

JERUSALEM A CITY OF WAR AND PEACE AND HOLINESS... A SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

Rabbi Adam Rosenwasser, enlighten in this paper the place of Jerusalem as a city of war and peace and holiness from a Scriptural perspective. The *Rabbinic midrashim* support the biblical text and explain the holiness of the City of Jerusalem from a Judaic perspectives. The readers of this paper will discover the different Jewish images of Jerusalem and will understand how Jews have related to this very special place throughout the ages.

Key words: Jerusalem, Rabbinic *midrashim*, Jerusalem City of war and peace, Jerusalem City of Holiness, Jerusalem in the Jewish tradition.

Introduction

Jerusalem holds a beloved and complicated place in Jewish tradition. Of the many different images of this awesome city which exist, four are especially noteworthy: Jerusalem as a city of war and peace, a city of holiness, a city of mourning, and a city at the center of the world. Each image appears in an early form in the Hebrew Bible and is then reinforced in later Rabbinic *midrashim*, stories which serve to explain and expand upon the biblical text. By examining these different Jewish images of Jerusalem, the reader will understand how Jews have related to this very special place throughout the ages.

Jerusalem a City of War and Peace

An early mention of the city in the book of Jerusalem lists the city along with many cities which are to be conquered by Joshua and the Israelites as they enter the land of Canaan after their forty years of wandering.

"And Tzela, Elef, and the Jebusite (city)- it is Jerusalem, Givat, K'riat, fourteen towns

1 rabbi_rosenwasser@betham.org

and their villages, this is the portion of Benjamin by their families".²

Jerusalem, along with other cities, is scouted out by a leader of the tribe of Benjamin. It is not given any special meaning or status. Its name simply appears alongside the other cities as a target of conquest.

By the time of King David however, Jerusalem has taken on a much greater role than simply as a city to be conquered. The book of Second Samuel describes the Davidic Monarchy. Chief among its descriptions of King David is his conquering of Jerusalem and the relocation of his capitol from Hebron to Jerusalem.

David was thirty years old during his reign (when he became king) and for forty years he reigned. In Hebron he was the king of Judah for seven years and six months and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty three years over all of Israel and Judah. The king and his men went to Jerusalem to the Jebusites the dwellers of the land. And they said to David, "Do not come here because the blind and the lame will make you go back saying, "Do not come here, David." And David captured the fortress of Zion which is the City of David. And David said on that day, "All shall strike the Jebusites and approach the water-channel. The lame and the blind are the haters of David. That is why they say the blind and lame don't come to the House." And David resided in the fortress and called it the City of David and David built around it from the Milo toward the house. And David was strengthened, and Adonai the God of Hosts was with him.³

A question which this text does not answer is why David wished to move the monarchy from Hebron to Jerusalem. The biblical text does not give insight into David's decision, but one possibility, solidified by the assertion in Joshua that Jerusalem was situated in the tribe of Benjamin's territory, is that by David conquering Jerusalem, he became not only the ruler of Judah, but also the ruler of Benjamin or the House of Israel in general. Moving from Hebron to Jerusalem gave the king and the monarchy more power. This text asserts that notion, stating that David now reigned "over all of Israel and Judah".

Joshua begins the process of conquering the city, invoking fear in the local leaders. However, it is David who makes Jerusalem the capitol city of both kingdoms and it is during his time that the king and the city gain in power and stature.

It is known that Jerusalem is a city with a long history of war and strife. However, the Rabbis, in certain *midrashim*, prefer to focus on Jerusalem as a place with potential for peace. In fact, they point to the strange etymology of the place to attempt and define it as a place where peace is entirely possible.

"And Melchitzedek, King of Salem, brought forth bread and wine (Gen 14:18)." *Melchitzedek means that this place caused its inhabitants to be righteous. Another*

2 Joshua 18:28

3 2 Samuel 4:4-10.

interpretation: "And the King of Tzedek (Joshua 10:1). Jerusalem is called "tzedek," as it is written, "Tzedek (righteousness) lodged within her (Isaiah 1:21)".⁴

This one small explanation of the origin of the city's name is rather complex. Jerusalem is clearly identified with Salem, the city named in Genesis. As a result, Salem becomes one half of the city's name. Beyond that, however, Melchizedek, as the gift-bearing King who goes out to greet Abraham in peace, is portrayed as a righteous resident of Jerusalem. Melchizedek's name connects righteousness and a peaceful offering with the city. In the second part of the *midrash* Jerusalem itself is known as *zdedek*, as the place of righteousness, and the proof text used is from Isaiah. So this one text both claims that Jerusalem makes people righteous, and also that Jerusalem is the epitome of righteousness itself. What becomes clear from this text is that according to this particular author, Jerusalem is the "*righteous city*".

