



# *Jerusalem*

## God's Eternal City

Celebrating 50 Years of a Unified Jerusalem



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International Fellowship  
of Christians and Jews®



## Introduction



David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, declared:  
“The value of Jerusalem cannot be measured, weighed, or put into words.  
If a land has a soul, Jerusalem is the soul of the Land of Israel.”<sup>1</sup>

**From Adam to Abraham, from King David to Ben-Gurion, Jerusalem has always been at the center of the Jewish faith.** It was in Jerusalem that both Holy Temples stood and in Jerusalem that Jews have celebrated their most joyous occasions and marked their most tragic moments.

**Despite being exiled from the city and seeing the Temple destroyed in 70 CE,** the Jews have never willingly left Jerusalem. In fact, over the centuries Jews constantly renewed their presence in the city — or died trying to come home.

**According to Jewish tradition,** when the First Temple was burning, a group of Jewish priests gathered on the rooftop with the keys to the Temple. They threw the keys heavenward and exclaimed: “Master of the World! Since we have not merited to be trustworthy custodians, let the keys be given back to You.” A hand came out of the heavens to receive them and the priests threw themselves into the flames.<sup>2</sup>

**Nearly 2,000 years later, in May 1948, a different set of keys, no less significant, was restored to the Jews.** As the British left the Holy Land after 30 years of rule, their last remaining soldiers in Jerusalem stopped in front of a house in the Old City. A British major knocked on the door of Rabbi Mordechai Weingarten, the senior rabbi in Jerusalem. When the rabbi opened the door, the major was holding a key nearly a foot long — it was the key to the Zion Gate, one of the gates of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Addressing the elderly rabbi, the major said: "From the year 70 until today, a key to the gates of Jerusalem has never been in Jewish hands. This is the first time in 18 centuries that your people have been so privileged." Weingarten, his hands trembling, took the rusted key and said, "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe who has granted us life and sustenance and allowed us to reach this day." Then he turned to the Englishman and said: "I accept this key in the name of my people."<sup>3</sup>

Little did Weingarten know, he and all of the Jews living in the Old City of Jerusalem would be marched out of the very gate for which he had just been given the key. The War of Independence would secure Israel's statehood, but at the cost of losing Jerusalem. The heart and soul of the Jewish people would be split in two — West Jerusalem belonging to the fledgling Jewish State, and East Jerusalem including the Old City, the Western Wall, and the Temple Mount placed under Jordanian control.

*"...Jerusalem is  
the soul of the  
Land of Israel."*

DAVID BEN-GURION

Still, something shifted on that fateful spring morning when God sent an Englishman to give the key to His Holy City back to the Jews. It would take 19 years, but on June 11, 1967, Jerusalem, along with the Temple Mount, would fall under Jewish sovereignty for the first time in nearly two millennia.

**This year we will celebrate 50 years** since that momentous day that forever altered the course of history.

**Join us as we study** the history of Jerusalem, the meaning of Jerusalem, the significance of Jerusalem to people of faith, and the six miraculous days in 1967 that reunited Jerusalem with her people, never to be separated again.



## Part 1 — Jerusalem in the Bible



Jerusalem is mentioned well over 600 times by name in the Jewish Bible, and hundreds of times by other names such as Zion, City of David, Moriah, and Ariel, to name a few.

**The Five Books of Moses (the Torah)** begin with the creation of the world, and end with the Israelites on the verge of entering the land of Israel with the ultimate goal of conquering Jerusalem and building the Temple there.

It would only be when the Temple stood in Jerusalem that the nation of Israel could wholly worship God and completely fulfill their personal potential and national purpose. Essentially, this part of the Bible is the story of the birth of the nation of Israel and their journey toward Jerusalem.

**The remaining books of the Jewish Bible** (which, in its entirety, Christians know as the Old Testament) teach us about the conquest and settling of Israel, David's conquest of Jerusalem, and Solomon's building of the Holy Temple. We learn about good and bad times for the Israelites, including their exile from the land, the destruction of the Holy Temple, and their eventual return and rebuilding of the Temple.

Their story includes prophecies upon prophecies about Jerusalem — some fulfilled and some yet to be fulfilled. From beginning to end, the Jewish Bible is in many ways the story of Jerusalem and her people. As the primary focus of Judaism's holy books, there is no place more sacred or more central to the Jewish people than Jerusalem.

**To understand the Jewish people and their faith**, both from a biblical and historical perspective, one needs to begin in Jerusalem.

### MAIN TEACHING POINT

**Jerusalem is at the epicenter of the Jewish tradition and of the Jewish Bible**

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**KEY VERSES:**

*If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
may my right hand forget its skill.  
May my tongue cling to the roof of my  
mouth if I do not remember you,  
if I do not consider Jerusalem  
my highest joy. — PSALM 137:5–6*

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN:**

**What does Jerusalem mean to you? Why do you suppose the physical place is so critical to our spiritual faith? Why mustn't we forget Jerusalem?**

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## PART 1 — JERUSALEM IN THE BIBLE

## Chosen by God

In each of the verses referenced below, the name of a specific place or places is mentioned. Record the name(s) of the place you find in the Scripture references below.

Scripture Reference	Name of place or places
Genesis 14:18	
Genesis 22:14	
Joshua 10:1	

**In the first Scripture,** Abraham had just won a military victory in the war involving four kings allied on one side and five kings on the other. In the midst of the battle between these two groups of kings, Abraham's nephew, Lot, had been taken captive. Abraham assembled his men and went out to rescue Lot.

After routing the four kings and rescuing Lot, a king named Melchizedek, king of Salem, came out to greet Abraham and bless him. In Hebrew, Salem is *shalem*, which means “wholeness” or “complete.” It is also related to the word *shalom*, which means “peace.”

According to Jewish tradition, Melchizedek, whose name literally means “king of righteousness,” was the righteous son of Noah, Shem. Salem was therefore known to him to be a place of great holiness because his father, Noah, would have taught Shem the tradition of Jerusalem's unique qualities. So Shem, recognized as a man of God, settled there and was made king over the area by the people of the city.

**In the second Scripture,** Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac as instructed by God, when an angel stopped him. He saw a ram in the thicket and sacrificed the ram instead. Depending on the translation, you will learn that Abraham named the place “God will provide” or “God will be seen.” The original Hebrew translates most accurately either as “God will see” or “awe of God,” but all these translations are relevant and teach us about the significance of that particular place in “*the region of Moriah*” (Genesis 22:2).

**In Hebrew, the place named by Abraham** is “*Hashem* (God) *Yireh*.” Tradition teaches that for centuries *Shalem* (Salem) was eastern Jerusalem, while western Jerusalem was known as *Yireh* (Jireh). Eventually, the two parts were combined to produce *Yirushalayim*, or Jerusalem, which can be translated as, “complete awe of God.” This is how Jerusalem got its name, the name which we encounter for the very first time when Joshua led the Israelites in conquering the Promised Land.

Read the following passage from Judaism's Oral Tradition:

Said the Holy One, blessed be He, "If I call the place *Yireh* like Abraham did, the righteous Shem will complain. However if I refer to it as *Shalem*, the righteous Abraham will complain. Rather, I will call it *Yerushalayim*, and that name will contain the way it was called by both of them: *Yireh Shalem*' (Jireh Salem)<sup>4</sup>

**What can we learn about the nature of Jerusalem by knowing the stories and meanings of the words that led to its naming? What qualities stand out as central to the character of Jerusalem?**

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## Hidden and Revealed

**In the Five Books of Moses, the name "Jerusalem" does not appear**, yet Jerusalem is alluded to over 20 times. Look up the verses listed below to see how Jerusalem is mentioned and by what name. Take note of the context as well.

Scripture Reference	Term used for Jerusalem	Context
Deuteronomy 12:4-7		
Deuteronomy 14:22-25		
Deuteronomy 16:5-7		
Deuteronomy 17:8-9		
Deuteronomy 31:10-11		

**In the Five Books of Moses, Jerusalem is referred to** as "*the place that God will choose*." In case there are any doubts that this term indeed refers to Jerusalem, take a look at this verse from 1 Kings 11:36, which reads: "... *Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name*." This is just one of several places where Jerusalem is specified as the place that God had chosen, the place hinted at in the Five Books of Moses.

**What can we learn about the centrality of Jerusalem to the commandments listed in Deuteronomy? What can we learn about the importance of Jerusalem to Jewish practice and the Christian faith?**

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**It is not surprising that all the references to Jerusalem** as “*the place that God will choose*” are in Deuteronomy. It was at this juncture that Moses was preparing the Israelites to enter the Promised Land. It is clear from these references and others in Scripture that Jerusalem was critical to worshiping God as directed in the Bible.

