

Who are the Yazidis?

# Overview



Hi, We're a group of students and we work in our spare time to raise awareness of the Holocaust and other genocides. Recently we conducted a survey of our classmates and we discovered that not a single one had heard of the genocide of the Yazidi. Hopefully, over the next few minutes this lesson will help you understand more about the Yazidi people and the terrible atrocities that were committed against them.

# About the lesson

- Yazidis were not placed on the earth so they could be victims of persecution and genocide.
- It is important to understand that they have a rich and sophisticated culture and heritage
- To understand what has been lost in the genocide we have to know about the history and beliefs of the Yazidis
- We hope that this lesson will help you understand a bit more about the Yazidi people, where they come from and what they believe

# Who are the Yazidi people?

- The Yazidi people live in found primarily in northern Iraq, south-eastern Turkey, Northern Syria, the Caucasus region, and parts of Iran.
- Yazidis speak Kurdish
- There are between 200,000 and one million Yazidi people
- They have a well-organised society, with a chief sheikh as the supreme religious head, and an emir, or prince, as the secular (non-religious) head.

# What do Yazidis believe?

- The Yazidi religion includes elements of ancient Iranian religions as well as elements of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
- After forming the universe, God sent his chief Angel, Melek Taus/Tawusi Melek (“Peacock Angel”), to earth, where he took the form of a peacock and painted the world the bright colours of his feathers.



# What religious traditions do Yazidi follow?

- The Yazidi belief system is highly concerned with religious purity, so Yazidis follow a number of taboos governing aspects of daily life. For instance:
- Blue clothing is forbidden (the colour of Tawusi Melek, which is too holy for a human).
- Wednesday, the day that Tawusi Melek first came to earth, is the Yazidi day of rest and prayer.
- Yazidis always pray towards the sun.
- The word Satan is not pronounced, and words which sound similar are also avoided.

# Why have Yazidis been persecuted throughout history?

- Yazidis have been persecuted for centuries because others have disapproved of their beliefs
- Some Muslims equate the Peacock Angel with Satan, as in the Qur'an Allah commanded his chief angel, Iblis (Satan), to submit to Adam. When he refused, Allah cast Satan into Hell as punishment for disobeying his command.
- This has caused the Yazidis to be inaccurately described as devil worshippers, and Yazidis have been persecuted by Muslims and Christians for centuries because non-Yazidis have wrongly identified the Peacock Angel as Satan.

# End of lesson knowledge check

Question 1 Where do the Yazidi people come from?

- A. France
- B. USA
- C. Northern Iraq
- D. South Africa

# End of lesson knowledge check

Question 2 What do Yazidi believe?

- A. Yazidi believe in the 'Peacock Angel', sent to earth by God
- B. Thursday should be a day of rest
- C. The word 'Angel' should not be pronounced
- D. Yazidi pray towards the moon

# End of lesson knowledge check

Question 3 Roughly how many Yazidi are there?

- A. Less than 100,000
- B. More than 10 million
- C. Somewhere between 200,000 and 1 million
- D. Around 5 million

# End of lesson knowledge check

Question 4 Why have the Yazidi been persecuted for centuries?

- A. Because others wrongly disapprove of their religious beliefs
- B. Because the Yazidi have attacked others for centuries
- C. Because Yazidi refuse to allow others to be free
- D. Because Yazidi have enslaved others

# End of lesson knowledge check: Answers

## Answers

1. C

2. A

3. C

4. A

# Thank you

Thank you for learning about the Yazidi people. It is important that they are not forgotten about.

We'd also like to thank Ryan D'Souza and Kirsten Greenaway for all their help in putting together this resource.