A second Genesis Rabbah⁵ text attempts to figure out the origins of the naming of the city, but does so in a very different manner. The previous *midrash* plays with linguistic commonalities, while this next *midrash* takes two episodes from the Bible and pulls them together into one coherent narrative:

"Abraham called the place appointed for the Temple "yi'reh" because he knew it would be the abiding place for the fear of God. But Shem gave it the name "shalem," or place of peace. God did not want to offend either Abraham or Shem, so the Holy One, Blessed be He, united the two names, calling the city "yireh-shalem," or Jerusalem".⁶

This text seems to be a Divine compromise between two different visions of the city. Shem, one of Noah's sons, sees it as a place of peace. Perhaps it also represents to him a new place of wholeness, following the destruction wrecked by the flood. Abraham, traumatized by the experience he has just gone through on the mountain, believes that this place represents fear. Clearly, the texts on the naming of Mount Moriah⁷ demonstrate that the Rabbis believe contradictory things about its naming and perhaps its very essence. Jerusalem can represent opposing ideas; a place of wholeness but at the same time, a place of fear. God names the city Jerusalem, and in doing so, establishes this city as a place both of peace and of fear and war. Both exist and both elements find their way into many other *midrashim* about the city.

4 Genesis Rabbah 43:2.

5 Genesis Rabba is a religious text from Judaism's classical period. It is a *midrash* comprising a collection of ancient rabbinical homiletical interpretations of the Book of Genesis (B'reshith in Hebrew).

6 Genesis Rabbah 56:1.

7 Mount Moriah is the name given to a mountain range by the book of Genesis, in which context it is given as the location of the sacrifice of Isaac.

Jerusalem a City of Holiness

Jerusalem has always been the holy city of the Jewish people. In Judaism, holiness is often equated with something separate, set apart, or different. In a previously analyzed *midrash* on King David, for example, the monarch declares that the blind and the lame may not enter the city because of its special status. This theme occurs elsewhere in the Bible, in the Book of Isaiah, equating holiness with uniqueness.

*Awake awake! Dress in your strength, Zion/ Dress in the clothing of your splendor/ Jerusalem the Holy City/ For no more will they come to you again/ uncircumcised and impure. Arise from the dust, rise/ sit Jerusalem/ Open the bonds from your neck/ captive daughter of Zion.*⁸

Here, Jerusalem is personified and told to garb herself in robes of splendor. There is also an allusion to the Second Samuel text describing David's conquering of the city. Just as King David would not let the lame or blind into the city, now it is the uncircumcised and impure who cannot come. Isaiah's vision of the city here seems to be that she should be a place of purity where every person follows the particular laws set out in Torah and which the prophets demanded must be observed. Another interesting point in the text is that Jerusalem is directly referred to here as, *ir ha-kodesh*⁹, the Holy City. The descriptions of David's conquering and Solomon's building the city certainly allude to Jerusalem being a special and unique place, but this text makes it abundantly clear that Jerusalem carries with it a status seemingly unlike any other city in the world.

This idea of Jerusalem as *ir ha kodesh*, the Holy City, is carried out in a particular *midrash* which determines that the city is holy because it rests upon two sacred mountains which gain their special status due to the sojourning of the Jewish people as well as the path of the Torah.

*The foundation of the world is Jerusalem on the merit of two holy mountains: Mount Sinai and Mount Moriah. Rabbi Pinchas in the name of Rabbi Reuven said, "In the future, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will bring together Sinai and Tavor and Carmel and place Jerusalem on top of them, as it is written, "In the days to come, the Mount of the LORD's House shall stand firm above the mountains." (Isa. 2:2).*¹⁰

Jerusalem here is linked to being the foundation of the world because of two holy mountains, Sinai and Moriah, which are associated with one another even though this is a geographical impossibility. This demonstrates that the Rabbis are not concerned with geography. It stresses the importance of Jerusalem as the place where God and the Torah rest. The Torah begins its journey on Sinai and then makes its way to Moriah, Zion, and Jerusalem. Thus the mountains,

8 Isaiah 52:1-2.

9 City of Holy place/holiness.

10 Midrash to Psalms 87:3.

created facing one another in Jubilees, are now physically brought together in Rabbinic Literature, making Jerusalem worthy of being the foundation of the entire world. Here, neither mountain is made more important, but both, as critical aspects of the people's journey, are needed to support the city. The mention of additional mountains in the future perhaps points to the author's feeling that the journey needs to be continued; that there are other holy mountains worthy of supporting Jerusalem.