**If Jerusalem is so important, why do you think that God did not call Jerusalem by name and define its precise location in the Five Books of Moses?**

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Maimonides, Rabbi Moses Son of Maimon, a 12th-century renowned scholar, provides this perspective:

The fact that the *Torah* does not make specific mention of it [Jerusalem], but rather hints at it and says, “...[the place] which God will choose” etc., appears to me to have three explanations. The first: so that the nations would not seize the place and wage power struggles over it, knowing that this place — out of the entire Land — represents the ultimate purpose of the *Torah*; secondly — lest whoever possessed it at the time destroy it and devastate it to the limit of their power; and thirdly — the strongest reason of all — that a situation would not arise in which every tribe would want it included in its inheritance, so as to be able to rule over it, and it would fall to [whichever tribe would emerge victorious] as a result of controversy and strife, as did the quest for the priesthood. For this reason we are commanded that the Temple not be built until after the coronation of a king, so that there is one single ruler and all strife falls away ...”<sup>5</sup>

**As Maimonides explains, the fact that Jerusalem isn't mentioned by name in the Five Books of Moses doesn't mean that it isn't important.** On the contrary, Jerusalem is so very important that it had to be hidden until the right time. History has proven this theory to be correct. Once Jerusalem's holiness was known to the world, she became the subject of devastating attacks and multiple attempts to take her away from the Jewish people. It is a struggle that continues to this very day.





## PART 1 — JERUSALEM IN THE BIBLE

# Jerusalem: The Eternal Capital of Israel

From the time of Joshua — the leader who began settling the Holy Land — until the time of David, the Israelites were unable to conquer Jerusalem. As we read in Joshua 15:63, *“Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah.”*

By the time the book of Joshua comes to a close, the Israelites had conquered almost all of the Holy Land and divided it among the 12 tribes. Only Jerusalem, which stood on the border between the territories of Judah and Benjamin, remained unconquered, because the city was so well fortified. All that changed when a young new king named David arrived on the scene. King David was finally able to conquer Jerusalem, changing the course of history forever.

In the verses below, David did five critical things that profoundly affected the significance of Jerusalem. Look up the Scriptures below and record the action that David took in each.

Scripture Reference	Action Taken
2 Samuel 5:6–7	
2 Samuel 5:9–10	
2 Samuel 6:12	
2 Samuel 24:18–24	
2 Samuel 24:25	

**These verses (and parallel ones in 1 Chronicles 11) are some of the most important Scriptures when it comes to the status of Jerusalem today.** Until this time, every judge or king of Israel had ruled from his or her tribal territory. David reigned in Hebron, part of Judah for seven years. Then he did five things that would change everything. He captured Jerusalem, moved to Jerusalem (marking it as the capital of Israel), brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, bought a specific threshing floor in a particular place as directed by the prophet Gad, and built an altar there. In short, he established Jerusalem as the eternal physical and spiritual capital of Israel.

**Why do you think David chose to conquer Jerusalem and make it the capital of Israel?**

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**While we take it for granted that David captured Jerusalem and made it Israel's capital,** we need to remember that at the time this was a surprising move. No judge or king had established any capital, let alone one in a place that was difficult to conquer. Why did David choose Jerusalem?

**Jewish scholars and historians suggest four reasons.**

**The first** is the water source that Jerusalem possessed. In a desert country where water was a precious commodity, Jerusalem was extremely desirable due to her unusual supply of water from natural springs.

**The second** reason suggested is that Jerusalem was strategically desirable. The deep valleys surrounding the city made it a natural fortress. It was strong and fortified, making it an especially safe residence from which a king could govern.

**Third,** Jerusalem was at a crossroads between north and south, east and west. It was centrally located, making it accessible to all tribes and all foreigners who would come to worship the one true God. In addition, it was not part of any tribal territory, so it was equally important and accessible to all the tribes.

**Finally, the fourth reason** suggests that the tradition of Jerusalem being an especially holy place had been passed down to David. Even if it hadn't been written down in the Bible, this knowledge was most likely passed down through Judaism's Oral Tradition. That Jerusalem is the place referred to in the Bible as "*the place God would choose*" is reinforced when the prophet Gad tells David to buy a particular threshing floor in the city that was later revealed to be the site on which the Holy Temple would be built. Solomon, David's son, built the First Temple on that site, solidifying its holy status (1 Kings 6). Centuries later, the Second Temple was built in the same space (Ezra 6).

**King David established Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel.** He legally purchased the site of the Temple. The Jewish people never forfeited their right to Jerusalem or the Temple. They never left willingly but only in chains, while thousands upon thousands gave their lives for Jerusalem. Over the centuries of exile, Jerusalem was never forgotten. Small enclaves settled and resettled Jerusalem over the years. In 1967, Jerusalem came under Israeli rule for the first time since the Romans conquered it in 70 CE. Today, the Jews remain the rightful owners and inhabitants of Jerusalem.



## PART 1 — JERUSALEM IN THE BIBLE

# Exile and Redemption

From the time that David conquered Jerusalem and established the capital of Israel there, the story of the Israelites revolved around periods of triumph for Jerusalem, times of war, miraculous moments of salvation, oppression, exile, and return to the land.

**The Jewish Bible concludes before the Second Temple was destroyed.** The story of *Hanukkah*, in which a small group of Jews called the Maccabees rebelled against the Greeks and rededicated the Temple, took place after it was written. Centuries later, the Romans defeated the Jews, destroyed the Temple, and sent them into exile, where most Jews have remained until modern times.

However, all of these events that occurred after the writing of the Jewish Bible — and those still to come — were written about in the Bible prophetically, some more explicitly, others more mysteriously. In the sections below, we will look at a sample of verses both on exile and on redemption in regards to Jerusalem. For each verse, we will consider whether the prophecies have come to pass or are yet to come. We will see how the word of the living God is very much alive today.

**One more thing to consider before we start:** Although the Bible was written in chronological order, it does not mean that prophecies already fulfilled are isolated events. God's Word is eternal and relevant to each generation. Therefore, prophecies that were once fulfilled can come to pass again at another time. Even prophecies that will never come about again have a message for us today. If not, they would not have been included in the Bible, which is primarily a guide to our lives today and not a history book.

## The Exile

Let's begin with prophecies about exile. Look up the following verses, then write down the event or circumstances spoken about and whether or not it has come to pass.

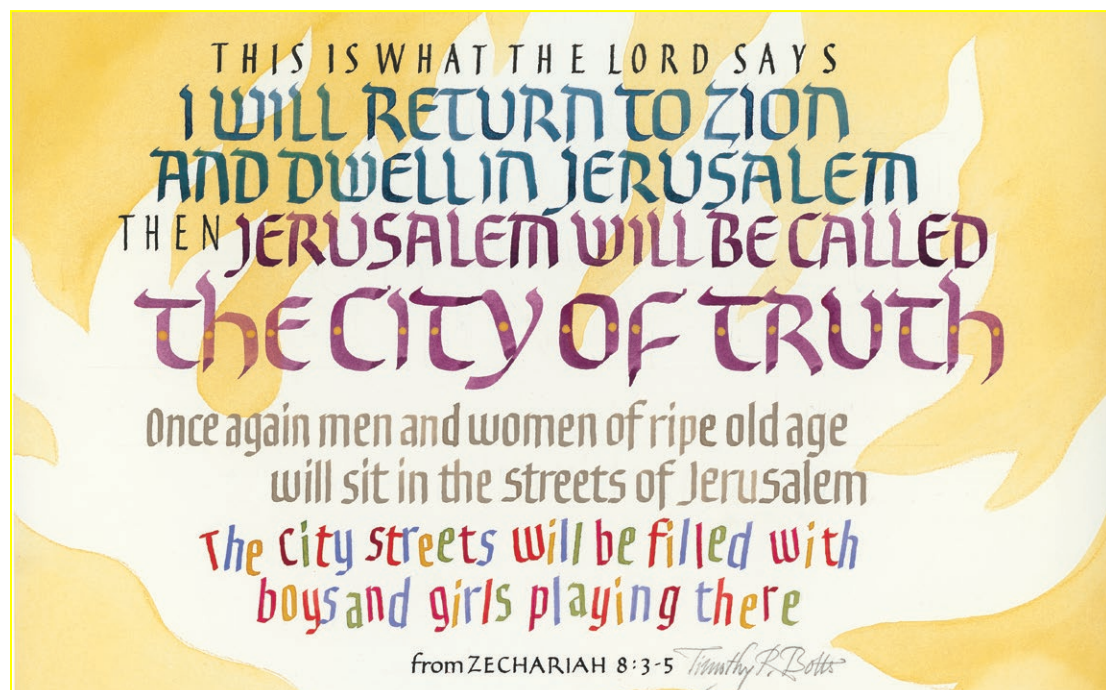
Scripture Reference	Prophecy	Has it come to pass?
Jeremiah 9:11		
Jeremiah 21:10		
Lamentations 1:4		
Ezekiel 12:19		
Micah 3:12		

## Return from Exile

Now let's take a look at a few of the many prophecies about redemption and return. Specifically, we will focus on prophecies concerning Jerusalem.

