# THE ETERNAL CITY

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The wayfarer, forty centuries ago, travelling from Ur or Haran, seeking to avoid the thronged "Way of the Sea" and the equally bustling "King's Highway," would prefer the less-frequented road traversing the central watershed of Canaan, passing through numerous city-states, most of which had been established in the great wave of urbanization at the beginning of the third millennium BCE. There was Shechem, set in its lush fields, Bethel, dominating the highlands south of Baal Hazor, Gibeon, in the middle of a fertile plain. Trudging up and down the ridges he would espy a city of no great dimensions crowning a spur of the watershed. This was the town founded by (the god) Shalem—Canaanite Jerusalem. The reason for this location for the city was obvious: the proximity of the spring of Gihon, the only source of living water within a radius of three miles. Shalem's area, now established as about fifteen acres—and even this extent was achieved only by dint of much terracing—admits a population of about fifteen thousand. It possessed the usual water installations, including a tunnel giving access to the spring from within the walls. The kings, who, according to the usual Semitic concept, ruled as priests and representatives on earth of the local deity (the "el elyon"—"most high god"), bear titles combined with the word zedek ("just") e.g. Melchizedek (Genesis 14, 18), Adonizedek (Joshua 10, 1); but from the el-Amarna letters and II Samuel 24, 16, respectively, we know of one called after a Horrian goddess and another who had an Indo-Aryan name. The population, apparently, had become mixed at an early date, with the non-Semitic elements predominating, as was the case elsewhere in Canaan. In the Late Bronze Age, the period preceding Joshua's conquest, the kings of Jerusalem seem to have enjoyed some sort of precedence in the southern hill-country, though the rulers of Hebron and the far more powerful lords of Shechem disputed this. There was nothing to indicate the city's destiny as a national and religious focus.

### The City of God

Jebusite Jerusalem successfully withstood the onslaught of Joshua and his warriors, and it remained a thorn in the flesh of Israel, separating the House of Joseph and Benjamin from Judah and the southern tribes. Nor were the rulers of the city, an enclave in the midst of the Israelites, averse from enlisting Philistine support. Indeed, when the hour of national unity had struck, and David was crowned king over all Israel, one of his first acts was to launch an attack on the Jebusite stronghold. Recent excavations indicate that the capture of the city was effected through its water tunnel, the sinnor of the Bible (II Samuel 5, 8). As Joab and his warriors were the king's men, David was not beholden to any tribe for the city and it became royal domain. Thither he moved his court and administration and it became known as the City of David. He fortified the citadel of Zion, and it was during his reign that, for the first time in its history Jerusalem became the capital of an empire extending from the Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt. But the king concerned himself not only with mundane affairs. By bringing up the Ark of the Covenant from Kiryat Ye'arim, he transferred the amphictyonic shrine of Shiloh to Jerusalem, and by selecting the threshing floor of Aravnah, the last Jebusite ruler, for the site of an altar, he endowed the city with the status of chief sanctuary of Israel, "the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to put His name there" (Deuteronomy 12, 21). The notion of Jerusalem the Holy as distinct from its physical existence dates from this time and is the result of the acts of David; he more than any other individual associated with it, is the father of the city as it has evolved in history. Fittingly he was buried within its walls.

David gave Jerusalem its soul; Solomon's main concern was its body. He erected the Temple and the royal palace. Although in design and ornamentation the sanctuary was the fruit of Canaanite and Phoenician traditions, the spirit in which it was dedicated, as I Kings 8, 60 affirms: "The Lord is God and there is none else," bespeaks its importance in the history of monotheism. Under Solomon, the city became an entrepôt of international commerce—"and the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones" (I Kings 10, 27). The reek of corruption attendant upon riches and luxury rose in Solomon's declining years, and Israel's spiritual mission was forgotten with the importation of foreign wives, the resurgence of idolatry and the enfeeblement of the national fibre.

