



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 2, Folder 25, "Jerusalem" [statement before the Near East Subcommittee of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs], 28 July 1971.

STATEMENT ON "JERUSALEM" BEFORE THE NEAR EAST SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PRESENTED BY
RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM OF NEW YORK, JULY 28, 1971, WASHINGTON, D.C.

My name is Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum of New York City. I serve as National Interreligious Affairs Director of the American Jewish Committee. The views which I present in this testimony are personal, although I should like to feel that they represent a broad sentiment within the Jewish community.

In accepting the invitation of the Chairman, Congressman Lee Hamilton, to testify at this hearing, I did so with the understanding that my role is that of a religious spokesman and a student of religious history. I am not here as a political figure from whom formulae or proposals for the political resolution of the status of Jerusalem and attendant issues are to be expected. In the last analysis, that responsibility should rest on the principal parties involved whose governments and leaders have the authority and competence to negotiate such mutually acceptable terms. Since the lives of thousands of persons who have their daily existence in the city of Jerusalem are involved in the outcome of such political arrangements, it would be a presumption and even mischievous on my part - especially since I am not a citizen of Israel nor of Jordan - to pretend at playing foreign-ministry-in exile.

Nevertheless, it is self-evident that Jerusalem is unique among the cities of the world, with special although differing claims on the religious and cultural sentiments and loyalties of millions of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Therefore, it should be profitable to seek to clarify the nature and meaning of those commitments and their implications for the adherents of the three great monotheistic religious communities. As I indicated in my letter of acceptance, I take part willingly in these hearings in the hope that they will contribute in some measure to the depolarization of tensions in the Middle East, the overcoming of hostilities and misunderstandings, and above all, to the building of a common ground on which constructive policies and programs can be shaped for the welfare of all the people - Muslims, Christians, and Jews - in that region, and to their eventual reconciliation as sons and daughters of the Covenant of Abraham. After some 20 years of mutual recrimination and isolation, if the People's Republic of China and the United States now find it possible to begin a rational dialogue looking hopefully toward co-existence and mutual acceptance, is it too much to hope that such a breakthrough might become possible between the Arab and Israeli nations and peoples?

I

This coming Saturday evening (July 31st), the Jewish people throughout the inhabited world will observe Tishoh B'Ov, the ninth day of the Jewish month of Ov. Tishoh B'Ov is the most important of four historical fast days in the Jewish liturgical calendar that commemorate events connected with the destruction of the ancient Temple and of Jerusalem.

According to Jewish tradition, it was on the ninth day of Ov in the year 586 BCE that the first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. On the same day six hundred fifty-six years later, 70 CE, the second Temple was burned by Titus and his Roman legions. In the year 135 CE, the Second War of Independence against the Romans, with the Jewish forces under Bar Cochba and Rabbi Akiba, ended with the fall of fortress Bethar on the ninth of Ov. By tragic coincidence, the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 also began on this "black-letter" day of Jewish history, resulting in thousands of Jews seeking refuge in the Holy Land. In our own time, a great catastrophe is bound up with Tishoh B'Ov; on that day in 1914, Russia ordered the mobilization of her armies, and the World War started. A year later, Czarist Russia evacuated all Jews from the border provinces, and a period of great catastrophe began for East-European Jews, who still remember that their misfortunes began on Tishoh B'ov.

The fast of Ov is marked by all the rigor of the Day of Atonement. Among traditional Jews, Tishoh B'Ov is preceded by three weeks of mourning, during which all celebrations are forbidden; one is not allowed to cut one's hair; bathing is forbidden; no meat is eaten; no new clothing is to be put on. At the final meal before the fast, on the eve of Tishoh B'Ov, some Jews dine on hard rolls and eggs, sprinkling the eggs with ashes, a ritual associated with mourners after funerals.

After the meal, Jews go to their synagogues, which are dimly-lighted; they sit on low benches or on boxes; they wear slippers and pray like mourners with bowed heads. They read from The Book of Lamentations, purportedly written by the prophet Jeremiah, who foretold and witnessed the downfall of Jerusalem. Then kinos (dirges or odes of mourning) are recited by the worshippers over the passing of the Temple and the religious and national life of which it was the symbol and the embodiment. The closing section of the kinos express the Jewish people's longing for the Holy Land and contain prayers for her speedy restoration. After mid-day on this fast, oriental Jewish women anoint themselves with fragrant oils, for it is believed that this is the birthday of the Messiah, who will arise out of despair and bring consolation to his people.

