

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Jerusalem: City of conflict or city of peace?



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It's one of the oldest cities in the world, known as the City of David and the City of Peace. Yet it is today, and has been throughout history, a city of conflict. It is first mentioned in Hebrew Scriptures as Salem, when Abraham meets the King of Salem and is blessed by him (Genesis 14:18). Later, Jerusalem is conquered from the Jebusites by King David and made the capital of Israel (2 Samuel 5:6). Solomon built the first temple there, which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II after the Siege of Jerusalem of 587 BCE. The second temple was built later that century and then destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.

In his book, "Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel," author Eric H. Cline, professor of classics and anthropology at George Washington University, writes that Jerusalem was "destroyed at least twice, besieged 23 times, attacked an additional 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times." He goes on to point out the battles for control of Jerusalem are not because of its commercial or military value, but because of its importance as a political and religious center.

Jews and Muslims revere it as the site where Abraham offered to sacrifice his son as a sign of faithfulness to God. The Jews also considered the site as holy as it was

where the temple was built by Solomon and then rebuilt after its destruction. Following the second destruction of the temple by the Romans, the site, known as Temple Mount, is still revered — especially the Western Wall, the remains of that second temple.

Muslims call the city Al-Quds by its Arabic name, meaning "The Holy One," and consider it to be the third most important holy city, after Mecca and Medina. The site where the Jewish temple used to be is called Haram el-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary), and is also the home to the Al Aqsa Mosque. It is believed that Muhammad ascended from the rock at this site and visited heaven. It is there that the Dome of the Rock was completed in 692, and its golden dome is seen in most popular iconic pictures of current Jerusalem.

Christians revere Jerusalem as the place where Jesus was crucified and buried. The Via Dolorosa, or the "Way of Grief," is believed to be the path that he took on the way to his death and is marked by the Stations of the Cross. The narrow passages on the way lead to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, built by Emperor Constantine in the fourth century at the site that his mother considered to be the place of Jesus' death and burial.

Each of the religions remembers special times and events that took place in Jerusalem and cherish the times when they were in charge. Karen Armstrong, author and interfaith leader, in her book "Jerusalem: One

City, Three Faiths," points to another reality:

"In the history of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, Jews, Christians, and Muslims have all found other people in possession. They have all had to cope with the fact that the city and the land have been sacred to other people before them and the integrity of their tenure will depend in large part upon the way they treat their predecessors."

## LOCAL CLERGY BUILD UNDERSTANDING

As the Kaufman Interfaith Institute embarks on the "2018 — Year of Interfaith Friendships," we are reminded that conflict is not restricted to history or to the contested Holy Land. Our societies are tested today by the challenge to tolerance and coexistence.

We are also reminded that it is this week that clergy from Grand Rapids, representing the Abrahamic faith traditions, are in Israel as a part of an interfaith seminar and tour seeking better understanding of that part of the world and the various faith communities that reside there.

Upon their return, we will hear their reflections following each of the two performances in the return of the National Geographic IMAX production of "Jerusalem." In this award-winning and spectacular cinema presentation, we will see the city through the eyes of three young women, Jewish, Christian and Muslim.

This is an exclusive opportunity to learn more about this part of the world as well as insight from our returning clerics. The per-

sonal friendships that are developing among these clergy serve as an example of the way we can each pursue interfaith understanding and friendship in our communities.

See a two-minute introductory video at: [bit.ly/film-Jerusalem](http://bit.ly/film-Jerusalem).

As noted, "Salem," the first name in Scripture for Jerusalem, is derived from the same root as the word "shalom," meaning peace. Karen Armstrong also concludes, "The societies that have lasted the longest in the holy city have, generally, been the ones that were prepared for some kind of tolerance and coexistence." We all hope and pray for Jerusalem to again become the City of Peace through tolerance and coexistence.

In this year of interfaith friendship and in every year, let us be dedicated to the respect and acceptance of others that will mark every community as a City of Peace.

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## Coming up

Join us for the film "Jerusalem"

Celebration North, Grand Rapids

Wednesday and Feb 12 at 6:30 p.m.

\$5 per person or \$15 for a family

Tickets available only at [interfaithunderstanding.org](http://interfaithunderstanding.org)