When, during the reign of Rehoboam, the kingdom was divided, Jerusalem remained the capital of the smaller Judaean monarchy, overshadowed materially by its more powerful, dissident sister-State, Israel. While some of the servants of the Lord in Israel remained true to the Temple, the new shrines in Dan and Bethel drew away the fickle multitudes. Yet, politically diminished though it was, Jerusalem remained steadfast in its loyalty to the Davidic dynasty. The interval of two centuries intervening between the break-up of the United Kingdom and the destruction of Israel in the north was a period of fluctuation for Jerusalem, but under the surface its spiritual physiognomy was being formed. There were good kings and bad, some more, others less, fortunate, and fortune did not always favour the virtuous. Uzziah and Manasseh saw to the city's defences but neglected its spiritual life; Hezekiah did much in both the material and religious spheres. For a short time Athaliah reduced Jerusalem almost to the status of a dependency of Samaria and Tyre. On one occasion Jehoash of Israel breached the walls of the city, and plundered its treasures. In the eighth century, as the Assyrian menace banked up like a storm cloud, prophecy, which had been frequent in all Israel, became more and more concentrated in Jerusalem. The dominating figure of Isaiah stood stalwart by the king's side in an hour of dire peril, when the Assyrian hosts encamped beneath the ramparts. Jerusalem was delivered from the cruel hand of the Ninevites, and, although in the end it succumbed to another enemy, the reprieve, which lasted five generations, was of decisive import for Jerusalem and Judaism.

In these fateful years the ambivalent prophetic attitude

towards the Holy City crystallized. Without mercy the envoys of God castigated its sins, its hypocrisies, the superficiality of its worship, its social injustices, while in the same breath almost they painted a vivid picture of a city cleansed of iniquity, the teacher of true religion to all peoples, the chosen seat of the Almighty. Some of this prophetic vision was realized even before the Babylonian captivity. Religious reform during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah put an end to idolatry, and service at places of worship like that recently uncovered at Arad. which had flourished since the days of Solomon, was abolished. Partial reform, however, was not enough to save the city. No sooner had Jerusalem and its Temple gone down in the dust of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest than a purer image became enshrined in the fantasy of the exiles in Mesopotamia. The praise of Zion rose loud and clear by the waters of Babylon and found its immortal formulation in Psalm 136: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." The sanctuary and the city as it was to be restored were planned in meticulous detail in the later visions of Ezekiel.

When the hour of return came after fifty years in captivity, reality scarcely corresponded to the rosy visions of the prophets. Throughout its history there is this dichotomy of the living, mundane, city, and the ideal city of the dreamers. Yet the specifically Jewish conception, as distinct from that of other religions, was that body and soul should go together in God's service, that the real city should correspond as much as possible to the ideal, and that the ideal should make the real viable. The revival of Jerusalem after the Return to Zion perhaps furnishes the best example of this correlation. The tardiness of the Return, and the hardships and difficulties encountered by the repatriates, delayed the reconstruction and resettlement of the city. The Second Temple, much poorer than the First, was only dedicated seventeen years after the Return. And even then it was left unfortified and at the mercy of its many enemies for half a century. When Nehemiah finally succeeded in rebuilding its walls, he was compelled to confine himself to a smaller area than the city's previous precincts and exercise his authority as Persian governor to oblige every tenth family to take up residence within it. Once this was accomplished and the reforms of Ezra were put into effect there was no epoch in its long history in which Jerusalem approached more closely to the prophetic ideal of living according to the Law. For the rest of the Persian period Judaea and the capital were governed by high priests as a nomocracy; for the first time in its history the city wielded a spiritual hegemony over the Babylonian Diaspora.

