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JERUSALEM: JERUSALEM IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

Jerusalem both personifies and symbolizes the “sanctity of place” for all religions deriving from or responding to biblical scripture. The thousands of religious expressions, movements, sects, cults, and new religions that have emerged within the “clusters” or categories referred to as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were born of spiritual environments that were formed, in part, through the paradigms established by the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The multifarious expressions of these religious institutions can even be described as part of a general “biblicist” civilization. Some might call this a “scriptural” religious civilization, but other religions include literatures that have sometimes been described as scripture. The generally accepted or paradigmatic concept of scripture itself is strongly influenced by Western biblical paradigms. In any case, this heterogeneous, biblicist religious civilization contrasts with other religious civilizations, for example, those deriving from Hindu-Buddhist or Confucian roots.

Whereas the religious impulse and regard for the sacred may be universal among humans and the social groups they form, each particular expression is shaped in limited paradigmatic ways that are themselves informed or shaped by cultural, intellectual, and symbolic context. The complex symbolic contexts through which the broad array of religious expressions noted above communicate their theologies and traditions include the authoritative symbolism of the Bible.

Jerusalem, therefore, because of its biblical centrality, serves as a definitive image and symbol of sacred place. But what is the origin of its sanctity? According to Mircea Eliade, sanctity of place reflects a hierophany or eruption of the sacred. This is something associated with a place that demonstrates it is not like just any other place. Whatever becomes associated with the sacred place causes that place to transcend the mundane nature of other places and puts it in the realm of the sacred (Eliade, 1954). Thus Jacob, after his dream of angels, realized that the place where he was laying was no ordinary place. He acknowledged this realization by changing its name from the mundane appellation of Luz to a name acknowledging the sacred, *Beth El*, meaning “abode of God” (*Gn.* 28:10–19).

The sacred nature of a place may also originate in something extraordinary in its physical nature. Extraordinarily large or beautiful trees, mountains, geological formations, or geothermal phenomena have all demonstrated or symbolized the transcendent, thus sacred, nature of places.

The sanctity of Jerusalem probably originates from the abundant flow from its natural source of water, a bountiful

spring situated among barren desert hills. The spring is called *gihon* in the Bible (*1 Kgs.* 1:33, 38, 45; *2 Chr.* 32:30, 33:14), the root meaning of which conveys the meaning of bursting forth. The salvific waters of the desert spring thus burst forth in an unlikely place, attracting attention as a place of life-giving, transcendent power and meaning. The special nature of the spring is clarified by the use of the same name, *gihon*, for one of the rivers leading out of the Garden of Eden (*Gn.* 2:13); the nature or symbolism of the spring was powerful enough that it became the place wherein Solomon was anointed king of Israel (*1 Kgs.* 1:33ff.).

ISRAELIZING JERUSALEM. Jerusalem was an important and, most likely, sacred place long before the Bible takes note of it. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century BCE Execration texts mention Jerusalem, as do the late Bronze Age El-Amarna letters. But Jerusalem was not an Israelite city in those days; rather it was an Amorite and then Jebusite city. *Genesis* chapter 14 probably refers to Jerusalem (*yerushalayim* or *yerushalem*) when it places Abraham in or within the vicinity of a place named Shalem. Abraham encounters there a priest-king named Malki-Tzedek (meaning “king of righteousness”) who is both the king of Shalem (*melekh shalem*) and priest of Great El (*kohen le’el ’elyon*).

Some eight centuries later, at the end of the eleventh century according to the biblical account, David conquered the Jebusite city known as *yevus* (*1 Chr.* 11:4–8; cf. *2 Sm.* 4–9), and Jerusalem became the political and religious capital of the people of Israel.

