

What You Need to Know

JERUSALEM IN BRIEF

JEW, ARABS, AND PALESTINIANS

The Jews trace their Jerusalem roots to 1000 B.C., when King David captured the city and made it the capital of the ancient Kingdom of Israel. Muslim Arab armies first took Jerusalem from the Christian Byzantine Empire in 638 A.D. Since then, Jerusalem and the historical area of **Palestine** have been home to Muslims of numerous ethnic groups. Modern descendants of the region's Arab peoples are called Palestinians.

THE OLD CITY

At the heart of today's dispute over Jerusalem are the Jewish and Islamic holy sites of the Old City in East Jerusalem. The Temple Mount is sacred to Jews as the location of the Second Temple of Israel—almost completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. The Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque, Islamic holy sites, sit atop the Temple Mount. Muslims believe that these places mark the spot where Muhammad made his **Night Journey** to heaven.

A DISPUTED CAPITAL

For centuries after the Romans expelled them from Palestine, Jews around the world dreamed of a new Israel. The **Holocaust** of World War II increased international support for a Jewish homeland. Modern Israel declared itself a nation in 1948 and the following year joined the United Nations (UN). But the UN has disputed Israel's right to name Jerusalem as its capital, insisting that it be made an "international city" for both Jews and Arabs. Today, most countries recognize Tel Aviv as Israel's capital.



JERUSALEM:

Who should control this ancient city, Arabs or Jews? That question is at the heart of the Middle East conflict.

For more than 3,000 years, people have been fighting over the city of Jerusalem. Through the centuries, it has changed hands many times in the battle for control. Considered holy by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, it rests upon countless layers of ancient ruins and religious sites.

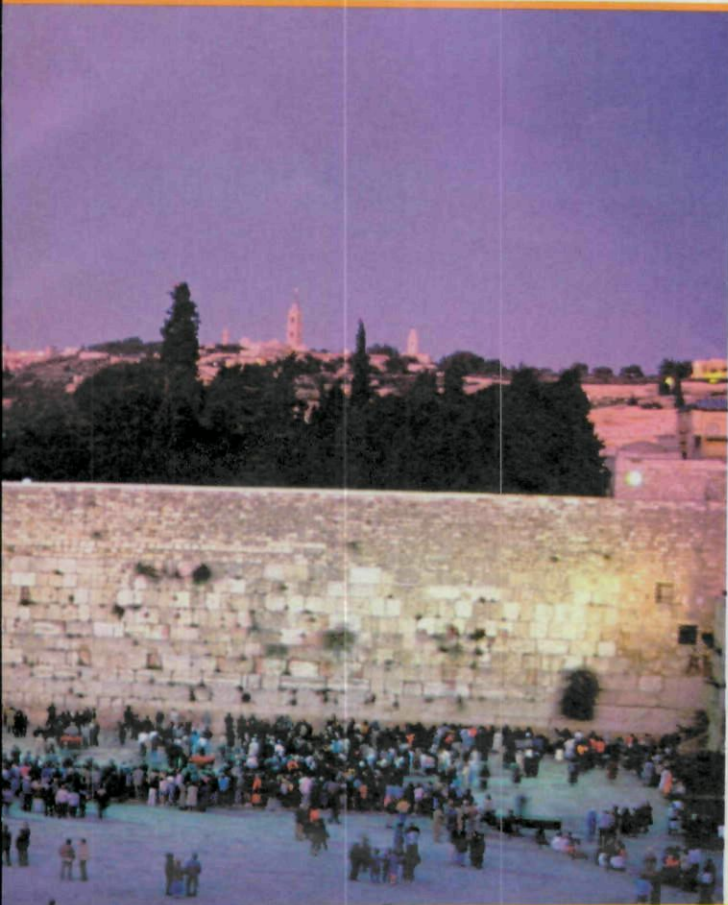
Today, two peoples are actively engaged in the struggle for Jerusalem. Israeli Jews dominate the



Lama Avoeida

western part of the city. They insist that Jerusalem is the capital of the nation of Israel (see sidebar). East Jerusalem is composed largely of Palestinian Arabs. They see the city as the capital of a Palestinian country as yet unborn.

The issue has become even more complicated in recent years, as Jewish neighborhoods have grown up in Palestinian areas. Israel is also building a security barrier around the city, which



Far left: The Al Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock sit above the Western (or Wailing) Wall of the Second Temple. Above: Jews pray at the Wall. Left: Palestinian women gather before the Dome.

