

# Session 2

## A Holy Land



Some people refer to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT) as the Holy Land. But what does that mean? 'Holy' has two meanings. It can mean something that is special to God or dedicated to serving God. It can also mean something or somebody that is perfect or pure in God's eyes.

The Holy Land is important in the history and stories of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. These three religions are called Abrahamic religions because Abraham (or Ibrahim as he is called in the Muslim holy book, the Qu'ran) is important in their story, and Moses, David, and Solomon are also important figures in all three. Christians, Muslims and Jews all believe in one God who created the world and cares about people, and all three religions believe we should pray, worship God, and follow God's teachings. All three religions have special holy places in IOPT, especially in Jerusalem. In IOPT, 80% of people are Jewish, about 14% are Muslim and 2% are Christian. In Jerusalem you will find sites which are important to each of these religions.



The Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third most important site for Muslims after Mecca and Medina. It is a very old building. The Dome of the Rock is a shrine near to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. It has a beautiful gold dome. Muslims believe you shouldn't draw pictures of God or holy people, so the mosque and the Dome of the Rock are decorated with geometric patterns. Many Muslims believe that their most important prophet, Mohammed (peace be upon him), was taken up into heaven from Jerusalem and then returned to earth in Mecca after talking and praying with the prophets in heaven. Muslims also believe that Jesus was a prophet and that he spent his last days on earth in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was the site of a temple that was destroyed in 587 BCE (Before the Common Era), rebuilt, and destroyed again in 70 CE (Common Era). When it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, it is said that just one wall was left standing. This wall is said to be the same wall that stands in Jerusalem today. It is called the Western Wall, or Wailing Wall, and many Jews go there to pray. Some people write prayers and put the folded paper into cracks in the wall. Jewish people believe that Israel is the land that God promised them. The Hebrew scriptures hold the same stories as the Christian Old Testament.



Christians believe that Jerusalem is where Jesus preached, where he was taken after his arrest, where he was put to death, and where he rose again. There is a special church called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the middle of Jerusalem, which is said to be on the site where Jesus died and was buried. A sepulchre is a small room or building where a dead body is laid. In Jerusalem, you can follow the Via Dolorosa, which means the 'sorrowful way', the path Jesus walked to the place where he was crucified.

Bethlehem is the town where the Bible says Jesus was born. Today, Bethlehem is a town in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. What other places in IOPT do you recognise from Christian Bible stories?



## Bible Link Luke 10:25-28

*Then a teacher of the law stood up. He was trying to test Jesus. He said, "Teacher, what must I do to get life forever?"*

*Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"*

*The man answered, "Love the Lord your God. Love him with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind." Also, "You must love your neighbour as you love yourself." Jesus said to him, "Your answer is right. Do this and you will have life forever."*

The 'Golden Rule' of loving all others as yourself is common to all religions, including Islam and Judaism as well as Christianity. I wonder what you think it means? How do we show that love? What did Jesus mean by 'neighbour'?

## Prayer

Creator God, who made all things, all people and all places, thank you that we can see signs of your goodness wherever we go. Help us to remember that your son Jesus isn't just a story. He lived and loved and laughed and learned just like we do and he understands just what life is like when we talk to him. Help us to follow Jesus' golden rule in all we do. Amen.

## Active Prayer

Use a map of your local area. Can you see places on the map where you might like to talk to God or spend time with God? Or places which you love for some reason? Maybe because you connect them with someone special, or they hold special memories, or they are just good places for praying. Stick a sticker in those places and thank God for them.

## Game

Sharing and working collaboratively is tricky sometimes but can be fun. Split into teams of about five. Each team should have a large sheet of paper and a matching set of felt tip pens or wax crayons at the far end of the room. The leader chooses one colour pen/crayon to give to the first member of each team (e.g. each team gets a blue crayon) and names a picture to draw (something like a beach scene or a farmyard scene would be good). The first runner runs to the paper and starts drawing something blue to contribute to the overall picture. After ten seconds the leader shouts "change" and the first runner swaps their crayon for a different colour, runs back to the team and hands the new crayon to the next runner, who runs to the paper and starts drawing something in that colour. Allow each runner a few runs before getting together to judge the pictures. (Ten seconds may be too short for younger players so you may choose to give longer.)

## Activity

Many holy buildings started life as just a stone or a pile of stones as a shrine or an altar. A shrine is a place where people go to worship because of its connection to a holy person or event, while an altar is a table (or just a big stone) where people would place gifts and offerings to God. Decorate some pebbles with pictures and words, using Sharpies or paints. Choose words and images of what is special to you about God or about the Golden Rule. When you have all finished you can put them all together like a shrine and take a photo. Perhaps you could reconstruct your shrine for the intergenerational celebration.



## Greta Wonders...

- Why might people from all around the world really want to visit Jerusalem and other places in IOPT?
- What else might the followers of Judaism, Islam and Christianity have in common?
- Why do you think most people (including us!) find sharing so difficult?

## Action Point

If there is a mosque or a synagogue near you, perhaps you could arrange to visit it or to meet up with a group of children who worship there. If you can't do that, watch these two videos: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mwxn> and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mx8x7>. How would you explain your faith, if you have one, to someone of a different faith? The more we learn about each other and understand each other, the easier it is to share and to care for each other.

