

## **OLD-CITY WALL & GATES**

**Ready For The Holy Journey?** Jerusalem is best visited in **autumn** [September to November] or **spring** [March to May]; summers can get hot [normally 28-35 C] and winters go just cold [ranging from 11-15 C] but sometimes very cold - and rainy, too. Summer in Jerusalem is hot and dry but often mild at night. However, the **religious holidays** - Easter, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot [*the dates vary each year*] attract large number of pilgrims to Israel; thus accommodation prices go double, shops and restaurants go closed and public transport seldom open.

During **Ramadan**, the month when Muslims fast from dawn to sunset, many cafes and restaurants in the Eastern Jerusalem particularly the Old City and near Damascus Gate are closed and business hours go changed. In Muslim areas, eating or drinking in public during the fasting hours should be avoided.

Seeing the **Old City** usually involves a lot of **walking** around holy places and ancient sites each day. The terrain is often stony and irregular; however, charming also. To enjoy the trip to Jerusalem, you should do some walking during few weeks before departure. Get used to walking a km or so at odd times daily. Buy new trainers or soft shoes for the trip but wear them for a few days before departure so their stiffness should go lost. If in doubt about your fitness, must discuss with your doctor or clinic.

Walking or travelling in this holy city is quite safe. Even during days of Israel-Palestine fighting in the streets; the scene rarely involves bombs and bullets; terrorist incidents are extremely rare in whole of Israel and Palestinian areas. For tourists it is often said that: "**Daily life in Jerusalem involves buns rather than guns.**"

The **OLD CITY** of Jerusalem, a magic and majestic landscape of magnificence and splendour – since ever one of the world's holiest

and most visited locations. Its ruins are significant to the three monotheistic religions: **Judaism, Christianity and Islam**; a walk through its hallowed passages is an exciting and life-changing source of historic, cultural and spiritual uplift. Visiting the Old City of Jerusalem is like travelling to a mystical, miraculous and amazing new world.

The **Old City and its Walls** are a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1981. The Old City stands surrounded by walls for its defence since ancient times; see the **Amarna letters** dating back to years 1330s BC. In year 1010 BC, Nabi David AS conquered **Jebus**, renamed it **City of David** and started expanding it. Prophet Solomon AS, while building the First Temple which he had inherited in year 970 BC, also extended the city walls in order to protect the Temple. However, the entire city was destroyed, including the Temple and its outer walls in c.586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

After about half a century, the Persians conquered Babylonia; Cyrus II of Persia allowed the Jews to return to Judea and rebuild the Temple. In year 445 BC, governor **Nehemiah** got re-built the broken walls of Jerusalem. The full description of rebuilding is described in Chapter 3 of the **Hebrew Bible**.

Details are: **The Sheep Gate** [leading to market where lambs & sheep were sold for sacrifices in Temple]; **Fish Gate** [also called Ephraim Gate]; **Inspectors' Gate** [Also known as **Council Gate**; where the elders of the city used to decide local disputes]; **Valley Gate** [leading towards nearby Hinnom Valley]; **Dung Gate** [through which the garbage was removed from the city]; **Fountain Gate** [the primary access point to the Gihon Spring, the city's main water source]; **Water Gate** [the main way leading to the Temple-I]; **Horse Gate** [for Prophet David AS [King]'s chariot to pass through].

**FOUND & LOST:** During 140-116 BC, the city walls were expanded more and renovated; Herod the Great in year 44 AD, made

additions near today's Jaffa Gate; but the Roman attack of **70 AD** had completely destroyed it along with **Second Temple** – thereafter Jerusalem remained without protective walls for over two centuries. For nearly a thousand years, there was, of course, protective wall around Jerusalem, good or bad, but there is no authentic history about it till 1033 AD when the city was destroyed by a gigantic earthquake. It was once more reconstructed after taken over by Saladin Ayyubi in 1187 AD.