Scripture Reference	Prophecy	Has it come to pass?
Jeremiah 33:10–11		
Micah 4:2		
Zechariah 8:3		
Zechariah 8:4–5		
Zechariah 12:9		

As you see, all the prophecies regarding the destruction and exile of Jerusalem have come to pass. When it comes to the prophecies of redemption and return, some, but not all, have come to pass. Indeed, we are living in wondrous times when many of these ancient prophecies are unfolding before our very eyes.



**What follows is a passage from the Talmud**, the written compilation of Judaism's Oral Tradition. It takes place just after the destruction of the Second Temple, the event that would herald in the 2,000-year-exile the Jewish people are still experiencing today. It is one of my favorite Jewish stories, as Rabbi Akiva teaches us a powerful lesson on hope, faith, and optimism even when things look their worst.

Rabbi Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Joshua, and Rabbi Akiva . . . were walking toward Jerusalem. When they reached Mount Scopus [from which it is possible to see the Temple Mount], they tore their clothing. When they arrived at the Temple Mount, they saw a fox running out of the area where the Holy of Holies had been. They began to cry, while Rabbi Akiva laughed. They said to him, "Why are you laughing?" . . . He replied, "Why are you crying? Isaiah the Prophet said, '*I will bring two reliable witnesses regarding my people, Uriah the Priest and Zechariah ben Yeverchyahu.*' (Isaiah 8:2) . . . the verse in Isaiah makes Zechariah's prophecy dependent on Uriah's. In Uriah's case, it is written, '*Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed under like a field*' (Micah 3:12). In the case of Zechariah, we find, '*Yet again, elderly men and elderly women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem . . .*' (Zechariah 8:4). Now that I have seen Uriah's prophecy fulfilled in full detail, I know that Zechariah's prophecy will also be fulfilled." Hearing that, Rabbi Akiva's colleagues said to him, "Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us."<sup>6</sup>

**What can we learn from the connection that Akiva draws between the prophecies of destruction and those of redemption? How is our hope and faith in prophecies – even those yet to be fulfilled – about Jerusalem strengthened by what Rabbi Akiva teaches us?**

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**Rabbi Akiva's teaching, which is a lesson for all things in life**, is to see the good side of everything. In fact, this great sage is famously known for his saying "This, too, is for the best" in any situation. Under these particular circumstances, Rabbi Akiva was able to see the heart-wrenching state of the Temple Mount, but also see the promise of a bright future. He reasoned that if the harsh prophecies of the Bible came to pass, then surely the positive ones would manifest as well.

**We can all hold on to this idea when we need strength.** As we see prophecy after prophecy coming to life before our very eyes we must be strengthened by knowing that just as these have been fulfilled so will the ones we have yet to see fulfilled. All of the prophecies regarding Jerusalem will become reality – it's only a matter of time. We may be the fortunate generation to witness it.



## PART 1 — JERUSALEM IN THE BIBLE

# A Call to Action

As we conclude our section on Jerusalem in the Bible we will look at several verses regarding Jerusalem that demand action on our part. God will do His part in restoring Jerusalem, but we have a duty to do our part as well. Read the following verses listed below and consider what actions these verses might be calling us to take.

Scripture Reference	Call to Action
Psalms 122:1–2	
Psalms 122:6	
Psalms 137:5–6	
Isaiah 62:1	
Isaiah 62:6–7	

**Scripture here and elsewhere encourages us to safeguard Jerusalem**, to speak on her behalf, and to pray for peace in God's Holy City. In addition, we can help support Israel and Jerusalem by joyfully coming to visit with a message of support and love for the Israeli people. In a world that seeks to demonize and even attack God's Holy City, it is incumbent upon us to speak the truth and to offer support in any way we can. The future of Jerusalem is everyone's future.

**What are three steps that you can take today to serve as a protector of Jerusalem and to help restore Jerusalem to her rightful place?**

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## PART 1 — JERUSALEM IN THE BIBLE

# Final Thoughts

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We have traced the origins of Jerusalem from the beginning of the Bible until the conclusion of the Jewish Bible, also known to Christians as the Old Testament. We have seen how Jerusalem was intended from the time of creation to be a city of holiness. We learned how many laws and observances directed in the Jewish Bible are tied to Jerusalem as the center of worship for the Jewish people.

We traced through Scripture King David's conquest of Jerusalem, his establishment of Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel, and the fulfillment of Jerusalem's ultimate purpose with the building of the Temple by King Solomon. We witnessed how much of the rest of the Jewish Bible deals with exile from Jerusalem and the redemption of Jerusalem.

**In short, we have seen how Jerusalem is at the center of the Bible and our two faith communities.**

This is why we are determined to never forget Jerusalem. Until Jerusalem is fully rebuilt and redeemed, we as a people and as a world are not complete. Jewish traditions include leaving a place in every home incomplete to remind us of the loss of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. During weddings, a time of great joy, we also break a glass under the wedding canopy to remember the destruction of Jerusalem. For two millennia, Jews have prayed for their return to Jerusalem and God's return to His Holy City as well.

**We will never stop longing for Jerusalem until she is fully rebuilt and redeemed.**

We long for the day described in Psalm 126:1–3:

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.  
Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.  
Then it was said among the nations,  
“The LORD has done great things for them.”  
The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

**What is the most significant thing you have learned about Jerusalem so far? How has that changed your view of historical, biblical, and present-day Jerusalem?**

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## Part 2: God's Holy City



According to Jewish tradition, Jerusalem was designated as holy from the beginning of time. Jerusalem is the place where Adam was created. It is the place where Cain and Abel came to offer their first sacrifices to God. It was that same place where Noah rebuilt the altar to God and offered his own sacrifices after surviving the Great Flood.

In fact, it was Noah's son Shem who truly understood the significance of the city, building a study hall there where people could learn about the one true God. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham is said to have studied in Shem's study hall. In addition, it was at this same site where Abraham led Isaac to be sacrificed and where Jacob slept and saw in a dream the gateway to heaven.

**Even today, Jewish tradition holds** that it is in Jerusalem where we can come closest to God, and from Jerusalem where blessings emanate to the entire world. This explains a quote from the Roman-appointed Herod Agrippa I, King of Judaea in the 1st century CE:

"Jerusalem is mother city of all cities. My native city is Jerusalem, in which is situated the sacred shrine of the most high God. The holy city is the mother city not of one country, Judaea, but of most of the other neighboring lands, as well as lands far away, Asia, similarly Europe, to say nothing of the countries beyond the Euphrates."<sup>7</sup>

**Indeed, Jerusalem, chosen by God** to be the gateway between heaven and earth, is the holiest place in the world.

**MAIN TEACHING POINT:**

**Jerusalem is a city unlike any other, a city designated for God's holy purposes — God's dwelling place on earth.**

**KEY VERSES:**

*Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise,  
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.*

*Beautiful in its loftiness,  
the joy of the whole earth,  
like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion,  
the city of the Great King. — PSALM 48:1–2*

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

**What do you think makes Jerusalem holy? What do you think it means to be a holy city?  
What other cities would you consider holy?**

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## PART 2 — GOD'S HOLY CITY

# A Holy City

In order to understand what a holy city is, let's first look at what holiness means. In Hebrew, the word for "holy" is *kadosh*. The verses referenced below all have a permutation of the word *kadosh* in them. By looking at these verses and how the word *kadosh* is utilized, we will come to an understanding of what holiness is and what it means to be holy.

Scripture Reference	What is holy?	How or why is it holy?
Genesis 2:3		
Exodus 19:5–6		
Exodus 20:8–10		
Exodus 26:31–33		

In the verses we have looked at, we have learned that the nation of Israel is holy, that the Sabbath is holy, that the Temple is holy, and that a particular place in the Temple is the most holy — the Holy of Holies. We have seen that people, time, and space can all become holy.

**But what is holiness?** Based on these verses we can suggest, as the Jewish sages do, that holiness means to be designated for a particular purpose.

For example, when a Jewish man and woman are married, after the official betrothal, the woman is declared *mekudeshet*, a permutation of the words *kadosh*. It means that she is designated for that particular man. When a person, place, or thing is *kadosh*, it is set aside for God's purposes.

The seventh day, the Sabbath, is designated as a day to deepen our connection with God and our recognition that He is the Creator and Sustainer. The nation of Israel has a special mission in carrying God's Word to the world and can be holy when they follow Him in obedience. The Holy Temple in Jerusalem was the place where a person could become closest to God.