That ritual, reenacted annually for nearly 2,500 years by

Jews dispersed in every part of the world, speaks more persuasively than academic tomes of the centrality of Jerusalem in the religious and folk consciousness of the Jewish people. How does one explain the persistence and tenacity of the attachment of the Jewish people to Jerusalem? The answer in large measure must be looked for in the Jewish religion and Jewish history. All of the Biblical writers looked to Jerusalem as the essence of the meaning of their faith, life and hope. As Prof. Shemaryahu Talmon, a leading Biblical scholar now teaching at Harvard University, has observed ("The Biblical Concept of Jerusalem," The Journal of Ecumenical Studies, July 1971), "The city name Jerusalem is mentioned in Hebrew Scriptures some 750 times. Zion appears 180 times. There are several hundred more references to diverse appellations of the city, such as, Mount Moriah, City of David, City of Juda, Temple Mount, Holy City, Shalem, etc. Altogether there must be some two thousand mentions of Jerusalem in the Hebrew canon." The number of references is even greater in inter-testamental literature and in Rabbinic writings.

"The word count," Prof. Talmon states, "reveals to us the focality of Jerusalem in biblical thought. The plethora of references discloses the importance of the city and the ideas connected with it in the minds of the biblical authors and their audience alike" as it developed and grew over a thousand years.

Historically, the association of the Jewish people with Jerusalem dates back to the Patriarch Abraham, the founding father of Judaism. Abraham had a two-fold relationship with Jerusalem: one located in a political context arising out of the war against the five foreign kings who had invaded Canaanite territory to fight against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14); and one establishing the religious character of Jerusalem through the Patriarch's building of an altar on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22) for the sacrifice of Isaac at God's behest. This two-fold significance of the city was projected into the days of the Davidic kingdom.

Initially, Jerusalem had served as a foreign cult place (Genesis 14:2; Samual 24:18-25) inhabited by Canaanites, and later ruled by Jebusites. In the late bronze age, there was nothing to indicate the city's destiny as a national and religious focus. It was through the actions of David that the "foreign" city was transformed for the first time in its history into the capital - "the metropolis" - of the Jewish kingdom. Jerusalem became a new unifying political center for the Israelite tribes whom David had set out to weld into one nation. ("And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem," I Chronicles 11:4). By transferring the ark of the covenant from Kiryat Ye'arim, the shrine of Shiloh, to Jerusalem, and by laying the foundations for the building in Jerusalem of the Temple dedicated to Israel's God,

David endowed the city with the status of the chief sanctuary of Israel, "the place which the Lord Thy God shall choose to put his name there" (Deutoronomy 12:21). David thereby made Jerusalem the cornerstone of the religious and cultic unification of Israel. The concept of Jerusalem as "the holy city" dates from this time.

"It is extraordinary," comments the noted Anglican historian, Dr. James Parkes ("Whose Land: A History of the Peoples of Palestine") "how quickly Jerusalem became in the national thought of the Jewish people not just a symbol of unity but an embodiment of the whole conception of the covenant relationship between God, land, and people." David, who remained for all subsequent history, the ideal of a Hebrew king, and the prototype of the expected Messiah, more than any other individual associated with it, is the father of city as it has evolved in history. Fittingly, he was buried within its walls, and his tomb remains a venerated shrine, as it has been for Jewish pilgrims across the unbroken centuries.

In the period of Israel's unity under David and Solomon, the Jewish nation experienced an unprecedented state of political glory, economic achievement and religious splendor. It is for this reason that Jerusalem as the capital of the realm became a beacon of well-being and success for future generations. Late

Biblical and post-Biblical Judaism made the idealized image of that historical Jerusalem the keystone of their hope for a national and religious renaissance. Ultimately, they perceived in it the prototype of the New Jerusalem, the very fulcrum around which turned their messianic and eschatological aspirations.

