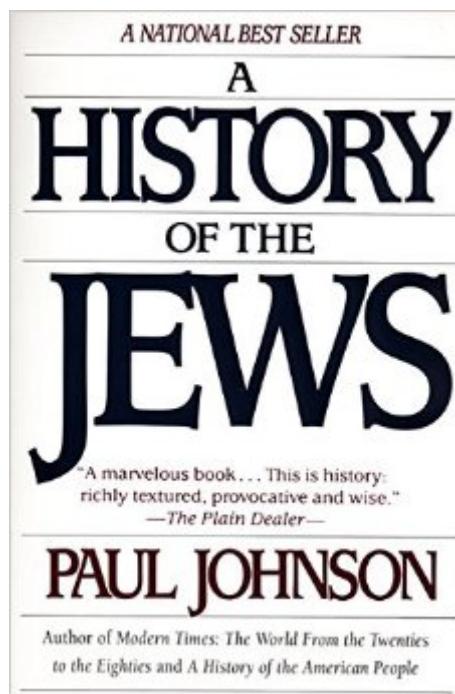


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# A History Of The Jews



## **Synopsis**

A national bestseller, this brilliant 4000 year survey covers not only Jewish history but the impact of Jewish genius and imagination on the world. By the author of *Modern Times: The World From the Twenties to the Eighties*.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This is my third book by British historian Paul Johnson. There is no question that he is an extremely talented writer and an excellent but opinionated historian. As always this combination makes for a lively and exciting read. Johnson states in the introduction that, as a believing Christian, he feels he owes much to the Jewish people who he greatly admires. He therefore felt that he wanted to write a complete history. It proves that a good Jewish history does not need to be written by a Jew.

Johnson divides Jewish history into a series of epochs, each one of which consumes a part in the book. The chapters are called "Israelites" which covers the biblical period, "Judaism" which covers the period from the building of the Second Temple through the early Christian and early Islamic period, "Cathedocracy" in which Johnson deals with the experience of the Jews under medieval Christendom and Islam, "Ghetto" which deals with the late Medieval and Renaissance period in Europe. "Emancipation" which discusses the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe, "Holocaust" which needs no further explanation and "Zion" which covers not only the birth of modern Israel but also the post-war Jewish experience world wide. This book is enormously detailed and highly opinionated. Johnson's affection for the Jewish people shines through on virtually every page. Never one to hedge on a conclusion, Johnson has opinions on everyone from Abraham to Begin. My favorite

chapter was the opening one, "Israelites". Here Johnson attempts to use similarities between biblical descriptions and known facts of other ancient civilizations to demonstrate that the bible, from Abraham forward is essentially historical. This section will be of enormous interest to everyone, whatever your knowledge of the bible. The Jewish saga is the human saga. It is complete with pathos, absurdity, tragedy and triumph. It is remarkable that an ancient people could survive under such hostile conditions. Really a miracle. Johnson captures the essence of that miracle. The entire book will be of interest to those with less than complete knowledge of Jewish history. It will also be excellent reading for those who have a good knowledge of Jewish history because of Johnson's excellent writing ability. This book is well worth the money.

As an Orthodox Jew, an "insider", I was absolutely (and positively) amazed to see an "outsider", like Mr. Johnson, penetrate through the layers of confusion and misunderstandings and really "gets it". In the words of Rabbi Berel Wein (a contemporary Jewish historian), "Mr. Johnson did a much better job than many secular Jewish historians". There are many things I disagree with in this book but more often then not I found myself nodding in agreement and underlining key sentences. All this is my commentary on the CONTENTS of the book, when it comes to lucidity, choice of words and philosophical depth, well... Brilliant is putting it mildly. This book is a must-read for Jews and non-Jews alike!

I have read histories of the Jews by at least half a dozen authors and I rate Johnson's as the best. Just as he successfully captured the character of the American people in "A History of the American People," so too, he captures the essence of Judaism, its culture and history. What is remarkable about these two works is he is not an American (he's English) nor Jewish (he's Roman Catholic) yet observing from the "outside," he does great justice to both America and to Jews. I consider myself to be well versed in Jewish history and traditions. I am well read on the subject and, indeed, I have taught a college course in Judaism (at Marymount College in Tarrytown, NY). I find Johnson's views to be insightful and his facts to be laid out with no glaring errors. Starting in prebiblical times and continuing to the present, he tells a remarkable story. If you read only one history of the Jews, you would do well to select this one.

This book definitely opened my eyes as to the deep and full history of the Jewish people. For the non-Jew, it was a very moving and disturbing book. It traces the development of the Jewish nation, from Abraham to Menachim Begin. What struck me most was the immensity of the tragedies that

have followed the Jews throughout history, from the Diaspora to Hitler. Johnson details their story with sympathy, but not without noting their failings as well. I found it superb and I highly recommend it. It changed my view on Jewish history and the Jewish people completely

As a Catholic tragically aware of what he owes to the people of the Bible, I have been reading Jewish authors over the last twenty years, developing my own ghetto within my religious family and becoming extremely sensitive to gentile - not so gentle - oversimplifications concerning the Jews. Reading Paul Johnson was a permanent pleasure, if not bliss. From the standpoint of ethical monotheism, which he rightly so attributes to the Jews, he offers a thrilling travelogue across 4,000 years of human history, being honest enough to Christianity and Islam as Jewish sects which finally found a life of their own. Much before reaching his chapter on the Holocaust, his presentation on the seeds of antisemitism are extremely enlightening. This book is one of the best presents one can imagine for those who are prepared to suffer and rejoice with a people that cannot renounce to be God's elect.

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