

## Tour of the Holy Lands - Olympia (Part 1)



Here we are in Olympia - birthplace of the Olympic Games! It's also the sacred place of the king of the Greek gods, Zeus. Ancient Olympia isn't visible to us today — it's buried beneath many grand trees. Even so, walking through this archeological site is like walking back in time to visit one of the most important sanctuaries in ancient Greece.

In ancient times, the Games were always held here in Olympia; in modern times, they are held all over the world. In 2016, the summer Games will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Olympics always start with a ceremony that features the lighting of the Olympic torch. A runner carries a flaming torch through the city to the site of the Games on Opening Day.



The runner's goal is the giant cauldron in the middle of the stadium. There, using his small torch, the runner lights the giant torch, which then lights up the whole sky and remains lit for the two weeks of the Games – all the way through the Closing Ceremonies.

How does the runner's small torch get lit? It's not with a match or a lighter. The flame begins right here in Olympia, Greece. In ancient times, eleven young women dressed in long white gowns came to this exact spot where once stood the temple of Hera, the wife of Zeus. There they lit the torch by means of a perpetual flame in her temple. "Perpetual" means it is always lit, day and night. Today, more than eleven women participate as "vestal virgins" in the dancing and lighting ceremony.



There isn't a perpetual flame in Hera's temple today. So where does the runner find the fire? One of the maidens brings out a huge bowl lined with a curved mirror. She holds the mirror up to the sun and when it heats up to a very high temperature, she touches the torch to the mirror and it flares up. How clever!





Once the torch is lit, the maiden transfers the flame to a torch carried by the first runner.





The torch briefly travels around Greece by means of short relay races, and then, after a ceremony in Athens in the spectacular Olympic stadium made of solid marble, it starts its long journey to the host city somewhere else in the world.





The torch is carried by a series of runners who have been given this great honor. Each runner is guided and protected by a lead vehicle. When the runner arrives in the next town, the runner passes the flame to a new torch carried by a new runner. The identity of the final runner is often kept a secret until the last moment, and is usually a sports star of the host country. The final torch bearer runs toward the cauldron, often placed at the top of a grand staircase, and then uses his torch to start the flame in the arena. It is a great honor to be asked to light the Olympic flame. The lighting of the torch in Olympia for next summer's Games will happen a few months before the Games begin.



Next summer, just before the 2016 Olympics begin, we'll take a closer look at the differences between the ancient Games and our modern ones.

Plus, we'll continue to follow the Apostle Paul as he finishes his journey through Greece.

It's been another wonderful summer of travel with you. We look forward to seeing you again next June!