



# Middle East Spotlight

## Jerusalem: A Holy City Open to All Faiths

On May 24, Israelis and Jews everywhere celebrated *Yom Yerushalyim* (Jerusalem Day)—an Israeli holiday that commemorates the reunification of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War of 1967. Fifty years later, Jerusalem is Israel's most populous city and a dynamic and multicultural metropolis open to the faithful of the world's major religions.

For more than three millennia, the city has played a central role in the lives of Jews throughout the world. The Temple Mount, the site of the First and Second Temples, was the focal point of ancient Judaism. Even after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, Jerusalem remained a home for Jews and the holiest city of the Jewish people as celebrated in daily prayer.

Following Israel's War of Independence in 1948, Jerusalem was divided for the first time in its history. The western half of the city became the capital of the modern state of Israel, while Jordan controlled the eastern half that included the Old City. Jews were evicted from the Jewish Quarter for the first time in millennia, and completely banned from entering the Old City or praying at the Western Wall. In addition, Jordan banned Israeli Muslims from visiting Islamic holy shrines under its control and permitted Israeli Christians to visit their holy sites only on Christmas.

All that changed following the 1967 war. Israel reunified Jerusalem and its Old City for all faiths—Jews, Christians and Muslims could once again worship at their respective holy places. In a moment of victory, the Jewish state gave up its greatest prize—the Temple Mount—in an attempt to create peace; Israeli authorities immediately granted Islamic religious authorities jurisdiction over the holy area, which contains the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque.

For 50 years, Jerusalem has remained a symbol of Israel's commitment to peace and the free exercise of religion. Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat [gave voice](#) to the power of this message March 2017, saying:

"I showed [seven UNESCO ambassadors] the city, the churches, the mosques, the synagogues, that in one square kilometer, we have more holy sites than anywhere else in the world...And they were stunned to see not just our past, but how Jerusalem is open, how many people live and breathe in the city, how it works in an amazing way...[O]ur roots and our history and our holy sites on one side and the connectivity to the future and making a better world for the benefit of all people from all over the world."

As we celebrate *Yom Yerushalyim* and the reunification of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War, let us also take pride in what the city is today: and a symbol of Israel's commitment to peace and a vibrant home to people of all faiths.