

The Sacred City of Stone

Jerusalem

The ancient, arid city of Jerusalem lacks the riches that usually entice conquerors: it has no major trade, port, or industry, and no mines of gold, silver or diamonds. Yet virtually every major empire in human history, from the Romans and the Crusaders to the Byzantines and the British, has staked a claim on the sandstone city.

And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time *By William Blake*

And did those feet in ancient time,
Walk upon England's mountains green
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen
And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

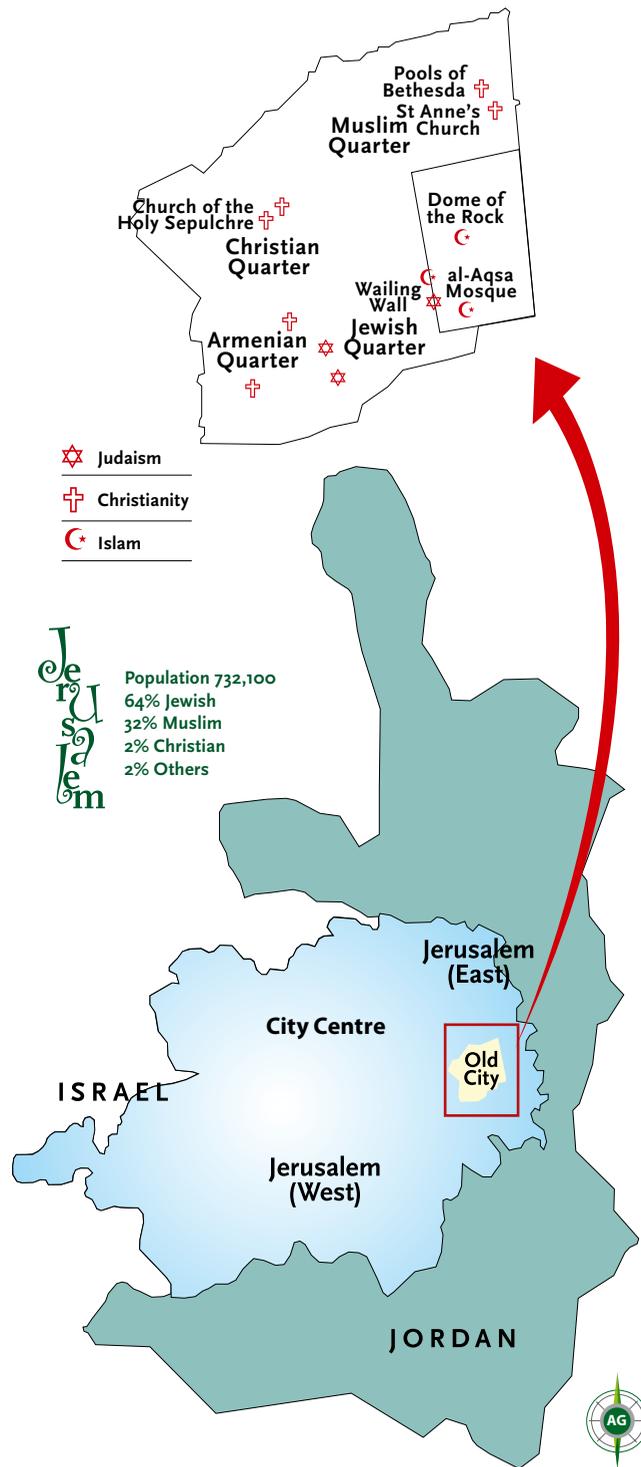
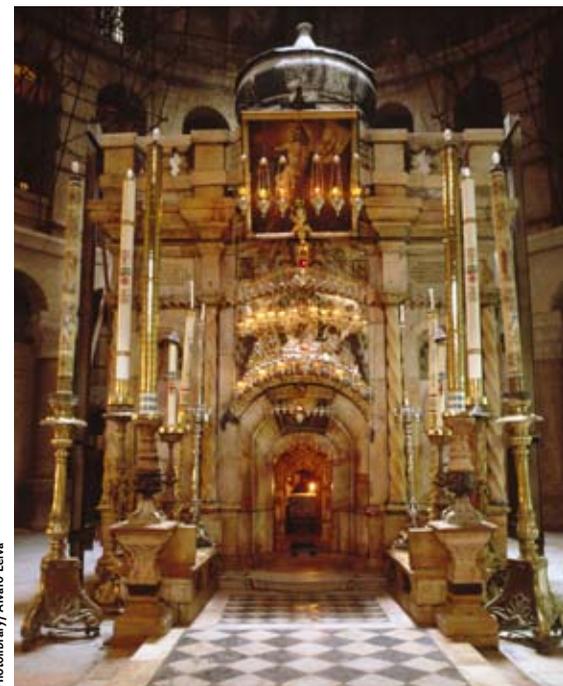
Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire;
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold:
Bring me my Chariot of fire!
I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land.