**Jerusalem, as God's Holy City**, is an entire place designated to play a critical role in God's master plan. In Temple times, when Israel followed God's laws, Jerusalem served its purpose and was most holy. The people, the places, and the events that happened in Jerusalem all served the goal of bringing godliness into the world.

Even now, according to Jewish tradition, Jerusalem still maintains a degree of holiness that can never be extinguished — because of its history, its centrality to Jewish worship as the past and future site of God's Holy Temple, and because of its ultimate destiny as the place the messiah will reign.



**Imagine what an entire city wholly devoted to God would look like. What might daily life be like? What would the character of the people be? What would it be like to live in that city?**

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## PART 2 — GOD'S HOLY CITY

## From the Beginning of Time

According to Jewish tradition, when God created the world, Creation began at one point and then extended outward to the entire world. That initial point of creation has a name in Judaism: the Foundation Stone (in Hebrew, *Even Shetiya*). According to Jewish tradition, this is the holiest point in the entire world, the gateway between heaven and earth, and it can be found in the center of Jerusalem.

**Judaism teaches** that it was from this point on earth that Adam was created. It was on that stone that Adam erected the first altar. It was there that Abel and Cain brought their offerings, and where Noah rebuilt the altar destroyed in the flood and brought his own sacrifices. This was the very spot where Abraham brought Isaac as an offering and was stopped by an angel. It was upon this rock where the Temple was built, and more specifically, where the Holy of Holies stood.

**Most people have heard of the Dome of the Rock**, the Muslim shrine that was built upon the ruins of a Roman pagan temple, which itself had been built upon the ruins of the Jewish Holy Temple in Jerusalem. But have you ever wondered why it is called “Dome of the Rock”? Whoever built that structure knew about the significance of the spot.

They knew about the holy rock and the holiness of Jerusalem.

With this knowledge in mind, let’s revisit one of the best-known stories of the Bible and look at it with different eyes. The story of Jacob’s famous dream about a ladder spanning heaven and earth occurs in Genesis 28 as he was fleeing his brother Esau and going north to find a wife:

*Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it...*

*When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.”*



*Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.*

*Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." (Genesis 28:10–12, 16–22)*

**The Jewish sages teach** that the “certain place” and “stone” mentioned in verse 11 is not just any place or any stone. Rather it was the place of the “Foundation Stone.” Now re-read the passage and substitute “Foundation Stone” every time the word “stone” appears.

**How does this change your understanding of this story?**

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**From this vantage point, this is how the story unfolded:** when Jacob arrived at this site, he knew it was a holy place because of the Oral Tradition passed down to him from his father and grandfather. This is why he stopped at this place to pray and spend the night. However, he did not know that the very stone upon which he chose to lay his head was the “Foundation Stone.” His dream was an explanation of where he was, the very place where heaven meets earth: Jerusalem.

Appropriately, when Jacob awoke he called the place the “house of God” and the “gate of Heaven.” Understanding the significance of the “Foundation Stone,” Jacob sanctified the rock and called the place Bethel, which means “house of God.” He promised that if he survived his journey, a House of God would be erected upon the stone. Centuries later, that promise was fulfilled by his descendant, King Solomon.

**Appreciating the significance of Jerusalem and the “Foundation Stone,”** we can also understand this ancient Jewish teaching, which depicts the significance of Jerusalem in context to the world:

“The world is like a human eyeball. The white of the eye is the ocean surrounding the world. The iris is this continent (the land of Israel), the pupil is Jerusalem, and the image in the pupil is the Holy Temple.”<sup>8</sup>

**Moreover, in ancient times, Jerusalem was the center of the world,** not just figuratively, but also quite literally. God could have chosen any land to be His own, but He chose the physical location of Jerusalem for a reason. As we read in Ezekiel 5:5, *“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem, which I have set in the center of the nations, with countries all around her.”* If you look at an ancient map, you will see that the location of Jerusalem guaranteed that it would be profoundly connected to the history and development of the world.

In ancient times, the known world consisted of two large land masses — Eurasia (Europe and Asia) and Africa. It was impossible to travel from one area to the other without passing through the land of Israel. This was not by accident. God wanted His city to be a place that the world would encounter. Anyone passing through from one region to the next had to go through Jerusalem and was undoubtedly influenced by her spirit, culture, and values.

By the same token, the people of Jerusalem would have had great exposure to the cultures of the world, deriving the best of what they saw and learning from all types of wisdom.



**Jerusalem was the epicenter** where values, truth, and morality evolved and influenced all civilization. This was the purpose of God's Holy City and her destiny. As we read in Isaiah 2:3. *“... The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”*



## PART 2 — GOD'S HOLY CITY

# Temple Times

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Imagine that you are alive during the time that the First Temple stood, around 700 BCE. You have come to Jerusalem for the Passover observance, one of the three pilgrim holidays commanded in the Bible. As far as your eyes can see, throngs of people are walking along the hills surrounding Jerusalem with their sheep in tow for the Passover offering. As you near the Temple Mount you catch a glimpse of the most beautiful, towering structure that you have ever seen. It seems to glow and take on a golden hue in the sun.

You notice that even though it is a windy day, the dramatic pillar of smoke that rises straight toward heaven from the place of the altar does not move or sway. You have heard that this is one of the ten daily miracles that occur in the Temple. You also marvel at another one of those miracles – that despite Jerusalem's small size and the amount of pilgrims present, all the people converging on Jerusalem have a comfortable place to stay at night.

As you enter the Temple you can hear the most exquisite music coming from the Levites, the priests. You tremble knowing that you are stepping into the holiest place on earth, not far from the Holy Ark with the cherubs on top, between which God communicates with His people and sends His blessings.

The people coming out of the Temple are jubilant. They have had a profound encounter with their Creator in this holy place. The words of the Psalms echo in your mind, reminding you that this city is the “joy of the whole earth” (Psalm 48:2).



**Clearly, the holiness and special status of Jerusalem** stems from the “Foundation Stone” and the Holy Temple that was constructed upon it. In order to understand the holiness of Jerusalem, one must understand the holiness of the Temple. What was its purpose? Why was it constructed? As King Solomon asked at the dedication of the Temple he built: “*But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!*” (2 Chronicles 6:18).

**Why do you think God desired the Temple to be built?**

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Take a look at the following Bible verses to get an idea of why the Temple was built and what its purpose was — and will be again.

Scripture Reference	Purpose of the Temple
Exodus 25:8	
Deuteronomy 12:7	
Deuteronomy 12:11	
Deuteronomy 14:23	
2 Chronicles 6:20–40	

**It's true that God does not need a Temple.** However, God chose to give us the Temple as a gift so that we might have a way to become closer to Him. As mentioned in the verses above, and particularly in Solomon's prayer, the Temple would serve a host of purposes as the gateway between heaven and earth.

**First and foremost, the Temple would serve as a conduit,** making it possible for God to dwell among us; His presence would be more readily and intensely experienced there than in any other place. The Temple was where a person could offer sacrifices. The Hebrew word for sacrifice is etymologically related to the Hebrew word for "closeness."

Though we might have difficulty understanding it today, the sacrifices offered in Temple times brought a person closer to God. Sacrifices enabled a direct interaction with God, they brought atonement for wrongdoings, and they helped worshipers express their love, gratitude, and devotion through giving God the best of what they had.

The Temple was a place to learn and grow spiritually. A place to express gratitude to God. A place to sing His praises. A place to experience forgiveness. A place to find guidance. A place where God would hear all prayers. Clearly, the holiness of the Temple was intricately tied to the holiness of Jerusalem.

**It is notable that during Temple times,** Jerusalem was not just the city of God's Holy Temple, but also housed the palace of the king and the Sanhedrin, the main court of law which was composed of 70 of Israel's most learned men. This is the meaning of the verse from Psalm 122: "*There stand the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David*" (v. 5). The "*thrones for judgment*" refer to the court of the Sanhedrin, and the "*throne of the house of David*" refers to the royal palace. Both stood in Jerusalem.

**The Jewish sages teach** that most prophets lived in Jerusalem and also spoke their prophecies from there. In addition, Jerusalem was a commercial center that flourished from the amount of people that streamed in and out of the city. Therefore, in Temple times, Jerusalem, as God's Holy City, was the hub of royalty, of government, of justice, of knowledge, of culture, of commerce, of spirituality, and above all of holiness, all at the same time.

**For Christians, Jerusalem holds great spiritual significance as well.** Jesus spent time there, teaching and worshiping at the Temple. When he was a baby, Mary and Joseph presented him to the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem. When he was 12 and went missing, Mary and Joseph eventually found him at the Temple in deep discussion with the rabbis.

Jerusalem is where Jesus made his triumphal entry, where he was crucified, where Christian pilgrims follow in Jesus' footsteps, and where the Christian church was birthed. At Pentecost, the Christian Bible in Acts 2:5 says, "*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*" It was during this gathering that God's spirit descended on Jesus' followers and the Christian church was born.