THE "HOLY CITY"

The depth of Jewish feeling towards Jerusalem as "the holy city" of Judaism is reflected in the fact that in the Midrash of the Rabbinic sages the terms for the Temple and Jerusalem were used interchangeably. The City, as it were, constituted a broader extension of the Temple itself. It is the whole circumference of the city which is held, and will be held, holy.

During the first Temple period and the early days of the second, Jewish law permitted the consumption of the edible portions of the sacrifices offered by individuals within the Temple area only. (This applied to peace offerings and the paschal lamb). Now, however, their consumption was permitted throughout the entire city (Talmud Zebachim V8).

Jerusalem acquired a sanctity of its own. Laws were enacted which accorded legal status to the holiness of the city and defined the implications of this status as they affected all of Jewry. To protect the holy city from defilement, practices were instituted which meticulously regulated life within it. The dead

were not to be buried within its walls. Streets were swept daily. Those eating of the Temple sacrifices were thereby protected, and could confidently rely upon the ritual purity of Jerusalem.

In the mind of the Jewish people, as well as in actual practice, Jerusalem became an integral part of the Temple and identical with it. Highly instructive is the fact that a half-shekel was collected each year from every adult male Jew in Palestine and the Diaspora, and the proceeds were used for the public sacrifices. But this revenue not only covered all the expenditures of the Temple, such as the remuneration of the judiciary and of the Torah-scroll proofreaders, but also paid for the maintenance of the "city wall and the towers thereof and all the city's needs". (Talmud, Tractate Shekalim, IV:2).

In distinction from other religions that have invested their reverence for Jerusalem on particular localities or sites which are connected with specific events in their religious histories, Judaism has sanctified the city as such. In doing so, Judaism has kept alive the significance attached to Jerusalem in the Bible, and that has been of decisive importance for the significance attached to the Holy City in Jewish tradition until this very day.

Rabbi Tanenbaum

THE "HEAVENLY JERUSALEM"

The aspiration to see the Temple in all its purity and splendor and, after its destruction, to witness its restoration which finds expression in the vision of the heavenly Temple, gave rise to the longing and yearning for the heavenly Jerusalem. The idea of a heavenly Temple or city is connected with the idea of ultimate redemption, of the end of the days, and in the deepening of religious feeling awakened by the Temple and the holy city. This is expressed by the Rabbis in the language of the Midrash (Tanhuma Pekudei, Sec.1)

"And so you find the Jerusalem above directly opposite the Jerusalem below. Because of His great love for the earthly Jerusalem, He made another above...and so David said, Jerusalem thou art builded as a city that is compact altogether." (Psalms 122·3).

In the wake of enemy incursions, desecrations, and destruction, the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem acquired a new significance for it now constituted a source of consolation and hopeful confidence in ultimate rehabilitation and reconstruction of the nation. In contrast to the concept that the heavenly Jerusalem is to come down to earth, Talmudic literature expresses the view in the remarks of Rabbinic sages that the heavenly Jerusalem will remain forever ensconced above, while the earthly Jerusalem will be reconstructed with human effort. The two cities will, however, maintain a close connection with one another. As Rabbi Johanan said, "The Holy One, blessed be he, declared: 'I shall not enter the Jerusalem which is

above, until I enter the Jerusalem which is below.'" (Taanit 5a). This concept follows logically from the view that the Divine Presence, the Shekhinah, departs into exile and suffers along with Israel, and that the perfection of the heavenly worlds can only be restored with the redemption of and reconstruction of the earthly Jerusalem by human hands.

Normative Judaism thus was less concerned with the meta-historical "heavenly Jerusalem" than with the historical "New Jerusalem" which, in the main, Jewish eschatology portrayed as an improved edition of the historical Jerusalem of the Hebrew Scriptures. The fervent hope for a future restoration of Jerusalem which signifies the glorious revival of the nation became the vision of Jewry throughout the exile. Linked with the eschatological picture of the ultimate and final peace for all mankind the era of eternal peace to be inaugurated in Jerusalem, was the ongoing hope of Jewry for an imminent restoration of Jerusalem as a renewed center of national worship and an imminent source of rejoicing and well-being. Even eschatological Jerusalem, as presented for example by Jeremiah (31:38-40), is envisaged in the boundaries of earthly Jerusalem as it had been in Biblical times.

