

Jerusalem



Divided under Jordanian control from 1948-1967, Jerusalem today is the seat of Israel's democratic institutions and the historical and spiritual capital of the Jewish people.

Jerusalem today is the undivided capital of the state of Israel. For more than three millennia the city has played a central role in the lives of Jews throughout the world. There are more than 800 mentions of Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible, and literally thousands of references to the city throughout more than 2,000 years of rabbinic literature.

Jerusalem's Central Role in Jewish Tradition

According to tradition, the Jewish connection to Jerusalem predates even the city's formal establishment as Israel's capital in 1,000 B.C.E.

One of Jerusalem's hills was the setting for the famous Biblical story in which the patriarch Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Hundreds of years later, after King David had made Jerusalem Israel's capital, David's son Solomon built the First Jewish Temple on that same summit, known as the Temple Mount. The Temple Mount became the focal point of ancient Judaism, drawing rabbis and religious pilgrims from throughout Israel.

Jerusalem remained the holiest city of the Jewish people even after 70 C.E., when the rebuilt Second Temple was destroyed by Israel's Roman conquerors. Jews maintained a continuous presence there for the next two millennia, while generations of their dispersed co-religionists prayed three times a day for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The hope was expressed in a famous verse from the Psalms: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."

Jerusalem as the Capital of Israel

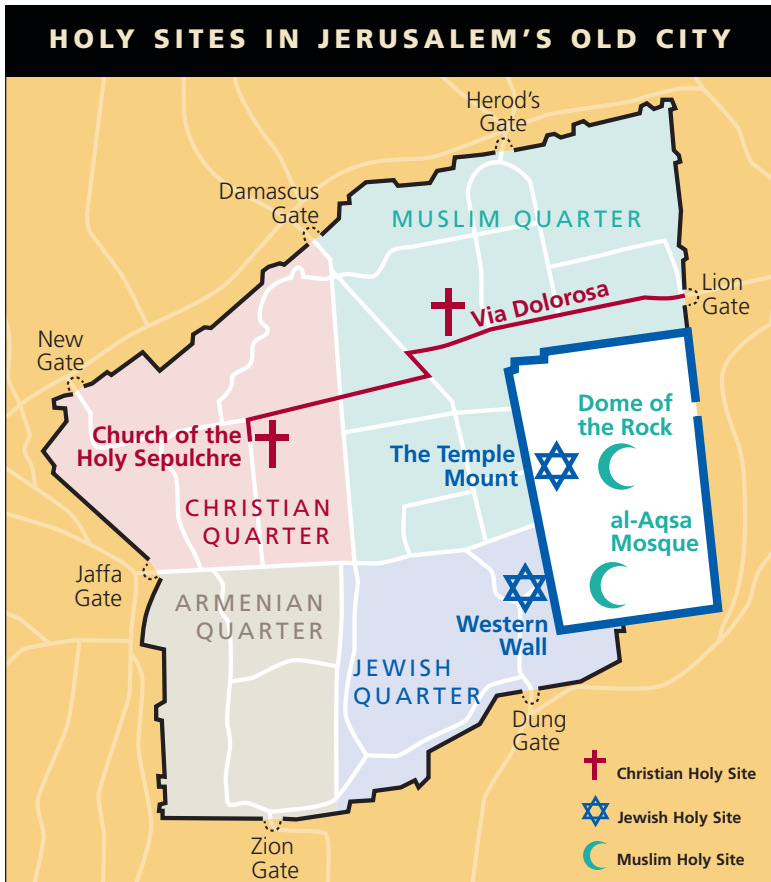
Following its war of independence in 1948, the centuries-old Jewish dream of reclaiming Jerusalem was partially realized, when the western half of the city was made the capital of a re-established Israel.

Jews had formed a majority of Jerusalem's population since the 1860s, and the founders of Israel had wanted to make the entire city the reborn nation's capital. However, it was divided after the Jordanian army succeeded in occupying eastern Jerusalem—the area of the city containing Jewish holy sites such as the Western Wall, a surviving remnant of the Second Temple.

Jerusalem's division represented a grievous time for the Jewish people and the city itself. Arab armies shelled and laid siege to Jerusalem during their 1948 war against Israel. After the conflict ended, a barrier cut through the city's center along the armistice line. Thousands of Jews, some of whose families had been living there for centuries, were expelled from eastern Jerusalem. Arab soldiers even desecrated the graves of Jews buried on the Mount of Olives.

The city was finally reunited during the Six-Day War of 1967, when Israel won a stunning victory over several Arab nations that again forced the Jewish state to fight for its survival.

Israel immediately abolished Arab restrictions on access to the city, allowing all Jews, Christians and Muslims to worship at their holy places. Israel even granted Islamic religious authorities jurisdiction over Judaism's holiest site, recognizing that Muslims had built two places of worship—the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque—on the Temple Mount centuries after the Roman Empire destroyed the Jewish Temple.



Israel protects and guarantees access to Christian, Muslim and Jewish holy sites located inside the ancient walls of Jerusalem's Old City.

Under Israeli rule, east Jerusalem sees hundreds of Muslims gather on the Temple Mount daily. Nearby, Jews enjoy total access to the Western Wall, and Christians are allowed to visit sites such as the Garden of Gethsemane and the Via Dolorosa without restriction.

Israel has also undertaken to develop Jerusalem responsibly, with an eye toward its expanding population and security. Hills surrounding Jerusalem—once the homes of Arab cannons pointed toward the city's heart—now feature houses and apartment complexes. None of the developments violate agree-

ments Israel has signed with the Palestinians, which stipulate that any changes in Jerusalem's present status should be reserved for discussion until the final round of peace talks.

Jerusalem Recognized as Israel's Capital

There is an overwhelming consensus among Israelis, Jews around the world and millions of Christians that Jerusalem must remain the capital of Israel forever.

A 1980 Israeli law states that Jerusalem is the state's "eternal, undivided" capital, and that sentiment has been reaffirmed by Israeli governments on both the left and right of the political spectrum.

Congress has also weighed in on behalf of that position. A series of resolutions has stated that Jerusalem "must remain an undivided city in which the rights of every ethnic and religious group are protected."

In 1995, Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act, which stated that Jerusalem should be recognized as Israel's capital and required the United States to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem no later than May 31, 1999.

However, Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have used waivers granted by the legislation to delay relocating the U.S. embassy. As a result, Israel remains the only country in the world in which the United States neither recognizes the nation's designated capital nor locates its embassy there.

Members of Congress will continue to play a key role in pressing the administration to follow through on the legislation and move America's embassy to Israel's capital.

Congress has
passed legislation
recognizing
Jerusalem as
Israel's undivided
capital and
calling for a U.S.
Embassy to be
established there.

Key Points

- Jerusalem is the undivided capital of the State of Israel.
- For more than three millennia, Jews have maintained a continuous presence in Jerusalem and the city has played a central role in the lives of Jews throughout the world.
- Jerusalem is home to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest sites.
- In contrast to the Jordanian government that controlled eastern Jerusalem from 1948 to 1967, Israel guarantees access to holy sites for worshippers and tourists of all nationalities and religions.
- Israel has developed Jerusalem responsibly, developing new neighborhoods on strategic hilltops that were once used to shell the city.
- Israelis of all political persuasions and Jews and Christians worldwide believe Jerusalem should remain the capital of Israel under any peace deal reached with the Palestinians.
- Congress has passed numerous resolutions recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and a 1995 law requires the United States to move its embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv.