

Partnerships and Partitions

Lesson 3 Strategy 3

Do Good Fences Really Make Good Neighbors?

The City of Jerusalem became the capital city of Israel almost 3,000 years ago. Through the centuries the city has become a religious center. It has played an important role in the development of three of the world's religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The

Jews, Christians, and Muslims who live in the Middle East have a strong attachment to the land where their ancestors worshiped and where important religious events took place. People who live outside the Middle East often have a keen interest in visiting the city, especially the old walled city near the temple.

People have tried to avoid conflict by using two strategies within the Old City: partnership and partition. In Jerusalem's Old City, both partnership and partition can be seen at the same time.

Partitioning the Holy City

Jews, Christians and Muslims live in Jerusalem, but sharing the city space has not always been peaceful. Religious differences have often boiled over into violence within the city, and outside forces have sometimes tried to take control of the city and its holy sites as well. During the 1600s, the land within the walls of the Old City was partitioned among four groups who laid claims to the territory. Leaders hoped to reduce conflict by allowing each religious group space to do things in their own way. Inside their neighborhoods they could follow their own customs, speak their own language, and worship without interference. They would have fewer contacts with people from other groups, and it was hoped that this would lead to peace.

Today the people of the Old City of Jerusalem still live in sections defined by religion. Each of the sections of the city is called a 'quarter,' although they are not of equal size. The largest territory belongs to the Muslims. The Christian Quarter and the Armenian Quarter are controlled by two branches of Christianity. The remaining section near the wall of the old temple belongs to the Jewish residents. [See Map 1.](#) For most of the last 500 years, people have been peaceful within the traditional partitions of the Old City. But population in the

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region, and in the Old City of Jerusalem, is changing. Christians have largely migrated away from Jerusalem. As they leave, Muslims or Orthodox Jews try to purchase their houses. Many people predict that the Christian Quarter will gradually become smaller or may someday disappear. Others predict that the lines between the quarters may become less defined. But no one expects to see an end to

partitions in the Old City. This traditional land division has reduced conflict and allowed each group to maintain its traditions for hundreds of years.

Thinking like a Geographer

- How might partitioning the city lead to peace among the city residents of different faiths? In what ways might this traditional solution lead to increased conflicts?
- How might this map change if present trends continue?

Partnership and Cooperation

The Old City of Jerusalem contains numerous holy sites and shrines. Many of the events in the holy scriptures of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims happened here. It was here that King Solomon built the Jewish Temple. Christians believe that Jesus was born in near-by Bethlehem, taught in the same temple, and was finally executed and buried within the walls. Muslims believe that the prophet Mohammed was raised to heaven to speak with other prophets at the place called the Dome of the Rock. All of these places are very close together, but are not always within the quarter assigned to their religion. [See Map 2.](#)

Followers of each religion want access to the holy places to worship. Religious pilgrims come from all over the world to visit the holy sites. All of this movement can lead to tensions, but a partnership of sorts has allowed thousands of people to visit the shrines and holy sites each year. Religious leaders and groups have made public statements in support of access to all the holy sites. The government of Israel and the city government of Jerusalem allow most visitors to come and go freely. All visitors are asked to respect the sites they visit and other visitors.

It is essential that Jerusalem remains an open city, with full access to the religious sites which are holy to three faiths.

– Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, June 27, 2013

This partnership is not perfect. Every day, people stream through the gates of the Old City to visit the holy places. The streets are crowded with residents, tourists, and vendors of souvenirs. Contacts between people from different cultures and backgrounds can lead to misunderstandings and disagreements. Crowded conditions can lead to competition. At times security concerns cause police to restrict access to one or more of the sites. There are occasional threats or incidents of violence. But most leaders in Jerusalem, in Israel and around the world agree that this partnership is worth keeping. They look for ways to make the partnership last and work better for all concerned.

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- Look at [Map 2, Shared Access to Jerusalem](#). Which quarter is likely to have the most visits from people of other faiths?
- Use the map to plan a route for a tour group from each of the religious faiths. Which group will have the most contact with people from other faiths? Which group is likely to have the least contact?
- Based on the map, what places in the Old City might have the most potential for conflict?
- What steps might leaders take to reduce misunderstandings and conflicts in the Old City?