Take a look at some of these other references from the Christian Bible and record what you learn about the importance of Jerusalem during Jesus' time.

Scripture Reference	Significance of Jerusalem
Matthew 5:34–36	
Matthew 16:21	
Luke 2:22–24	
Luke 18:31	
Luke 24:46–48	
John 12:11–13	
Acts 1:4	

**Based on what you know about Jerusalem from the Jewish tradition, how was its centrality to Christianity the same? How did it differ?**

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## PART 2 — GOD'S HOLY CITY

# Eternal Holiness

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Maimonides (Moses, son of Maimon) was one of the best known Jewish scholars and also physician to the sultan of Egypt in the 12th century. In 1166 C.E. Maimonides made a pilgrimage to Israel and penned these words in his diary:

“We left Acco for Jerusalem under perilous conditions. I entered into ‘the great and holy house’ [the term used to refer to the place where the Holy Temple once stood] and prayed there on the sixth day of the month of Cheshvan. And on the first day of the week, the ninth day of the month of Cheshvan, I left Jerusalem for Hebron to kiss the graves of my forefathers in the Cave of Machpela [the place where according to Jewish tradition, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah are buried]. And on that very day, I stood in the Cave and I prayed, praised be God for everything. And these two days, the sixth [when he prayed on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem] and the ninth of Cheshvan I vowed to make as a special holiday and in which I will rejoice with prayer, food and drink. May the Lord help me to keep my vows . . .”<sup>9</sup>

**This account demonstrates how Jerusalem maintained supreme importance** among the Jewish people even after the destruction of both Temples. Maimonides felt that his singular encounter with the Temple Mount (and Hebron) was cause for celebration and gratitude to be expressed every year. Maimonides and his family celebrated these dates as holidays.

**If the holiness of Jerusalem was tied to the Temple, do you think it is still holy now that the Temple is gone?**

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**Indeed, the Jewish sages taught that Jerusalem was holy before the Temple was built** and after the destruction of both Temples. Moreover, they taught that the Divine Presence never left the Western Wall, the only surviving part of the grand Temple complex.

Let's take a look at some verses from both the Jewish and Christian Bibles and decide whether they support the idea that Jerusalem is eternally holy.

Scripture Reference	How is Jerusalem eternally holy?
Genesis 28:16–17	
1 Kings 8:29–30	
2 Chronicles 6:1–2	
Daniel 6:10	
Hebrews 12:22–23	
Revelation 21:10	

It's clear from the words uttered by Jacob that Jerusalem was holy before the Temple was built. When King Solomon dedicated the Temple, he designated it as a space where God would dwell forever. He also said that whenever a person prayed toward the place of the Temple, that God would hear their prayers. The most significant verse, however, is the one in which Daniel is described as praying toward Jerusalem *“just as he had done before.”*

Remember, at this time the First Temple had been destroyed and Daniel was in Babylon. But he knew that praying in the direction of Jerusalem was the best way to pray in obedience to God. Also keep in mind that the punishment for doing what he did was death, and because of his actions, Daniel was thrown into the lion's den and miraculously saved by God. Clearly, Daniel felt that praying toward God's Holy City, Jerusalem, was so important that he was willing to risk his life for it.

**According to Jewish tradition, Jerusalem is eternally holy.** Moreover, we believe that all prayers enter heaven through the Western Wall, and that all blessings pass from the heavens, through the Western Wall, and then to the world, as it says in Psalm 122: 5, *“May the LORD bless you from Zion.”*

**This is why we as Jews face Jerusalem when praying.** No other people or religion has this practice. Every synagogue in the world is built facing Jerusalem. And when one is in Jerusalem, we face the Temple Mount. We attach ourselves to the holiness of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount even today because it still retains its holy status.



## PART 2 — GOD'S HOLY CITY

# Jerusalem of the Future

A common phrase emerged in Judaism that dates back at least ten centuries: “Next year in Jerusalem!” It is said out loud at the end of every *Yom Kippur* service, the holiest day of the Jewish year, and at the end of the Passover, another important holiday in Judaism. It has been turned into a song for joyful celebrations and a prayer for more solemn moments.

However, the full phrase is actually, “Next year in the rebuilt Jerusalem.” This refrain is not just about returning to Jerusalem, the physical city. It’s about returning to Jerusalem as it once was. It’s about rebuilding what was lost and what is promised to come. It’s a prayer for nothing less than the messianic era.

**The Bible is replete with prophecies about this era.** In Part I of this study, we looked at several of them. Now we will look at several more that describe in more detail what it is that we are praying for, why we mourn Jerusalem and pray for her peace, and why we hope for the future.

Scripture Reference	How is Jerusalem of the future described?
Psalms 147:2	
Isaiah 52:9	
Isaiah 56:7	
Zechariah 8:8	
Zechariah 8:22	
Zechariah 9:9	

These verses, among others, teach us that the rebuilding of Jerusalem will herald in a new era. It will be accompanied by the ingathering of the exiles. It will signal the return of God’s presence and a spiritual rejuvenation among Israel. People from all over the world will come to Jerusalem to pray and worship the one true God. The Messiah will come and the messianic era will begin.



**This is captured so beautifully** in the words of Isaiah 2:2–4:

*In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established  
as the highest of the mountains;  
it will be exalted above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.  
Many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths."  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore."*

**What is your vision of Jerusalem in the messianic era?**

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**The Christian Bible also includes many prophecies involving Jerusalem.**

Look up the following verses:

Scripture Reference	How is Jerusalem of the future described?
Luke 21:20–24	
Hebrew 12:22–23	
Revelation 3:12	
Revelation 21:2–4	
Revelation 21:9–14	
Revelation 21:22–27	

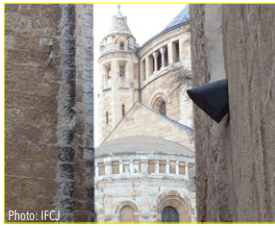
**How does the Christian view of the future Jerusalem differ from the Jewish view? In what ways is it similar?**

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## PART 2 — GOD'S HOLY CITY

# The Message and Meaning of Jerusalem

With all its significance, over the centuries Jerusalem has come to represent far more than just a physical space. It has become a symbol that means different things to different people. Jerusalem is a word used poetically and metaphorically. For example, Rabbi Nachman of Breslau (18th century, Ukraine), once said, “Wherever I go, I am going to Jerusalem.”<sup>10</sup>

**What do you think it means to be on a spiritual journey to Jerusalem as opposed to a physical one?**

To help us explore the meaning and message of Jerusalem, let's look at a few of the many names the city is known by. Jewish tradition teaches that there are 70 names for Jerusalem. Each name describes an aspect of the city. Below, look up the following verses and write the characteristic described.

Scripture Reference	Characteristic of Jerusalem
Psalm 87:3	
Isaiah 1:26	
Isaiah 62:12	
Isaiah 65:18	
Jeremiah 31:23	
Zechariah 8:3	

**Righteous, faithful, joyful, a delight, desired, prosperous, and city of God** are just some of the names Jerusalem is called. Jerusalem symbolizes the idea of a perfected city, and indeed, a perfected world — one in which all people are righteous, kind, joyful, and faithful to God.

William Blake, the famous 18th-century English poet, wrote a poem called *Jerusalem* in which he declares his intention to turn England into Jerusalem. The last stanza reads:

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green and pleasant Land.<sup>11</sup>

**Now that you know what Jerusalem symbolizes, what do you think Blake meant by turning England into Jerusalem?**

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**Finally, what steps might you take to turn your community, your city, or your country into "Jerusalem?"**

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## PART 2 — GOD'S HOLY CITY

# Final Thoughts

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It is quite curious that according to Jewish tradition, in Temple times there were no signs leading to Jerusalem. When pilgrims came to the Holy City, there were no helpful guideposts pointing in the right direction. Instead, pilgrims had to search for Jerusalem and ask others for help. The very nature of Jerusalem is that one has to want it in order to receive it. Jerusalem is a city we must seek and strive toward.

This idea is most clearly stated in Deuteronomy 12:5, “*But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go.*” This theme is echoed in God’s commandment to sacrifice Isaac in “*the region of Moriah . . . on a mountain I will show you*” (Genesis 22:2), which we now know was Jerusalem. The opposite of this idea is bemoaned by the prophet Jeremiah when he referred to Jerusalem as: “*Zion for whom no one cares*” (Jeremiah 30:17).

**As we have learned in this study,** God’s Holy City is indeed a divine gift. It is inspirational, transformational, and transcendental. But if we are to receive the rebuilt Jerusalem of the future, just like our forefathers and ancestors of faith, we must seek it and desire it.

In the familiar words of Psalm 122:6, we are to “*pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*” Literally translated from the original Hebrew, the verse reads, “Ask about the peace of Jerusalem.” The rabbis explain that we must inquire about Jerusalem because when a person cares about something, they ask about its welfare.

