus, non-Middle Easterners have come to regard the Middle East as politically despotic, economically backward, and culturally decadent. As a result, there is a tendency to overlook completely the contributions of the Middle East to the development of Western European civilization and, in restructuring the realities of Middle Eastern life and history, to distort them. The cultural or intellectual assumptions that Occidentals bring to their study of Jews and Arabs make an understanding of the Arab–Israeli conflict considerably more difficult.

More serious as far as solving the conflict is concerned, Jews and Arabs bring their own prejudices and negative stereotypes—exaggerated by past and recent history—to bear upon each other. For Jews, the most pervasive stereotype of the Arab, according to Shipler, is “the fearsome violent figure of immense strength and duplicity... capable of great cruelty, given to fanatical disregard for human life, he murders easily, either out of a crazed lust for blood or as an emotional animal easily incited and manipulated by murderous leaders.” Arab stereotypes of Jews are remarkably similar to those of their Jewish counterparts. Jews are seen by Arabs as violent and cowardly. Ignoring the ancient ties of the Jews to Palestine, the Arabs regard them as aliens, as outsiders, and as interlopers who do not belong. Needless to say, these prejudices add significantly to the passions of the participants in the conflict.

THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION: JUDAISM AND ISLAM

Much of the Arab–Israeli conflict is secular, involving issues of territory, security, and ethnic and cultural differences. In many respects, the sources of tension are nonreligious, resembling those of any conflict, but religious identification is a central element in the conflict and adds an extra dimension and sense of inevitability to the unfolding events. Despite the fact that only a minority of Arabs and Jews are strictly observant religiously, religion has been, and continues to be, a focal point for the peoples involved in this conflict. Religion significantly shapes the attitudes of the protagonists toward each other. Furthermore, high-profile religious extremists and their inflammatory statements attract widespread press and public attention which is, no doubt, why the conflict is sometimes described as a religious war. All this is somewhat ironic given how much both religions share in common.

Judaism is the oldest monotheistic religion and foreshadows both Christianity and Islam. Judaism refers to the faith and ceremonies of Jews and is a faith that is revealed by God and interpreted by religious teachers, namely rabbis. In its widest sense, Judaism is the entire Jewish tradition and way of life. Central to Judaism is the belief that God acted personally in history through a Chosen People, the Jews (the people called Israel), and that God entered into a Covenant with them that if they obeyed His teachings He would, through them, save all mankind. God’s instructions

to the Jews are contained in the Torah (literally teachings) or Pentateuch, which consists of the five books of Moses. The Torah contains the laws God revealed to the Jews, including the Ten Commandments. It also includes the message to establish an independent society based on divine precepts, which are elaborated in great detail. One finds in the Torah, as well, God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the three Jewish patriarchs, that God will give the Jews the land of Israel—the Promised Land—the state in which they will live in truth, justice, and peace. Throughout the Torah, the boundaries of the “Promised Land” vary (see Genesis 15:18–21; Numbers 34:1–12; Deuteronomy 1:7–8), but the borders were greater than those of the state of Israel even after the 1967 war. In the minds of many religious Jews today, the Torah is more than just a “Bible”; it is a blueprint for existence and should be the constitution of any Jewish state.

Judaism has gone through several stages in its long history. The first stage could be said to be that described in the Hebrew Bible, which consists of the Torah, the books of the Prophets, and a collection of other writings such as Kings, Chronicles, Ruth, Esther, and the Song of Solomon. It tells of the Jews' search under Moses for the land promised to them by God after their expulsion from Egypt (the Exodus) and describes the Kingdoms of David and Solomon. The boundaries of Solomon's kingdom around 1000 B.C.E.,* with Jerusalem as its capital, included the areas called Judea and Samaria, and extended from Aqaba and the Negev beyond Beersheba in the south, to beyond the Litani River and Golan Heights in the north, to areas of present-day Jordan on the east. Extreme religious and nationalistic groups today insist that these biblical boundaries of *Eretz Yisrael*, or the Land of Israel, especially Judea and Samaria, or the West Bank of the Jordan River, must remain under Jewish control.

The northern part of the kingdom, or Samaria, was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. The Jews of the southern kingdom, or Judea, were exiled to Babylonia in 586 B.C.E., after the destruction of the First Temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem, which had become the center of Jewish worship until it was destroyed by the army of King Nebuchadnezzar. Restored to Palestine by the Persians, the Jews built a Second Temple in Jerusalem and lived autonomously under a succession of foreign rulers until 70 C.E., when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and dispersed the Jews (the Diaspora). One of the last strongholds to fall to the Romans was the hillside fortress known as Masada. The Israeli slogan “Masada shall never fall again” has come to symbolize Israel's determination to fight to the death to maintain its national sovereignty. It is thus significant that recruits of the Israel Armoured Corps swear their allegiance at Masada.

Following the destruction of the Temple and the disappearance of the priestly class, synagogues (places of worship, study, and community gathering) came into existence throughout the Jewish world, and teachers, or rabbis, interpreted the law. This oral law of the rabbis was later codified in a work known as the *Mishnah*. Commentary on the *Mishnah* was known as the *Gemara*, and taken together, *Mishnah* and *Gemara* made up the *Talmud*. The accumulated mass of law and lore

* The term “B.C.E.” (before the Common Era) is used throughout the text and corresponds to the designation “B.C.” (before Christ) used by Christians.

based on the Torah and Talmud was then codified by about 500 C.E. In subsequent centuries, living under Muslim or Christian rulers, Jewish thinkers and teachers continued to study and interpret their traditions. In the Middle Ages, Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides (1135–1204), a Jew living in Islamic Spain, emigrated to Egypt, where he served as a physician at the court of the Muslim rulers. Recognized as the most learned and authoritative Jewish figure of his age, Maimonides codified Talmudic law up to his time in the *Mishneh Torah* and dealt with fundamental theological and philosophical questions in the *Moreh Nebuchim*, or *Guide for the Perplexed*. Maimonides distilled thirteen articles of the faith and enumerated 613 positive and negative commandments found in the Torah that form the basis of Jewish law and faith.

