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Images and Visions of New Jerusalem



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Jerusalem - Hope for Humanity

Introduction

Heavenly Jerusalem has always been a special place, and with good reason: For two thousand years, this city has been honoured and sought out by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. These three world religions have a very close connection to Jerusalem, and New Jerusalem is above all a place that is closely interlinked with apocalyptic concepts. It is to be a future place of peace, justice, community and togetherness. All that is evil and unjust is to be banished from it. That is why in all three monotheistic religions Jerusalem is a holy city. This is what makes it stand out and transforms it into a special place of hope. Often – far too often – these hopes have been disappointed and Jerusalem has appeared more as a place of mourning and tears. But we should not forget that there is also another image of Jerusalem. It is this image we will examine in this book.

Let us begin with Judaism, which has had a particularly ancient and intense relationship with Jerusalem. Approximately one thousand years before Christ, King David conquered a small town belonging to the Jebusites, which had once been located on the site of the modern city of Jerusalem. In 1006 BCE David elevated this town to become the symbol of the twelve Israelite tribes. Ultimately, this symbol encompassed the people, the nation and finally the Jewish faith itself. God Himself had chosen Jerusalem as “His” city (Jeremiah 31:34-39 and 33:14-26). It was here

that the patriarch Abraham spoke to God, and it was here that Solomon built his Temple. Jerusalem is mentioned 669 times in the Tanach (the Old Testament), and Zion (which is usually equated with Jerusalem) is mentioned a total of 154 times. No city is mentioned nearly as often in the Scriptures. In the Talmud as well, there are numerous mentions of Jerusalem as being of special importance for Judaism: Jerusalem is not only a holy city, but also the holiest of all cities, the centre of the world and the place from which the world is ruled by God. Here one is close to Heaven, for it is in this place that the End Times will begin.

Particularly in the rabbinical tradition, a separate idea of a Heavenly Jerusalem came into being: It is the earthly Jerusalem which will one day be transformed into a new, Heavenly Jerusalem, while not entirely yielding up its previous character and condition. There is always something of the future Jerusalem contained in the earthly one. For this reason, Jews from the entire known world have made pilgrimages to Palestine. As the saying went: "He who has not celebrated the Sukkot festival in Jerusalem has not lived." For this reason, for thousands of years Jews from all over the world have arranged to have themselves buried on the Mount of Olives, for according to the prophets Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zacharias, this is the place where the Last Judgement is to take place.

This explains how the memory of the city of Jerusalem was cultivated in the Diaspora. Every year at their Passover festival, Jews repeated the words: "Next year in Jerusalem!" And this was not only a pious wish, since Theodor Herzl's political Zionism attracted many followers, who actually returned to Palestine and above all to Jerusalem. That is why in the twentieth century Jewish artists expressed a new, Heavenly and future-pointing Jerusalem in their works. We

can see this in the creations of Reuven Rubin, Jean David, Menucha Yankelevitz and David Yohanan.

Above all, a conception developed surrounding future events. Earthly Jerusalem would become a new, Heavenly Jerusalem. This notion is naturally linked to the appearance of a future messiah, who would of course appear in and reside in Jerusalem. In Judaism, a number of apocalypses emerged depicting Jerusalem as the site of future events, as a place of religious promise, and as the New Jerusalem. One of these texts, which was particularly influential among Jewish Christians in the first century ACE, was the Apocalypse of St John.

In Christianity as well, Jerusalem has become a unique place of hope: It is the place where Jesus Christ visited and taught, where he died at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and where he finally rose from the dead and then ascended into heaven from the site of the Chapel of the Ascension atop the Mount of Olives. Here the spirit of God was and remains present and has spoken to men and women. Here was laid the cornerstone of the Church, and Jerusalem has always been an archetype of the Church. Here was formed the very first Christian protocongregation in peace and justice - a kind of reflection of Heavenly Jerusalem. Mount Zion and the "City of the Living God" are expressly identified with Heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews 12:22. It is a positive place, a kind of end-of-days paradise: Here, following the end of the world, humankind and Creation will live united with God. In the final chapters of the Book of Revelation, everything is described, all the way down to a detailed description of how the city will one day look: "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of

heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel... Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass.”

This central reference text would later become a motivation for the crusaders to conquer Jerusalem in order to come closer to Heavenly Jerusalem. They, like the Jews, also regarded Jerusalem as the *umbilicus mundi* – the geographic centre of the world. Today, when we speak of “orientation”, we are actually referencing the word “orient” as the starting point for Jerusalem on world maps, the alignment of churches to the east (Jerusalem) and, finally, Jerusalem as the direction of prayer.

Countless groups of pilgrims have flooded to Palestine since the Middle Ages for the sake of terrestrial and celestial revelation. Later on, entire Christian groups migrated to Jerusalem in order to seek their fortune there. One of these is depicted in the novel “Jerusalem” (1901/02) by the Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf, who became the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Particularly in the religious movements of the seventeenth century and pietism in the eighteenth century, Jerusalem became a

great, transdenominational utopia of hope for Christianity, as seen both by theologians and by “simple” people of faith, whose hard everyday lives were rendered more tolerable by faith and hope in Jerusalem. Up to recent times, New Jerusalem has served as a shared reference point for both Catholics and Protestants: In the Catholic hymnal of 2013, the section entitled “The Heavenly City” (no. 549-554) contains the bulk of the songs, including the originally Lutheran Hymn, “Jerusalem, thou city built on high”.

