

MEMMO

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Since Reuniting Jerusalem in 1967, Israel Has Opened the City and Safeguarded All Religious Holy Sites

Since Israel reunified Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War, the city has been open for worshippers and visitors of all nationalities and religions. During 19 years of Jordanian rule from 1948 to 1967, religious sites in the Arab-occupied areas were desecrated, destroyed and placed off-limits. Jerusalem today is a diverse city where Christian, Muslim and Jewish holy sites are protected by Israeli law. Recognizing Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel and spiritual center of the Jewish people, Congress has passed legislation calling for a U.S. embassy to be established in the city.

For more than three millennia, Jerusalem has played a central role in the lives of Jews throughout the world.

- Jews have maintained a continuous presence in Jerusalem for 3,000 years.
- There are nearly 700 mentions of Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible, and literally thousands of references to the city throughout more than 2,000 years of rabbinic literature.
- There has been a Jewish majority in Jerusalem for nearly 150 years—since the Ottoman Empire.
- Since the Romans destroyed the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E., generations of dispersed Jews have prayed three times a day for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and their return to it.

Under Jordanian control, Jerusalem was divided and holy sites were desecrated, destroyed and placed off-limits.

- Jews were denied access to their holiest site, the Temple Mount, upon which stood the second Temple that was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.
- Jews were completely banned from visiting the Western Wall, Judaism's most important prayer site.
- Jordanian soldiers desecrated the Mount of Olives—an ancient Jewish cemetery and holy site for Christians—by destroying tombstones and using them to build roads, walls and latrines.
- The Jordanian army used barbed wire and ditches to separate east and west Jerusalem, severing movement between Israeli- and Jordanian-controlled areas.
- Two days after conquering Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter 1948, the Jordanians dynamited the Hurva synagogue—the most prominent synagogue in Jerusalem for over 300 years.

- Israeli Christians were permitted to visit their holy sites once a year—on Christmas—while Israeli Muslims were banned from visiting Islamic holy shrines under Jordanian control and Jewish Israelis were forbidden from entering East Jerusalem.

The State of Israel guarantees open access to Jerusalem's holy sites for worshippers and tourists of all nationalities and religions.

- Christians, Muslims and Jews from all over the world can today visit the holy sites in a unified Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty.
- Despite gaining control over Jerusalem in the Six-Day War, Israel decided to allow Muslim religious authorities to retain administrative control over the Temple Mount—Israel's holiest site—recognizing that Muslims had built mosques there.
- Israel's parliament, the Knesset, has passed a law protecting all holy places under Israeli control.

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

- 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.
- 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 play a key role in pressing the administration to follow through on the legislation and move America's embassy to Israel's capital—Jerusalem.

Basic Facts Summary

- For more than three millennia, Jerusalem has played a central role in the lives of Jews throughout the world.
- The State of Israel has opened Jerusalem to worshippers and visitors of all nationalities and religions.
- Israel safeguards Jerusalem's Christian, Muslim and Jewish holy sites.
- Under Jordanian control from 1948 to 1967, Jerusalem was divided, holy sites were desecrated and destroyed and access to them was restricted.
- Congress has passed legislation recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital and calling for a U.S. Embassy to be established there.