DIVIDED CITY

by Erica Chernofsky in Jerusalem

threatens to cut off East Jerusalem from Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank (see map, p. 13).

Both Israelis and Palestinians yearn to have control of the holy ground. Their disagreement has left Jerusalem a divided city.

Sharing the City?

Lama Avoveida (*ah-voh-VEY-dah*), 14, was born on the Mount of Olives in East Jerusalem and raised in the nearby neighborhood of Jabal Mukabar (*JAH-bul moo-KAH-bur*). Although Lama and her family are Muslim, she attends a Christian school for girls, where her favorite subject is physics.

Lama hopes to become a doc-

tor. "I like to help people," she explains from her home, where she lives with her parents and three siblings. Lama has many friends, most of whom are Muslim. Outside of school, she takes painting classes and piano lessons.

Lama loves the city but wishes it had more going on. "In Jerusalem, it's so quiet," she tells *JS*. "Everyone's already at home by 6 p.m."

Lama is prepared to share her hometown, but with reservations. "There are so many [Muslim] religious places here that I've known all my life," she says. "We can only share Jerusalem with the Jews as long as there's no violence, and everyone has their rights here."

"My Home Is Here"

Avital Vilik, 15, was born in the Baka (*BAH-kuh*) neighborhood of Jewish West Jerusalem, where she lives with her family. "I love Jerusalem," she says. "My friends are here, my home is here. My whole life is here."

Continued on next page →

Words to Know

- **Holocaust:** genocide of some 6 million Jews by Nazi Germany from the late 1930s to 1945.
- **Night Journey:** Muhammad's mystical vision of ascending to heaven to meet God.
- **Palestine:** historical area—today, Israel and the West Bank.

British forces line a street in Israel.

1917 British troops occupy Jerusalem as Turkish armies leave near the end of World War I.

1948 The British withdraw from Palestine. Israel declares itself a new nation, with Jerusalem as its capital. Neighboring Arab countries attack and capture the Jewish quarter of the Old City. After peace treaties are signed in 1949, an Armistice Line divides Jerusalem into Jewish West and Arab East.

Jews celebrate on the eve of the armistice (truce).

CHRONOLOGY: JERUSALEM SINCE 1917

Avital attends the Omanuyot Art School for girls. While she currently concentrates on studying drama, she wants to be a lawyer so that she can “change the world.” After school, she participates in a social-activism youth group with her friends, who all live in her neighborhood.

Avital says that she can’t imagine living anywhere else. Yet she worries that much of the city might be given to the Palestinians in a future peace deal.

“It is our capital,” she says. “Jerusalem belongs to the Jews. I would

like to think that the Arabs and the Jews could both live here in peace, but they can’t take it away from us.”

Security or Freedom?

Last year, Israel marked the 40th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem after the Six-Day War of 1967. During that conflict, Israel seized East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan. Jordan had held the Old City and its Jewish holy sites since the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 (see chronology above).

Palestinians did not celebrate the anniversary. Most of them view the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), Israel’s military, as an occupying army. Palestinians complain that the IDF imposes harsh restrictions on their ability to move about the city and arrests people without cause. They also protest that the Israelis’ separation barrier is intended to wall off East Jerusalem for themselves.

Israelis insist that they are only concerned with security. In some Jewish neighborhoods, people have

TEEN DIARY
A REPORT FROM JERUSALEM

“I’m Overwhelmed With Gratitude”

by Avital Vilk, 15

When I’m in Jerusalem, I can feel that even the air is different, special. I don’t think about it all the time, how lucky I am that I get to walk the streets of Jerusalem. I have to remind myself it wasn’t always this way, and that it’s my privilege to live here.

But when I do think about it, I’m

overwhelmed with gratitude that I get to live here, that my home is here, just a short walk away from where the Holy Temple once stood and where everything happened in our history and tradition.

