

Jerusalem and the Western Wall

About 200 years after the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, in about 996 BCE, King David moved the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and made it the Capitol of his kingdom. David's son Solomon, the next King of Israel, built a magnificent Temple to replace the portable Tabernacle used while traveling through the wilderness. He chose to build it on Mount Zion, which some believe is the same mountain where Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. Some of the largest stones that made up the wall around the Temple weigh as much as 40 tons and are still visible today! This Temple was destroyed in 586 BCE, when the Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, captured Jerusalem and exiled the Jewish population to Babylonia.

In 516 BCE the Temple was rebuilt when the Jews returned from exile, and it remained in use until 70 CE, when the Romans captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. The only part which remained was a portion of the external wall around the Temple mountain. This last remnant of the Second Temple became the holiest of Jewish places. Before Israel gained control of Jerusalem in 1967, some referred to this wall as the "Wailing Wall" because Jews would go there to mourn the loss of the Temple. Since then, it has simply been called the Western Wall and has become a common place to visit. Many people write notes and leave them in the cracks of the wall, and some young people travel to Israel to celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah at the Wall.

Jerusalem has become one of the most famous cities in the world. Within the walls of the old city of Jerusalem are three of the world's most sacred religious sites. In addition to the Western Wall, there are Islam's Dome of the Rock, where the holy prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven and Christianity's Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where Jesus was crucified.



Extensions:

1. Chapter VI and most of chapter VII in the First Book of Kings contain detailed descriptions of King Solomon's Temple. Read these chapters and write a report on your findings.
2. Read Psalm 13:7. What does this tell you about the Jews' exile into Babylon? Describe the feeling and language of the Psalm.