It is unlikely that the choice of Jerusalem was merely an arbitrary political decision (Smith, 1987, p. 86), given other hilltops in the Judean Hills that might have made a more effective fortress and Temple site. While the choice of place attributed to David certainly had a political component, in order to be effective it required a trans-political unifying element to be recognized as a capital of a dozen, often unruly, disparate tribes. The unifying element appears to have been an inherent aura of sanctity associated with Jerusalem. It became the site of the Temple and the center of the religious cult, and this centrality is attested by the abundant biblical poetry associated with Jerusalem in psalms of thanksgiving, victory, and mourning. Jerusalem served as the symbol of universal hope among the prophets, and its broken ramparts personify the bereavement of Israel and, by extension, humanity as a whole. As the location of the Temple, Jerusalem symbolizes the location of God’s indwelling, the earthly center of the divine presence.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Jerusalem’s sanctity, however, is that all of the most authoritative biblical depictions of hierophanies occurred elsewhere. God’s most powerful revelations occurred at the Red Sea and Mount Sinai, both outside of Jerusalem and even outside of the biblically defined Land of Israel. The theophanies described in relation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob occurred in Elon Moreh (*Gn.* 12:6), Eloney Mamre (*Gn.* 13:18, 14:13), 18:1ff.) Gerar (*Gn.* 20), Be’er Sheva (*Gn.* 21:32ff., 26:23f), Moria (*Gn.*

22:2), Luz/Beth-El (*Gn.* 28:10–29), and elsewhere. In fact, aside from the uncertain and enigmatic reference in *Genesis* chapter 14, Jerusalem is never even mentioned in the Torah (Pentateuch), the symbolic, literary, and religious core of the entire Hebrew Bible. The many deuteronomic references to “the site which [God] will choose” (*Dt.* 12: 5, 11, 21, 26; 14:25, and 15:6) do not refer specifically to Jerusalem, and the binding of Isaac in the “Land of Moria” is only associated with Jerusalem in the Second Temple period (*2 Chr.* 3:1). The prophets also received their messages outside the walls of Jerusalem.

This problem is resolved according to traditional Jewish and Christian commentators and theologians in a variety of ways that claim the primordial, divinely established prehistoric sanctity of Jerusalem for Israel. From the historical perspective, however, it must be noted that Jerusalem did not come under the full and consistent control of Israel until David, who lived in an era that is much later than that depicted in the Pentateuchal narratives. Jerusalem was chosen by David to be the political capital of an often-fractious group of tribes. It was not only the politically neutral nature of Jerusalem, located outside the established tribal areas, or the supposed geographic centrality of the city that caused it to become the capital of Israel. It was also the previously recognized pre-Israelite sanctity of the place that served to make Jerusalem an acceptable unifying symbol for the people of Israel. This is a noteworthy detail. To be precise, despite the Bible’s consistent condemnation of Canaanite religion and the repeated command to destroy its ritual “high places,” it was exactly such a place that became the most sacred space for Biblical religion. Jerusalem thus represents an early example of a sacred place that transcends cultural and religious boundaries. Ironically, perhaps, it was the pagan, non-Israelite sanctity of Jerusalem that made it not only an attractive place, but also a unifying center for the people of Israel and its emerging expressions of monotheism.

The challenge for the national record that would become the Bible was how to make the political capital of the Davidic chief-kings into the spiritual capital of a national religion whose memories of divine intervention all occurred elsewhere. Some of this process can be gleaned from the complex and layered writings of the Bible itself. One of its most powerful witnesses is the repeated reference in *Deuteronomy* (12:5, 11, 21, 26; 14:25, and 15:6) to an as-yet-unknown place where God will choose to cause the divine presence to dwell, the subtext of which is obviously Jerusalem. The authority of the divine word to Moses as depicted in *Deuteronomy* establishes Jerusalem even without specifically naming it, and David’s and Solomon’s divinely based authority as depicted in *2 Samuel* and *1 Kings* served to authenticate the priority of Jerusalem over Samaria and any other contending centers. The program was successful and Jerusalem would become the undisputed center, both physical and spiritual, for virtually all Jewish- and Christian-based religious movements, and one of the earliest and most important centers

for religious expressions merging into and deriving from Islam.

THE EXTENSION OF SANCTITY. Just as the sanctity of Jerusalem moved across the religious boundary from Canaanite to Israelite religion, so would it become an important and perhaps necessary part of the sanctity that would define subsequent biblicist religious institutions. The defining act of the Crucifixion that would both symbolize and epitomize Christianity had to occur there, and even the divine authority of Jesus was established by his association with the holy city (*Lk.* 13:33–35). But the essential nature and meaning of Christian Jerusalem was not the same as Israelite Jerusalem. It had to be transformed in order for it to be a central and empowering institution for Christianity (*Mt.* 21:10–14). Jerusalem became spiritualized and delocalized in the early Christian context and therefore among its many derivative expressions. It is a “new Jerusalem” (*Rv.* 3:12), a “heavenly Jerusalem” (*Gal.* 4:26, *Heb.* 12:22), detached from the essentially defiling nature of physicality.

