

# JERUSALEM

***“The glory of the world is Eretz Israel; the glory of Eretz Israel is Jerusalem; the glory of Jerusalem is the Holy Temple.”***

Ramban (Nachmanides) – 1268

***“Ten measures of beauty descended to this world. Nine were given to Jerusalem and one to the rest of the world.”***

The Talmud

***“You also find that there is Jerusalem above corresponding to the Jerusalem below. For sheer love of the earthly Jerusalem, God made himself one above.” Elsewhere these words are placed in the mouth of God himself: “I will not enter heavenly Jerusalem until I have entered the earthly Jerusalem first.”***

The Talmud

***“Next year in Jerusalem!”***

The end of the Passover and Yom Kippur Services

***“Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the centre of the nations, with lands around her.’”***

The Bible - Ezekiel 5:5

***The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the {other} dwelling places of Jacob.***

The Bible - Psalm 87:2

Jerusalem is the centre of world attention. Although in the early 1800s Jerusalem was still a small town in the heart of a rural district, with a population of just 8-10,000 souls, it is now the focal point of international tension and conflict.

What are the conflicting claims of the Jewish people, the Arab world, the Church and major world powers to this city, and what significance do they have to the concerned Christian? Can Israel legitimately claim an undivided Jerusalem as her capital; do the Palestinians have a just claim to the same city; what stake does the Christian church have in this city where Jesus died and rose again; and what will be the future of this the most hotly contested city on earth. Does it matter who owns it?

## JERUSALEM AND THE BIBLE

Jerusalem (or Zion) is a major theme in the Bible. It is first referred to as “the place which the LORD your God chooses” (20 times) until the designation changes to “Jerusalem”, which itself occurs 811 times plus 161 times as Zion, a total of 972 times. It is abundantly clear that God chose Jerusalem. **“... Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen from all the tribes of Israel to put His name there.”** I Kings 14:21 **“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.’”** Zech 1:17

God chose Jerusalem for some purpose central to His purposes both for Israel and for all peoples, and not only for this world, but for the age to come. It was the city of King David and capital of ancient Israel, the place for His Temple, and the place where in due time Jesus died and rose again and from which He ascended. It will, after His return, become the centre of a world government under the Messiah <sup>1</sup> from which the Word of the Lord will go forth <sup>2</sup>, and finally, at the end of time as we know it, merge into the heavenly Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> This glorious future for Jerusalem is also clearly spoken of in the Old Testament, in the prophet Isaiah. <sup>4</sup>

The prophetic scriptures <sup>5</sup> clearly foretell a final climatic battle around Jerusalem before the coming the Messiah and the salvation of Israel as a nation. In view of God’s choice of Jerusalem and her key role in the coming of the Messiah, the redemption of the Jewish people and the Messiah’s reign on earth, it is no wonder that Satan is focusing his venom on that city, and is pressing his counter claim to ownership in an attempt to frustrate God’s purposes.

## JERUSALEM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Jerusalem has been continuously inhabited by Jewish people for the past 3,000 years, in fact ever since its conquest by King David. By virtue of continuous occupation, the Jewish people have an unassailable claim to this city. It has never been the capital of any other nation, least of all any Arab/Moslem nation. It has only ever been a capital of a sovereign Jewish state.

When, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was under the heel of Muslim (Turkish or Jordanian) powers it was allowed to remain in a decayed state, and under Jordanian rule from 1948 to 1967 was divided, deliberately mutilated and its synagogues destroyed and graves desecrated. The Arab concern for and care of Jerusalem can be judged by the description of the Old City by Mark Twain in 1869 in his *“The Innocents Abroad”*:

***“Rags, wretchedness, poverty, and dirt, those signs and symbols that indicate the presence of Moslem rule more surely than the crescent flag itself, abound. Lepers, cripples, the blind, and the idiotic assail you on every hand ... Jerusalem is mournful,***

***and dreary, and lifeless. I would not desire to live here.”***

During the nineteen years of Jordanian rule, a motor road was built through the Mount of Olives Cemetery, tombstones were used as building materials, the Tomb of Simon the Just was used as a stable, and the synagogues of the Old City were demolished or desecrated<sup>6</sup>.

However after its return to Jewish hands in June 1967 its loving restoration commenced until now it is a city of beauty, a restoration in which Arabs have benefited as well as Jews.

***“Suspended between heaven and earth, Jerusalem is a city in which the spiritual and the temporal have always been inextricably intertwined.”***<sup>7</sup>

Conquered by David it became from 1000 BC the political and religious capital of the Jews. There was continuous Jewish occupation until its destruction in 70 AD. Although the Jews were forbidden by law to enter Jerusalem, pilgrimages were resumed the moment Roman vigilance relaxed, and in the third century they became so common that a leading rabbi remarked: “Anyone who wished to go up to Jerusalem may do so.”