Jews who lived in Spain, or Sepharad, as well as those who lived elsewhere under Islamic domination are generally known as the *Sephardim*. In the Islamic world, Jews had lived for hundreds of years as *Ahl-al-Dhimma*, or people of a contract or covenant, with the Muslim rulers. As *Dhimmis*, Jews, like Christians, were given the status of second-class citizens. They were subject to heavy land and poll taxes (*jizyah*) and discriminatory social regulations and were forbidden to exercise control over Muslims, although these restrictions were sometimes ignored. A “tolerated minority,” *Dhimmis* were allowed to worship freely, to live under their own laws, and to enjoy a large measure of self-government. There were no restrictions on their travel or economic life. Although there were occasional massacres, attacks against them, and sometimes even forced conversions, no Islamic ruler ever instituted a policy of wholesale expulsion or extermination of the Jews. Arabized Jews tended to take on the characteristics of their surroundings. Defined in terms of their religion, they tended to think of themselves primarily as a religious group.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Jews of Western Europe (European Jews in general were known as *Ashkenazim*) were gradually emancipated, and many older customs and rituals were rejected to enable Judaism to accommodate the modern world. Reform Judaism, Zionism, and secular Yiddish culture emerged. Today, the largest Jewish communities are in the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Israel. Devout Jews maintain traditional Jewish observances in their individual and familial practices, including following the dietary (kosher) laws, attending synagogue or temple, observing special holy days and periods of fasting, and other rituals. The Jewish return to Jerusalem and to Zion (Mount Zion, which came to stand for the Holy City and the Holy Land) became a central part of Jewish ritual and ceremonial practice. Although there are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and other branches of Judaism, the vast majority of Jews throughout the world support the existence of the Jewish state of Israel.

Islam asserts that God has revealed Himself several times in history, and it accepts the validity of scriptural religions like Judaism and Christianity. Muslims believe that the transmitter of God’s final revelations to mankind was Muhammad, a member of the Quraysh tribe of the trading city of Mecca. Muhammad was born about 570 C.E. and is regarded by Muslims as the last of God’s prophets, in a line that includes Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Not much is known about Muhammad’s life, except that he came from a poor family of the clan of Hashim, married Khadija, a wealthy widow fifteen years his senior, became a successful businessman, and was also deeply spiritual. According to tradition, the angel Gabriel (the same archangel

who appeared to Mary in Christian tradition) appeared to Muhammad and revealed the word of *Allah* (*al-Illah*, or The God), whom Muhammad accepted as the One True God—the same monotheistic deity of the Jews and Christians.

Around the year 610 C.E., Muhammad began to preach the word of God, and the passages of rhymed prose that he uttered were copied down and later collected to form the *Qur'an* (or Koran), the holy book of Islam, considered by pious Muslims to be the divine word of God. Within a few years, and especially after his flight, or emigration (*Hijra*, or Hegira), from Mecca to Medina in the year 622 C.E.—the year 1 of the Muslim calendar—Muhammad was the acknowledged religious, political, and military leader of a new community of believers, or *Umma*, as it was called. In 630 C.E., after he had taken over Mecca and reconsecrated the *Kaaba* (a cubelike structure that had previously housed 360 idols) to Allah alone, delegations of tribes from all over Arabia accepted Muhammad's authority. The precepts of the Qur'an became, theoretically, the law of a new religious-political entity.

Although the Kaaba became the focal point of Muslim worship, and a pilgrimage to Mecca, the *Hajj*, is one of the Five Pillars of Islam (the others being the profession of faith that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger, prayer, fasting, and charity), Jerusalem also occupies a special place for Muslims. Sura (or chapter) 17 of the Qur'an recounts a mystical night journey of Muhammad to a spot known today to the Jews as the Temple Mount, the platform upon which Solomon's and later Herod's Temple once stood, and to the Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, or the *Haram al-Sharif*. From there, he ascended to heaven for a vision of Allah. The Western Wall, all that remains today of Herod's Temple, and the Muslim shrines known as the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque that were later built on the platform, are important symbols for both Jews and Muslims and have made Jerusalem a focal point of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Muhammad died in 632 C.E., and it was left to his successors, the *caliphs* (who inherited his manifold functions but not his power of revelation), to put down revolts of recalcitrant tribes and then to lead Muslim Arab armies out of Arabia to conquer, within a century, an area extending from the Pyrenees in the west to the Punjab in the east and the borders of China in the north. Arabic soon became the language of the entire Middle East and Islam the dominant religion, and it remains so today.

Islam means "submission," and for Muslims the primary purpose of existence is to submit to the will of God as revealed in the Qur'an. Muslims, like Jews, believe that the state should exist to do God's will; the Qur'an, covering all aspects of living, therefore, became the foundation of a legal system for a community in which religion and politics (or "church" and "state") were one and the same thing. The *Sharia*, or "straight path," the corpus of Islamic law that developed over about three centuries, consists of the Qur'an, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (*Hadith*), and, for Sunni Muslims, legal points derived from analogous situations (*Qiyas*), and material often based on local traditions and customs accepted by the consensus (*Ijma*) of the community or, more accurately, by the learned men or jurists. The entire Sharia, once compiled, was considered to be divinely inspired; it continues to form the basis of the legal system in many Middle Eastern countries today.

Islam is no more unified than Christianity; and conflicts over the question of leadership in the early community led to a schism between the Sunnis, the followers of tradition, who insisted on an elective element to the position of caliph, and the