Similar to Christianity, the expressions of Judaism that emerged following the destruction of the Temple and the end of Jewish political power would also redefine the nature of the city, and their redefinition would find deep parallels with their sister Christian expressions. Although Jews, unlike Christians, would mourn the physical destruction of the city and its Temple (Babylonian Talmud [B.T.]: *Mo'ed Katan* 16a), and pray daily for its rebuilding in future days, Jewish Jerusalem also became largely spiritualized (B.T.: *Baba Batra* 75B, *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Pequdey*) and it became, among other things, the gateway to heaven (*sha'ar hashamayim*) (*Pirqey deRabbi Eli'ezer* chapter 35).

Islam, too, would become deeply associated with this holy city, despite its preferential feeling for the sacred places of its origin in the Hijaz of west-central Arabia. As in the case of David and Solomon, the kings of Israel and Jesus, Muḥammad's divine authority was established through his personal association with Jerusalem (*Qur'ān* 17:1). But unlike the cases of these former personages, Muḥammad's entire mission took place in Arabia and not in Palestine.

From the perspective of the historian and student of religion, Muḥammad's association with Jerusalem is precarious, but from the perspective of the believer, it is deeply established and foundational. Anchored onto the first verse of the seventeenth chapter of the *Qur'ān*, known as the “Night Journey,” the biographies of Muḥammad found in the *ḥadīth* and interpretive literatures prove his association with Jesus and the prophets of Israel in the holy city. Muḥammad's night journey to Jerusalem (*al-isra'*) was not an end in itself, however, for the narratives always include his ascension (*mi'raj*) through Jerusalem, the gateway, to heaven. Although finding many parallels with Christian and rabbinic traditions, the Islamic association with Jerusalem remains unique. After arriving in the holy city (Arabic, *Al-Quds*), Muḥammad leads the other prophets in prayer; and through Jerusalem, the gateway to heaven, the Prophet en-

ters and ascends the seven levels until he reaches the lotus tree beyond which no one can enter. At this highest level, Muḥammad receives a number of divine gifts, including divine guidance and knowledge of the divine will. These gifts guide him and authorize his *sunnah* or personal behavior to become the highest norm for Muslims throughout the world and throughout history. The record of Muḥammad's divinely guided *sunnah* was recorded over the centuries in an authoritative literature known as the *ḥadīth*, the most authoritative religious literature of Islam and second only to the *Qur'ān*. All of this is authorized and authenticated through the acknowledged sanctity of Jerusalem, the holy city.

EMERGING MONOTHEISMS AND THE SYMBOLIC POLEMICS. Rodney Stark, in partnership with William Sims Bainbridge and Laurence Iannacone, has demonstrated how successful emerging religions invariably adopt symbols of previously established religions and use them to establish their own credibility (Stark and Bainbridge, 1966). In other words, newly emerging religions that fail invariably fail to integrate the symbolism of established religions and put them to their own use. The exact nature of Jerusalem's sanctity prior to the Davidic conquest of the city is unknown, but it is clear that the Bible took great pains to ensure that Jerusalem was recognized as sacred, particularly for the emerging religious institutions of Israel. At first Jerusalem provided a special credibility to the centralization of Israelite worship in the Temple. Later the Temple established the sacred nature of Jerusalem. Attempts by factions such as the Samaritans to compete with Jerusalem through the sanctification of other sacred sites failed, and Jerusalem became symbolic of authentic monotheism. Jerusalem was the Temple and the priesthood. As the location of the indwelling presence of God, Jerusalem became the center of the universe. By the pre-Christian Roman period of control, the sacred nature of the city was known throughout the Mediterranean world.

In order for Jesus' death and resurrection to have an impact as a significant and authentic event on the populations of the Eastern Mediterranean in the first centuries CE, they had to have occurred in Jerusalem, as *Luke* 13:33–35 makes clear. The numerous other prophets and messianic figures known to have missions in other places from that period all failed. But Christianity, as opposed to biblical religion, quickly moved away from the old Near Eastern model of religion centered around a physical sacred place. It required “ownership” of Jerusalem for its success, but physical ownership was impossible for the most formative period of its existence. It therefore spiritualized the symbolism of the holy city for Christianity and thus controlled it. No new physical Temple would be rebuilt for the True Israel (*verus israel*), that is, Christianity. The Temple of Israel became the Universal Church.