Among Jerusalem's 30 rulers in 3,000 years, arguably none have staked a fiercer claim than the faithful of the three major religions that have roots in this soil. Jews, Christians and Muslims may disagree on theology, but they agree that this land is hallowed: This was where God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; where Jesus was crucified and resurrected; where Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) ascended to heaven.

While the archeological evidence in Jerusalem dates human inhabitation back to at least 3,000 BC, for the Jews, Jerusalem's sacred timeline starts in 1,000 BC. Around this time, King David, known as both master warrior and Psalms writer, unified the tribes of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital. Indeed, much of the drama of the Old Testament – *aka* the *Tanakh* or Hebrew Bible – is staged on Jerusalem's green rolling hills. The Book of Samuel recounts David's persuading God to accept the location for the Kingdom's earthly seat, the Ark of the Covenant. The later Book of Kings tells of David's son Solomon, who built a temple to the Lord there. That book richly details the First Temple's elaborate fixtures of gold and bronze, and a succession of courtyards, each one more holy than the next, with the innermost containing the sacred Ark.

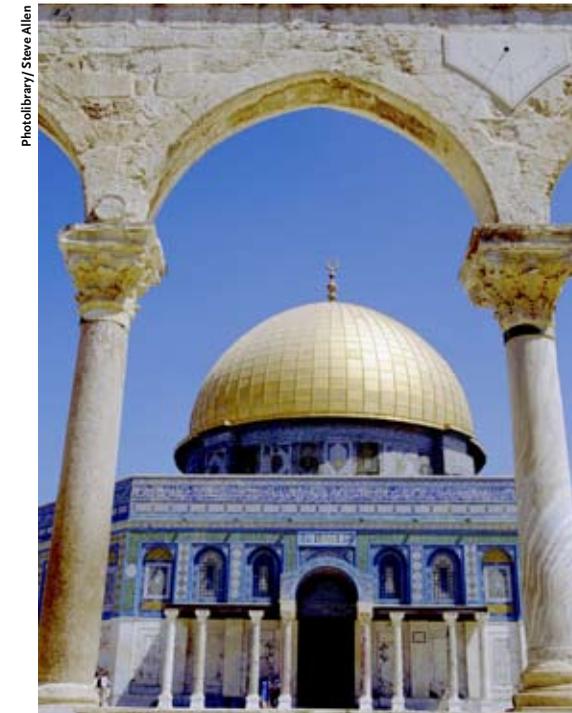
Yet as empires rise and fall, so did the original Jewish Kingdom, and with it the so-called First Temple of Jerusalem. The Babylonians captured the city, exiled the Jews to Babylon, and in 586 BC levelled the city and its sacred temple. King Herod – himself only half-Jewish, but a skillful politician – would later herald the Jewish renaissance in Jerusalem, both spiritually and materially. Not only did he rebuild Solomon's

▼ Edicule of the Tomb of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, Israel.



Temple, he added a 14-hectare platform – known by Jews as the Temple Mount. The Western Wall (also known as the “Wailing Wall”, as the teary-eyed faithful stuff its cracks with handwritten prayers) still standing today is but a small piece of the original platform. The 4.9-metre-thick wall is made up of stones as long as nine metres and as heavy as 50 tonnes.

“Look, Teacher, what large stones! What great buildings!” gasped one Jew upon gazing the Temple for the first time. “Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be



▲ Dome of the Rock, Old City, Jerusalem, Israel.

▼ Arch of the Hurva Synagogue, Old City, Jerusalem, Israel.



thrown down,” replied the teacher – who was none other than Jesus, according to the Gospel of Mark.