Jerusalem as Navel: The City at the Center of the World

The idea of holiness is also developed through the perceptions that Jerusalem's location is the geographical center of the planet, at its navel. This idea first appears explicitly in the book of Ezekiel. *"To turn you against repopulated wastes, and against a people gathered from among the nations, acquiring livestock and possessions, living at the center of the earth."*¹¹ In the previous chapter of this first, Ezekiel gives the people what is commonly referred to as the "Dry Bones Prophecy," where the Prophet reassures the people that they will be resurrected and returned to the Land of Israel. The next text serves as a warning to the people that after they have returned to their land, they will still be in danger. In later, *tibbur haaretz* becomes linked to Jerusalem as the city located at the center of the earth.

Three major themes involving the navel emerge. The first theme is anthropomorphic: just as a human being has a navel, so, too, does the world. The second theme is that of *"foundation:"* the navel of the world is in Jerusalem because this is also the location of the *'even shetiyah*, best translated as "the foundation stone of the entire world." The third is of the navel as Torah, which is life-giving; the navel of the world is in Jerusalem because Jerusalem is the home of the Torah which gives life to humanity.¹² All of these texts demonstrate the clear association in the Rabbinic mind of Jerusalem as the navel of the world, as a place of utmost importance.

An early text to compare man's anatomy with the land's anatomy is Ecclesiastes Rabbah. This particular text is notable for its brevity and its simple, list-like comparisons. There is no mistaking the author's intent here; whatever a man possesses, so, too, does the land.

Man has hands and the land has hands, as it is written, "And the land behold! It has wide hands."(Gen 34:21) Man has thighs and the land has thighs, as it is written, "I will gather them from the thighs of the land" (Jer 31:8). Man has a navel and the land has a navel, as it is written, "They who dwell on the navel of the land."(Ezek

11 Ezekiel 38:12, New JPS translation.

12 Isaiah 2:2-3.

38:12)¹³

The comparison is clear here and it moves in an interesting manner. Hands are considered an extremity of the human body and along with feet, they are the body part which is located farthest away from the center of the body. Next comes the comparison of thighs, which are located closer to the center of the body and finally the navel which is more or less in the center of the body. The text here moves spatially from outer to inner, a pattern which will be followed throughout comparisons to Jerusalem's position at the center of the earth.

The Ecclesiastes Rabbah text has a close parallel in *Midrash Tanhuma Buber*.¹⁴ The difference, however, is that the *Tanhuma* text compares the land to a woman. The "feminization" of this comparison adds some unique elements that would be impossible to use in the comparison of a man to the land. The *Tanhuma* text moves from both woman and land having a mouth and then, like in the Ecclesiastes Rabbah text, states that both woman and land have hands, using the same proof text from Genesis Chapter Thirty-four. The thigh comparison between man and land is missing here, and the navel comparison, nearly identical to the Ecclesiastes Rabbah text, follows directly after the verse about hands. What comes next is fascinating. The text reads,

*"Just as a woman swells and gives birth, so, too, does the land as it is written, "Can a land pass through travail in a single day? Or is a nation born all at once?" (Isaiah 66:8) This is Israel, who the Holy One, Blessed be He, brought them and let them enter into Jerusalem for the first time".*¹⁵

Here, the meaning of navel is connected to a woman's ability to give birth. A woman has a navel which is her center. The people Israel are brought to the center, Jerusalem, by God, after they have been born. So center means the place which creates and sustains life. According to the *Midrash Tanhuma Buber* author, the nation, born in the Isaiah text, becomes the people of Israel who are then brought to the navel of the land, to Jerusalem, in order that they may live. Thus, the notion of woman having much in common with the land adds an element of nurturing and the ability to procreate that is missing from the initial text of Ecclesiastes Rabbah.

Other *midrashim* follow the pattern established by the Ecclesiastes Rabbah text, but they add additional elements to their comparisons. In the Midrash on Psalms, the text reads as follows:

"The heavens have a heart before the Holy One Blessed be He, as it is written, "The mountain was ablaze on fire unto the heart of the sky." (Deut 4:11) And likewise there

13 Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:1

14 Midrash Tanhuma Buber to Va'erah 18. For an additional parallel, see Pitron Torah to V'Ethanah, p. 244. Midrash Tanhuma is the name given to three different collections of Pentateuch haggadot; two are extant, while the third is known only through citations.