Early rabbinic Judaism, the most successful form of Judaism emerging from the ashes of the Second Temple destroyed by Rome, was ambivalent about the sanctity of Jerusalem's physicality. It found substitutes for animal sacrifice

in family home ritual and for the priests and prophets in the rabbis or in all the Jewish people, but it also longed for the Temple and prayed that it be rebuilt. When Christianity won the spiritual battle for the Roman Empire in the fourth century, it became necessary for Christianity to demonstrate its absolute hegemony through the symbolism of Jerusalem. This was accomplished by shifting the spiritual focus of the city from the Temple Mount symbolizing the old Israelite/Jewish religion, to the Holy Sepulchre symbolizing the essential act of Christianity: the passion and resurrection of Christ.

To emphasize these intentions, the Byzantine rulers of Jerusalem made the Temple area into the city dump. The polemics of this statement could not be clearer. God had demonstrated through history the divine rejection of Judaism and the Jews on the one hand, and the divine love for Christ and his followers on the other. Jewish Jerusalem was impure and filled with refuse, whereas Christian Jerusalem was sublime. But whereas the physical sanctity shifted westward toward the Holy Sepulchre, it took on less of the sanctity of place that was so clearly exemplified by the Temple.

When the armies of the Arab Conquest reached Jerusalem in 638 CE, according to legend they were appalled at the condition of the Temple Mount. The caliph 'Umar himself rolled up the sleeves of his robe and led his people in a clean up of the sacred Temple precinct. It became known later in Arabic as the Sacred Precinct (*al-haram al-sharif*), and some of the old sanctity of place was renewed. To the conquering Arabs, Jerusalem was the city of the prophets, the most powerful and universal symbol of monotheism. Islam would then claim its hegemony over both Judaism and Christianity with the erection of a magnificent monument, symbolic of the purity and superiority of what it claimed as the most perfect expression of monotheism and the divine will. That construction was not a mosque, but rather a monument celebrating the presence and success of a new faith. Grabar described the Dome of the Rock, completed in 691 CE, as "the first consciously created masterpiece of Islamic art" (1986). Only later, next to this testimonial structure, was begun the monumental construction of the al-Aqsa mosque.

SACRED OFFSPRING. Although the sacred spring may have first brought attention to the place known as Jerusalem or *al-Quds* ("the holy"), there is no absolute certainty about the origin of Jerusalem's sanctity or an "original" Jerusalem, only that its sacred nature predates the Israelite occupation. Like other sacred places, Jerusalem emerged from the shadows of ancient days and acquired meaning that evolves and changes through the ages. The personality and significance of the place in the days of the Amorites and Jebusites has been lost, and, although the Hebrew Bible provided meaning and significance at a later time, the "Biblical Period" of Jerusalem itself spanned centuries and represents many distinctive political, cultural, social, and religious communities, none of which exist today. The spiritual offspring of those communities live today as Christians, Jews, and Muslims, and all have

claimed to epitomize if not personify the true Israel or the pure and primordial monotheism of the biblical Abraham. Each has maintained that it is the true embodiment of God's religion. As such, each claims an exclusive right to Jerusalem, the symbolic center of monotheistic sanctity.

The sacred nature of Jerusalem continues to exert its pull in modern and postmodern history. It has become the symbol of Jewish nationalism known as Zionism, the "Zion" of which is a biblical appellation for Jerusalem (*I Kgs.* 8:1; *Is.* 2:3, 4:9, 10:32, 52:1; *Ps.* 102:17). Jerusalem has become the symbol of Palestinian nationalism as well, a nationalism that has become increasingly Islamic and religious in nature. In this regard Christianity differs existentially from both Judaism and Islam in that it no longer considers itself a religious peoplehood, though the Crusades are witness to this sentiment in some premodern Christian expressions.

At least since the 1930s, but increasingly so after 1967, new prophets have found their way to Jerusalem. A phenomenon called the "Jerusalem Syndrome" takes hold of anywhere from a dozen to a hundred or more individuals per year, mostly tourists but occasionally locals as well, who believe that they are prophets or messianic figures. The behavior of those caught up in the fervor varies, but often includes bathing or engaging in some kind of ritual purification, dressing in white, and engaging in bizarre but usually harmless behavior. They are treated in a psychiatric duty hospital and are generally released after four or five days.

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