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BUILDING BEYOND THE ARMISTICE LINE SINCE 1967 411
This book should be read, not only by travellers and potential travellers in Jerusalem, but by all of us. Jerusalem remains the most remarkable place in the world and Karen Armstrong is as good a guide as we could want.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

Jerusalem has cast more of a spell over the human imagination than any other city in the world. Held by the faithful to contain the mountain upon which Abraham offered up Isaac, the site of the Hebrew Temple, the hill of Christ's crucifixion, the tomb of the Virgin Mary and the rock from which the Prophet Muhammed ascended to heaven, the city has been celebrated and revered for centuries by Jews, Christians and Muslims. Karen Armstrong's elegant study of this most contested and beautiful of cities introduces us with eloquence and passion to a difficult and complex place, the crossroads, and too often battleground, of world's three greatest religions. It has never been more relevant than in this era of Middle Eastern conflict.

'A luminous history of Jerusalem... Armstrong's book, imbued with sympathy for all three religions, added to careful scholarship and deep knowledge of theology and history, is a triumph' LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS

Amazon reviews

Karen Armstrong has written a book which is both informative and enjoyable to read. She takes us from the first settlements in this area right up to the present day. She shows us how important the ownership of both land and buildings has been and is to the occupants of this city. Throughout its history there has been a struggle for ascendancy between Jews, Christians and Muslims. Various holy buildings have been demolished, added on to or built over as they have passed between the different religions. Not only disputes between the different faiths but also amongst the different Christian sects The author gives a very fair and balanced account and helps the reader, who may be looking at Jerusalem from a western Christian point of view, to have a better understanding of the Muslims position. She points out that when Saladin took Jerusalem from the crusaders the Christians were allowed to leave and were not slaughtered, even though this meant some of them left for the coast in order to carry on fighting I would say this book is essential reading for anyone hoping to understand the dilemma that Jerusalem poses today and how peace in the Middle East will only come when Jerusalem is at peace.

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While this is a superb, fair-minded and empathetic history of the city which will be enlightening to all except very knowledgeable specialists, it is at the same time Karen Armstrong's meditation on the "sacred geography" conceived by the three faiths in its spiritual and its material form. She is very sympathetic to and receptive of the spiritual ideals of all three faiths, and is dismayed by how so often they have all been debased by bitter rivalries (between as well as within religions), by demands for exclusivity and domination, as well as by the "idolatry to see a shrine or a city as the ultimate goal of religion". This is something the wisest theologians - few, alas, in number - have taught. At the same time, however, a material shrine is one expression of one's spiritual identity, so that the perceived threat or the destruction of a shrine - let alone expulsions and exile - are experienced as violations of one's spiritual identity. She shows that the potency of religious symbolism is such that even secular nationalism (to which she perhaps does not pay quite enough attention) has recourse to it. She shows how the best periods in the history of the city have been those few when the rulers of one faith or ethnicity have respected the faith, ethnicity and buildings of another. She is not optimistic that such wisdom is available in Jerusalem in the near future.

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A gripping book, that opened my eyes about the Jewish, the Christians and Muslims. I have learnt and understood more about this city with so much violence in its history and turmoil that affects us today. It should be compulsory for all politicians to read this book; all decent and pious people should also make an effort to read this fantastic book before attempting to understand the complexity of God and his "holy" City. If anything, the objectivity and effort of the author puts her above the ordinary scholars.
The story of Melchizedek’s meeting with Abraham may have been told first at the time of King David’s conquest of the city to give legitimacy to his title: it shows his ancestor honoring and being honored by the founder of Jerusalem. But the story also shows Abraham responding with courtesy to the present incumbents of the city, offering Melchizedek a tithe of his booty as a mark of homage, and accepting the blessing of a foreign god. Jerusalem does not figure at all in the stories of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, which became absolutely central to their faith. The biblical account of these events has mythologized them, bringing out their spiritual, timeless meaning. It does not attempt to reproduce them in a way that would satisfy the modern historian.