In the 16th century, during reign of the Ottoman Empire in the region, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent rebuilt the city walls completely afresh - **in 1535-42 AD**, that is the wall which exists now. Today's traveller finds the same **Wall of Jerusalem**, about 4kms around, their average height is 12 meters and the average thickness is 2.5 meters at base. The wall contains 34 watchtowers and seven main gates open for traffic, with two minor gates reopened by archaeologists of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### THE OLD-CITY GATES:

During different periods, the Old City walls got varying number of gates. During the Crusaders' Kingdom for instance, there were four gates, one on each side. The current walls by Ottomans provided **six gates**; several older gates were filled and walled up with time. The number increased to seven after addition of a **New Gate in 1887**.

The walls around the Muslim shrines, the **Golden Dome & Al-Aqsa Mosque**, lead the travellers into an arena of another set of [inner] gates; one finds massive blocks of dressed stone of the Herodian times and the overlying courses of smaller stones of later restorations - some **NOT** important. However, there are Five Gates now in use being **Bab al-Magharib**, **Chain Gate** [Bab es-Silsileh], the **Cotton-Merchants' Gate** [Bab el-Qattanin], the **Iron Gate** [Bab el-Hadid], and **Watchman's Gate**.

**COTTON MERCHANT'S GATE** is the most beautiful gate leading to al-Aqsa Mosque from western side. It was first built by Mamluk Sultan Muhammad in 737 AD in typical style; it is a combination of alternating red and yellow stripes, black and white stones, topped by *muqarnas*. The gate was re-built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the outside of this gate was a popular place of prayers for Jews.

**HERODS GATE:** [also the **Flowers Gate**] Historical accounts indicate that **in 1099 AD** the Crusader army entered the Old City through a breach located near this Herod's Gate - was also believed to have led to King Herod's **Palace**. It was constructed by **Sultan Suleiman I** in 1537-38 AD - that original entrance does not exist nowadays; the current entrance was re-built later in 1875. Right outside the gate was an old cemetery. In 1998 and during several subsequent excavations [the latest in 2004], archaeologists dug in the eastern area of Herod's Gate and found **nine archaeological layers** of the Old City – covering from the Iron Age up through the Ottoman period.

**MOROCCAN GATE:** This gate lies along the western wall of al-Aqsa Mosque - also known as the '**Maghrabi**' Gate. Its residents had originally come from North Africa after **Saladin Ayyubi** conquered Jerusalem. The Moroccan Gate is actually built on top of another gate from the Herodian period known as **Barclay's Gate**; which was once identified as one of the **Second Temple** period gates. It was blocked with stones in ending 10<sup>th</sup> century.

During 12<sup>th</sup> century [or perhaps later], it was rebuilt at new ground level. This area was cleared, houses demolished and made a big open courtyard in 1967 and the inhabitants were shifted elsewhere. There is currently a wooden ramp that gives direct access from the Western Wall area to the Moroccan Gate. **This is the only place from where non-Muslims can get access into al-Aqsa and Haram Plaza.**

**GOLDEN GATE:** Now closed – on the east side of the Haram Sharif's retaining wall, one can see this gate, an elaborate gatehouse and portal; it could be a **Byzantine Christian structure**. However, gigantic stones in the walls nearby date back to the time of Nehemiah. In 1969, a massive arch was found underneath the Golden Gate and adjoining walls – considered that the ruins were of the **Nehemiah's East Gate** [then also called **Shushan Gate**] mentioned in **Nehemiah 3:29** – an era of 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. But the gate stands here in the present form since 630 AD at least. The Golden Gate actually has two doorways; one of this is called as the **Gate of Repentance**.

Church claimed that in 614 AD, when the Persian Empire conquered and briefly ruled Jerusalem, they took back to Persia parts of the True Cross [believed to be the cross of the Crucifixion] from **Church of the Holy Sepulchre**. Fifteen years later, after defeating the Persians, Heracles the Byzantine emperor, brought the True Cross back – via the Mount of Olives to the Temple Mount, and then to the Church of Holy Sepulchre – entering through this gate. On another account, the Christian's Gospel of Matthew holds that **Jesus entered through** the then Sheep gate – **today's Lions Gate**. In 1540-41 AD Ottoman Turks walled up this gate – and since then it is closed by all means.

