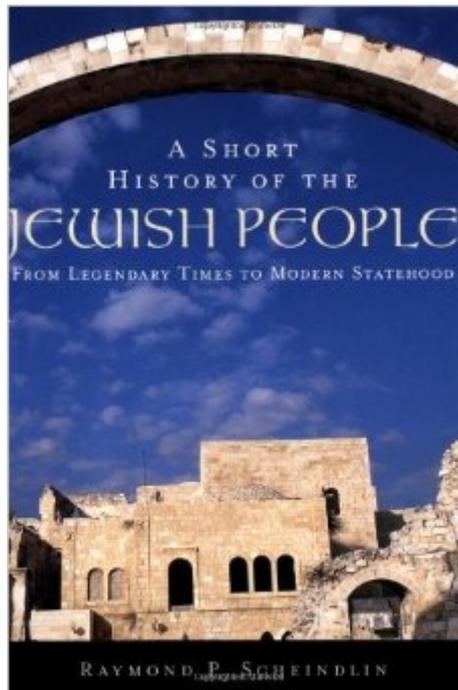


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# A Short History Of The Jewish People: From Legendary Times To Modern Statehood



## Synopsis

Where did the Jews come from? How did they retain their strong sense of community through centuries of dispersion? How have the Jews of the present, with their proud ethnic identity and thriving national home, emerged out of the downtrodden Jews of the past? Such questions arise naturally in the minds of anyone contemplating the long history of Jewish people. In one concise, authoritative volume, *A Short History of the Jewish People* provides insights and answers. This sweeping and highly informative work presents the major geographical, cultural, and political forces that have determined the course of Jewish history, introducing the many individuals, both religious and secular, who have shaped the character, mindset, and prospects of the Jewish people. Organized chronologically, the narrative follows the Jewish experience from legendary times to the peace agreements currently being negotiated in the Middle East. And, to give this overview an international and timely perspective, Raymond P. Scheindlin focuses his study on the pivotal events and dominant communities within each historical period. Written by a respected Hebrew scholar, cultural historian, noted author, and rabbi, *A Short History of the Jewish People* carefully describes the story of a people as varied as the many cultures in which they have lived. Including detailed maps and stirring photos, as well as timelines and sidebars, this pioneering work is a valuable resource for anyone broadly curious about the Jewish people.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Raymond P. Scheindlin has managed to write, in 263 pages, an accurate, secular and very readable history of the Jewish people. He takes the reader, chronologically, from the period of the

first known references to the Israelites outside the Bible, (1220 B.C.E.), an Egyptian inscription commemorating the victory of the pharaoh Merneptah over the wandering tribe, to the declaration of Israeli statehood in 1948, and further still to the present peace negotiations in the Middle East. This sweeping and highly informative work presents the major geographical, cultural and political forces that have determined the course of Jewish history. Scheindlin also discusses the many individuals, secular and religious, who have shaped the mindset and character of the Jewish people. I am taking a course in Jewish history and asked my professor for "an excellent but readable book" on the subject. I told him I wanted to be able to "enjoy the reading process as well as study." He immediately suggested Rabbi Scheindlin's "A Short History of the Jewish People." I must say that if it is possible to call a history book "riveting" and "compelling" and still maintain credibility, I will say it. I could not put the book down! The text is beautifully written and the history itself, as well as the people who made it, are fascinating. The book also serves as an excellent outline of Jewish History and has assisted me in understanding the course's assigned texts. Highly recommended! JANA

Although one can quibble over specific statements and interpretations (e.g. he writes that Yiddish is a dialect of modern German, when actually it derives from Middle German and is as much a dialect as English is, which also evolved from Middle German) or his inclusion or exclusion of certain figures, facts, etc.-- overall Scheindlin has created a superb work. It is concise, well written, and nicely complemented with clear historical timelines, maps, and small topical essays. The book is well organized with sensitivity to the difficulty of understanding the tremendous amount of material being covered. The chapters break down as follows: 1) Israelite Origins and Kingdom [Biblical] (c1220 BCE - 587 BCE) 2) Judea and the Origins of the Diaspora [2nd Temple Period] (587 BCE - 70 CE) 3) Roman Palestine and Sassanid Babylonia [Classical Rabbinic Period] (70 CE - 632 CE) 4) Jews in the Islamic World: From the Rise of Islam to the End of the Middle Ages (632 CE - 1500 CE) 5) Jews of Medieval Christian Europe (9th century to 1500) 6) Jews in the Ottoman Empire and Middle East (1453 - 1948) 7) Jews of Western Europe (1500 - 1900) 8) Jews of Eastern Europe and the United States (1770 - 1940) 9) The Holocaust (appx. 1925 - 1946) 10) Zionism and the Origins of the State of Israel (appx. 1862 - 1948) 11) The Jewish People after 1948 This is an excellent historical primer and contains a good bibliography for further study.

Scheindlin has managed to write nearly the perfect book for a lower division course on Jewish history. He successfully spans the entire scope of Jewish history from legendary times to the modern State of Israel in a mere 263 pages of very readable prose. His writing is neither dry nor

laden with jargon. He writes like Leon Uris or Herman Wouk. Two issues of debate in the book should be supplemented with additional readings. The first is that the portrayal of the Jewish-Christian schism is only presented in the context of medieval Antisemitism, and a more balanced and informative view of the formative period of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity is found in *From Text To Tradition* by Lawrence Schiffman. The second is the lachrymos portrayal of Jewish life in the Middle Ages. That should be balanced with Salo Baron's groundbreaking article "Ghetto and Emancipation," reprinted in *The Menorah Treasury*, ed. Leo W. Schwarz (Philadelphia, 1964). With those two caveats, I would recommend this book for any introductory Jewish history or Jewish studies survey class.

In taking a "Survey of Jewish History" course this fall, which is a broad subject, a broad and sweeping primary textbook was needed. In the short space of 263 pages, Scheindlin covers equitably the history of world Jewry, balancing coverage of religious and sociopolitical elements. Although accurately described as a secular book, Scheindlin is a practicing Jew and the book is certainly not irreligious. In most cases (esp. premodern situations,) Scheindlin approaches an event or a conflict as a neutral observer, a historian documenting causes and effects. Importantly, he explains the way Jewish societies around the world conceived of and reacted to their circumstances, without actually adopting their views in his writing. This allows both Jew and non-Jew to feel comfortable with the book. Anyone who faults the book for its lack of detail misunderstands the point of the text and the feasibility of what they are asking for. What Scheindlin does with stunning success is give an interesting, accurate depiction, albeit with broad brushstrokes, of the forces that have shaped Jewry throughout the ages. (I especially recommend the chapter on the Holocaust as riveting and awe-inspiring. Scheindlin, in his understated tone, evokes the horror of "Shoah" (destruction) in a way that impresses even veteran readers with its vividness.)

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