But this state of quietude, "the day of small deeds," could not last. New forms had appeared in the international arena and they soon challenged the seclusion of the Holy City. The conquests of Alexander and the establishment of the Hellenistic monarchies rudely shattered its restful life. Under the Ptolemies Egyptian troops were quartered in the Temple citadel, and the large number of Judaean captives deported were destined to become the nucleus of the flourishing community of Alexandria. Agents of the royal fisc demonstrated an increasing interest in Jerusalem's economic possibilities, in terms of expanding trade and industry. For a time the conservative element succeeded in combining godliness with material prosperity. The resources, newly-acquired, enabled the High Priest, Simon the Just, to carry out much-needed improvements in the Temple and the city, but soon the innovating Hellenists clashed with the establishment. Actually the younger priests, the hope of the conservative classes, were first to adopt the new way of life, centring around physical exercises in the gymnasium. On the slippery path of assimilation, these seemingly harmless essays in Greek athletics soon led to participation in games in honour of pagan gods. By degrees Jerusalem became engulfed in the morass of Late Hellenism. Internecine bickering broke out when the authority of the high priesthood was undermined and positions and honours were sold to the highest bidder. When the struggle between the two leading families of the era, the Oniads and the Tobiads, became more violent, the king Antiochus IV intervened—intent upon achieving three objectives in a single stroke: to hellenize both city and Temple, to channel the Temple treasures into the bottomless pit of the Seleucid exchequer, and to secure his rear in the struggle for the Egyptian crown. Typically, the momentum of revolution carried the most extreme party to power. It was the High Priest Menelaus and the more radical Hellenizers of his party who finally persuaded the king that the time was ripe for the establishment of "Antioch in Jerusalem," and for the thorough paganization of the Temple. When the king complied, incidentally assuring himself of a fortress, the Acra, inside the walls and dominating the Temple, he initiated the first religious persecution in history and raised a hornet's nest of resistance.

The Maccabaean revolt centred round Jerusalem, although there was little fighting in the city itself, until Judas Maccabaeus, by a series of brilliant strategic and tactical victories, beat off all Syrian attempts to raise the siege of the garrison in the Acra, and finally secured the Temple area. The sanctuary was reconsecrated, but in a neat historical parallel the city remained divided between the Jews and their adversaries for nineteen years. The Temple and the Lower City were in the hands of the Hasmonaeans for most of this time, while the Upper City ("Antioch") and the Acra were held by the Hellenizers and Syrian troops. This state of affairs came to an end when Simon the Hasmonaean took the Acra in 143 BCE. Jerusalem became the capital of an expanding Hasmonaean State. New walls, a new palace, the first of the bridges connecting the Upper City and Temple, and some monumental tombs in the vicinity attest the prosperity then enjoyed. Yet not even the victory of the party faithful to the Law could clear the atmosphere in which the city now lived. However hard the Hasmonaean kings tried to follow the Law they were constrained to adopt at least the technical achievements of Hellenistic civilization. Once again, even under a Jewish dynasty loyal to the Torah, there was conflict between the mundane and the ideal Jerusalem. The quarrel of the Sadducees and the Pharisees which ended in fratricidal war and foreign intervention was but one aspect of this tragedy. In vain did the last Hasmonaean ruler appeal to popular sentiment by representing the Temple utensils, the seven-branched candelabrum and the table of shewbread, on his coins. He could not prevail against Herod the Idumaean and the Roman legions.

