

Did you know that only a handful of ancient people groups continue to exist in our modern society? The Hebrews (or Jews) are one of these people groups. The only other people groups still living today who extend as far back into history as the Jews are the Chinese, Egyptian, and Hindu peoples.¹ Judaism has survived not only time but adversity - despite their consistently small number throughout history - and this makes them a particularly unique people. They have also displayed excellence in various contributions to the world in disproportionately large numbers - from art to religion to science. That kind of endurance, that kind of greatness on the world stage yet smallness in number, warrants a closer look at their origins and beliefs. What's found could be beneficial to anyone.

As I stated above, Judaism is ancient. And, while surviving time alone is impressive, their endurance is that much more impressive when you consider that there has been targeted persecution of Jews at various times in history. They have experienced captivity, forcible breaking up and scattering of them as a people, and multiple extended periods of time where they had no land to call their own.² Other cultures throughout history simply disappeared with that kind of opposition. Many of the Israelites' contemporaries were certainly wiped out by such forces. It's worth noting that the three other ancient people groups that I listed above (Chinese, Egyptian, Hindu) did *not* face the type and scale of opposition the Jewish people did, and that those cultures continued existence today could be attributed to that lack of opposition.³ Those people groups can be recognized for surviving time, but not for surviving time plus concerted efforts to annihilate them. The scale to which the Israelites experienced this - especially when considering its relativity to their size - is significant. One can conclude that they have survived not just the length of history in general but have survived a harsh history - one that makes it even more remarkable that they continue to thrive as a people today.

And what about that small size I keep mentioning? Out of the nearly 7 ½ billion people in the world less than 15 million (that's less than 1/3 of 1%) are classified as Jews.^{4,5} And it's not as though they are only small in number today. At any given point in history the Hebrews "have always been a small nation" - a small percentage of the world's population.⁶ Yet their impact has been, and continues to be, so much greater than that small number would suggest.

Let's look at some of that impact:

Though Jews comprise roughly 0.2% of the world population, approximately 22% of Nobel Prize

¹ Max Dimont, *Jews, god and history*. (New York, New York: The Penguin Group, 1994), 16-17.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid

⁴ Demographics of Judaism. (n.d.). Retrieved August 10, 2016, from <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/demographics-of-judaism>

⁵ U.S. and World Population Clock. (n.d.). Retrieved August 10, 2016, from <http://www.census.gov/popclock/world>

⁶ Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A short history of the Jewish people: From legendary times to modern statehood*. (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1998).

winners are Jewish.⁷ When considering for what purposes a Nobel Prize is awarded, it's safe to say that their contributions to scientific, cultural, and academic advancement in our world have been significant. Other notable areas of excellence include their military presence,⁸ contributions to literature, and achievements in art and humanities. Of Pulitzer winners for nonfiction, 53% are Jewish. They comprise 14% of winners for fiction⁹ and they make up 44% of the fifty most frequently cited twentieth century works in arts and humanities literature¹⁰. As for the field of science, an estimated 77% of lives saved worldwide are due to scientific advances made by Jewish individuals^{11,12} and Jews comprise 39% of top psychologists of the twentieth century listed in the *Review of General Psychology*.¹³

I want to note here that these are simply facts. Unlike British imperialism in past world history or even majority white culture here in America, there has not been a systemic power of majority in play with Judaism, because - as I just pointed out - they are a minority on the world stage both now and at all times past. Theories have been posited to explain the reason for the success of the Jewish people, and I think some are compelling,¹⁴ but I would like to posit my own theory based on a few stories from Judean history.

First is the story of Gideon. He had an army of 32,000 men. Over the course of multiple scenarios, God eventually had Gideon cut the army down to the size of 300 men. With 300 men they still defeated their enemy, the Midianites, who greatly outnumbered them.

Or there's the story of David. He's known for killing the taller-than-average soldier, Goliath, with just a simple stone. Before doing this he declares, "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hand."

⁷ Julie Bien, "5 reasons Jews win so many Nobel prizes,"

http://www.jewishjournal.com/thebulletinbored/item/5_reasons_jews_win_so_many_nobel_prizes, (October 9, 2013)

⁸ Israel Military Strength. (n.d.). Retrieved August 16, 2016, from

http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=israel

⁹ Jewish Contributions in Literature. (n.d.). Retrieved August 16, 2016, from <http://www.jinfo.org/Literature.html>

¹⁰ Arts & Humanities Citation Index, 1976-1983. Jews in Philosophy. (n.d.). Retrieved August 16, 2016, from

<http://www.jinfo.org/Philosophy.html>

¹¹ Science Heroes News. (n.d.). Retrieved August 16, 2016, from <http://www.scienceheroes.com/>

