

JERUSALEM, THE CITY OF ETERNITY



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JERUSALEM FOREVER

"Jews care intensely about Jerusalem. The Christians have Rome and Canterbury and even Salt Lake City; Muslims have Mecca and Medina. Jerusalem has great meaning for them also. But the Jews have only Jerusalem, and only the Jews have made it their capital. That is why it has so much deeper a meaning for them than for anybody else...."(Teddy Kollek, Mayor of Jerusalem from 1965-1993).

Throughout its long and turbulent history, Jerusalem, more than any other city, has evoked the emotions, aspirations, yearnings and religious fervour of civilised mankind. Yet this homage of the world cannot overshadow the consuming and single-minded passion of one particular attachment: that of the Jewish people. For that people, as no other, Jerusalem is not just its one and only religious centre and source of spiritual life; from time immemorial it has been and, still is, the very heart and core of the people - the tangible embodiment of its nationhood, the lodestar in its wanderings, the theme of its prayers each day, the fulfilment of its dreams for the Return unto Zion and indeed the cornerstone of its continuity.

Many thousand of years ago, it was in Jerusalem that the priests would offer up daily sacrifices in the Temple on Mount Moriah. It was there in the Temple that the Sanhedrin, the great court of 71 Jewish sages, would sit in judgement. And three times a year on the harvest holydays of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, the entire Jewish nation would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It is in the direction of Jerusalem that Jews face when they pray three times daily. The prayers themselves contain numerous references to Jerusalem and Zion. In the Amidah, the Silent Devotion, God is praised as the Builder of Jerusalem. In many other places the prayers echo the messianic belief that God will restore the Jewish people to His holy city. On Passover and the Day of Atonement Jews conclude services with the fervent hope: "Next year may we be in Jerusalem!"

The Jewish connection to Jerusalem harks back to Biblical times. Jacob, encountering the site where the Temple would stand centuries later said: "How awe-inspiring is this place! It is the House of God! It is the gate to heaven!" (Gen. 28:17). Jerusalem was "the site that the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes, as a place established in His name. It is there that you shall go to seek His presence" (Deut. 12:3).

Jerusalem began to fulfil the function of a spiritual and national capital when King David conquered the city in the 10th century BCE. He made it his seat of judgement and brought the Ark of the Covenant to rest there. It was also David who conceived the idea of building a permanent house of God, a Temple, a plan eventually fulfilled by his son Solomon.

DESTRUCTION & REBIRTH

The story of the Jewish people and Jerusalem has been one of exile, destruction and rebirth. In its 3000 years of history the city was destroyed 17 times and 18 times reborn. There always remained a Jewish presence in the city, and the Jewish people as a whole always dreamt of returning to and rebuilding their city.

When the Babylonians destroyed the city in 586 BCE, the Jewish exiles pledged that they would never forget their beloved Jerusalem: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and we wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in its midst we hanged up our harps. For there they that led us captive asked of us words of song, and our tormentors asked of us in mirth: 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.' How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy" (Psalms 137:1-6). The exiles did not forget their beloved city. They were to return there and rebuild the Temple under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah.

When the Seleucids took control over the Land of Israel and placed Greek idols in the Temple, the Jewish Maccabees revolted. They succeeded in recapturing Jerusalem and rededicating the Temple in 165 BCE. The Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 CE. When the Emperor Hadrian

began planning to replace it with a shrine to Jupiter, a Jewish revolt known as the Bar Kochba Rebellion broke out.

For the last 2000 years, on the 9th day of the Hebrew month of Av, Jews everywhere have commemorated the destruction of their city and Temple with a 25-hour fast. They sit on low stools in their synagogues and recite Jeremiah's Lamentations. They recite elegies for the city which is "scorned without her glory".

During the periods of exile Jews throughout the world would be linked as they prayed together in their Hebrew tongue all facing in the same direction, maintaining their affinity with their eternal Jerusalem.

Today Jerusalem flourishes once again as the heart and soul of Judaism. It boasts a full range of synagogues, Talmudic academies and institutes of Jewish research. It is home to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel which administers the life cycle events of the nation's Jewish citizens. All varieties of Judaism are represented there. Nowhere else is the spiritual element of the Jewish people so visible as in this "place that the Lord has chosen".

NATIONAL CAPITAL

Jerusalem was never the capital city of any of its Muslim rulers. It was not the capital for the Umayyad, Abbasid, or Fatamid caliphates who ruled for 400 years. Nor was it the capital for the Mamluks (1260-1516), Ottomans (1516-1917), or Jordanians who ruled East Jerusalem (1948-1967).

The only time (until 1948) that Jerusalem was a capital over the last two millenia was for a period during the Crusades when it was conquered in 1099 by Godfrey de Bouillon who founded the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Under Jordanian rule, from 1948-1967, East Jerusalem was the provincial capital of "Muhafazat el Quds", the Jerusalem Region. Yet, its mayor was not elected by the twelve city councillors, but appointed by the Minister of Interior in Amman irrespective of the number of votes he received in elections. Furthermore, no ministry had its seat in East Jerusalem. The Jordanian parliament and senate, and the headquarters of all public institutions and banks, were situated in Amman. East Jerusalem was regarded by the Jordanian authorities as a semi-municipal area, with services far below the minimum normal standards for municipalities.