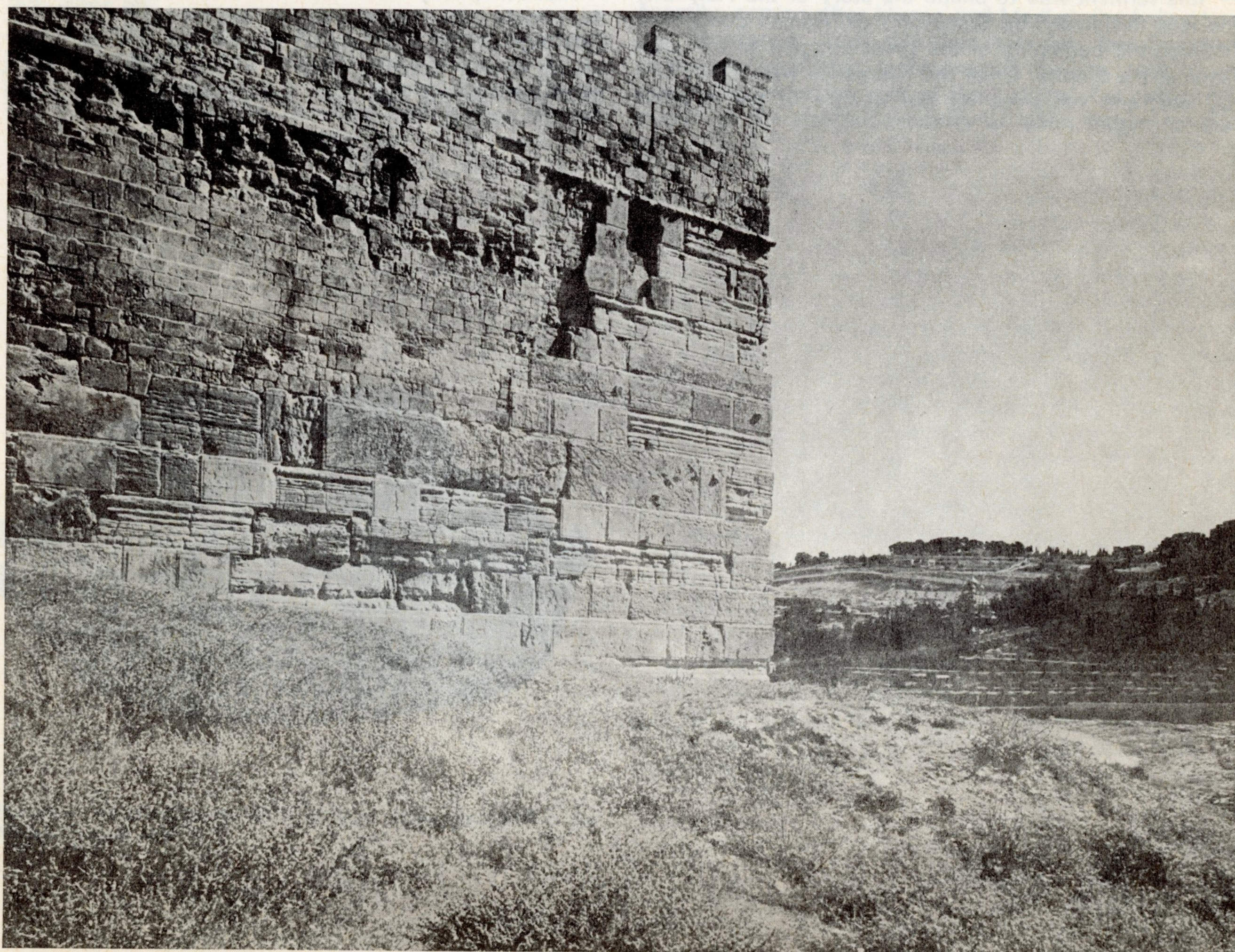
Yet even under the rule of this Roman vassal the sacred character of the city asserted itself. Although Herod did all he could to strengthen his hold on it by building himself a palace in the western part of the Upper City, strengthening it with great towers, and building another fortress, the Antonia, overlooking the Temple, this was only one aspect of his activity in Jerusalem. Parallel to

the creation of the new political-military focus in the west, and the construction of a theatre and hippodrome in the Graeco-Roman style, he undertook a vast rebuilding of the Temple. The enclosure around the sacred edifice was enlarged to double its former size, the walls constructed for this purpose changing the course of two valleys. To this day the huge masonry of that part of the Herodian enclosure venerated as the Western Wall is an object of admiration. Almost nothing, however, has remained of the architectural splendours of the Temple courts, their double porticos, the royal basilica and the multicoloured paving. The sanctuary itself was doubled in height—the measurements on the ground were strictly adhered to—to dominate the city. In the reconstruction all religious prescriptions were strictly observed, while the services continued without interruption. The new edifice was of three varieties of marble and richly gilded—in the words of Josephus it resembled "a snowy mountain glittering in the sun." Even the Rabbis who were not partial to Herod were forced to admit that "he who has not seen the sanctuary built has not seen a magnificent building." It is Herod's Temple which has lived in the memory of the generations as the prototype of the sanctuary-to-be. Its dimensions were carefully recorded in the Mishna in the undying hope that one day it would rise again from its ashes.

The majesty of Herodian Jerusalem, later enhanced by his grandson Agrippa I, who constructed the Third Wall, greatly enlarging the metropolitan area, was no more than the façade of a far more momentous evolution within. Jerusalem was now the heart of a Diaspora extending from Persia to Italy. On the occasion of the Three Feasts —Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles—on which pilgrimage to the Holy City was enjoined by the Torah, it was thronged with strangers from all parts of the world. The Temple treasury waxed rich on the gifts showered upon it by the devout.