Visitors of all denominations are frequently overwhelmed when they enter the gates of the Old City. Some among them succumb to a holy ecstasy. There is now even a technical term for this phenomenon: The “Jerusalem Syndrome”. But artists, builders, architects and painters have also been fascinated by this city and have depicted New Jerusalem in myriad ways. Whether they have presented it as an ancient mosaic, as a wall-filling mural, as a radiant stained glass window, or in any of a number of different other ways: Heavenly Jerusalem has been immortalised surprisingly often. One need recall only the masterpieces of Albrecht Dürer, William Blake and Henri Matisse. We should also mention the Seventh Day Adventists, for no other Christian community has created as many images of the New Jerusalem as this originally North American church. It comes as no surprise that there are powerful Christian fundamentalist movements in America that have transplanted the coming of New Jerusalem to their own new continent. One religious movement in particular – the Mormon Church – has made this notion into a central tenet of its faith.

And what about Islam? The Arabic name for Jerusalem is “Al-Quds”, which means “the holy one”. Originally, the Prophet Mohammed and his first followers directed their prayers towards Jerusalem (Qibla) as a reference to

Heavenly Jerusalem. It would one day be the residence of the Mahdi, and it is written: “May he who wishes to see a piece of Paradise look to Beit al-Maqdis/Jerusalem.”

Surah 17:1 in the Quran states: “Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed.” This surah interprets Islamic tradition and theology as an ecstatic and visionary ascension to heaven: In the year 610, the Prophet Mohammed was transported from Mecca to Jerusalem. There, from the later Dome of the Rock, he was further raptured into heaven, where he met with other prophets of Islam (including Abraham, Moses and Jesus). While, in later traditions, this nighttime ride on the horse Buraq was embroidered with wonderful events, the core of the story is simple: There is no direct path from Mecca into heaven. The mandatory stopover is and remains Jerusalem.

At the time of the Syrian Umayyad caliphs, who particularly promoted the rocky shrine atop Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, an Islamic literary genre celebrating the “virtues of Jerusalem” arose: They proclaimed this city to be of indescribable splendour and full of wonders. This was also an effort to inspire Islamic warriors to liberate the holy sites from the crusaders. This fada’il literature, mainly by Abu Bakr al-Wasiti and Ibn al-Murajja, spread in the tenth and eleven centuries and underscores the significance of the city for Islam worldwide. Even today, countless shops and restaurants belonging to Muslim proprietors are adorned with two pictures: One depicting Mecca and the other depicting Jerusalem.

Claus Bernet

Berlin, December 2018

Jerusalem: A Jewish view

Shalom,

Jerusalem - a city name that arouses feelings like no other. We can already read about Shalem, meaning Jerusalem, in the Bible. Jerusalem is the ultimate source of blessings for the Jewish people, and it has remained so for thousands of years. In Jewish prayers, Jerusalem is mentioned every single day. "Please return us to Jerusalem" is our daily prayer.

Why, one might ask, does Judaism focus so much on Jerusalem? It was in this city that the Jewish Temple stood, and Jewish people from across the world flooded in to worship God.

Within its walls, Jerusalem harbours extremes for people of different cultures and religions. As the renowned poet Chaim Gouri stated: "In Jerusalem, suffering and glory lie close together."

The name of Jerusalem is mentioned more than 600 times in the Tanakh, the written Tora. The name Jerusalem means utter reverence. When one visits Jerusalem, one experiences utter reverence for God's greatness. Jerusalem has always offered the Jewish people protection, and for generations it has been a foundation of consolation and reliance for communities and individuals alike.

When one is in Jerusalem, one senses one's connection to the Creator, and one longs to come closer to Almighty God. That is what makes Jerusalem so remarkable.

Jerusalem may be as old as Judaism itself. And yet, when one walks through its streets, one experiences a modern, positive energy that provides strength and vitality to oneself, for life today, as well as a source of encouragement for the future.

For this reason, I congratulate the author of this book, Claus Bernet, for this tremendously significant undertaking, for this wonderful publication on Jerusalem. I hope that it may serve countless visitors as an inspiration, and I pray that peace may forever rest upon the gates of this unique city.

With God's blessing,

Rabbi Yehuda Teichtal

Berlin, Heshvan 2018

Rabbi of the Jewish Congregation of Berlin
Chair of the Chabad Jewish Educational Centre

Jerusalem: A Christian view

On days when my sleep is light, I wake up early. In the earliest dawn, the call of the muezzin resounds in my ears. From the minarets, it rings out across the entire city. Allahu akbar. God is great and Mohammed is his prophet! At this early hour of the morning, Muslims are invited to turn to God in their first prayer of the day.

