

For 3,000 years, Jewish civilization has been rooted in the city of Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel. Today, Jerusalem, holy also to Christianity and Islam, is a city of freedom, openness and diversity, where the sanctity of all religious sites is respected and protected.

An Ancient City

- Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel, is one of the oldest cities in the world, dating back some 3,000 years.
- No other city in the world has as many sites holy to the three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
- Archeological findings provide evidence of the ancient Jewish kingdoms. For example, a royal seal excavated in the Old City of Jerusalem dates back to the 8th century BCE and confirms the existence of the Jewish King Hezekiah of Jerusalem, as mentioned in the Bible.
- The first hints of Jerusalem in the Bible occur in the Book of Genesis. The Biblical patriarch Abraham (who lived in the second millennium BCE) met Melchizedek, the King of Salem, which is identified with Jerusalem. Later, Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah, the site in Jerusalem where the Jewish Temple would later be built.

The Center of Jewish Civilization

- Jerusalem is at the heart of Judaism, serving as the geographic, political, cultural and spiritual center of the Jewish people over the millennia.
- The holiest sites of Judaism are located in the Old City of Jerusalem: The Temple Mount, where the ancient Jewish Temples stood, and the Western Wall, which is the surviving section of the Second Temple compound.
- Jews are indigenous to the city and to the broader region. For some 3,000 years, Jews have inhabited Jerusalem almost continuously and, in the modern era, Jews became the majority ethnic group in the mid-1800s.
- Jews in the Diaspora, who were expelled from the Land of Israel throughout the centuries, have longed to return to Jerusalem. This longing is a central theme of Jewish liturgy, holidays and customs, as expressed in the ancient prayer "Next year in Jerusalem." Jews all over the world always pray in the direction of Jerusalem.
- Jewish wedding ceremonies include a tradition in which the groom breaks a glass to commemorate the destruction of the Jewish Temples in

- Jerusalem, and recites, "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill."
- Jerusalem is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) over 660 times.

Religious Significance to Christianity and Islam

- Jerusalem holds great significance to Christianity and Islam.
- Some of the holiest sites in Christianity are in Jerusalem, including the Via Dolorosa, Golgotha and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.
- The third-holiest site of Islam, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is in Jerusalem. Muslims believe that Muhammad was transported from the Sacred Mosque in Mecca to al-Aqsa during the Night Journey.
- Jerusalem appears 146 times in the New Testament. In the Quran, the word Jerusalem is not mentioned.

Religious Freedom throughout the Centuries

- Jerusalem was the capital of the Jewish Kingdom of Israel in antiquity, the capital of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, and the administrative capital of the British Mandate. It was never the capital of any Arab or Muslim state.
- For much of its history, under a variety of empires, minorities were denied religious freedom in Jerusalem. During the Crusader rule over Jerusalem, most Jewish and Muslim inhabitants of the city were massacred. During the subsequent Mamluk and Ottoman empires, non-Muslims were considered second-class citizens and suffered discrimination.
- At the end of the British Mandate in 1948, modern Israel gained independence and established Jerusalem as its capital. However, from 1948-1967, Jerusalem was divided, as Jordan occupied its eastern part, including the Old City. Jews were evicted from eastern Jerusalem and the Old City and were completely barred from their holy sites. In contrast, Muslims and Christians could choose to stay and were free to visit in the Israeli western part of the city.
- During the Jordanian occupation, the Arab Legion of Jordan, together with local Arabs, looted and destroyed 58 synagogues, turning many religious sites into animal stalls and latrines. The 2,500-year-old Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives was desecrated and vandalized. For Christians, limits were placed on the number of pilgrims allowed in Jerusalem.

Modern Jerusalem: Unified, Diverse and Free

- Jerusalem was reunited by Israel in 1967 and is today a vibrant cultural and spiritual center that celebrates its diversity and welcomes visitors of all faiths from around the globe.
- Since reunification, for the first time in modern history, Muslims, Christians and Jews are free to worship in Jerusalem at their holy sites. There are over 100 synagogues, 50 churches and over 33 mosques operating freely in Jerusalem.
- There are some 524,700 Jews, 307,300 Muslims, and 12,400 Christians living in Jerusalem.
- Thousands of pilgrims from all over the world, of all faiths, flock to the many holy sites in Jerusalem.
- All holy places are protected by Israeli law (1967), which reads in part: *The Holy Places shall be protected from desecration and any other violation and from anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions to the places sacred to them or their feelings with regard to those places.*
- Holy sites are kept secure and accessible to followers of all religions. The only time that access to holy sites is restricted is when a direct security threat jeopardizes the safety of people, irrespective of their faith.