**We must care about Jerusalem, pray for Jerusalem, and overall, desire Jerusalem.** When we do, Jerusalem will not only be God’s Holy City, but our Holy City, too. If we seek it, we shall find it and bask in God’s glory.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

What is one way you can seek Jerusalem today?

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## Part 3: The Reunification of Jerusalem



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu once said:  
“Jerusalem is the heart of the nation. We’ll never divide our heart.”<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the political implications, this statement underscores two of the key elements of the Holy City: first, that it is the heart of the Jewish nation, and second, that Jerusalem is intended as a source of unity and love.

**Thousands of years ago**, King David called Jerusalem “*a city that is bound firmly together*” (Psalm 122:3 ESV). The Jewish sages explained this description related not to the physical structure of the city, but to the nature of its inhabitants. Jerusalem is intended to be a city that connects people and brings strangers together.

**Today, one can literally witness this as Jews from the four corners** of the world have come home to Jerusalem to form one nation. Many others Jews from around the globe come on pilgrimages to Jerusalem and encounter their roots in a way not possible anywhere else in the world. In Jerusalem, thousands of years of history and dispersion come together in one great story.

**Moreover, thousands of people of different faiths** also make their way to Jerusalem each year where they sing and pray — in different languages, in different ways, but bound together by love for God. In Jerusalem, strangers become friends, people of differing ethnicities and beliefs find common ground, and deep connections that might otherwise never have been made are created between individuals.

Jerusalem today is a beautiful mosaic, a magnificent tapestry of multihued threads woven together to form one image.

**It wasn’t always like this.**

Jerusalem  
is intended as  
a source of  
unity and love.

**Between the time that the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE until June of 1967,** Jerusalem was a divided city. Jerusalem had been torn from the fabric of the Jewish faith and tradition, like a heart out of a body. For centuries, Jerusalem had been conquered by different nations, each one imposing religious restrictions on the next.

**Six miraculous days in June** changed all that when Israel unexpectedly, and definitely as a result of Divine Providence, reunited Jerusalem for the first time in almost 2,000 years. Since that historical moment, the Jews have experienced a reunited Jerusalem, and people of all faiths are free to worship in God's Holy City.

On the 28th day of the Hebrew month of *Ivar*, in recognition of the great miracles and events that led to the reunification of Jerusalem, Israelis and people around the world celebrate Jerusalem Day, *Yom Yerushalayim*. The day is celebrated with special prayers, pilgrimages to Jerusalem, ceremonies, and a general outpouring of gratitude to God for this miracle that the people of Israel will never take for granted.

### MAIN TEACHING POINT:

**The reunification of Jerusalem in 1967 was a key, defining moment in history, and one of the greatest miracles of our times.**

### KEY VERSE:

*Jerusalem—built as a city*

*that is bound firmly together* — PSALM 122:3 (ESV)

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

**Based on what you know about the biblical significance of Jerusalem, what does the historical significance of the reunification of Jerusalem mean to you? What does this event mean to all people of faith?**

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## PART 3 — THE REUNIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

# The Fate of Jerusalem

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The Jewish Bible takes us through the return to Jerusalem after the first exile and the beginning of the Second Temple era. Other than prophecies about the future, history recorded in the Bible leads us through the rebuilding of the Temple walls by Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, but not much beyond that.

**So what does happen after the 5th century BCE** when the final books of the Jewish Bible were likely written? Before we answer that question, answer this multiple choice question below:

**After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem by the Romans, when do you think the Jews first began returning to Jerusalem?**

- A. In 1896 when Theodore Herzl published his paper calling for a Jewish State
- B. In 1917 after the British signed the Balfour Declaration, pledging that a permanent homeland be established for the Jewish people
- C. In 1922 after the British divided the region of Palestine into two administrative sections
- D. In 1946 after World War II ended and Holocaust survivors looked for a new home
- E. Jews have always lived in Jerusalem

The correct answer is E. From the time of the second exile until today, Jews have always lived in Jerusalem.

To see how that transpired, we will take a very quick look at nearly 2,000 years of the history of Jerusalem.

*Let's go!*



## PART 3 — THE REUNIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

## History of Jerusalem

We begin with the story of *Hanukkah* that occurred in the 2nd century BCE, as recorded in the Books of the Maccabees. The events of *Hanukkah* took place while the Second Temple was still standing, but the Jewish people were under the harsh rule of the Greek Empire.

While the story is one of victory, as the Jews reclaimed the Holy Temple from Greek desecration and rededicated it to God, their sovereignty didn't last long.

**About 100 years later**, the Romans conquered the Greeks and ruled over Judea. It is the Romans who ultimately destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE. Everything we know about this time period and onward from a Jewish perspective is from the *Talmud* and other Jewish writings, as well as history books.

**The book of Lamentations**, which is relevant to both Temples' destructions, described Jerusalem during this time period as follows:

*How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!  
 How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations!  
 She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.  
 Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks.  
 Among all her lovers there is no one to comfort her.  
 All her friends have betrayed her;  
     they have become her enemies.  
 After affliction and harsh labor,  
     Judah has gone into exile.  
 She dwells among the nations;  
     she finds no resting place.  
 All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.  
 The roads to Zion mourn,  
     for no one comes to her appointed festivals.  
 All her gateways are desolate,  
     her priests groan,  
 her young women grieve,  
     and she is in bitter anguish. — LAMENTATIONS 1:1-4*

And so goes the rest of the chapters of Lamentations.

**Indeed, Jerusalem was burned,** most of her people were killed, and the Romans banned the Jews from the Holy City.

As Josephus, a historian from that time period, who provides us with many firsthand accounts, wrote:

“Jerusalem ... was so thoroughly razed to the ground by those that demolished it to its foundations, that nothing was left that could ever persuade visitors that it had once been a place of habitation.”<sup>13</sup>

**Jerusalem was made desolate.**

**Most of the surviving Jews were taken into Roman captivity.** Others managed to stay in Israel, but certainly not in Jerusalem. About 60 years later, the Roman Emperor Hadrian was extremely displeased with the Jews in Israel who continued to revolt and try to overthrow their Roman occupiers. He persecuted the Jews even more harshly and made a concerted effort to sever all Jewish ties with Jerusalem and Israel altogether.

To that end, Hadrian renamed Jerusalem “Aelia Capitolina” in honor of his own family name, and Israel was renamed “Syria Palaestina,” after the biblical enemy of Israel, the Philistines. This is how Israel eventually became known as “Palestine” — from the fabricated name of a vengeful occupying enemy.

Moreover, Hadrian built a pagan temple to the Roman god Jupiter on the ruins of the Holy Temple. Jews were banned from Jerusalem except for one day a year — the ninth of the Hebrew month of *Av*, when the destruction of both Temples occurred. Only then were Jews allowed to enter the Holy City and mourn the Temples.

**[Hadrian] made a concerted effort to sever all Jewish ties with Jerusalem and Israel altogether.**

## A Series of Rulers

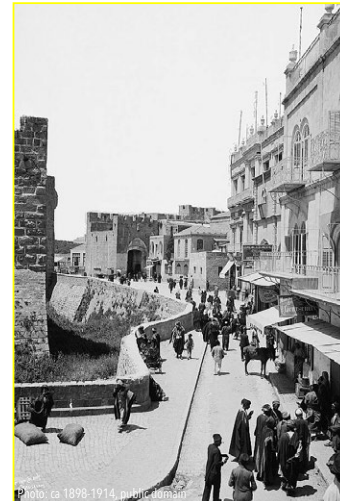
**After the Romans' rule, from 324 to about 638 CE, Jerusalem changed hands many times,** to the Byzantines, to the Persians, and back to the Byzantines again. Throughout this time Jews tried to re-establish their presence in Jerusalem — at times successfully, and at other times, ending in destruction and death.

Other factors were at work in the world which would have a lasting impact on the Holy City. Around the year 600 CE, a new religion, Islam, entered the scene, and in 638 a Muslim ruler conquered Jerusalem. During the Umayyad Dynasty, from 661–750 CE, Jews were tolerated and were able to reestablish their presence in Jerusalem.

**In 691 the Muslim ruler of Jerusalem,** Caliph Abd al-Malik, wished to assert his importance in the Muslim world which until that point centered on the cities of Mecca and Medina. In order to do so, Caliph Abd al-Malik built the impressive Dome of the Rock where it remains today — on the ruins of the pagan temple that was built upon the ruins of the Jewish Temple.

**The Crusaders followed in the 12th century**, burning 2,000 Jews alive in a Jerusalem synagogue and massacring many others. They were followed by the Mamelukes in the 13th century, then the Ottomans in the 16th, who successfully ruled over Jerusalem until they were defeated by the British in 1917 during the First World War.

