

JERUSALEM

10 ESSENTIAL FACTS



The Jewish people, whose indigenous roots in the land of Israel are deep and unbroken, forged a powerful and unique attachment to Jerusalem over 3,000 years ago.

“ If you want one simple word to symbolize all of Jewish history, that word would be Jerusalem. ”

—Teddy Kollek, former mayor of Jerusalem

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1 Jerusalem is the capital of the modern State of Israel. Jews are indigenous to Jerusalem and the rest of the country, having maintained a continuous, unbroken presence there for over 3,000 years. Since King David made the city his capital in the 10th century BCE, Jerusalem has been the geographic center of the Jewish people. For centuries it was the capital city of Jewish kingdoms, the location of Judaism's holiest sites, and the historical focus of Jewish political life. The histories of Jews and Jerusalem are impossible to separate from each other.



Royal seal impression of King Hezekiah, a direct descendant of King David, dates back to the seventh century BCE.

Special thanks to the City of David Foundation for the use of this photo.

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2 In the first and second centuries, the Roman Empire conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the Second Jewish Temple, and prohibited Jews from even visiting their holiest city. While some Jews remained in their land, most scattered across Europe and the Middle East. For 1,900 years they lived as an oppressed minority, suffering expulsions, massacres, and ultimately genocide.

3 Jerusalem is so central to Jewish culture and civilization that memory of its destruction by imperial Rome (depicted on the *Arch of Titus*, which is located in Rome) and the hope to return are included in numerous Jewish customs and holidays. The breaking of the wine glass at weddings while reciting, in Hebrew, "If I forget you, Oh Jerusalem, may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth" memorializes Jerusalem's destruction, as does the Jewish holiday Tisha B'Av – a fast day of mourning. The Western Wall (aka "Wailing Wall") is the last standing remnant of the Jewish Temple, the holiest site for Jews. "Jerusalem" appears in the Hebrew Scriptures (aka Old Testament) over 660 times.



Detail from the Arch of Titus built in 81CE depicting Roman soldiers' removal of the Jewish menorah.

4 Jerusalem is also of great importance in Christianity and Islam, containing holy sites held in deep reverence by billions of people around the world. For Christians these include the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Garden Tomb, and the Garden of Gethsemane. For Muslims these include the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque, which is the third holiest mosque in Islam after the mosques of al-Haram in Mecca and al-Nabawi in Medina. "Jerusalem" appears 146 times in the New Testament. In the Qu'ran the word "Jerusalem" is not present.

5 No Arab or Muslim power ever claimed Jerusalem as its capital. Over the centuries, Jerusalem has been ruled by various invading empires. Other than the Crusaders, the rulers made their capitals Caesarea, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, and Constantinople. The city became a capital again in 1920, when the League of Nations established the British Mandate for Palestine. The British were made responsible for restoring the territory as a national home for the Jewish people while safeguarding the rights of all other communities living there.

6 After the Jews accepted and the Arabs rejected the United Nation's 1947 proposal to divide the British Mandate, Arab forces laid siege to Jerusalem and nearly starved 100,000 Jews to death. In 1948 the Arab Legion of Jordan, commanded by British officers, attacked Jerusalem's Jewish neighborhoods and captured the Old City. The Jordanians evicted all Jews from the areas they conquered and illegally occupied the eastern sector of Jerusalem until 1967. Together with local Arab Palestinians, they destroyed and looted nearly 60 Jewish synagogues, turning many into animal stalls and latrines. The 2,500-year-old Jewish cemetery on the Mt. of Olives was vandalized, with thousands of tombstones shattered and used for building materials. Jerusalem was a city divided by mine fields and barbed wire, and for the first time in over a thousand years, Jews were barred from living near and praying at their holiest sites.



The historic Hurva Synagogue, destroyed by the Jordanian army in 1948 and restored in 2010.

7 During the Jordanian occupation, Christians, unlike Jews, were given access to their holy sites in Jerusalem and Bethlehem but with limits on the number of pilgrims allowed in during Christmas and Easter. Christian charities and religious institutions were prohibited from buying real estate. Christian schools were subject to strict controls, including being required to teach the Qu'ran to all the students.

- 8 During the 1967 Six-Day War, following unprovoked attacks by Jordan against Israel, Israel's army liberated Jerusalem's Old City from Jordan, finding the Jewish Quarter completely neglected and virtually destroyed. Since 1967, under Israeli control, members of all faiths have enjoyed religious freedom and access to their holy sites in Jerusalem. There are over 50 churches and 33 mosques operating freely in Jerusalem today. The only time access is restricted is when there are specific security threats that jeopardize the wellbeing of people of all faiths.



Modern Jerusalem

Old City of Jerusalem, where today followers of all religions have free access to their holy sites.

- 9 Jews became a plurality of Jerusalem's population in the early 1800s and have been a majority since 1864, a generation before the Zionist movement began. Before 1948 substantial Jewish communities lived in both eastern and western Jerusalem. In 1967 the Jewish population was 197,000, and the Palestinian Arab population was 68,000. Today, the population is about 500,000 Jews and 300,000 Palestinians.

- 10 Jerusalem is Israel's largest city at nearly 50 square miles. It has become a major cultural center with over 70 institutions teaching arts and sciences, some 60 museums, over 30 annual festivals, an annual marathon, 26 wineries, and over 1,500 public parks and gardens. All of these are visited by some 3.5 million tourists per year.

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