From the Christian perspective, Jerusalem's glory did not reach its height until 1,000 years after King David made it capital of the Jews. Jesus had a different take on the Temple. All Jews of the ancient world, whether Jerusalem resident or not, had to pay an annual temple tax. During holidays like Pesach (Passover), when pilgrims to Jerusalem would number in the hundreds of thousands, the Temple's coffers overflowed. While Jesus preached love and tolerance, he also espoused radical ideas that championed the poor and challenged the Temple as a commercial entity. In Matthew 21:12 of the New Testament, “Jesus went into the temple, threw out everyone who was selling and buying in the temple, and overturned the moneychangers' tables and the chairs of those who sold doves.”

While Abraham was prepared to give his son Isaac, who was spared by God's mercy, according to Christian theology, God *did* sacrifice his only son – Jesus – right in the heart of Old Jerusalem. Abetting in his own death sentence handed down from Roman Emperor Pontius Pilate, Jesus lugged the rough-hewn wooden cross across the Old City. The cobblestone route, now known as Via Dolorosa, is well worn with the steps of pilgrims from around the world, although like many details from Jerusalem's spiritual history, the current route is thought to be historically inaccurate.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, formally dedicated in 335 AD, commemorates the supposed site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, originally just a small rocky outcropping into which tombs had been carved. The church, stewarded today by the Greek Orthodox Church, has been built up over the centuries in an architectural patchwork of Byzantine, medieval, Crusader, and modern styles.

That historic church is typical of the complex, often literal layers of spiritual history in Jerusalem. In fact, the two holiest Muslim landmarks in the city (known not as Jerusalem in Arabic but *al-Quds*, “The Holy”) were built directly atop the rubble of the glorious Temple Mount of the Jews.

Al-Aqsa Mosque commemorates the supposed spot where Muhammad (*pbuh*) was miraculously transported one night from Mecca. As it is told in the Qur'an, Muhammad (*pbuh*) was lifted from here to heaven to meet his fellow prophets – to include Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The Dome of the Rock stands over the “Foundation Stone”, which Muslims believe was the platform from which Muhammad (*pbuh*) ascended to heaven. The dome symbolises the journey that all Muslims must make to God at the end of their earthly stay. Some 100,000 gold coins were melted down to gild the Byzantine dome, built sometime between 685 and 691 AD, which supposedly shone so brightly that no one could look directly at it.

While today we might be surprised at the harmonious juxtaposition of the main figures of Judaism, Islam and Christianity in this story, respect for the religions that came

before it was the rule in early Islamic Jerusalem. Muhammad (*pbuh*) never believed that he was founding a new religion that cancelled out the previous faiths, according to religious historian Karen Armstrong. “When Caliph Umar, a successor of Muhammad (*pbuh*), conquered Jerusalem from the Christian Byzantines in 638 AD, he insisted that the three ‘faiths of Abraham’ coexist”, wrote Armstrong. “He refused to pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre when he was escorted around the city by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch. Had he done so, the Muslims would have wanted to build a mosque there to commemorate the first Islamic prayer in Jerusalem.”

Unfortunately, the period of peace and tolerance would not last. Both Jews and Muslims were slaughtered as the Crusaders capture the Jerusalem in 1099, and the city would continue to change hands throughout the millennia.

20th Century Jerusalem: Divided We Stand?

While Christians and Muslims believe that Jesus and Muhammad (*pbuh*), respectively, were sent by God to proclaim the final word, Jews are still awaiting the Messiah to fulfill their spiritual destiny in Jerusalem and rebuild its glorious monument – the Third Temple.

The Jews began to see their destiny unfold in 1947, when the UN agreed to partition the British-controlled Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. The agreement imposed a special status on Jerusalem, ordering that it remain separate from the two new states to be created. Recognising the special significance of Jerusalem, the UN saw “international jurisdiction as the best way to insure both protection of the holy sites and free access to all”.

On 14 May, 1948, Israel declared its independence and called for the Jews to return home, an event 3,000 years in the making. The Israeli “Law of Return” promised citizenship for all the world’s Jews. After spending a few millennia scattered

▶ (from top to bottom) Ethiopian priest at the entrance to a holy site; A Christian nun in front of the Armenian Bishop, during an ecumenical religious service.