On days when my sleep is deeper, I slumber through the call to prayer and wake up somewhat later. Then it is the crow of a rooster that awakens me. Behind our flat next to the Church of the Redeemer in the Old City of Jerusalem stands the home of an ultra-Orthodox Jewish congregation that raises roosters and chickens for the great Day of Atonement. In Kapparot – chicken-swinging – on the eve of Yom Kippur, the fowl dies an expiatory death. Then the crow of the rooster is silent for several weeks.

But sometimes I even miss out on the crow of the rooster. Then I am awakened by the clatter of bells. Barely two hundred metres from our bedroom window, the Greek Orthodox monks strike the bells of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in traditional fashion. Several times a day, they invite the faithful to the site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus in order to celebrate the liturgy.

Jerusalem is a unique resonance chamber of religions, an incomparable resonance chamber of the religious spirit. This place radiates an immense fascination that has found its expression in the Holy Scriptures. For millennia, this city on

the hill has been sacred to the adherents of the three world religions. Jews, Christians and Muslims live here side by side. Others focus their longing on this place from a distance. They are all present, and they all have the right to be here with their own diverse stories, which, in their origins, are tightly woven with all the others.

This book by Claus Bernet represents a statement. In its consistent focus on the traditions of the three above named world religions, the book represents a statement for an encounter across religious boundaries, for mutual recognition and understanding, for mutual respect and tolerance. This applies all the more, since behind the façade of the sublime city there rages a struggle for the right to exist, for self-assertion and influence. Nothing happens here without political implications. Demarcation serves to strengthen one's own identity. That is why a view of the whole, which is the concept behind this book, is all the more important.

If one wishes to do Jerusalem justice, one has to meditate it. The diversity and multidimensionality of the Holy City calls for a broad view, and for a tranquillity and leisure that one frequently seeks in vain within the city itself. So what could be better suited than the language of images and poetry so as to become inspired to embark on such a meditation! The pages of this book reach out their hand to us and lead us down into the treasure troves of religious traditions that have sought a linguistic and visual expression of the Jerusalem "phenomenon". They show us something of the expression of that faith (and scepticism) that has been directed toward this pilgrim destination in images and words across the centuries. "Images and Visions of New Jerusalem" represents a rich treasure that must be discovered attentively. In perusing its quotations, and viewing its pictures, one can discover many commonalities extending

beyond religious boundaries. At the same time, the differences and specific approaches of the three religious orientations also become visible. The collected wealth of these gems astonishes me as a reader.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:1-2)

In the final book of the Bible, New Jerusalem shines forth as a place of hope for the healing of the nations. In its quotations and pictures, “Images and Visions of New Jerusalem” reflects something of this splendour. It encompasses everyone: Jews, Christians, Muslims and more – the entire world.

Provost Wolfgang Schmidt,

1.12.2018

Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem

Jerusalem: A Muslim view

The Temple Mount experienced its golden age in the era of the venerable prophets David and Solomon (may the peace and blessing of God be upon them). It is from this period that the Wailing Wall – although not in its original form – has been preserved. It is sad to observe how, over the course of history, a place of light and joy has become a place of sorrow. We Muslims call Jerusalem el-Quds, meaning the Pure One – a purity that humankind has stained with hatred and the lust for power. I thus gladly recall moments of peace in this city and derive hope from them.

I recall Umar (died in 644), the friend of the Prophet Mohammed (may the peace and blessing of God be upon him), when he assumed responsibility for the city of Jerusalem in 638 CE. Umar deliberately offered his prayers outside of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and justified his decision by saying that he feared Muslims might transform the church into a mosque in order to commemorate his person. As a Muslim, he sought to make use of this gesture in his own way so as to protect and preserve the Holy Sepulchre.

I remember Sultan Saladin (died in 1193), at whose grave in Damascus Kaiser Wilhelm II (died in 1941) would later stand and say he was “deeply moved by the thought of standing at the place where there had resided one of the most chivalrous rulers of all time, the great Sultan Saladin, a knight in shining armour, who frequently had to teach his enemies the true meaning of knighthood.”

I remember Süleyman the Magnificent (died in 1566), who placed the following inscription on one of the city gates of Jerusalem: “Lā ilāhe illāʾllāh ibrahīm halīluʾllāh” – “There is no God but God, and Abraham is the friend of God!” He thus did not choose to emphasise the differences, but rather the commonalities among Jews, Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem.

With these thoughts in mind, this book permits a very different way to address the issue amidst the fervour of the current political debates surrounding Jerusalem. It opens the gates of art, culture and literature, adorning them with pearls from and about Jerusalem. In doing so, it shows us that this wonderful city is the home of all three Abrahamic religions. This approach gives us hope for the future and helps us better cope with the chaos of our feelings.

Imam Kadir Sancı

Berlin, 25th May 2018

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Among the ten miracles of Jerusalem was the fact that no one was hurt, no fire ever broke out, and no house ever collapsed.

Avot de-Rabbi Nathan is a rabbinical commentary in two main versions on the Mishna Avot and is included among the non-canonical tracts that were printed in the annex to the Babylonian Talmud, normally as an annex to the Neziqin (ARN 35, 103).