Outside this Golden Gate, now there is vast graveyard but interestingly, the adherents to Islam, Judaism and Christianity all desire to be buried here. As a result, cemeteries dominate the immediate vicinity surrounding the Golden Gate where Jews and Christians are buried side by side with the Muslims.

**LIONS GATE [Bab al Asbat]:** Re-built in 1535-40 with four lions at its forehead; the Turkish Sultan dreamed about the lions spiritually guarding the thrones of Prophets David & Solomon AS. This entrance leads to **Via Dolorosa** [*Holy Christ's path to crucifixion at Golgotha*]. Through history it has also been known as **St Mary's Gate** - as Virgin Mary's birthplace is 30 yards inside this gate.

**DAMASCUS GATE:** Also known as **Bab al-Amood** built in year 1537 AD, in the north wall. It is the busiest gate on all weekdays with travellers & tourists visiting Jerusalem. It performs a visible division between the Old City and modern Jerusalem. The most architecturally impressive of the Ottoman Old City gates, Damascus Gate is the heart of Arab Jerusalem. It is also called **Bab al-Amood** because Roman columns of Byzantine era [324-638 AD] were found here.

Excavations done under this gate discovered the foundations and a triple-arched gateway dating back to the times of Roman Emperor Hadrian [135 AD]; Turk ruler built this gate upon the ruins of Hadrian's same 2<sup>nd</sup> century gate. Outside the gate steps lead to a wide plaza where the tourists take rest & chat.

**NEW GATE:** Also known as **Bab Al-Jadid**; built in the northwest corner of the Old City in 1887-89 AD when Christians demanded the Turkish ruler to give them direct access to their residential quarter and monasteries. In the 1920-30s, the **New Gate** had an iron gate operated by the Police being the border between Jordan and Israel, called No Man's Land. The Jordanians kept the gate normally closed until the 1967's war – now open.

**JAFFA GATE:** [aka **Bab el-Khalil**] – a structure just inside this Gate has been identified dating back to 1<sup>st</sup> century BC's Jerusalem; believed to be foundations of a defensive tower King Herod built for his palace. He had built **three towers** here in 37-34 BC; one of these now known as the **Tower of David** - still stands today. Near Herod's Palace there is also a raised platform from which the Roman procurator held court [located outside the Citadel]. Above the Gate is a stone plate which commemorates the date of construction and its Ottoman builders.

As you enter Jaffa Gate, to the left is the **Christian Quarter**, to right the **Armenian Quarter**, and straight ahead lies the **Muslim Quarter**. During the Crusader conquest of

Jerusalem in 1099 AD, Muslim defenders and their wives and children sought refuge and protection inside the Tower of David. Much later, beheadings also took place here during 1860's; Jerusalem's holy past cannot hide its bloody footprints, too.

In 1898 AD an opening was built into the wall near Jaffa Gate to allow the German Kaiser Wilhelm II enter Jerusalem without dismounting his horse. Later, the mayor of Jerusalem also welcomed the British army here and surrendered the city **on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1917**; Brig Gen Watson and Lt Col Bailey were the first to enter. Two days later, the British General Allenby entered, on foot, through this Gate and formally accepted the beg for surrender. Accompanying him was Major Lawrence - better known in history as the **Lawrence of Arabia**. During the years 1914-17, the population of Jerusalem shrank from 85,000 to 55,000 residents.

On **17<sup>th</sup> October 1938**, the Hitler's army attacked Jerusalem but just two days later, the British army stormed all gates of the Old City including Jaffa Gate and reclaimed their rule again. **On 17<sup>th</sup> May 1948**, Jewish forces did not gain control of this gate so it remained with the Jordanians till 1967.

**ZION GATE:** [aka **Bab Al-Nabi Dawud**] built near the west corner of the southern wall; connects King David's tomb and the Last Supper Room to the Jewish Quarter of the Old City – named so because the gate faces and provides access to **Mount Zion**. The gate was built by Suleiman the Magnificent in 1540 AD but the walls near the Zion Gate date from the Hasmonean periods. Since then, a Jewish family living in the Jewish Quarter held the key to this Gate.

