

## Jerusalem

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Jerusalem is Judaism's holiest city, and is also holy to Christianity and Islam.

The Jewish people are inextricably bound to the city of Jerusalem and it has a dominant role in the history, politics, culture, religion, national life and consciousness of Jewry and Judaism. From the time King David established the city as the capital of the Jewish state, circa 1000 BCE, and his son Solomon built the Temple on the site where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac, it has served as the symbol and most profound expression of the Jewish people's identity as a nation.

Since their exile from the Land of Israel, Jerusalem has embodied the Jewish yearning for the return to Zion. In their daily prayers, Jews worship in the direction of Jerusalem, and prayers for and references to Jerusalem are incorporated throughout the liturgy. Passover Seder tables have resonated with the refrain "Next Year in Jerusalem."

With the brief exception of the Crusader period, no other people or state has made Jerusalem its capital. Since King David's time, Jews have maintained a continuous presence in Jerusalem, except for a few periods when they were forcibly barred from living in the city by foreign rulers. Jews have constituted a majority of the city's inhabitants since 1880, and today Jews represent just under two-thirds of the city's population.

Jerusalem is an important spiritual and historic center for Christianity. Jerusalem is central to the events of the New Testament. According to the Gospels, as a child Jesus was brought the Temple by his parents, and, most importantly, it was in Jerusalem that he was tried, crucified and resurrected. Jerusalem was a focus for

the apostle Paul, and it continued to be a center for the early church. Jerusalem took on added significance for Christianity when Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine (the Roman emperor who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire), designated the holy sites in Jerusalem associated with the last days of Jesus' life. The great churches built on these spots continue to attract streams of pilgrims, and are surrounded by Christian monasteries, convents, hospices, churches, and chapels.

Jerusalem is a holy city for Muslims as well, who refer to it as "al-Quds" (the holy place). According to Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven from the rock which the Dome of the Rock currently envelops. The Prophet Muhammad and his followers initially turned to Jerusalem in prayer and although the direction was later changed towards Mecca, the sanctity of Jerusalem continues to be stressed in Islamic tradition. Jerusalem is considered Islam's third holiest city after Mecca and Medina. The 20th century saw a renewed emphasis on the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islamic religious tradition.

The only time Jerusalem was divided was between 1948-1967 when [armistice lines](#) drawn between the newly declared State of Israel and Jordan divided Jerusalem into two sectors, with Jordan occupying and annexing the eastern sector, including the Old City, and Israel retaining the western and southern parts of the city. Barbed wire divided the sides. In violation of the Armistice Agreement, Jordanians denied Jews access to and the right to worship at their holy sites, including the Western Wall. The 58 synagogues in the Jewish Quarter were systematically destroyed and vandalized, and Jewish cemeteries desecrated.

When Israel captured Jerusalem from Jordanian forces in [1967](#), it allowed Israel to unite its previously divided capital city, and declare Jerusalem the eternal capital of the Jewish State. It officially annexed East Jerusalem in 1981. Following the 1967 War, Israel immediately passed the "Protection of Holy Places Law," which guarantees the sanctity of all holy sites and makes it a punishable offense to desecrate or deny freedom of access to them. Under Israeli rule, Christians and

Muslims have always administered their own holy places and institutions and have had access to Israel's democratic court system in order to present any claim of violation of these rights. While the Temple Mount is considered Judaism's holiest site, when Israel captured the Mount in 1967, the government handed day-to-day control to the Muslim Waqf religious authorities, overseen by the Jordanian government. This policy, which is known as the "status quo", is supported by the Israeli government, and remains in effect today. While many religious Jews won't ascend to the Temple Mount for religious purity reasons, the Waqf forbid Jews from praying while on the Mount, a situation that is controversial among some Israelis.

Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem have status as residents of the city, but not citizens of Israel. Palestinian leaders assert that all of East Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, be the capital of a future independent Palestinian state, and consider Israeli Jewish neighborhoods in the eastern part of Jerusalem to be [settlements](#).

The status of Jerusalem continues to be a subject of international concern. Under the [Oslo process](#), Jerusalem is considered a "final status issue." There have been creative proposals over the years to resolve the sensitive status of Jerusalem, including mechanisms to handle the difficult issues related to holy sites.