



MUCH MORE THAN A PILE OF STONES

As a sacred site second in importance only to the Temple Mount itself, the Western Wall is a symbol of Jewish hope, religious devotion, and national identity. Located inside the Old City of Jerusalem, the **Kotel** (kò tel, Hebrew for "wall"), as it is commonly called, is actually a portion of the retaining wall of the Temple Mount dating to the extensive Temple building program of Herod the Great who died in 4 B.C. Its massive blocks are the only vestige of the Holy Temple which was destroyed in 70 A.D. at the hands of the Romans.

Non-Jews popularized the designation, "Wailing Wall," based on their observation of Jews weeping at the wall over the tragedy of having no temple in which to worship in the tradition of their ancestors.

Beginning in 1948 Jews were barred from the Kotel by the Jordanian government which controlled that part of the divided city of Jerusalem. It was only after Israel's victory in the Six Day War, when Israeli paratroopers captured the Old City on June 7, 1967, that Jews were once again permitted to visit the spot. Since then it has taken on

an even greater significance as a representation of Jewish commitment to never again see Jerusalem divided.

Jewish men and women gather in separate areas along the Western Wall to read prayers from the **Siddur** (sid dodr, Jewish prayer book). It has become common practice to write a request on a scrap of paper and to jam it into a crevice between blocks of the wall, in hopes of it receiving special attention by God because of the sacredness of the spot. It has also become common practice for Jewish boys from all over the world to become Bar Mitzvah ("Son of the Commandment") in the plaza facing the Wall.

NOTABLE QUOTES

"We have returned to our holy places, never to part from them again." (General Moshe Dayan upon gaining control of the Kotel in 1967)

"The people of Israel were exiled from their land, but their land was never exiled from their hearts. In whatever country they dwelt throughout the nineteen Diaspora centuries, they yearned for their homeland, Israel." (Moshe Dayan in his *Living with the Bible*, 1978)

THE SOURCE OF LIGHT IN THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

A prominent feature of the eight days of Hanukkah (beginning at sundown on December 23 in 1997) is the lighting of the Hanukkah lampstand (Hannukiah), consisting of eight separate candles, plus a ninth which is lit first on each of the eight evenings and from which the others are successively lit until all are burning on the final night of the holiday. This ninth candle is called the **shammash** (pronounced shàh mish), meaning "servant." The name is also applied to the paid sexton of a synagogue who is entrusted with a myriad of responsibilities and duties relating to the smooth functioning of the congregation.

What is noteworthy about the **shammash** is that, in nearly all of the countless number of different styles and designs of Hanukkah lampstands, this "servant-candle" is given a position of distinction and prominence by either elevating it above the level of the other eight or by setting it apart from the others on the lampstand.

What a remarkable picture this is of Jesus who Himself observed this holiday in Jerusalem (John 10:22, where it is called by the technical name, "Feast of Dedication"). The symbolism reminds us:

- That He is the source of light.
"Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall

have the light of life." (John 8:12)

- That He came into this world as a "Shammash" (servant).
"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28)
- That He has been given an exalted position of prominence.
"Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." (Philippians 2:9)

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