▼ Crosses left by pilgrims outside an Ethiopian Orthodox monastery.

Jerusalem was more than a place of worship for the monotheistic faiths. Back in the Bronze Age, Jerusalem was the venerated home of the local god Shalem, from which Jerusalem’s name was derived.

around the globe, the descendants of the Jewish Diaspora were welcomed home at last.

That happy homecoming had a different meaning for the Arab people, who refer to the events of 1948 as the *nabka*, or “catastrophe”, and viewed Israel’s declaration of independence as a declaration of war. By 1949, Israel controlled more than three-quarters of the territory of Palestine, though it only had claim on pockets of West Jerusalem. The mainly Arab-populated East Jerusalem, like the rest of the West Bank, came under Jordanian administration.

The Jews had waited millennia to fulfill what they believed was their manifest destiny as a people. Jerusalem is a pillar in Jewish history, tradition, and religion, mentioned hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Giving it over to the UN and leaving half of the city to the Arabs was not seen as compromise but defeat. In 1967, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan massed troops close to Israeli borders, expelled UN peacekeepers and blocked Israel’s access to the Red Sea. Israel fought back and won. During that so-called “Six-Day War”, Israel took over the rest of Palestine – East Jerusalem included – and claimed the holy city as unified under its flag.

Since that dramatic capture, the Jewish settlement movement has worked to repopulate all of Jerusalem by building up the Jewish presence in traditionally Arab areas. In the first half of 2008, *The Economist* reported that some 1,800 housing tenders were issued to Jewish Israelis in East Jerusalem, the Arab Quarter, versus less than 50 in all of 2007. Jewish foundations have even obtained permission from the government to build on disputed lands, such as the “Museum of Tolerance” erected on the Muslim Mamilla cemetery in the centre of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem Today: Hope Flickers

Garments of piety still overpower Old Jerusalem’s scenery – not surprising given the city claimed 1,204 synagogues, 158 churches and 73 mosques in 2000. Armenian Orthodox priests hide under pointy black hoods; Orthodox Jewish men



Did you know

The Four Quarters of Jerusalem

While greater metropolitan Jerusalem now extends over an area of more than 840 square kilometres, the so-called Old City – home to the city’s key religious landmarks for Christians, Muslims and Jews – only covers less than a square kilometre.

Until the 1860s, Jerusalem city limits were limited to this area, which includes the Temple Mount, Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque. Today, the Old City is roughly divided into four quadrants: the Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Armenian quarters.

A Timeline of Jerusalem

1000 – 1004 BC

King David captures Jerusalem from the Jebusites and makes it capital of Israel.

960 BC

King Solomon begins building the First Temple.

586 BC

Nebuchadnezzar destroys the First Temple and exiles Jews to Babylon.

538 BC

Upon the Fall of Babylon, Jews allowed to return to Jerusalem.

516 BC

The Second Temple is completed.

332 BC

Alexander the Great conquers Palestine.

63 BC

The Romans, headed by General Pompey, conquer Jerusalem.

31 AD

Crucifixion of Jesus.

70 AD

Jerusalem is demolished by Titus and survivors are exiled or sold into slavery.



sport dark hats and suits, rough beards and curly, shoulder-length sideburns; Palestinian women wear *jalabiyya* dresses embellished with needlepoint flowers and Palestinian men don white *keffiyehs* secured by a black halo of rope. The common thread is covering one's head out of modesty and humility before God.

But it is images of young Jewish soldiers in olive fatigues slinging shotguns, and Palestinian children bearing rocks that dominate the media. Of course, clashing religions, resented rulers, and military occupations are not alien to Jerusalem. The Jews rioted against the Romans in 4 BC, throwing stones at their well-armed occupiers and decrying the Roman flag desecrating their holy places. "A building of soldiers loomed over the Temple courtyards like a watchtower over a prison. As Jesus and the other pilgrims performed the most sacred rites of their faith, they would never be beyond surveillance," declared an article in *Time* magazine. Yet the violence experienced in Jerusalem today is in some ways like nothing seen before in its history. Its targets are often random, its victims often innocent. The city operates like business as usual, when life is anything but. One frequently used corridor connecting East and West Jerusalem, whose formal name means "The Prophets", is known as "Suicider Alley", as suicide bombers sometimes blow up there before they reach their target.