But physical well-being was not, and never has been, the main purpose of life in Jerusalem. The century between the siege of the city by Herod and its destruction by Titus in 70 CE was marked by some of the most significant developments in its history, destined to leave their mark throughout the ages. Beneath the hellenized court and the worldly high-priestly aristocracy the Pharisees assiduously expounded the Law. The flowering of Jewish nomocracy, which was to provide the nation with

*The south-east corner of the city wall. The large blocks of masonry, of what was once the enclosure of the Temple Court, indicate the splendour of Herodian architecture.*



its protective armour throughout the Middle Ages and to save Judaism from extinction, began in the schools of Jerusalem, under the leadership of successive "pairs" of scholars, the last of whom were Hillel and Shamai. Their work was continued by the descendants of Hillel and such outstanding figures as Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zaccai right down to the days of the great siege.

Not all, however, were prepared to follow the path of the Law. The miraculous rise and the grievous decline of the Hasmonaean commonwealth had left the people in a state of traumatic shock. Feeling themselves innocent of the crime of idolatry, for which they had once suffered the penalty of exile, they tried to comprehend the cause of their distress. Psychologically, it was on this soil that the messianic fervour, characteristic of the last days of Jerusalem before the siege, burgeoned and flourished. Some of the Jews joined the Zealots and made ready for the war of "the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness." Others left the city, already doomed in their eyes, and, remaining true to their ideal conception of Jerusalem, prayed for its realization with the advent of the messianic era, which they were convinced was at hand. The voice of many prophets rose again in the streets and market places. One of them was that of Jesus of Nazareth, which has reverberated down the centuries. The evolution of Christianity, the Last Supper, the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, although barely noticed at the time in the whirl of events, were pregnant with momentous historical development, later to change the character of the city in the eyes of millions.

This ferment was to shape the story of the Holy City no less decisively. Its liberation from Roman domination marked the beginning of the great struggle of the Jews against the Empire. Once the fortresses were taken one by one, and sacrifices for the welfare of the emperor were no longer offered up in the Temple, Jerusalem became the insurrectionary capital of Israel. The new silver coinage, struck in defiance of the Roman Government, bore on one side the inscription "Jerusalem the Holy," and a myrtle branch, possibly the arms of the city. In the first three years of the revolt no enemy threatened its defences, which in the meantime had hastily been repaired. But internal faction gravely sapped its capacity for resistance. When the supreme hour of trial came in the year of 70 CE, Jerusalem with twenty-five thousand warriors valiantly withstood an army four times as big for five months. And even after the capture and the ravishing of the Temple the surviving Zealots fought on for a month in the Upper City. The memory of the calamity has been enshrined in many legends; the Arch of Titus in Rome is its abiding monument.

### Days of Affliction

Titus quartered the Tenth Legion among the ruins of Jerusalem, leaving only the three towers of Herod as testimony to the strength of the city and the magnitude of his victory. Yet life went on. A small community gathered among the shards of past glories, including many Jews. Seven synagogues were still in use on "Mount Zion." But even now Jerusalem's cup of sorrows was not yet full. In 130 the emperor Hadrian visited it and resolved to erect a Roman colony on the site. The perimeter of the new city, Aelia Capitolina, was ploughed by the governor Tineius Rufus, according to the Roman custom; to the Jews this seemed the ultimate outrage. A vast conspiracy was formed, and when the hour struck the people rallied round their spiritual leader, Rabbi Akiva, and their prince and general, Simon Bar Kosiba, better known as Bar Kochba, "Son of a Star." Within a short time the Romans had been compelled to evacuate the

city and for two more years Jewish rule was restored. Sacrifices were probably offered on the restored altar, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish senate, resumed its sessions, and coins were struck again. Finds in the Judaean desert caves throw light on the orderly process of administration under Bar Kochba. But in the third year of the War the Jewish forces were compelled to withdraw from the Holy City. Coins, undated, inscribed "Jerusalem," indicate their aim of once again liberating it, an aspiration that was long to be denied.