THE THREE RELIGIONS

Thus far I have concentrated on the meaning of Jerusalem to Judaism and the Jewish people. The Holy Land, and in particular, the Holy City, have mothered however two religions, Christianity as well as Judaism, which in turn possess a unique relationship to a

third, Islam. Though the immense majority of Jews and Christians have long ceased to dwell within its narrow frontiers, and it was never a primary Islamic homeland, yet to none of the three has it become a matter of indifference. But the interests of the three religions differ in both emphases and intensity.

Christianity has become indigenous in many parts of the world; it is represented by strong Christian states. There is nowhere a desire of homeless Christians to return to the original land of their religion. Yet its holy places have been a constant attraction for Christian pilgrims, and their protection and maintenance has been a religio-political interest of Christian powers at many periods of history. For two centuries there were efforts of Christendom, again half religious and half economic and political to regain the land by force, and the crusades have left a permanent mark on the country.

The Jewish interest has been both more intense and more complicated. For Jewry has nowhere established another independent national center, and as is natural, Jerusalem and the land of Israel are intertwined far more intimately with the religion and historic memories of the Jewish people. Indeed the bonds with Jerusalem are uniquely a necessary part of the Jewish religion - its past, present and future. The connection of the Jewish people with Jerusalem and the land has been of much longer duration - in fact it is continuous from the second millenium BCE up to modern times. Only the defeat by Rome, and the scattering by imperial force of the Jewish population made a decisive change politically in the history of the land.

Nonetheless, the realities of Jewish history during the nineteen centuries of exile are misrepresented without acknowledging the impressive existence of Jewish communities in the land itself throughout the centuries. In Jerusalem itself, as Arthur Hertzberg has pointed out ("Israel and Palestine," IDOC, Oct., 1970) "whenever the barest possibility existed, even under hostile powers, enough Jews were to be found to cleave to Jerusalem that, across the centuries, theirs was the largest continuing presence in the city." Thus, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, since 1844, a half-century before the first stirrings of modern Zionism, Jerusalem has been the one city in the Holy Land which has consistently had a Jewish majority in its population.

Jewish religious literature is more intimately connected with its history, its climate, and its soil. In the daily prayers of the Jews to this day one of the benedictions of the silent devotion is a prayer for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. In the grace which Jews say after every meal, morning, noon and night, the third benediction reads

"And rebuild Jerusalem, the holy city, speedily and in our day, blessed art thou, O Lord, who builds Jerusalem." All synagogues throughout the Jewish world, from the first synagogue in antiquity to those being erected this very day, have been built in such fashion that they face toward Jerusalem. To be buried on the Mount of Olives, no matter where one dies, has been regarded for two millenia as the surest hope of the resurrection, and bodies were being returned from Rome some two thousand years ago for that purpose. To participate

in the rebuilding of Jerusalem was the hope of the ages.

Jerusalem and the land therefore have provided an emotional center which has endured through the whole of the period of "exile" and has led to constant returns or attempted returns in every century, culminating in our day in the Zionist movement.

Jerusalem and the land is not in the same sense the homeland of the third religion with whose history its own is intertwined. The homeland of Islam is Arabia. In Jerusalem stands the third holiest shrine for Muslims throughout the world.

From the Arab conquest until the British mandate it was never even a name on the political map of the world. It was a portion of some larger unity, whether Arab, Mamluk, or Turkish, and its people were never conscious of themselves as a national unit, nor did they ever attempt, as they had done in early and later Israelite days, to form an independent kingdom. During the long period of Islamic rule, with its kaleidoscopic changes of dynasty, no claimant to the throne of caliphs, or even to a separate sovereignty, ever emerged from its population. It was the alternate prey of dynasties ruling from Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, or Istanbul. Only in the 20th century has it resumed a separate identity, and that initially by the will of outsiders rather than that of the will of its own population.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

All the major Biblical faiths have deep interests and continuing involvements in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, but they are not

exactly parallel. There is need for an objective assessment of the moralities involved in the entire situation, and as Arthur Hertzberg has wisely observed in his essay, "we must get our moral priorities in the right order."