On **17<sup>th</sup> May 1948**, the Jewish forces launched a siege on the Zion Gate and broke through two days later. However, **on 28<sup>th</sup> May**, two rabbis exited the Zion Gate holding white flags and surrendered the Jewish Quarter to Arabs – so this Gate remained with Jordanian guards till

1967 when the Israeli troops intercepted while dashing their way to victory. Later, the Gate was renovated by Israel government in 2008.

**DUNG GATE;** aka **Gate of Silwan** after the nearby Silwani village, was re-built in 1538-40 by Suleiman the Magnificent along with the main wall. It derives its name from the fact that refuse and ashes were escorted out of the city through this gate and dumped in the nearby Hinnom Valley since centuries. It was a gate for trash from not only the Old City but the Haram Sharif as well - today it stands as the main entrance to the **Western [Wailing] Wall**. The original Dung Gate also existed nearby which was in use since the **First Temple Period** - the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. This makes it the **oldest of the gates of Jerusalem in continuous use**, though in slightly modified locations; see Hebrew Bible's Book of **Nehemiah 2:13**.

Inside **Dung Gate**, is a covered wooden ramp which takes the non-Muslim visitors direct to the Haram Sharif [Temple Mount]. In fact there was a solid built ramp which was in use since decades. In February 2004, a wall which supported the 800-year-old ramp jutting out from the **Western [Wailing] Wall** partially collapsed. In 2007, the Israel Authority built a temporary wooden pedestrian bridge to the Moroccan Gate - no permanent structure has been constructed yet. The damaged ramp, situated beneath the bridge, is preserved for further archaeological research.

**HULDAH GATE:** Also called **15 STEPS OF ASCENSION**; consist of two separate gates, both located in the southern wall of the Haram Plaza - both are now sealed shut - one called the **Triple Gate** while the other as **Double Gate**. The exact date of their construction is unknown but believed to have been raised during the Herodian period. The etymology of the name **Huldah** is a mystery; mostly believed that the name derives from the First Temple period Hebrew prophetess Huldah; **II Kings 22:14-20** is referred. One Jewish sect links it to the Second Temple periods after **Southern Steps** excavations at the Archaeological Park. Further

excavation near the **Haram Sharif [Temple Mount]** itself is prohibited by the Israeli government.

At top of the **Southern Steps**, there stands the **Triple Gate** in east — since closed with stones but had once served as entrance into the Temple Courts. At the far west of the staircase stands a **Double Gate** — today only a portion of this gate and its lintel can be seen. The gates represent entrance & exit of the temple with alternating wide and narrow steps with ample biblical references. Here a popular activity for tourists often includes reading one psalm on each wide step, moving up two steps to the next wide step for next reading – as revival of Nabi David AS's rhymes for singing.

*[The **holy Qur'an** tells that when Nabi David AS used to sing [in praise of Allah], the birds around in the air used to join the Prophet AS to make it as singing in chorus.]*

The Jewish religious literature holds that the **fifteen psalms** were sung by the priests who used to stand on these 15 Southern Steps. Most tourists prefer standing at the remnants of these centuries old **Stairs of Ascent**, knowing that the stairs are not taking them anywhere as the huge wall is just ahead – some go to the last stair. While sitting there **the Jews** keep the concept that the Temple is behind the wall – AND the **Muslim tourists** imagine they are at the door steps of their **Golden Dome of Haram Sharif** [behind the wall] and the angles are coming down and going up in front of them.

**The Last Word:** Wars, sieges, destruction and rebuilding have changed the face and landscape around Jerusalem many times. Trash and debris collected over the millennia have filled in many of the valleys that remind the tourists of divided and re-defined city. However, since the Ottomans of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in saddles, these primary gates of Jerusalem mostly remained unchanged. It is likely these gates were built on prior gates, perhaps even dating back to the

times of Nabi Solomon AS, and later Nehemiah - mysteries are yet to be discovered.