However, there is a recent development in Jerusalem's story that isn't often told. A renaissance of the tradition of tolerance, inclusion and respect that once was the norm in this holy city. Scenes that would make Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (*pbuh*) proud of their followers: Jews preparing *iftar*, the meal to break the daily fast during the holy month of Ramadhan, for their Muslim brothers; Muslims studying with their Jewish and Christian brethren about the meaning and importance of fasting; scholars of all three faiths preparing a shared code of ethics of respect for 'the other' based on joint study of each other's holy texts.

This is the work of the Jerusalem Peacemakers, a network of religious leaders and grassroots peacemakers dedicated

► Jew stands in silent meditation, in front of the Wailing Wall at Temple Mount.

▼ Young and old Hassidic Jews.

While Israel has claimed Jerusalem as its capital since its founding, the global community does not recognise it as such. Most countries have their embassies in Tel Aviv, or at closest in the Jerusalem suburbs, outside official city limits.

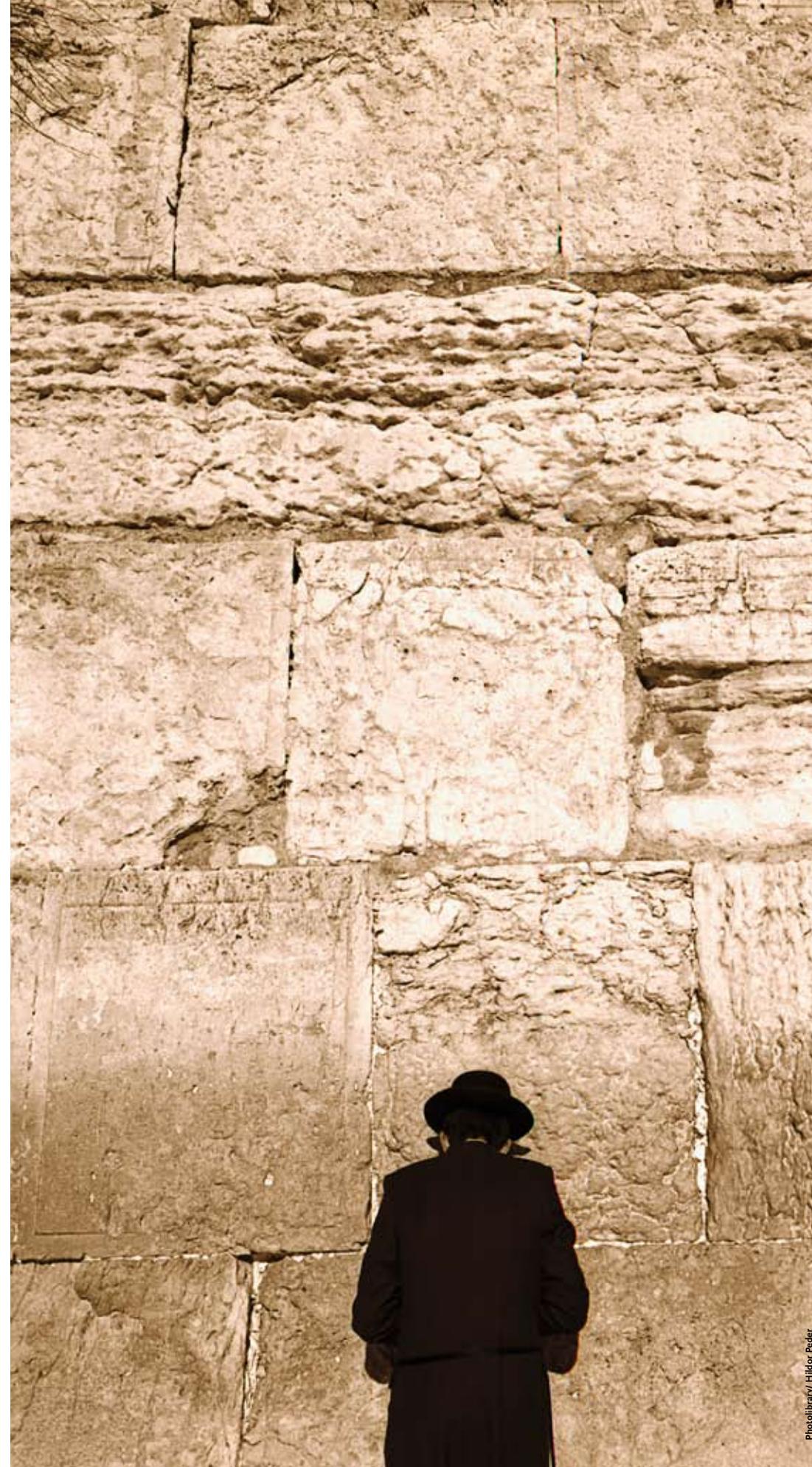
to building bridges of understanding between Israelis and Palestinians, "the Children of Abraham".