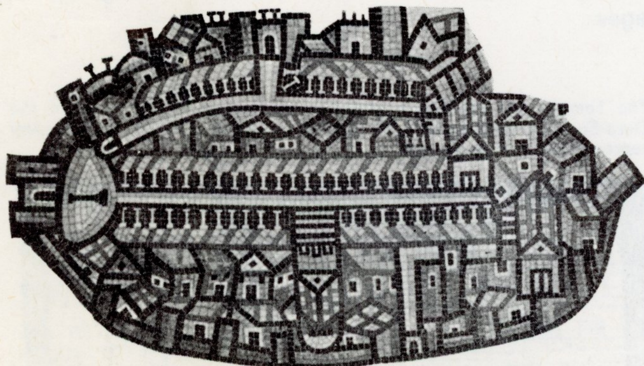
The tragic conclusion of Bar Kochba's War marks a turning point in Jerusalem's history. Hadrian undid the work of David and attempted to obliterate its very name. Aelia Capitolina, the surrogate city of Roman imperialism, did indeed vegetate for two centuries as an utterly insignificant provincial town. Jews were forbidden to set foot even within its limits, while the Christian community was purged of its Judaeo-Christian elements. The erection of the colony on the ruins, however, had two lasting effects: the work of construction wrought havoc with whatever remained of the city of David, which was used as a quarry, while the squarish shape of the Roman camp, adopted as the plan of Aelia, is still recognizable in the layout of the Old City of Jerusalem today.

With the passage of the second century the Jewish community in the Land of Israel regained its legal status, and the restrictions on the pilgrimage of Jews were set aside, at least "de facto." In the second half of the third century a leading sage, Rabbi Yohanan of Tiberias, could say: "Anyone who wishes to go up to the earthly Jerusalem, goes up."

In the fourth century the status of Jerusalem was again completely transformed. Adoption of Christianity as the State religion converted it from a forgotten backwater into the Holy City of the dominant faith. Helena the empress and her son Constantine wrought mightily to make it a Christian centre. The Church of the Anastasis (Resurrection), forerunner of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, became its focal point and was gradually surrounded by other churches, monasteries, hospices and infirmaries for pilgrims. The Madaba mosaic map offers a vivid glimpse of the internal aspect of Byzantine Jerusalem in the sixth century, when the emperor Justinian gave it its Christian form. One of the greatest benefactors of the city was the empress Eudocia, who resided there in the middle of the fifth century. It was due to her, apparently, that Jews were again permitted to reside in it.

Byzantine Jerusalem was a splendid city, materially as well as religiously. It did, indeed, experience two crises: the first in the middle of the fourth century, when the emperor Julian made his abortive attempt to restore the Temple, and the second in 614 when the Persian conquest shook the city to its foundations. But even though the "True Cross" taken by the Persians was restored by Heraclius in a triumphal procession, which marked the last great day of Byzantine Jerusalem, the strength had gone out of the régime. Less than ten years later the patriarch Sophronius surrendered the Holy City to the Caliph Omar, and the long rule of the Moslems began.

Koranic tradition, as interpreted in later days, identified "the furthest Mosque" (al-Aqsa) with the house of prayer erected on the southern flank of the Temple Mount. In 691 the Caliph Abdul Malik built the Dome of the Rock to compete with the shrine in Mecca; nevertheless Jerusalem enjoyed only the third place in the hierarchy of sanctity, coming after Mecca and Medina, the holy cities par excellence. Arab rule was tolerant; the Christian community and that reconstructed by the Jews lived peaceably under the rule of the Caliphs. But, when the power of the central authority of Islam began to dis-



*Byzantine Jerusalem in the sixth century, vividly portrayed in the Madaba mosaic map.*

integrate in the eighth and ninth centuries, the lot of the "unbelievers" was aggravated. The oppression of the Seljuks, the real rulers of the decaying Abbasid Caliphate, the interference with the pilgrimages and the attempts of Caliph Hakim to destroy the Church of the Holy Sepulchre finally provoked the counterblast of the Crusades.