**Again, throughout the centuries, Jews tried repeatedly to settle in Israel**, and when possible, in Jerusalem. The Zionist movement picked up steam in the 19th century, and the first officially recognized wave of *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) began in 1882. Many Jewish towns were established, and Jerusalem was repopulated by Jews. By the early 20th century, 45,000 of Jerusalem's 65,000 residents were Jews.



## Birth of the Jewish State

**In 1917, the British were the first to sanction the creation of a Jewish state** in the ancient Jewish homeland (then known as Palestine). After discussions within the Cabinet and consultations with Jewish leaders, the decision was made public in a letter from British Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community in Palestine.

The contents of this letter became known as the Balfour Declaration:

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours,

Arthur James Balfour<sup>14</sup>



**After several different attempts** to implement the plan to give the Jews a state of their own had failed, the “Partition Plan” finally passed in the United Nations in 1947. It is important to note that in this plan, Jerusalem was to remain a “Corpus Separatum,” meaning it would remain under international rule until the residents voted on its status.

That vote never came to pass because in 1948, after the state of Israel was officially declared a nation, the Jewish State was immediately invaded by five Arab armies determined to destroy the fledgling country.

**Israel miraculously won that war**, known as the War of Independence, but at a great price — the Jewish State lost Jerusalem. It became occupied by Jordan, then known as Transjordan. Abdullah el-Tel, the commander of Transjordan’s Arab Legion, reported in 1948 that the “Jewish Quarter [of Jerusalem] has been destroyed” making the return of the Jews to this place impossible. In describing the significance of the Jewish defeat in Jerusalem, the commander noted that it was the first time in 15 generations that the Jews were completely cut off from the Western Wall and the Jewish Quarter.<sup>15</sup>



... it was the first time  
in 15 generations that the  
Jews were completely cut off from  
the Western Wall and  
the Jewish Quarter.

**Based on the history of Jerusalem you have learned so far, how would you respond to this statement made by former Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek:**

For three thousand years, Jerusalem has been the center of Jewish hope and longing. No other city has played such a dominant role in the history, culture, religion and consciousness of a people as has Jerusalem in the life of Jewry and Judaism ... This heart and soul of the Jewish people engenders the thought that if you want one simple word to symbolize all of Jewish history, that word would be “Jerusalem.”<sup>16</sup>





## PART 3 — THE REUNIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

# The Six-Day Miracle

Nineteen difficult and long years passed before Jerusalem would be accessible to the Jews once again. Before we go into the conflict that ultimately reunited Jerusalem, let's look at some promises in the Bible that speak about God fighting on Israel's side in times of war. It is against this backdrop that we will study one of the greatest military upsets of all time — one that could only have come about by the hand of God.

Scripture Reference	Main Idea
Leviticus 26:8	
Deuteronomy 3:22	
Deuteronomy 7:23	
2 Chronicles 20:29	
Psalms 30:11	
Psalms 118:23	
Isaiah 54:17	

## Summary of Events

**Relations between Israel and her neighboring Arab countries** never normalized between 1948 and 1967. There were constant threats, conflicts, and skirmishes across borders. Tensions became dangerously high in the spring of 1967 when Egypt, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, took two belligerent actions. First, Egypt expelled United Nations peacekeepers from the Sinai desert (who left without even the slightest protest) and moved in their own troops. They made no secret that they intended to destroy the Jewish State. Second, they blockaded the Straits of Tiran, the water passageway that linked southern Israel to the rest of the world.

**The war began on June 5, when Israel, realizing that an attack was inevitable, struck first.**

Israel risked nearly its entire Israeli Air Force (IAF), about 200 planes, to carry out a daring mission. The aircraft crossed into Egyptian airspace in broad daylight and targeted the Egyptian air force, knowing full well that Egypt had the means to down their aircraft.

Israeli Air Force Commander Motti Hod sent his pilots out with the following words:

“The spirit of Israel’s heroes accompany us to battle ... From Joshua Bin-Nun, King David, the Maccabees, and the fighters of 1948 and 1956, we shall draw strength and courage to strike the Egyptians who threaten our safety, our independence, and our future. Fly, soar at the enemy, destroy him and scatter him throughout the desert so that Israel may live, secure in its land, for generations.”<sup>17</sup>

**The success of the IAF was extraordinary and miraculous**, setting the tone for the rest of the war. Israel decimated the Egyptian air force in six hours, and then went on to defeat the Egyptian forces completely a few days later.

However, before an official surrender was declared, both Jordan and Syria were led to believe that Egypt was succeeding in her ambitions because Egyptian propaganda boasted success despite their defeats. And so, Jordan and Syria also entered the war and were defeated.

**By June 11th, six days after the conflict had started**, Israel had defeated all three armies, tripled her territory, and most importantly, reclaimed Jerusalem.

## Miracles of the War

“In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he was saved from Egypt: for He did not redeem only our ancestors, but even us as well, as it is written ‘*And He brought us out from thence, that He might bring us in, to give us the land which He swore unto our fathers*’ (Deuteronomy 6:23). Therefore we are obligated to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, magnify, adore, and give eternal honor to the One who did all these miracles for us and for our ancestors, and took us out from slavery to freedom, from servitude to redemption, from sorrow to happiness, from mourning to festivity, and from deep darkness to great light; let us say before Him, Hallelujah!”

— The Passover *Haggadah*, the primary text used on the night of Passover, quoting the *Talmud*, Judaism’s Oral Tradition that was compiled and written down.

Just as we recognize God’s salvation on Passover, it is most fitting that we recognize His hand in our times, in our lives, and in the miracles He has performed for Israel from biblical times through today.

**Before we look at some of the many miracles that occurred in the 1967 Six-Day War**, look up the following Scripture references to see how God has miraculously intervened on Israel's behalf on the battlefield in the past.

Scripture Reference	Miracles
Joshua 6:1–21	
Joshua 10:9–14	
Judges 4:12–16	
Judges 7:8–22	
1 Samuel 14:4–15:	
1 Samuel 17:32–51	
2 Kings 7:3–9	

**Now consider the list of just some of the great miracles** that occurred in the 1967 Six-Day War.

- The entire war, which resulted in an amazing triumph for Israel and the reunification of Jerusalem, was based on false information provided to Egypt by the former Soviet Union.
- Israel was completely outnumbered and outgunned. The enemy had twice as many soldiers, three times as many planes, and four times as many tanks.
- When Israel invaded Egypt, Israeli planes flew at a dangerously low altitude, too low to be detected by Egyptian radar, but not too low for the Jordanians, who had more sophisticated equipment. However, although Jordan tried to alert the Egyptians, they could not. The Egyptians had changed their code system a day earlier, but failed to update the Jordanians.



In addition, the war took place on three separate fronts. Israel fully expected another Holocaust. In fact, in the days leading up to the war, Israel prepared for the worst, digging graves and designating public parks as cemeteries because the number of casualties that were expected exceeded the existing capacity to bury the dead. The victory of Israel was completely unexpected.

- Israel attacked Egypt just after 7:00 a.m. The Egyptian air force had completed their scan of the area and concluded that no threats were evident. They were having breakfast and sipping their coffee. In addition, the Egyptian Commander-in-Chief could not be reached. He had gone to bed with strict orders not to be disturbed. It was during that small window of time that Israel attacked with a great advantage: those who could have destroyed them were simply not present.

- When Egypt realized that they were under attack, they did not shoot at the Israeli planes. Two planes carrying the top commanders of Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq were airborne at the time, and there were strict orders not to launch any anti-aircraft missiles which could have otherwise destroyed the attacking Israeli planes because they could also mistakenly down the aircraft of these important commanders. Instead, Israel managed to eliminate more than half the Egyptian air force in less than an hour.
- After Israel carried out the initial strikes on the Egyptian air force, they were not targeted on their way back to Israel either. This is because the enemy, seeing them headed *toward* Israel, were confused and assumed that these were Egyptian planes on their way to attack Israel.
- By the second day of the war, with Israel's pilots exhausted and low on fuel, there was an expectation that Egypt would take advantage of this weakness and retaliate with full force. But that retaliation never came. It has been said that Egyptian military officials were reduced to issuing incoherent and disorganized instructions. When Israel did press into the Sinai desert, they found abandoned Egyptian equipment, vehicles, uniforms, even shoes. The soldiers had run for their lives in spite of their superiority in troops and tanks. They were consumed with inexplicable fear.
- In spite of repeated warnings by Israel not to join the war, Jordan attacked Israel anyway, bolstered by false Egyptian claims that the Arabs were winning and Israel was being destroyed. This move is what forced Israel into fighting the Jordanians and ultimately, into liberating Jerusalem from Jordan. A legion of paratroopers suddenly found themselves tasked with the mission of securing the Old City of Jerusalem. This had not been in Israel's original plans at all!
- When Israeli tanks invaded Egypt, more than once, the enemy was confused and thought the Israeli tanks were Egyptian tanks. This spared the Israeli tanks from attack and allowed them to defeat the enemy.
- When the Israelis entered the Arab-occupied town of Shechem, sacred to Christians and Jews alike, they were surprised to find the Arabs waving to them, displaying white flags, and smiling. Only later did they realize that the residents had been confused, thinking that the Israelis were Iraqis who had come to help them. This confusion allowed Israel to easily regain control of one of its holiest cities.