In 2000, when the second *intifada* (Palestinian uprising) began, the group's founders did a three-day fast and prayer vigil at a small tourist overlook, from which they could see the Wailing Wall and al-Aqsa Mosque. "Palestinian Muslims, Israeli Jews and Christian pilgrims came and joined our circle. Over three days, offering prayers and sharing their hopes and fears, the prayer circle got larger and larger," said Eliyahu McLean, one of Jerusalem Peacemakers' founders. "Even a Israeli soldier came and sat with us. 'I more than anyone want your prayers to succeed.' the soldier said."

After the Muslim prayers at the al-Aqsa Mosque that Friday, clashes broke out on the Temple Mount between Muslim worshippers and Israeli policemen. The police came to vacate the tourist overlook, saying "everyone has to leave, but they [referring to those in the prayer circle] can stay. Who knows, maybe what they are doing can help?" That first prayer circle vigil evolved into a weekly interfaith peace vigil that continued every Friday for years.

Three years later, Jerusalem Peacemakers was officially founded. The group offers safe spaces where people of all faiths and backgrounds – from right-wing religious Jews to left-wing peaceniks, Arab Anglican priests to Muslim sheikhs to West Bank Palestinians, can come together for dialogue and prayer. Groups gather regularly in McLean's West Jerusalem apartment, wedged between the homes of two prominent Israeli politicians. Jerusalem Peacemakers co-director Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari, also hosts inter-faith peace events in his home, the Uzbek Culture and Naqshabandi Sufi Center in the Muslim quarter of the Old City.

Bukhari, whose ancestors came to Jerusalem in 1616 from the city of Bukhara, in what is now Uzbekistan, works with his fellow peacemakers to creatively reframe the common history and traditions shared by the city's three faiths. "How to fight the wrong with good, how to transform hate to love...



Photoblibrary/ Hildor Feder

A Timeline of Jerusalem

135 AD
Emperor Hadrian rebuilds Jerusalem; Jews are banned from the city again, which is now called Aelia Capitolina.

313 AD
Emperor Constantine legalises Christianity.

638 AD
Six years after the Prophet Muhammad's death, the Muslim Caliph Omar captures Jerusalem and Jews are welcomed back into the city.

691 AD
Dome of the Rock is built.

715 AD
Construction of Al-Aqsa Mosque is completed.

1099
Both Jews and Muslims slaughtered as the Crusaders, led by Godfrey de Bouillon, capture Jerusalem.

1244
City back in Muslim hands, under the Mamluk Sultans.

1492
Jews arrive on the heels of the Spanish Exile.

1849
Christ Church, the first Protestant church in the Near East, is consecrated.

1917
British conquest of Jerusalem under General Allenby.

1947
UN Resolution to create a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine.

1948
British withdrawal from Palestine; State of Israel and War of Independence (Israeli term) declared. The Palestinians refer to this period as the *nabka* (catastrophe).

1949
West and East Jerusalem is divided between Israel and Jordan respectively under the Israel-Transjordan Armistice Agreement.

1967
Israel captures Arab East Jerusalem, including the Old City, from Jordan in the Six-Day War.

This is the real jihad... the real power," says Bukhari, giving the Arabic term for "holy war" a new, positive spin.

If Jerusalem Peacemakers' work has been successful, it has not been free of obstacles. The group organised the first annual "Big Hug of Jerusalem" in 2007, with the goal of "uniting the lovers of Jerusalem and redirecting all that passion" for the city in an inclusive, positive manner. However, on the eve of the Big Hug, an Israeli passenger murdered a Palestinian taxi driver, nearly causing the event to be cancelled. "The mother of the murderer called the bereaving family and said 'I will come and sit and mourn with you – this is not how I raised my son,'" said McLean. "The gesture of the mother reaching out to mourn with the family changed the atmosphere." The Big Hug went on.

