

## The Jewish Temple and Its Significance

living there ever since. They have been the largest single group of inhabitants there since the mid-1800s.

Jews face Jerusalem when they pray and mention it constantly in their prayers.

Still, Palestinians hold to their radical claim—a claim echoed even by the so-called “moderate” Palestinian leaders. In the past, Palestinian leaders have claimed that Jerusalem is Muslim.

And yet, despite these claims, Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Muslim holy book, the Koran. It never served as a capital under Muslim rule, nor was it a Muslim cultural center. In fact, in any discussion of cities holy to Muslims, Jerusalem places a distant third to Mecca and Medina, both in Saudi Arabia.

Here are the inescapable facts: Jerusalem has been the spiritual center of Jewish life since the time of King David. The ancient, eternal connection of the Jewish people to Jerusalem is

reaffirmed time and again in Holy Scripture. There has been a continuous Jewish presence in Jerusalem for thousands of years, and the city has never been claimed by any other nation

or people. These facts expose the denial of the Jewish connection to Jerusalem for what it really is—an attempt to rewrite history.

Perhaps the most eloquent words written about the Jewish connection to Jerusalem are those

of the psalmist: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.’” (Psalm 122:6–7).

The terrible events we remember on *Tisha B’Av* remind us of the need to always pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the safety of the Jewish people. Today, let us indeed say a prayer for this city, holy to Jews and Christians alike.



Praying at the Western Wall at the base of the holy Temple Mount



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*The city of Jerusalem is the center of the Jewish people’s dreams, longings, and aspirations. And according to Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, there is a higher level of devotion and holiness in Jerusalem.*

“The Temple Mount in Jerusalem, where the holy Temple once stood, is the very essence of the Jewish faith and our longings for Zion,” states Rabbi Eckstein. “God’s *shechina*, or divine presence, rests there more than any other place on earth. Jews around the world face toward Jerusalem when they pray, and in Jerusalem we face toward the Temple when we pray.”

### First Temple

The holiness of this site, known as Mount Moriah, can be traced back to the earliest history of the Jewish people.

It is believed to be the place where Abraham went to sacrifice his son Isaac in obedience to God (Genesis 22). King David chose this sacred ground as the

site for the First Temple, and when it was built by his son Solomon, it was unrivaled in its magnificence.

It was constructed in the tenth century B.C.E. (Before the Common Era), and destroyed by the Babylonians when the people of Judea were



Solomon's Temple



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conquered and sent away into exile in 586 B.C.E.

Nearly 70 years after the first Temple was destroyed, King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and build the Second Temple, which was constructed under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

This Temple stood until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. (Common Era).

For hundreds of years since, Jews have prayed at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the only remaining portion of the Second Temple.

Many risked their lives to pray there as Jerusalem fell under the control of the Crusaders and Muslims over the centuries.

That control ended in 1967 when Israel recaptured the Western Wall and the Temple Mount in the Six Day War.

Today Jews, and even Christians, come from around the world to offer their prayers at this ancient reminder of God's faithfulness to Israel.

## Temple Mount

Although the Jerusalem Temple stood long before Islam was even founded, Jews' very presence on the Temple Mount is viewed as a threat and incitement to

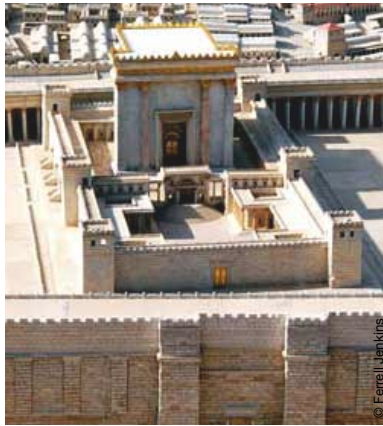
the world. As an act of deference to the Arab world, Israel handed authority over the Temple area to Muslims after the 1967 war.

But in the past, Jews and Christians have been banned from visiting the site.

Rabbi Eckstein says that Orthodox Jews will not go into

the central area of the Temple. "We may go to the side areas where the courtyard was, but we cannot enter the area that was sanctified, and certainly not the 'Holy of Holies,' until Messiah comes to rebuild the Temple, and the red heifer sacrifice is made to remove the impurity, as described in Numbers 19:1–10.

"This is what Jews pray for. We pray, 'May Messiah come speedily one day, and may we see the rebuilding of the Temple.'"



The Second Temple during Jesus' time

## Nations to Participate

The Bible says in Zechariah 6:15, "Those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the LORD." This prophecy that people from other nations besides Israel will participate in the future rebuilding of the Temple reveals the central place that it will have, not only for Jews, but for Gentiles as well.

## Miracle of Light

"The Temple had a special court to which non-Jews could come," Rabbi Eckstein

points out. "The Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three pilgrim feasts during which people came to Jerusalem on pilgrimage to worship at the Temple, was considered to be a holiday for all people. Seventy sacrifices were offered for all the nations."

The Temple also plays a significant role in one of the best known Jewish holidays, *Hanukkah*.

"The Syrian Greeks tried to destroy the Jewish people in the second century B.C.E. They brought a statue of Zeus and swine into the Temple to defile it."

The sacredness of the Temple, and indeed Jewish life itself, was threatened. But the Macabees were victorious over

the invaders and cleansed the Temple.

However, the Jews only had enough oil to light the menorah in the Temple for one day. But the oil burned for seven days until more oil could be found—a miracle celebrated each year during *Hanukkah*. If the Maccabees had not won a great victory and reclaimed the Temple, Jewish life might have ended and Jesus would not have been able to even visit the Temple 150 years later.

"Today, as we await Messiah, the rebuilding of the Temple is not just a Jewish desire," said Rabbi Eckstein. "Christians are also eagerly awaiting this pivotal event—and meanwhile seek to bless Israel and the Jewish people."

## Pray for Peace

The fate of the city of Jerusalem—and therefore the fate of the Temple—remains a controversial issue among the Arab world and Israel. The Palestinian viewpoint says that Israel's claims to Jerusalem are illegitimate. But Jews made Jerusalem their Holy City three thousand years ago and have been



The Temple Menorah is the miraculous focus of Hanukkah

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