A viable Jewish people in the land of Israel, and the restoration of Jerusalem to its natural condition as a unified city, is indispensable to the survival of the Jewish spirit and ethos in our age. An Arab sovereignty in Palestine, and in particular over that part of post-partition Palestine which is now Israel, accompanied by the unnatural bisection of Jerusalem, is not vitally necessary to the survival and creativity of the whole of Arab national culture and history, or of the Islamic faith. The great centers of Arab continuity and survival are elsewhere.

Once the survival of the land and people of Israel, and their reconstituted national capital, are accepted as the moral good of the first order, it then becomes possible to say that the immediate next order of moral concern is that justice be done to the claims of Palestinian Arabs, short of such action as would result in the end of the Jewish state or the exposure of Jerusalem to the desecrations that it suffered during the 19 years of Jordanian occupation.

The Christian interest in the Holy Land, as Prof. George Williams of Harvard recently formulated it, involves religiously solely the question of free access to the holy places, and the security and stability of the Christian populations in Jerusalem and in Israel. Once these interests are satisfied, Christians go beyond their religious competence and enter into the realm of politics in which they have no standing as ecclesiastical bodies.

As groups of Christian authorities both in Israel and the United States have recently testified, never has there been such free access to the holy places as since 1967 when Jerusalem was reunified under Israeli jurisdiction. On June 27, 1967, the Israeli Knesset passed a law for the protection of the holy places. On July 1, 1971, Israeli Foreign Minister reported that some two million dollars have been given to 17 Christian bodies in compensation for damages inflicted from 1948 to 1967 due to the wars initiated by the Jordanian Government. Proposals for extra-territorialization or for some other form of autonomous control over holy places by Christian and Muslim institutions is being explored actively now between their representatives and the Israel government. One can only hope that the recently intensified pressure campaign launched by some church authorities will not be responsible for inhibiting the possibilities for genuine resolution of this question.

With regard to the presence of Christian communities in Israel and the charge that they are being "suffocated" by Israeli housing projects, it is instructive to look at some statistics. During the time of the Jordanian occupation subsequent to the Jordanian invasion in 1948, there was a sharp drop in the number of Christians in Jerusalem.

Year	Jews	Moslems	Christians
1948	100,000	40,000	25,000
1967	195,000	54,000	10,800
1970	215,000	61,600	11,500

It is now evident that some 20,000 Christians emigrated from Jerusalem during that period of Jordanian occupation and that it has come to a halt since 1967. Against the background of the mounting departures of Christians from such Arab countries as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Libya, it seems that the Christian community in Israel has become one of the most stable and flourishing.

A recent report we have received from a reliable non-governmental source on the housing situation in Jerusalem disclosed that a great tempest was made in a teapot. The hovels in the Mograbî Quarter that were removed as part of what we here would call a legitimate and necessary "urban renewal" program were owned by a Moroccan foundation that received five to six times the rate of rent from the Jerusalem municipality for relinquishing its slum properties. The 110 Arab families were provided new housing far more expeditiously than I have seen poor blacks relocated in Manhattan. In the Jewish quarter of the old city, 112 dunams (28 acres) were reclaimed in order to resettle Jewish families in property that belonged to them that the Jordanian Arab Legion had expropriated in 1948. Some 3,000 Arab families have been compensated, and relocated in superior apartments to those they occupied in the Jewish quarter, in which Jews had lived for 700 years. The only large inhabited area taken across the former "green line" was a Jewish one - the Mamilla Road and the old commercial center complex opposite Jaffa Gate in what had been the Israeli sector of the divided city. Here some 350 Jewish families and 300 Jewish-owned businesses will have to relocate to make way for expanding central business district. While

urban renewal programs are never simple in any major urban development program, so much controversy was occasioned around these developments that it seems necessary to caution that judgements be constantly tempered by a full awareness of accurate facts if an atmosphere conducive to dialogue is to be kept open and trustworthy.

Abba Eban's words are an appropriate summary of this testimony: "The city (Jerusalem) is open to the constructive initiative of Jews, Christians, and Moslems the world over in the furtherance of its development, especially of its cultural and spiritual assets, and in increasing the number of institutions and enterprises testifying to the city's historical uniqueness and special mission of promoting faith, progress and peace. Should Christian and Moslem circles, to whom Jerusalem is dear, manifest initiative of their own, it will be welcome and they will benefit from Government support just as they have been benefitting up to now."