**There are many more examples of inexplicable events** that were published in newspapers over the years — for example, the account of an Egyptian tank commander who surrendered his large forces to only 2 Israeli tanks, claiming that a desert mirage made him see hundreds of Israeli tanks. Another story involved two Israeli fighters who were confronted by a truckload of armed Egyptians, but the commander failed to open fire claiming that his body froze and he could not move.

**These events were summed up** by Israeli Commander Rafael Eytan who said,

“Apparently someone in Heaven was watching over us. Every unintended action they took and every unintended action we took always turned out for our advantage.”<sup>18</sup>

Recognizing that the liberation of Jerusalem was a miracle, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan put a note into the Western Wall, as is the tradition. When Dayan left, the media opened the note. It was a quote from Psalm 118:23: “*the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.*”



**Based on the biblical and historical accounts that you just read, in your opinion, do you think the Six-Day War was miraculous? Why, or why not?**

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**Knowing about the events involved in Israel’s success during the Six-Day War, how has this changed your perspective of Israel’s claim to Jerusalem in light of current events? Future events?**

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## PART 3 — THE REUNIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

# Reunification and Celebration

Few things are more moving than hearing the recordings of army radio transmissions from the day Jerusalem came into Jewish hands for the first time in 2,000 years. On June 7, 1967, IDF paratroopers advanced through the Old City of Jerusalem toward the Western Wall and the Temple Mount.

Mordechai (Motta) Gur, commander of the brigade, can be heard saying:

“We’re sitting right now on the ridge and we’re seeing the Old City. Shortly we’re going to go in to the Old City of Jerusalem that all generations have dreamed about. We will be the first to enter the Old City ...”

And then shortly afterward came these historic words;

“The Temple Mount is in our hands! I repeat, the Temple Mount is in our hands!”<sup>19</sup>

General Rabbi Shlomo Goren, chief chaplain of the IDF, sounded the *shofar*, the ritual trumpet of the Bible, at the Western Wall to signify its liberation.

These were Commander Motta Gur’s words to his brigade upon their capture of Jerusalem:

“For some two thousand years the Temple Mount was forbidden to the Jews. Until you came — you, the paratroopers — and returned it to the bosom of the nation. 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.”<sup>20</sup>



Another eyewitness account comes from former Prime Minister, then Chief of Staff, Yitzchak Rabin. He recounted:

“I felt truly shaken and stood there murmuring a prayer for peace. Motta Gur’s paratroopers were struggling to reach the Wall and touch it. We stood among a tangle of rugged, battle-weary men who were unable to believe their eyes or restrain their emotions. Their eyes were moist with tears, their speech incoherent. The overwhelming desire was to cling to the Wall, to hold on to that great moment as long as possible.”<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps one of the most moving accounts of the moment came from IDF Chaplain Rabbi Shlomo Gorens, who addressed the soldiers who had just redeemed Jerusalem.

“I am speaking to you from the plaza of the Western Wall, the remnant of our Holy Temple. *‘Comfort my people, comfort them, says the LORD your God’* [Isaiah 40:1]. This is the day we have hoped for, let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation. The vision of all generations is being realized before our eyes: The city of God, the site of the Temple, the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, the symbol of the nation’s redemption, have been redeemed today by you, heroes of the Israel Defense Forces. By doing so you have fulfilled the oath of generations, *‘If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning’* [Psalm 137:5]. Indeed, we have not forgotten you, Jerusalem, our holy city, our glory. In the name of the entire Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora, I hereby recite with supreme joy, blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has kept us in life, who has preserved us, and enabled us to reach this day. This year in Jerusalem — rebuilt!”<sup>22</sup>

**As for the Jewish people of Israel and around the world**, there was great joy and pride where there had been fear and even embarrassment. A little while later, after the minefields had been cleared and the Old City declared safe, the Jews of Israel were able to go to the Western Wall for the first time in 19 years, under Jewish rule for the first time in two millennia.

It also happened to be the holiday of *Shavuot*, Pentecost, one of the three pilgrim holidays mandated in the Bible. No less than 200,000 Jews walked on foot from near and far to touch the stones of the Western Wall that year. And while the tradition of walking to the Western Wall on *Shavuot* continues every year since 1967, nothing can compare to that first year when “... *the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed*” (Psalm 126:1). Israel was living the dream that hope and faith had kept alive for thousands of years.

**Which of the firsthand accounts of liberating Jerusalem resonates with you most?  
How might this affect the way you think about Jerusalem today?**

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## PART 3 — THE REUNIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

# Final Thoughts

The reunification of Jerusalem fundamentally changed the life of the Jewish people and the state of Israel, and continues to have profound ramifications on all people around the world. It was nothing less than a watershed moment in history.

**For Jews, the reunification of Jerusalem** meant that the heart and the soul had finally been restored to the nation. Even the late Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, who was willing to give away large amounts of Israeli territory in exchange for peace, said in 1995: “If they told us that the price of peace is giving up on a united Jerusalem, my reply would be, ‘let’s do without peace.’”<sup>23</sup> Such is the importance of a united Jerusalem to the Jewish people. Or, as Moshe Dayan put in 1967, “We have returned to all that is holy in our land. We have returned never to be parted from it again.”<sup>24</sup>

**For people of all faiths,** it is only now that Jerusalem is under Israeli sovereignty that there is freedom of worship for all people. This had not happened since the times of the Second Temple.

In fact, just after the liberation of Jerusalem, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan proclaimed:

“To our Arab neighbors we extend, especially at this hour, the hand of peace. To members of the other religions, Christians and Muslims, I hereby promise faithfully that their full freedom and all their religious rights will be preserved. We did not come to Jerusalem to conquer the Holy Places of others.”<sup>25</sup>

This was later made into an official law by the *Knesset*, Israel’s Parliament, making freedom of worship in Jerusalem a lawful right for all people.

**A united Jerusalem has always been a more peaceful Jerusalem than a divided one.** God’s Holy City is meant to bring different people together and all people closer to God. This is the ultimate goal of the Messianic Era, and with the reunification of Jerusalem, we are one step closer to that goal, to the day when the Temple in Jerusalem “*will be called a house of prayer for all nations*” (Isaiah 56:7).

## A Poem for Jerusalem Day

## The Paratroopers Are Crying

BY HAIM HEFER

This *Kotel*\* has heard many prayers  
This *Kotel* has seen many walls fall  
This *Kotel* has felt wailing women's hands and notes pressed between its stones  
This *Kotel* has seen Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi trampled in front of it  
This *Kotel* has seen Caesars rising and falling  
But this *Kotel* has never before seen paratroopers cry.

This *Kotel* has seen them tired and exhausted  
This *Kotel* has seen them wounded and scratched-up  
Running towards it with beating hearts, with cries and with silence  
Pouncing out like predators from the alleyways of the Old City  
And they're dust-covered and dry-lipped  
And they're whispering: if I forget you, if I forget you, O Jerusalem  
And they are lighter than eagles and more tenacious than lions  
And their tanks are the fiery chariot of Elijah the Prophet  
And they pass like lightning  
And they pass in fury  
And they remember the thousands of terrible years in which  
we didn't even have a *Kotel* in front of which we could cry.

And here they are standing in front of it and breathing deeply  
And here they are looking at it with the sweet pain  
And the tears fall and they look awkwardly at each other  
How is it that paratroopers cry?  
How is it that they touch the wall with feeling?  
How is it that from crying they move to singing?  
Maybe it's because these 19-year-olds were born with the birth of Israel  
Carrying on their backs — 2000 years.

Haim Hefer (1925-2012) is a noted Israeli songwriter, poet, and writer, who wrote this famous poem shortly after the Battle for Jerusalem. It is often read on *Yom HaZikaron*, Israel Independence Day.

\*The *Kotel* is the Hebrew term for the Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall.





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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



# Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein



In 1983, Rabbi Eckstein founded the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (The Fellowship)*, devoting his life to building bridges of understanding between Christians and Jews and broad support for the state of Israel. He is an internationally respected Bible teacher and acknowledged as the world's leading Jewish authority on evangelical Christians. Under his leadership, *The Fellowship* now raises over \$125 million annually, making it the largest Christian-supported humanitarian nonprofit working in Israel today.

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**Isaiah 58.**



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