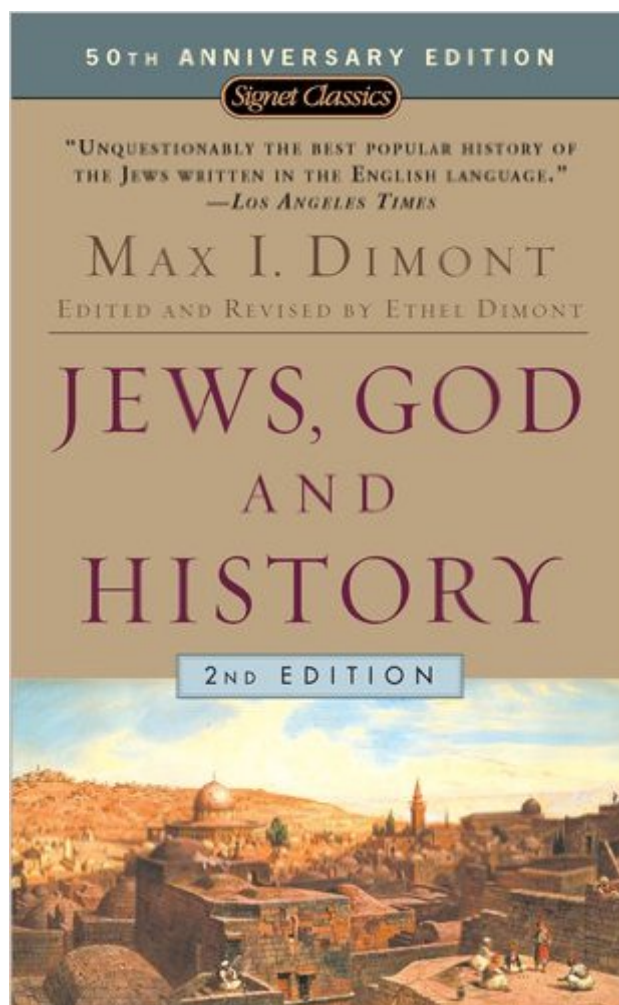


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Jews, God, And History (50th Anniversary Edition)



Synopsis

From ancient Palestine through Europe and Asia, to America and modern Israel, Max I. Dimont shows how the saga of the Jews is interwoven with the story of virtually every nation on earth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This popular history of the Jewish people succeeds in bringing the four thousand year saga alive for the general reader. The author observes that even though the furniture of the West may be Greek, the house of Western civilization is Jewish. One of the questions examined in this book is: How did the Jewish people survive the disappearance of every civilization in which they lived? The following six eras are discussed in the Preface: the Pagan World, Greco-Roman civilization, Diaspora, Islam, European Middle Ages and the Modern Age. Dimont accepts the psychoanalytic, philosophical and existentialist interpretation of history that holds that ideas motivate mankind and shape history. Part One: The Portable God, explores the age of paganism, the origin of the Hebrews and of monotheism and the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, until the coming of the Greeks and the clash of Greek and Hebrew culture. In Part Two: Age Of The Apikorsim, he looks at the survival of Jewish culture and religion under the Greeks, the Roman take-over of the land, the destruction of Jerusalem and the various Jewish revolts until the final banishment from the Holy Land. Part 3: Moses, Christ and Caesar investigates the birth of Christianity as a Jewish sect, how the religions were separated during the aforementioned wars and revolts and the spread and ultimate triumph of Christianity in Europe. The next section, Invisible World Of The Talmud, explains how Judaism and Jewish identity were preserved in the diaspora by means of Talmudic learning.

A book that spans Abraham to Maimonides to Disraeli can't get every detail in, but I still found the book very informative. I found Dimont's interpretation of events enlightening -- for example, in the Middle Ages the ghettoization and ostracization of Jews, in a way, helped the Jews, because they were free from the ludicrous system of Feudalism. Could we consider the Jews the originators of the Free Market system (which is a good thing)? Dimont hints at this. I also didn't know that the Church was in many ways the *protector* of the Jews (Gregory the Great forbade the forced conversion of Jews), and that it was lay Christians who incited and joined the Anti-Semitic mobs. This makes "sense" in a social psychological way (not to give credence to Jew hatred). You have a bunch of serfs, illiterate, ignorant of their own religion, ignorant of the Tanach/Old Testament (Catholic Church liturgy really builds entirely from the NT), ostensibly owned by their lords, and then you have a bunch of educated, "free" Jews who were different religiously from the oppressed Christians. Jealousy, envy, perception of a disruption in the "natural" order, thus Anti-Semitism. The Nazis would pick up on this later, quite literally emphasizing the "natural order", except the Nazis, as Dimont shows, aren't Christian but anti-Christian as well as anti-Jew. Their hatred of Jews had nothing to do w/ "deicide", rather motive that can only be described as Darwinian pagan "Blood and Soil". The Nazis had enough Zyklon-B gas to kill 20 million more, yet only 3 million Jews left in Europe after the evils of the Final Solution. The Nazis were going to go after everyone. I also liked the tidbits Dimont throws in: Germans during WWII had a higher suicide rate than Jews in the concentration camps. Amazing!

Max Dimont's "Jews, God, and History" is a now well-known summary of the subject. As has been pointed out by many previous reviewers, this book is appropriately acclaimed for being readable, helpfully condensed, and free of scholarly obfuscation. His collection of the facts of Jewish history is accessible in ways that more detailed and research-based works are not. One could quickly use an outline of the book to keep the chronology straight and get immediate access to greater detail when needed. He summarizes the key events and issues of Jewish history in a manner that can act as an introduction to more detailed works. Unlike more scholarly works, he is honest about his advocacy. He advocates a universal rationalism, on the model of Spinoza, rather than a philosophy based on revelation or authority. He minimizes the effects of Christianity and Islam. He is unabashed in his citation of the beneficial effects of Jewish innovations. His roll call of influential Jewish individuals (pp. 328-372) is a mini-encyclopedia in itself. He advocates a non-supernatural approach to history, so he accepts historical and psychological rather than theistic explanations. His secular approach

may make the book more accessible to a larger audience. Dimont's assets are as monumental as are his liabilities, with three areas of particular weakness. First, the title is a misnomer. The book contains a lot about the Jews, a lot about history, and little or nothing about God. It therefore has the paradoxical effect of portraying the uniquely Jewish theology as unnecessary to understanding Jewish history. Second, Dimont states that whether God is or is not involved in history is irrelevant to the story of the Jews.

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