Mediaeval Europe, having passed the nadir of the Dark Ages, was ready for the enterprise of recovering the Tomb of Christ. The First Crusade was victorious in 1099, but at the cost of incredible suffering. After the massacre of the Moslem and Jewish inhabitants, the feudal kingdom of Jerusalem was set up in the Holy Land. The city was divided up among the several claimants and all the energy of European craftsmanship was invested in its architectural transformation. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was reconstructed and enlarged, the Citadel was converted into a royal palace, the great complex of the Hospital (the demesne of the Knights of St. John) was erected, while the Templars set themselves up in the Dome of the Rock, fondly believed to have been Solomon's Temple. The Teutonic knights occupied what is now the Jewish quarter, and some Jewish craftsmen were permitted to shelter in the shadow of the royal palace. For a century Jerusalem was an outpost of mediaeval Europe, with its Latin churches, its art and architecture, its feudal chivalry and its mixed population. But there was one thing which this enclave of Europe in Asia lacked: a settled agricultural population upon which its cities could rest secure. The Crusaders did not strike root in the Holy Land, and once the European presence was drastically reduced their kingdom collapsed like a house of cards. Jerusalem was lost in 1187, and though temporarily reoccupied for fifteen years (1229-1244), it remained under Moslem domination till 1917. While the political capital of the country was at Gaza or at Safad, the rulers earnestly tried to endow Jerusalem with the character of a Moslem sanctuary. The Dome of the Rock was cleared of all traces of Christian worship, al-Aqsa Mosque was rebuilt, the Temple square surrounded by arched porticos, which adjoined a series of "madrases" and "zawiyas" (houses of study and Islamic monasteries), and the vicinity of the Temple itself crowded with pious foundations and monumental tombs. The remains of this splendid architecture are still visible in the Old City, and though sadly neglected, constitute one of its main charms. Throughout the turbulent Mamluk period, Jerusalem was regarded as an honourable city of refuge or place of banishment for court grandees out of favour; as such it enjoyed a certain prominence also from the worldly point of view. The Sultan Qalawoun repaired the old aqueduct from the south, and the walls, in particular the Citadel and the Damascus Gate, were restored and embellished. During this period the present-day image of the city was formed. The Jewish and Christian communities persisted, though with some difficulty, the Jews strengthened by successive waves of settlement, following each of the great mediaeval expulsions, the last of which was that from Spain. The Franciscan Custodia di Terra Sancta maintained its status in the Holy Sepulchre and on Mount Zion.

In 1517 Jerusalem fell to the Turks, whose dominion was to last for exactly four centuries. In the beginning Ottoman rule was energetic and beneficent (the Sultan Suleiman gave the walls their present aspect and made some improvements to the water supply), but the internal decay which set in in the empire almost immediately after his death caused the Holy City to sink to its lowest ebb in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With the decline of the pilgrimages, partly as a result of the wars of religion in Europe and partly because of the spread of nationalism, the Greek Orthodox community, whose members were Ottoman subjects, gained a strong position in the Holy Places. The corrupt and oppressive rule of the pashas vitiated all economic and spiritual life.

At the end of the eighteenth century appeared the first signs of change. The harbinger of the European intrusion, Napoleon Bonaparte, never reached Jerusalem, yet his appearance in the Holy Land was symptomatic. European influence, mostly in religious guise, grew apace. The French protected the Roman Catholic institutions, the Russians the Greek Orthodox, the British and the Prussians the Protestants. Schools, hospices, hospitals for the pilgrims multiplied. Religious groups, like the German Templars and the Swedish founders of the American Colony, settled in Jerusalem, which, beginning in 1864 with the creation of Sir Moses Montefiore's quarter of Mishkenot Sha'ananim, began to spread beyond the city walls. This Jewish suburb ushered in an enlargement of the Jewish community which went on without interruption until, by the end of the nineteenth century Jerusalem had a Jewish majority. Now, with the spread of European culture, communications, transport and the general amenities of living were much improved.

The meeting between Theodor Herzl, founder of the World Zionist Organization, and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany in 1898, in the gates of Jerusalem, may be taken as inaugurating a new era of the gradual restoration of the Holy City's true character, the highlights of which were the withdrawal of the Turks in 1917, the establishment of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in 1925 and finally its reunification in 1967.

Jerusalem's status as the capital of the Holy Land is inextricably bound up with its Biblical past: only when it was Jewish or, at least governed by nations inspired by the Bible, was it this country's chief city. This may appear ancillary rather than essential, but its stormy chronicles prove that failing a material substratum, the link between the heavenly and the worldly city becomes more and more tenuous. The view of the Jewish Sages that the Holy City must be a place of human habitation and not merely a sacred ruin has been vindicated throughout the ages.

*The Temple and the City's ramparts, as depicted in a mural of the Dura-Europos synagogue, 245 CE. This is the earliest known ideal representation of Jerusalem.*