

Jerusalem Day

Yom Yerushalaim is a day of special memory for us because it is a memorial of the time when we once again were able to be in the holy city of Jerusalem. From the time of Hadrian, Jews have been forbidden to live in the city of Jerusalem, or to own property within the city walls. It was not until 1948 that, in the formation of the new state of Israel, the city of Jerusalem once again came into the spotlight as the capital and holy city of the Jewish people. Intense fighting started between Israel and her enemies over who would control the city. On May 27th, the Jewish forces were forced to withdraw from the Old City and retreat to the New City outside of the ancient walls. Lack of food and water had caused many to die, and enemy forces were too powerful. As soon as the Israeli forces withdrew, the Old City was once again controlled by Israel's enemies, and great destruction was done to the city, especially to Jewish sites. The Churvah synagogue, once the biggest and best known synagogue in the Old City, was demolished. Cemeteries were dug up, and grave stones used to pave roads and make sidewalks. Once again, the Jewish people mourned the loss of Jerusalem to her enemies.

From May 37, 1948 until 1967, Jerusalem was a divided city. Through the power of the United Nations, the city was divided along a north-south demarcation, allowing Jews to travel into the western part of the city, and Arabs to control the eastern part. Unfortunately, the Temple mount as well as the Jewish quarter was in the section controlled by the Arabs. So even during the time of the divided city, Jewish people could not come to the center of the city where Solomon's Temple once stood.

But in 1967 the "six-day war" changed all of that. Actually, as far as Jerusalem was concerned, the war was only three days long for the Israeli forces, from Monday, June 5, 1967 to Wednesday afternoon. The war began when Jordan seized the UN headquarters in Jerusalem, and threatened to take over the entire city. Israeli forces responded and by Wednesday morning were fighting to capture the entire city. A fierce battle engaged at the Lions' Gate, with Israel victorious. For the first time in almost 2000 years, the entire city of Jerusalem was in the hands of Israel! Immediately soldiers moved through the Lion Gate to the Chotel (Western Wall), the wall of the Temple mount closest to the location of the ancient Temple. There, only minutes after the battle, soldiers paused to pray and to thank HaShem for the victory He had given. It is this regaining of Jerusalem that we celebrate on *Yom Yerushalaim*.