

Jerusalem

Jerusalem has been the stage on which some of history's most dramatic events have taken place. It is still a focus of interest in the world today. It has probably been besieged, destroyed and rebuilt more often than any other famous city. A succession of conquerors – including Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Romans – all saw the capture of Jerusalem as crucial to their overall strategy of empire-building in the Near East. It was the scene for much of the activity described in the Bible, and is a 'holy city' for three faiths – Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

There may have been a settlement on the site of present-day Jerusalem as long ago as around 2900 BC. The city is first mentioned in written records (inscriptions on Egyptian bowls) about 1,000 years later in the nineteenth century BC, as a city of the Canaanites. The site was probably chosen because its hilltop location and constant water supply from the Gihon Spring meant



Above: the walls of Jerusalem from the time of the Jebusites, King Hezekiah (about 715 BC) and Suleiman the Magnificent (AD 1536), with some modern retaining walls.

that it could be easily fortified and defended. However, there are no special physical or economic advantages which explain why Jerusalem should ever have become more than an anonymous village in the Judean hills.

When the Israelites entered Canaan in the middle of the thirteenth century BC, Jerusalem (then called Jebus) was occupied by a local tribe, the Jebusites. They were not ousted for some 250 years, until King David unified the settled tribes of Israel. He conquered the strategic site of Jerusalem and made it his capital city.

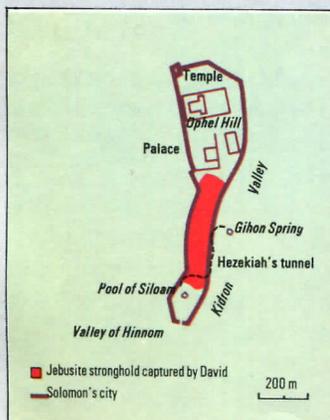
David set about making Jerusalem the political, military and religious centre of the country. His son Solomon carried this further

with an extensive building programme in the capital. The building of the temple (on the highest spot of the hilltop site) took seven years of Solomon's reign.

When the kingdom was divided in about 930 BC, Jerusalem was capital only of the two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin. Later kings strengthened the city's fortifications and withstood attacks from would-be invaders. King Hezekiah (715–687 BC), under threat of an Assyrian siege, sealed off the Gihon Spring from the outside to deny the enemy a water supply and ensure his own. He then had a 600-yard/550-metre tunnel dug to carry water inside the city walls to the Pool of Siloam, which acted as a reservoir.

In 587 BC, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians who destroyed and burnt the city and tore down the walls. Jewish survivors were exiled to Babylon. Their dream of returning to Jerusalem was fulfilled in 539 BC when the Persians conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to go back. They rebuilt a more modest version of Solomon's

Jerusalem at the time of the kings



Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah

