



JERUSALEM: “THE DEEP YEARNING THAT BEATS WITHIN THE JEWISH HEART”



Biblical History

One of the world’s oldest cities, Jerusalem has been the most treasured city of the Jewish people for centuries. Joshua 12:10 reveals that during the conquest of Canaan, the Jews defeated the king of Jerusalem and lived peaceably with the people previously living there for some time (c.f. Joshua 15:63, Judges 1:21). Jerusalem was the place where David brought Goliath’s head after he defeated him, and later King David reigned from that city for 33 years (see 1 Samuel 17:54, 2 Samuel 5:5).

Eventually, Jerusalem came to be known as the “city of David” (e.g., 2 Samuel 6:12, 1 Kings 8:1). God told King Solomon that because of his disobedience, he would tear the kingdom from his son but he promised that David’s descendant would still reign over one tribe, Judah, so that “My servant David may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen for Myself to put My name” (1 Kings 11:32, emphasis added). All in all, Jerusalem (along with its corollary “Zion”) is mentioned in the Tanak—the Hebrew Bible—over 800 times.

Jerusalem is central to Jewish culture and identity. Key aspects of Jewish holidays and traditions center around Jerusalem. At Passover, Jews pray, “Next year in Jerusalem!” On Tish B’Av, Jews commemorate and mourn the destruction of the Second Temple, as they do during wedding services accompanied with the prayer of Psalm 137:4-6.

“How can we sing the Lord’s song In a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, May my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth If I do not remember you, If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy.” -Psalm 137:4-6



Conquests of Jerusalem

According to one source, Jerusalem has been captured at least 20 times. It is a hub of religious significance to three of the world's major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Christians recognize and revere many holy sites located within Jerusalem, including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Garden Tomb, Gethsemane, and others. Muslims, too, recognize holy sites in this ancient city, including the Dome of Rock (which sits where the Second Temple once was) and Al Aqsa mosque, Islam's third holiest site.

While Jerusalem has been conquered a plethora of times and more than 100 battles have been waged over control of the city throughout its history, it has not been the capital of any ruling empire besides the Crusader kingdom's and the Jewish people's. Moreover, the Jewish people alone—no other people group—have consistently considered Jerusalem their eternal capital. Since David first claimed the city as his own, Jerusalem has always been the capital of the people of Israel.



Reunification of Jerusalem (1967)

After Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, Jordan captured the Old City of Jerusalem, evicting the Jews from their homes, destroying Jewish synagogues, and illegally occupying the city's eastern sector. Under Jordanian control, Jews were not permitted to enter Jerusalem and access the Western Wall (or Kotel in Hebrew), all that remains of the Temple which once stood there.

However, in 1967, during the Six Day War, Israel had captured enough land to triple in size, including the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza strip, and the ancient biblical heartland of Judea and Samaria. And finally, after thousands of years of waiting, they liberated the Old City of Jerusalem. Most of the land Israel eventually willingly exchanged for peace agreements, but Jerusalem was too precious to give up. After 19 years of painful separation, and for the first time in 2,000 years, the Jewish people again had access to their holiest sites. Under Israeli authority, Jerusalem was made safe for people of all religions to live in and freely worship according to their own traditions.

Upon the IDF's recapture of these historic and significant sites, Commander Mofa Gur said to his men:



The Western Wall, for which every heart beats, is ours once again. Many Jews have taken their lives into their hands throughout our long history, in order to reach Jerusalem and live here. Endless words of longing have expressed the deep yearning for Jerusalem that beats within the Jewish heart... You have been given the great privilege of completing the circle, of returning to the nation its capital and its holy center... Jerusalem is yours forever.



Jerusalem Today

More than 3.5 million tourists visit Jerusalem every year from diverse walks of life and myriad faiths. Israel's legislative body, the Knesset, meets in Jerusalem. The city is home to over 1,500 public parks and gardens, 26 wineries, over 30 annual festivals, and 800-year old olive trees.

Today, most of Jerusalem's residents are Jewish and have been since almost a century prior to Israel's declaration of independence in 1948. However, the city boasts a significant Palestinian population as well. Under Israeli control, people of all faiths can access their holy sites in Jerusalem, and the ancient city is closer to fulfilling its name, "city of peace."