¹² Jews Among the Greatest Scientific Life Savers. (n.d.). Retrieved August 16, 2016, from

http://www.jinfo.org/Life_Savers.html

¹³ Haggbloom, S. J., Warnick, R., Warnick, J. E., Jones, V. K., Yarbrough, G. L., Russell, T. M., . . . Monte, E. (2002). The 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century. *Review of General Psychology*, 6(2), 139-152.

doi:10.1037/1089-2680.6.2.139

¹⁴ Mark Creeger, "5 Reasons Jews Win So Many Nobel Prizes"

[http://www.tribeuk.com/sites/default/files/tribe%20Spark5%20reasons%20Jews%20win%20so%20many%20Nobel%20prizes%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.tribeuk.com/sites/default/files/tribe%20Spark5%20reasons%20Jews%20win%20so%20many%20Nobel%20prizes%20(2).pdf)

¹⁵ Levi Brackman, "Why Jews are disproportionally successful" (September 5, 2008)

<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3592566,00.html>

There's also the story of a slave rising to be the right-hand man for Pharaoh (Genesis 37-47), a little boy hearing from God better than a priest hears from Him (1 Samuel 3), people in captivity surviving fire and lions (Daniel 3 and 6), an ordinary woman killing a commander of an army (Judges 4), a captive blind man single-handedly bringing down a temple filled with his enemies (Judges 16), and story after story of the small being important and the weak being strong.

Perhaps, as 1 Samuel 2:9 states "[God] keeps the feet of His godly ones...not by might shall a man prevail". Perhaps this power in the seemingly unpowerful isn't evidence of a great people. Perhaps this survival throughout time and adversity and in spite of a small size, is not owed to their own intrinsic greatness but is evidence of a great God - a God who chose to reveal Himself to this particular people group thousands of years ago. You can boast of something you discover or produce, but you can't boast of receiving a gift. And I don't think I need to review the Israelites history to point out that this "gift of God revealing Himself to them" has not always made their part in history an easy part to play.

Besides power being displayed through the unpowerful, it's also not unreasonable to think that something otherworldly was revealed to the Israelites that helped them out-survive many of their contemporaries. They maintained sanitation practices, quarantine, and dietary restrictions that were in alignment with scientific discoveries that would not be made for another 3,000 years or more (discoveries such as germ theory, how disease spreads, and the effect of diet on things like cancer, heart disease, and our overall health). They took special measures that safeguarded themselves almost as if they already knew about these discoveries. Did they chance upon these healthy choices so far ahead of the rest of the world, or is it possible these instructions were revealed by One perfect in knowledge and outside of time?

The Judean telling of their own origins begins with a covenant. More specifically they record that God called Abraham by way of a covenant. This covenant can be found in Genesis 12 and had 5 parts to it: 1) Go to a land I will show you, 2) I will make you a great nation, 3) I will bless you, 4) I will bless those who bless you and curse those who dishonor you, and 5) In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Has this covenant born out? According to historical record, it seems Abraham did go to the land God showed him. And, according to the facts and figures above, Israel has remained a force of a nation throughout history and today. It would appear also that God has blessed Abraham and his descendents with many gifts, talents, and successes along with their religion of community, high morals, and various practices that physically preserved them as a people group and as a culture. It appears that parts 1-3 of the covenant have been fulfilled: 1) Abraham went, 2) the Israelites developed from his lineage and became a "great nation" (for they have impacted the world greatly in various ways and various successes) and 3) they have been blessed.

Others have gone to much greater lengths to show the unique place Judaism has held in history and today. But this is my brief, summarized version. They have survived time and persecution in spite of small size,

they have contributed greatly to the world in spite of that size as well, and a closer look seems to reveal an ordinary people, yet with evidence pointing to a divine source of wisdom and power. If parts 1-3 of their covenant appears to be true, I'm persuaded to align with part 4: I'll happily bless Israel. But, in keeping with part 5 of the covenant, I'll happily bless everyone else in the world too, for it's part 5 that says "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

All the families of the earth does not sound like a discriminatory, exclusionary promise. The Palestinian, the Jew, the African, the Asian, the European, the American, and every glorious, unique, specific people group in between - may you be blessed. The promise to Abraham has been, is being, and will be fulfilled by an extraordinary God working through ordinary people. The Jewish people have been a special repository of goodness and truth from which the world has benefited. And the story is not over. Isaiah 49:6 records God saying to Israel, "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Are you Jewish? God has and will bless your people. Are you in one of the other "families of the earth"? A blessing has been extended to you as well. Do you happen to be small and ordinary like the stories of Gideon, David, and the others above? Welcome. This God of the small might be for you and not against you too.