15 Tanhuma Buber to va'erah 18.

is a heart to the sea, as it is written, "The deeps froze in the heart of the sea." (Ex 15:8) The land has a navel before the Holy One Blessed be He, as it is written, "They who dwell on the navel of the land." (Ezek 38:12) And it has a mouth before the Holy One Blessed be He as it is written, "And the earth opened its mouth." (Num 16:32) And it has legs before the Holy One Blessed be He, as it is written, "And the earth forever stands". (Eccl 1:4)¹⁶

The comparisons between man and earth now shift to comparisons between man and heavens, man and sea, and then man and land. Depending on one's perception, one could see the heavens as most important followed by sea and then land, or if one follows the sequence set by the Ecclesiastes Rabbah text, then one would find the land to be most important as it comes after heavens and sea. The evidence for the land as being the most important of the three is strengthened by the fact that whereas the heavens and sky have a heart, the land has a navel, a mouth, and legs. Additionally, the words "navel," "mouth," and "legs" are preceded by the phrase *lifnay ha-kadosh baruh hu*, before the Holy One, Blessed be He. It is as if the land is given its navel, mouth, and legs directly by God. God's name here, repeated three times, adds sanctity. As a human being dwelling exclusively on the land, it fits that the author of Midrash Tehilim would consider the land to be the most important of the three. Here, navel is one of three major features of the land. The proof texts are virtually indistinguishable from the texts already studied, but the addition and supposed supersession of land over sky and sea forms the impression that the land, and especially its navel, could be considered even holier than the heavens above or the seas below.

A text in the *midrashic* collection *Yalkut Shimoni*¹⁷ adds a nuanced but important interpretation of the idea of the land having a navel. It begins by basically using a pattern that the skies and seas do not have hearts, and it is only through God's will that the skies and seas are given hearts. This pattern then includes the land and its navel. The text reads, "The land does not have a navel or thighs, but before the Holy One Blessed be He for they dwell on the navel of the earth. The earth stands forever and He gathered them from the thighs of the earth."¹⁸ The text does not cite the proof texts, but it clearly has brought together the common text used for navel from Ezekiel 38:12 along with Ecclesiastes 1:4 and Jeremiah 31:8. Basically, the text attributes the land's navel directly to God. The land, like the heavens and the seas, does not have any human attributes until God grants them. Although the land is important, the author of this particular text wants there to be no confusion. It is God who gives the land its navel and then, similar to the Tanhuma Buber text, allows the people to dwell on the land and assures

16 The Midrash on Psalms 19:3.

17 The "Yalkut" of Simeon of Frankfurt the best known and most comprehensive midrashic anthology, covering the whole Bible.

18 Yalkut Shimoni vol. II, remez 672.

them that the land will stand forever. Thus, while *v'haaretz ein tibbur*, and the land has no navel, may be linguistically the opposite from the very first text of *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, it is here where God and the navel are most closely connected; without God there can be no navel and therefore no human habitation in Jerusalem, the city located at the navel of the world.

Conclusion

Jerusalem is a fascinating place which has captured the imagination of the Jewish people for thousands of years. Its mentions in the bible show it as a city of war and peace, a city of holiness, and a city located geographically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually at the heart of everything. Perhaps that is why the psalms state, "If I forget thee O Jerusalem, let me forget my right hand." For Jews, Jerusalem is as precious and sacred as a part of the body. Its centrality to Judaism is quite simply, undeniable. One important invitation remain how can Jerusalem keep assuming its centrality and mission of being the light to the nations and to the new generations? A challenging and exciting invitation.

References

- Armstrong Karen, *Jerusalem: one city, three faiths*, 1 st ed., New York, 1996.
- Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the reading of Midrash*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Fahed Ziad (2009), "How the Catholic Church views the Political Community?" *The Politics and Religion Journal*, Belgrade, Serbia, Volume (3) I.
- Holtz, Barry W., *Back to the sources: reading the classic Jewish texts*, Touchstone ed., New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992, c1984.
- Ozzano Luca, Religious Fundamentalism and democracy, *The Politics and Religion Journal*, Belgrade, Serbia, Volume (3) I.
- Pinchas Winston, *The Unbroken Chain of Jewish Tradition; a Visual Overview of the History of the Jewish People*, Aish HaTorah, 1986.
- Howard Schawrtz, *Reimagining the Bible: the story telling of the rabbis*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Oleg Grabar, *Jerusalem*, Variorum collected studies series.
- Peters F., *Jerusalem: the holy city in the eyes of chroniclers, visitors, pilgrims, and prophets from the days of Abraham to the beginnings of modern times*, 1985.
- Yalkut Shimoni, Moses Given the Name Above All Names.

Рабин Адам Розенвасер

ЈЕРУСАЛИМ, ГРАД РАТА, МИРА И СВЕТОСТИ... БИБЛИЈСКА ПЕРСПЕКТИВА

Резиме

Рабин Адам Розенвасер у овом раду осветљава место Јерусалима као града рата, мира и светости из перспективе Светог писма. Рабински мидраши подржавају библијски текст и објашњавају светост града Јерусалима из угла јудаизма. Читаоци овог рада откриће различите јеврејске представе и разумеће како су Јевреји кроз векове повезани са овим посебним местом.

Кључне речи: Јерусалим, Рабински мидрашим, Јерусалим град рата и мира, Јерусалим град светости, Јерусалим у јеврејској традицији.

Примљен: 5.7.2011.

Прихваћен: 10.9.2011.