The city has always been the designated national capital of the Jews. It has been home to the Jewish kings, the Sanhedrin, and the High Priest. Since independence in 1948 it has automatically become the capital of the State of Israel. By contrast it is interesting to note that the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's founding document, the Palestinian National Covenant of 1964 does not mention Jerusalem even once.

JEWISH PRESENCE

There has been a Jewish presence in the city continuously over the centuries, despite the massacres and deprivation brought about by its ruling powers and invading armies. The only time that Jews were forced to leave the city was in the period immediately after the Roman destruction and for a short time during the Crusades.

In 1870 - before the waves of Jewish migration from Europe - out of a total population of 22,000, there were 11,000 Jews, 6,500 Muslims and 4,500 Christians. Since the 1875 census, Jews have consistently made up an absolute majority of the city's total population. In 1997, out of a population of 591,000, there were 417,000 Jews.

A CITY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Israel's Declaration of Independence promises that the State of Israel "will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the holy places of all religions..."

Under Israel, freedom of religion has been guaranteed for all faiths in Jerusalem. By contrast, between 1948 and 1967, under the rule of Jordan in East Jerusalem, fifty-four synagogues were destroyed in the Old City; gravestones from the ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives were used as paving stones; and Jews were expelled from the sector. Under Article 8 of the Israeli-Jordanian Armistice agreement of April, 1949, free access to the Western Wall and Mount Scopus was supposed to be guaranteed to the Jews, but the Jordanians never allowed this to take effect.

Immediately after the Israeli reunification of Jerusalem, the Protection of Holy Places Law was passed by the Knesset, on 22 June, 1967, guaranteeing the sanctity of all holy sites. The law imposes prison sentences of up to seven years on those who desecrate such places. The 1980 Basic Law on Jerusalem as the capital of Israel reaffirmed the principle of free access to the holy sites of all religions.

Israel permits Christians and Muslims to administer their own holy places and institutions. Jordan still administers the Muslim holy sites in the city. In 1988 King Hussein exempted Jerusalem when he ended his administrative ties with the West Bank, and the October 1994 Israel-Jordanian peace treaty agrees on respecting "the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem".

C. Witton Davies, Archdeacon of Oxford, wrote after a visit to Jerusalem: "From my own personal conversations and observations, I testify that Jerusalem has never been so fairly administered, or made accessible to adherents of all three monotheisms, as well as to the general tourist sightseer or visitor."

Former US President Jimmy Carter, a devout Southern Baptist and an outspoken exponent of human rights, has acknowledged the freedom of

religion in East Jerusalem under Israeli rule: "There is unimpeded access today. There wasn't from 1948-1967."

In April 1990, the chairman of the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, Dante Fascell, noted on the floor of Congress that "since Israel gained control of the (Old) City in 1967, it has been open to worshippers of all faiths."

A CITY REBORN

Since 1967, Israel has restored and repopulated areas in East Jerusalem. As a result of the efforts of Teddy Kollek, Mayor of Jerusalem from 1965-1993, facilities were provided for Arabs in East Jerusalem beyond anything introduced under Jordanian rule, including sewage, a piped water system, clinics, parks and gardens. Jerusalem's Arabs can work freely in Israel and are entitled to health insurance, hospital access, and other benefits enjoyed by Israeli citizens.

Despite the charges of those who assert that Israel is "Judaising" the city, the fact is that since Israeli reunification, the Arab population has grown rapidly. In 1967 there were 68,600 Arabs living in Jerusalem, whereas in 1995 there were 174,400, a rise of 154%. Whilst the demographic growth has been great, crowding has actually decreased. In 1967 there were 12,200 Arab-owned apartments; by 1995 the number had risen to 27,066, an increase of 122%. The Israeli decision to build housing units in Har Homa in south-east Jerusalem was a response to the fact that the city is naturally expanding. At the same time as approving construction of housing for Jews, the government approved the building of 3,015 housing units for Arabs in ten Arab neighbourhoods in Jerusalem.

A UNITED CITY FOR ALL TIME

Israeli rule has not been perfect, yet it has effectively safeguarded the religious freedom of Christians, Muslims and Jews and their holy places. Under Israel the infrastructure in East Jerusalem has been greatly improved and the Arab population of the city has grown significantly. A redivided city would increase the number of conflict points between Jews and Arabs dissatisfied with the partition, and which, under two ruling authorities, would be a nightmare to control.

In October 1995, the US Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act which recognised Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel and authorised the relocation of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The then US Senate majority leader, Robert Dole, stated: "Yesterday's vote to relocate the American Embassy to Jerusalem was truly a bipartisan effort... No other city on earth represents the same capital of the same country inhabited by the same people, speaking the same language and worshipping the same God as it did 3000 years ago."

For 3000 years Jews have turned toward Jerusalem for spiritual, cultural, and national inspiration. Since the destruction of the city by the Romans almost 2000 years ago, foreign powers ruled the city vanquishing its inner beauty. Today the beauty has returned to the city. Jerusalem has once again truly become the centre of the Jewish

people. The adage of the Talmudic sages has now been fulfilled: "Ten measures of beauty were bestowed upon the world; nine were taken by Jerusalem."

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