



## Yom Yerushalayim

The Return of Jerusalem

THE MODERN JEWISH  
CONNECTION TO JERUSALEM

### THE JEWISH SPIRITUAL ASSOCIATION TO THE HOLY JERUSALEM

To comprehend the Jewish association to Jerusalem we must start with the (Old Testament) Jewish Bible. In the Bible the area of extraordinary holiness is Mount Moriah, today known as the Temple Mount. This area is to be found below the platform on which the Moslem Shrine, and sits the "Dome of the Rock." Jerusalem has many names in the Bible. Salem, Moriah, Jebuse, Jerusalem and Zion. The most common term for the city, is Jerusalem, it's mentioned 349 times in the Bible, while Zion is mentioned an additional 108 times.

In Kabala, the Jewish metaphysical tradition, the rock of Mount Moriah is known as the "Even Shtiyah" = the Drinking Stone. This is the spiritual center of the universe, the place from where the world is spiritually "watered." Later patriarchal stories in Genesis are also connected with the site.

Many extraordinary moments of History take place on this Dome of the Rock.

- Genesis 4:18, marks the first statement about Jerusalem. When Abraham interacts with Malchizedek, King of Salem.

- When God created the world, He created the world by Mount Moriah

- The Binding of Isaac took place in the "land of Moriah" on the site of the present-day Temple Mount. Abraham chooses the site specifically because he sensed how God's presence is strongly connected to this site(Genesis 22: 1-19).

- When Isaac goes out into the fields to pray prior to meeting Rebecca for the first time, he is standing on Mount Moriah (Genesis 24:63-67).

- Jacob's dream of the ladder to heaven with the angels ascending and descending, takes place on this site (Genesis 27:10-22).



Over five thousands years, the Jewish people have always found Temple Mount being the holiest place on earth - the place where God's presence can be felt more intensely than any other place on earth.

This connection is still very much vibrant in Jewish practice.

- When religious Jews pray three times a day, they always turn toward Jerusalem. (Someone praying in Jerusalem faces the direction of the Temple Mount.) As the sages teach us, all prayers travel towards the Temple Mount, and subsequently goes to heaven. - Jerusalem is mentioned numerous times in Jewish daily prayers and in the "Grace After Meals."

- The Jewish people close the Passover Seder with the words "Next Year in Jerusalem." These same words are invoked to conclude the holiest day of the Jewish year, Yom Kippur.

- During a Jewish wedding ceremony, the groom breaks a glass as a sign of mourning to commemorate the destruction of the two Temples which stood on Mount Moriah.

The breaking of the glass is accompanied by the recitation of part of Psalm 137: *"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest Joy."*

- Religious Jews often keep a small section of one wall in their house unplastered and unpainted, as a sign of mourning for the destruction of the Temple.



In adding to the events already mentioned, the Book of Joshua (ch. 10) illustrates how Adoni-Tzedek, the Canaanite king of Jerusalem, wages war against the Jews.

Nearly the 400-year period from the entrance of the Jewish nation into the land, until the period of the Judges, Jerusalem remained a non-Jewish city. It was not until the reign of King David (ca. 1,000 BCE) that Jerusalem was captured from the Canaanites (2-Samuel 5) and converted into the political/spiritual capital of the Jewish people. (Archaeologists agree that the original Canaanite city and the City of David was located in what is now the Arab village of Silwan, a few meters south of the "modern" walls of the Old City.)

King David purchased the peak of Mount Moriah (2-Samuel 24: 18-25) as the site for the future Temple and gathered the necessary construction goods. The Book of 1-Kings (ch. 6-8) describes in great detail how King David's son, King Solomon, built and dedicated the Temple: "And it came to pass after the 408th year after the Children of Israel left Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel... that he began to build the house of the Lord" (1-Kings 6: 1).

The Temple of Solomon's is also known as the First Holy Temple. While all archaeologists agree that it stood on Mount Moriah, probably on the site of the present Gold Dome of the Rock, its exact location is unknown.

The Holy Temple lasted for Four hundred and ten years and was destroyed by the Babylonians when they besieged Jerusalem; there is no trace of it remaining.

Subsequent to the Babylonian destruction, most of the Jewish population of Israel was forcibly exiled from the land. This forced exile on the road to Babylon is mentioned in the famous verse from Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion."

After Fifty years, Babylon was captured by Persia, the Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem. Under the leadership of Zerubavel and Nechemiah, the Jews rebuilt both the Holy Temple and walls around the city (Nechemia 4-6).

This rebuilt Holy Temple is known as the "Second Holy Temple." It stood for 420 years on the same site as the First Temple, on Mount Moriah. The Second Holy Temple was remodeled a number of times, but reached its most glorious form during the reign of King Herod the Great (37-4 BCE). The great Jewish historian, Josephus, who lived during the end of the Second Holy Temple, gives detailed descriptions of both Herod's construction and the layout of the Temple compound (see "Antiquities" ch. 15 and "Jewish Wars" ch. 5).

The Second Temple period ended with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. It is possible that the Jews tried to rebuild the Temple at later periods, but they were never successful, and for over 600 years the site of the Temple Mount lay in ruins.

The only remains are the massive retaining walls that encompass Mount Moriah, built by Herod to support the platform on which the Temple stood.

In fact, the Talmud says that if the Romans (who destroyed the Temple) had realized how much benefit they themselves were benefiting from the Temple, they never would have destroyed it!



The Kotel was the only remaining part of the Holy Temple, were Jews from around the world come to pray daily.

### The Modern Jewish Association

While the Holy Temple hasn't stood for nearly 2,000 years, Jerusalem continues to be the focus of the Jewish world. The Holy Temple may not be there, but the Jewish belief is that the natural holiness of the site remains forever. As well the Jewish tradition also maintains that in the End of Days, during the Messianic Era, a third and final Holy Temple will be built on Mount Moriah.

The holiest site in the world to Jews is the Western Wall. The holiest spot for Jews is Mount Moriah itself, several feet behind the Wall. The Western Wall is merely a small section of Herod's massive retaining wall and has significance only as it relates to the Temple Mount itself.

So why do Jews pray at the Wall? Since the destruction of the Temple, the Sages decreed that due to the sanctity of the site, Jews (and non-Jews) should not go up on the actual Temple Mount. Therefore, the Western Wall became the site of prayer for Jews wishing to get as close as possible to their holiest site, the Temple Mount, as God's presence is strongly connected to this site, It earned the mark "Wailing Wall" because Jews coming to this site would shed tears over the loss of the Holy Temple.

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