

Summary: Israel Today

The People of Israel

In A.D. 70, the Jews lost their homeland. They lived all over the world, but many still thought of Palestine as home. They called their homeland Zion. Zionists encouraged Jews to return to Palestine. In the late 1800s, they began moving back.

Most came from Eastern Europe, where Jews had few rights. Some joined a communal farm, or *kibbutz*. To grow crops in the desert, they used drip irrigation. This system gives each plant just the water it needs. Then came World War II. After the Holocaust, homeless Jews sought refuge in Palestine.

In 1948, Israel became a Jewish state. Judaism is the state religion. Hebrew is the state language. More than 80 percent of Israelis are Jews. The rest are Arabs. The Declaration of the Establishment promised equal rights for all. Arabs, though, did not have equal opportunities. In 2000, the government unveiled a new plan. It is meant to improve life for Arab Israelis.

Israeli women have always had rights. Women work outside the home. They serve in the army. A woman named Golda Meir was prime minister from 1969 to 1974.

Life in Israel

Since 1948, nearly 3 million Jews have moved to Israel. The 1950 Law of Return welcomed all Jews as citizens. In 1987, the Soviet Union (now Russia) allowed Jews to leave the country. Most were skilled workers.

In the 1980s, Israel brought in Jews from new places. They came from North Africa and other countries in the Middle East. Many Ethiopian Jews have settled in Israel.

About one in four Jewish Israelis is Orthodox. Orthodox Jews want the state to be ruled by strict religious law. They want to limit activities, especially on the holy days. The other Jews are secular. Religious practices play a smaller role in their lives.

Before You Read

Highlight each vocabulary word. Highlight nearby words that are clues to each word's meaning.

kibbutz *noun*, a Jewish farming commune

secular *noun*, unrelated to religion

After You Read

REVIEW How does Israel improve its dry soil so it can produce almost all of its own food? Underline the sentence that answers the question.

REVIEW Why might Jews in other countries want to emigrate to Israel? Draw a box around at least two sentences that help you answer the question.