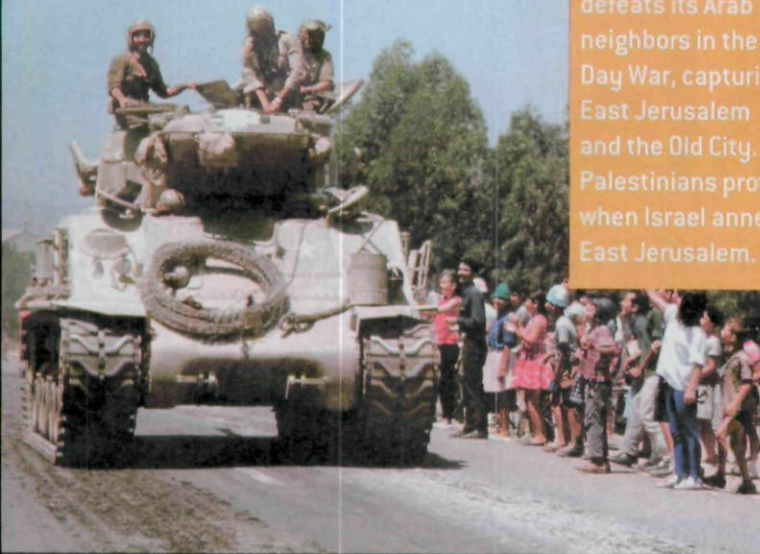
I think Jerusalem is the Jewish people, it is the heart of Israel, and it is everything to me.



Avital Vilk

ERICA CHERNOFSKY (AVITAL VILK); MAP BY JIM McMAHON/MAPMAN, SCHOLASTIC INC.

Israelis greet soldiers returning from the Six-Day War in 1967.



1967 Israel defeats its Arab neighbors in the Six-Day War, capturing East Jerusalem and the Old City. Palestinians protest when Israel annexes East Jerusalem.



Palestinian boys near the Israeli security wall.

2002 The Israeli government begins constructing a security barrier between East Jerusalem and the West Bank to prevent terrorism.

lived in fear of terrorist attacks. The new barrier, according to government statistics, has almost completely eliminated suicide bombings in Jerusalem.

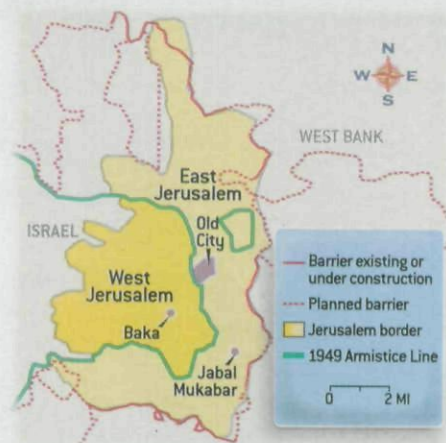
Avital's father, Shlomo, is a rabbi who participates in a discussion forum for Israelis and Palestinians. "We don't have a partner now who understands the value of moderation," he says, referring to militant Palestinians. And yet he thinks that eventually both sides will live "happily ever after."

"I don't know if it will be in my lifetime," he adds, "but I am sure it will happen one day."

Lama's mother, Rema, is a teacher. She thinks peace between Israelis and Palestinians is possible, even in the torn city. "Nobody likes violence, nobody likes wars," she says. "As Muslims, we've been taught the importance of Jerusalem since kindergarten. We can share this land if both sides respect each other and their borders."

Obstacles to Peace

Today, Jerusalem remains one of the major obstacles to a peace agreement in the Middle East. Lately, the



U.S. has tried to move the stalled peace process between Israelis and Palestinians forward. Last November, President George W. Bush sponsored a peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (*ay-HOOD OL-mairt*) and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (*mah-MOOD ah-BAHS*) agreed to meet regularly to discuss Jerusalem and the other issues dividing their peoples. The two leaders said that they can reach a full peace agreement by the end of 2008.

In January, Bush traveled to the Middle East to further press the

case. "The only way to have lasting peace . . . is for the two parties to come together and make the difficult choices," the President said, while offering U.S. help in negotiating a settlement.

At the moment, neither side in the dispute is fully prepared to compromise. But the younger generation in Jerusalem remains optimistic about the future.

"I hope we can live in peace together," says Lama. "I hope there can be two states, Jewish and Palestinian, living side by side."

Avital agrees. "My hope is for Israelis to live quietly, for us to be able to walk around freely and not be scared," she tells *JS*. "I believe in God, and that gives me hope. But I also believe in people, and in good hearts, and that gives me even more hope." *JS*

Think About It

1. Why do both Israelis and Palestinians claim Jerusalem?
2. Do you share Avital's gratitude about your hometown? Explain.

CHRONOLOGY: HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/CORBIS (1917); BETTMANN/CORBIS (1948); VITTORIANO RASTELLI/CORBIS (1967); DEBBIE HILL/UPI VIA NEWSOM (2002)

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