

JERUSALEM: FIGHTING FOR THE CITY OF PEACE THE ANCIENT CORNERSTONE IN REBUILDING THE MODERN ISRAEL

Ciprian-Beniamin BENEĂ*
Daniel TANC**

Abstract: From geographical, historical and theological point of views, Jerusalem is one of the most fought for capitals of the world. It has a strategic settlement, not only for Israel, but for the world. Its history begins with King David and continues with Solomon and all other kings and rulers. It had a restless history. Jerusalem's significance lies not only in its geographical and historical aspects, but also has theological roots. In fact, theology permeates the geography and the history of the city, its past and its future. The reconstruction of the city equates with its struggle. The geopolitical and religious aspects shape the international debate. The rebirth of Jewish interest in the Holy Land is also motivated by the Zionist movement. The very term "Zion" stresses the importance of Jerusalem in this reconstruction. Jerusalem is the cornerstone of present and future reconstruction of the country. It gives motivation, inspiration, hope and identity for Israel.

Keywords: Jerusalem, Israel, history, theology, reconstruction, Temple

In the history of God's revelation to man in his divine acts of redemption, Jerusalem is by far the most important site on the earth. Jerusalem is a royal city, thus having a very important political influence. Also, in Jerusalem was erected the Temple, where sacrifices had been offered. It is also important to mention that Jerusalem was the city of the prophets. These facts of the past shape the destiny of Israel and its future.

JERUSALEM IN GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

As we approach the geographical aspect of Jerusalem, it is crucial to keep in mind what Pliny, the Roman historian mentioned about Jerusalem. He said that Jerusalem is "by far the most famous city of the ancient Orient".¹

The word "Jerusalem" is Semitic and apparently was not a name given to the city for the first time by the Hebrews. In the time of Tell-el-Amarna letters (1400 B.C.) it was called *Urusalim*, that means "The city of Salim", more precisely translated as "city of peace". In the Hebrew Bible the term appears in Joshua 10:1, where it is spelled *Yerushalayim*. In the Aramaic of Ezra it is spelled *Jerushlem*. In the records of Sennacherib, it is called *Ursalimu*. In the Syriac, it is *Urishlem*, in the LXX, it is *Hierousalem*. In the time of Hadrian, 135 A.D., the Romans changed the name to *Aelia Capitolina*. After hundreds of years the Arabs have called the city *Al-Kuds al-Sharif*, which can be translated as "the Sanctuary".

* University of Oradea, Faculty of Economics, International Affairs Department, e-mail: c_benea@yahoo.com

** „Golgota” Church, 1012 Olteniei St. 410059, Oradea, e-mail: dandelitanc@yahoo.com

¹ Merrill C. Tenney (ed.), *Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977, p. 417.

The Rabbis say that in the Bible there are sixty different names for Jerusalem. It is worth knowing that the name "Jerusalem" occurs about 600 times in the Old Testament. The most frequently name used for this city, apart from Jerusalem, is Zion, which occurs over 100 times in the Old Testament. The name "Zion" is most frequently used in the Book of Psalms (Tehilim) and in the Book of Isaiah.²

It is worth mentioning that Jerusalem has always remained on the same site. It is precisely located 31 degrees, 46 minutes, 45 seconds N lat., and 35 degrees, 13 minutes and 25 seconds long. E of Greenwich. Jerusalem is situated 33 miles E of the Mediterranean, and 14 miles W of the Dead Sea at an elevation of 2 550 feet above sea level. Geologically, the city rests upon three hills. The SE hill, where it was the original city of the Jebusites, the city which David seized, and which later was named Zion, occupied about ten acres, being shaped like a gigantic human footprint, about 1 250 feet long and 400 feet wide. On the northern hill Solomon built the great Temple and his own palace, called Ophel.

On the E of these two hills was a deep valley known as the Kidron. To the S of the city was another deep valley called the Hinom. Through the middle of the city, running from N to S, was a third valley, now built over, and only discernible by careful investigation of the contours of the rock level, called the Tyropoeon Valley. On the far side of the Western hill was the Valley of Gehenna, a continuation of Hinom.³

The city never occupied a large area. Even in the time of Herod the Great the area within the walls was not more than a mile in length, nor more than 5/8 of a mile in width. The city was off the beaten path of the great caravan routes and was not, as the most large of the world capitals, on a navigable river and of a large body of water. Being 19 miles N from Hebron and 30 miles S of Samaria, it was centrally located to serve as the capital of the kingdom of Israel. From whatever direction is approached, Jerusalem can be seen only when one has arrived in its immediate vicinity. This aspect could be considered strategic from a military point of view.

Because on the deep valleys on the E, S and W of the city, it was only the northern side which could be more easily penetrated by an invading army. The walls on the E and W are built on the ridges of these valleys. Probably in the early days there was a wall extending far below the present southern wall structure. The first northern wall extended from Jaffa Gate to the middle of the great temple area. The second northern wall began at Jaffa Gate, extended northward and the curved to the east to the Tower of Antonia, beyond the northern end of the Temple area. The northern wall extends N and the E from the northern end of the western wall to the northern end of the present eastern wall. There was a third north wall that was discovered during the days of modern excavation.⁴

JERUSALEM FROM HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Jerusalem has a three millennia history. In 1002 B.C., king David conquered a territory that belonged to Jebusites and made it the capital of his Kingdom. The former capital was Hebron.⁵ The geographical aspect of Jerusalem is filled with symbolic and religious elements. In its rich history, Jerusalem suffered from 37 invasions. Like Berlin or Sarajevo, Jerusalem symbolizes the

² *ibidem*, pp. 417-418.

³ *ibidem*, pp. 418-419.

⁴ *ibidem* p. 419.