Over the succeeding decades and centuries there were always Jewish inhabitants. By 1554 there were some 1,000 Jews in the city, about 3,000 in 1621, and around 5,000 by the mid-17th century. By 1844 they numbered over 7,000 and were the largest population group of the city’s 15,000 inhabitants. In 1890 the number of Jews had increased to 25,000. By 1947 the Jewish population had reached 100,000, about two thirds of the total population, the remainder being composed of Christians and Moslems. By 1967 Jerusalem’s population comprised 200,000 Jews and 70,000 Christians and Moslems. In 1976 it comprised 264,000 Jews and 92,000 Arabs (Moslem and Christian).<sup>8,9,10</sup>

The Jewish love for Jerusalem is a reflection of God’s choice of and love for that city, and, despite the non-religious attitude of the majority, can only be properly understood in that light.

***“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget {her skill}. May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.”*** Psalm 137:5-6

### JERUSALEM AND ISLAMIC CLAIMS

In the 2,545 years between 587 and 1967 Jerusalem was conquered more than 20 times, and during these conquests was ruled from many different, often distant capital cities. In all this period of history Jerusalem has served as a capital city for the Jews (650 years), the Crusaders (188 years), and for the State of Israel since 1948<sup>11</sup>. In other words,

whenever Jerusalem has been a capital over a period of 2,574 years it has always been a Jewish capital, apart from 188 years of Crusader rule. Jerusalem has never been an Arab/Islamic capital. Even when occupied by Jordan between 1948 and 1967 it was never made the capital of a Palestinian entity, and King Hussein never even visited it.

***“Jerusalem is the capital of the state of Palestine whether someone likes it or not, and whoever does not like it, let him drink from the sea of Gaza.”*** Yasser Arafat, Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, 6 August 1995.

***“The Palestinian people are prepared to sacrifice the last boy and the last girl so that the Palestinian flag will be flown over the walls, the churches and the mosques of Jerusalem.”*** Yasser Arafat 6 September 1995.

The signing of the Peace Treaty with the PLO in September 1993 brought about a huge surge of anticipation among the Palestinians that a Palestinian state would soon be a reality, with Jerusalem as its capital. PLO flags were to be seen flying from many walls and buildings in the Old City. Ambiguous statements by the then Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin and Shimon Peres certainly bolstered this anticipation. However, how real are the Arab/Islamic claims to Jerusalem?

A great deal of clarification is required as regards the conflicting claims to Jerusalem. In the first place, it has become common among both Jews and Christians (and of course repeated by Moslem leaders) to affirm that Jerusalem is holy to all three monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Indeed Canon Naim Ateek of St George’s Cathedral in Jerusalem has written: “One needs to recognise that Jerusalem is a city holy - equally holy - to Judaism, Islam and Christianity” and then goes on to argue that because of this the city should be internationalised and become the federal capital of a United States of the Holy Land, comprising Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, and thus become the “city of the One God”<sup>12</sup>.

The echoing of this assertion by well meaning Jewish people greatly weakens the Jewish claim to Jerusalem. Christianity’s claim to Jerusalem as a city central to its life and existence has been much more tenuous especially as major sections of the church have taught that the Church has replaced Israel and earthly Jerusalem has been replaced by the Heavenly Jerusalem. Historically Rome has been presented much more strongly as the ‘capital’ of the Church. The Islamic claim is of shorter duration and is based not on historical fact, neither on the Koran, but on Islamic myth (note A) and, most important, as a result of military conquest. The relative claims of the three religions are by no means equal, and the only real claim is that of the Jewish people.

Whilst it may be true **politically** that Jerusalem is now assuming an important, and indeed prominent, place in the Islamic world, this has never, in fact, been the case

historically or theologically. The reality has been, instead, that there were no links between early Islam and Jerusalem. All the evidence combines to suggest that the city has only ever loomed large in Muslim sensibilities when it has not been under Islamic control. When it has been, it has not been a pilgrimage centre or a focal point at which Muslims choose to gather for prayers.

The emotional force with which Jerusalem is claimed to be holy to Islam is actually derived from its triumphalist resentment of Jews and Christians. Whilst this may validate the non-historical and mythical basis of Islamic claims **for Moslems**, those working from the facts of history and a Biblically based view of history and epistemology must reject them as unsound and derived from political manipulation.

In Sura 17 of the Koran we read “Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque the precincts of which We have blessed ..”<sup>13</sup> Another translation reads, instead of ‘the Further Mosque’, ‘The Far Distant Place of Worship’.<sup>14</sup> Muslims also believe that Muhammad rode to heaven at night on his horse from the rock on which the Dome of the Rock now stands.

The Koranic verse referring to ‘the Further Mosque’, or ‘The Far Distant Place of Worship’, was never initially taken to refer to Jerusalem, and might well have meant ‘heaven’.