The event brought close to 2,000 people together, forming a line around the Old City walls. Holding hands in a human chain, hundreds of Palestinian shopkeepers and children, Christian monks, religious Jews, soldiers and Israeli peaceniks came to share a love for Jerusalem and an unprecedented display of unity.

Countless other creative approaches to peacemaking in Jerusalem are being developed, both within and outside the city limits. There's Jerusalem Mosaic, which works with the city's diverse communities to create shared economic and cultural opportunities such as a women's folkloric fair. Jerusalem Mosaic has organised the city's first inter-community committee, comprised of leaders from different neighbourhoods and cultural backgrounds in Jerusalem. St. George's Anglican Church and College runs a project bringing Muslim, Christian and Jewish youth together in a project called "Kids4Peace". Another Jerusalem-based group, the Elijah Interfaith Institute, builds religious bridges beyond the city's borders, encouraging dialogue between followers and leaders of diverse faiths around the world, with participants ranging from Pope John Paul II to Tibetan lama Geshe Tashi Tsering, in addition to local Jewish and Muslim leaders.

A former Israel Defence Forces paratrooper and one-time leader in the Jewish settlement movement, Rabbi Menachem Froman has demonstrated that one can cross the religious

► Friday prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque esplanade.

▼ A classroom in al-Aqsa College.

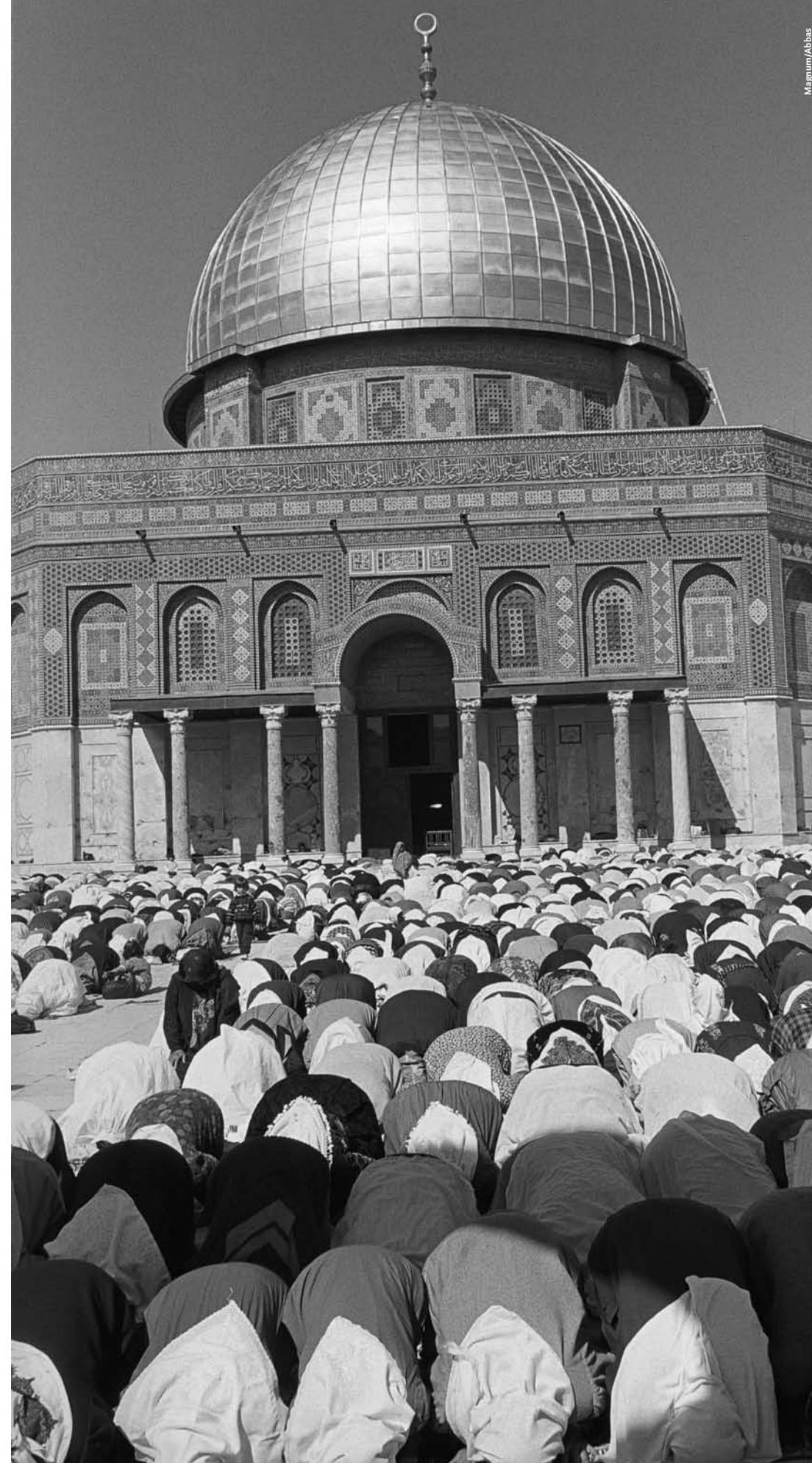
Muslims prayed in the direction of Jerusalem before the *qibla* – the direction of prayer – was changed to Mecca. The Jews have a similar tradition. To this day, synagogues around the world use Jerusalem as its spiritual compass, with the Holy Ark in each synagogue's chambers oriented toward the city.