The long Arabic inscription on the Dome of the Rock (which is over 230 meters long) represents a polemic against Christianity, and contains many Koranic verses but not the very verse dealing with the Prophet’s nocturnal journey. To many orientalists this proves conclusively that when the Dome of the Rock was built (in 692), sixty years after Mohammed’s death (in 632), the ‘farthest mosque’ or temple mentioned in the Koran was not then identified with Jerusalem, nor was the Prophet’s nocturnal journey perceived as having taken him there from Mecca.

In the 8th century, when the al-Aksa mosque was built, Jerusalem was still not called ‘al-Quds’ the holy one. It had an Arabic form of its old Latin name. At least until the 11th century the Dome was not used for Friday prayers at all, rather ceremonies occurred on Mondays and Thursdays, this Jewish practice being accompanied by Jews lighting candles, preparing oil lamp wicks, and cleaning the sanctuary. The Dome for some time seems to have functioned simply as a shelter from the weather! Jerusalem as a focus of Jihad is a very different proposition than merely as a focus of Islamic sanctity. For example, under Jordanian control (1948-1967) endowments to the Waqf Moslem authorities dropped, and the figure is far less than that for the period since the Six Day War.

Pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Ziyara - journey) has no status equivalent to the Haj to Mecca or Medina. In a statistical survey Eliyahu Tal<sup>15</sup> has drawn attention to the very few

Arab accounts of journeys over the centuries to Jerusalem, when compared with those of Christians and Jews who were obliged to travel much further and at far greater danger than Moslems.

The conclusion seems clear. In the course of history a pattern emerged, showing that as long as Jerusalem was in Muslim hands, its sanctity was of relatively small significance to Islam. As well as having no historical foundation in fact, Islam's claim is non-historical. Its violent emotive force must not be allowed influence, status or credence. For it is based upon lies and a spiritual assault upon the God of the Bible.

## REFERENCES

1. ***“Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.”*** Zech 14:16

2. ***“And many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.” For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”*** Isaiah 2:3

3. ***“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer {any} sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be {any} death; there shall no longer be {any} mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”*** Rev 21:1-4

***“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”*** Rev 21:10

4. ***“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem {for} rejoicing, and her people {for} gladness. I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying. No longer will there be in it an infant {who lives but a few} days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be {thought} accursed.”*** Isaiah 65:17-20

5. Zechariah 12-14

6. *Jerusalem Illustrated Atlas* Martin Gilbert p.103

7. “*One Jerusalem*” Yael Guiladi p.1

8. *ibid* p.7

9. *Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century* Yehoshua Ben Arie p.351-8

It is also of interest to note the following relative populations of various religious groups:

YEAR	JEWS	MUSLIMS	CHRISTIANS	TOTAL NON-JEWS
1870	<b>11,000</b>	6,500	4,500	<b>11,000</b>
1900	<b>35,000</b>	10,000	10,000	<b>20,000</b>
1910	<b>45,000</b>	12,000	13,000	<b>25,000</b>

The Jewish population fell during World War One, to recover and increase again after the cessation of hostilities. (*Jerusalem in the Nineteenth Century* Yehoshua Ben Arie p.358)

10. *Jerusalem Illustrated Atlas* Martin Gilbert

11. *Ibid* p.119

12. “*Justice and only Justice*” Naim Stephan Ateek p.173

13. *The Koran* translated by A. Arberry (OUP)

14. “*The Glorious Koran*. An explanatory translation by Marmaduke Pickthall (Dorset Press)

15. “*Whose Jerusalem*” by Eliyahu Tal (1994).

## ADDENDUM

Bible facts concerning Jerusalem:

Jerusalem occurs 811 times in 764 verses in whole Bible. The first occurrence is in Joshua 10:1

Jerusalem occurs 142 times in NT (Matthew 12 times; Mark 11 times; Luke 32 times; John 13 times; Acts 59 times; rest of NT 14 times)

Jerusalem always means the literal Jerusalem, except for 6 occurrences where it means the heavenly Jerusalem (2 in Galatians; 1 in Hebrews and 3 in Revelation)

It occurs in every OT book except Ruth, Job, Proverbs, Hosea, Jonah, Nahum and Haggai.

It is first referred to 20 times as “the place which the LORD your God chooses” (19 times in Deuteronomy and once in Joshua 9:27). At Joshua 10:1 the designation changes to Jerusalem.

Zion occurs 161 times in whole Bible of which 7 are in the NT.

## CONCLUSION

There is increasing world pressure on Israel to yield up her sovereignty over Jerusalem which is due in large measure to the militant claims of the Islamic world. In their desire to prevent at all costs a middle east conflict which would upset the agenda for a “New Middle East” as part of a New World Order under a One World Government, the major powers of the world governments will do all they can to bend Israel to their will. The place of Jerusalem in God’s final plan of blessing for the world means that Christians should obey the biblical injunction to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem”, and to that end stand against all expressions of anti-Zionism. God plans to bless all peoples, including and especially the Arabs, through Israel.

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