divides without compromising his faith. Froman, now one of the Jerusalem Peacemakers, has dedicated his life to bridging the faiths of Jerusalem, reaching out to Muslims and Christians as well as fellow Jews who don't always agree with his *modus operandi*. "I don't solve problems but I try to improve the basis on which issues may be settled," said Rabbi Froman, referred to by the now-deceased Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat as al Hakeem, "the wise one".

Jerusalem has seen millennia of creation, destruction and reconstruction. Its city limits are a moving target. It has been carved up countless ways, divided and united countless times. Yet regardless of the status of Jerusalem's physical barriers and political agreements, it is clear that peace will never endure as long as the hearts of Jerusalem's faithful shut out compassion for one another, a compassion taught by all three religions.

"I have pure religious interests in learning together with Muslims. This is the whole secret of religion – to meet the other side. 'Love your neighbour' is the key," said Froman, who wants to see Jerusalem become the "Peace Capital of the World". "The Temple Mount has no oil, no gold and no water. It contains the deepest emotions of Christians, Jews and Muslims... Jerusalem belongs to God." ■

APRIL THOMPSON is a Washington, DC-based writer, entrepreneur and consultant whose work has appeared in dozens of books and magazines. She has travelled to nearly 30 countries, including Israel, and worked in Egypt, Guinea, Tanzania and India. Her work can be viewed at www.aprilwrites.com.



Magnum/Abbas

A Timeline of Jerusalem

- 1973** Egypt and Syria launch the Yom Kippur War against Israel, after the Israeli government headed by Golda Meir refuses Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's offers to negotiate a settlement.
- 1979** Egypt and Israel sign a peace treaty.
- 1987** First *intifada* (Palestinian uprising) begins.
- 1993** Israel and PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) sign historic peace treaty in Oslo called "the Declaration of Principles".
- 1995** Israel and Jordan sign a peace treaty.
- 2000** Second *intifada* begins, sparked by a controversial visit by Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount.
- 2002** Israel decides to build a barrier – part electric fence, part barbed wire, part wall – to control entry of Palestinians from West Bank into Israel. More than 150 kilometres of the controversial 760-kilometre barrier, still under construction, will cut through and around Jerusalem.
- 2003** Israeli opposition political leaders and Palestinian leaders announce the Geneva Accords, an agreement in principle on conditions for a final settlement. Israel would give up rule over Arab portions of Jerusalem, while the Palestinians would renounce the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel. Both the Israeli government and Palestinian hard-liners denounce the agreement.
- 2004** Palestinian Authority Chairman and long-time leader Yasser Arafat dies on November 11.
- 2005** Mahmoud Abbas is elected President of the Palestine National Authority.
- 2008** Following the urgings by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations resumes around issues such as the future of Jerusalem.