⁵ Raymod Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Roland Murphy, *Introducere și comentariu la Sfânta Scriptură*, Vol I, Editura Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu-Lăpuș, 2005, p. 242.

tragedy in life, but also the cry for peace. For the Jews, Jerusalem has a highly religious significance.⁶

Jerusalem is known to have existed in the 19th and 18th centuries B.C. as mentioned in Egyptian texts. Early biblical references to it are in the First Book of Moses (Bereshit, i.e. Genesis). When Israel entered Canaan, the city was called Jebus and under the control of Jebusites, an indigenous Semitic tribe. Joshua defeated them, but did not take the city. That explains why just in the time of David it was captured.

When the kingdom was divided after Solomon's death, Jerusalem remained the capital of Judah, but it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 585 B. C. Fifty years later the Persian conquerors of Babylon allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, but the walls remained ruined until Nehemiah restored them in the 5th century B.C. In 167 B.C. Antiochus IV destroyed the walls, plundered and desecrated the Temple, but after the revolt of Judas Maccabaeus, the Temple was rededicated in 164 B.C.

The Romans entered the city a century later and from 37 B.C. the city was repaired and rebuilt. The Jewish revolt in 66 A.D. ended when the Roman general, Titus destroyed the fortifications and the Temple in 70 A.D. After another revolt in 132 A.D., the city was rebuilt as a pagan city dedicated to Jupiter Capitolinus, from which all Jews were excluded. In the 4th century A.D. Constantine allowed them back in the city. Since then it was captured by Persian, Arab, Turkish, British and Israeli forces. In 1542 the Turkish sultan Suleiman the Magnificent rebuilt the walls as they can be seen today.⁷

David made Jerusalem the capital of the kingdom, but also made it the religious center. The city shared in the prosperity of Solomon's reign. Immediately after capturing Jerusalem, David took measures to enclose the city with a wall. David fortified the city. Solomon built Millo and the wall of Jerusalem. Succeeding kings made repairs and additions until the wall passed near the present Jaffa Gate on the W.⁸

What means Jerusalem for the Muslims? For them Jerusalem is the final point of Mohamed's journey at the end of his life. Coming from Mecca, he arrived in Jerusalem in order to be lifted up into heavens from a cliff on Mount Moriah, where it had been situated the Solomon's Temple. Of course, this is a tradition based on an interpretation given to a verse from Koran. Caliph Omar ordered that on that place a mosque to be built. That is why Jerusalem is for Muslims the third holy city, along with Mecca and Medina.

Jerusalem was never the political capital of a Muslim state, nor even of a province of the Empire. In the 8th century, Ramallah had been the residence of a district that included Jerusalem. Jerusalem was considered a theological center.⁹

JERUSALEM IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In Deuteronomy, Moses, as prophet of God, says that God will reveal the place that would be the capital of Israel. That place would be a place of worship and people would rejoice there. The foreigner is not excluded from that place, but it has to come to the God of Israel on the way required by God in Torah.¹⁰

⁶ Alberto Castaldini, *Vocația politică a Israelului*, Editura Hasefer, București, 2008, p. 175-176.

⁷ Derek Williams (ed.), *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, IVP Press, Leicester, 1989, pp. 261-262.

⁸ *Illustrated Davis Dictionary of the Bible*, Royal Publishers, Inc., Nashville, 1973, pp. 390, 398.

⁹ Alberto Castaldini, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.

¹⁰ Willem J. J. Glashouwer, *De ce Israel?* Alfa Omega Publishing, Timișoara, 2007, pp. 125-126.

So, in this perspective, Jerusalem is an “international” city.

Jerusalem has a special significance in the Hebrew Scripture, and in other religious writings like Midrash. In Midrash Tanhuma, a post-exilic writing than explains Torah, it is was written: “The land of Israel is situated in the center of the World, Jerusalem is in the middle of the land of Israel and the Temple is in the middle of Jerusalem. From here the World was created. All the nations of the World will be gathered at Jerusalem”.¹¹

The Jewish historian Ariel Toaff wrote: “Jerusalem is not just a historical city strongly linked to Jewish people and its political and religious aspirations. Jerusalem finds its place in Jewish social imagery, where the past, present and future are connected, where the doors of Messianic era are opening.”¹² The messianic era was pictured by the prophets of the Old Testament. They did not just talk about a future Jerusalem, thus giving hope for Israel, but they presented the ideal Jerusalem (that of the future, in messianic era) in order to shape the present Jerusalem. Real and ideal Jerusalem ought to be one, and this is the real fighting motive for Israel.¹³

In Psalms and in Prophets it is developed a theology of Zion. Jerusalem’s importance is pictured, just to give one example, by a river flowing from Jerusalem and being a blessing for the arid lands of Israel.¹⁴ This image affirms the importance of Jerusalem for the entire nation. It is not only about politics, geographical strategy, or religion. Jerusalem confers identity.

ISRAEL: BUILDING IN THE PRESENT ON A GLORIOUS PAST TOWARD THE BEST FUTURE

Alberto Castaldini states that the history of Jerusalem plays a fundamental role in the political field and it has a symbolic value for the destiny of Jewish state.¹⁵

Jerusalem today resembles Jerusalem in the days of Joshua. Jerusalem was not and is not under the total control of Israel. Though there is nowadays an independent Israeli nation, which is internationally recognized since 1948 there is a harsh fight for the City. Palestinians say that Jerusalem should be the capital of the Palestinian state; the Muslim world sees it as the third sacred city; the Pope wants it to be an international city; UN refuse to recognize the Israel’s decision in 1967 that states that Jerusalem should be undivided capital of Israel.¹⁶

As we have mentioned above, David was the one who conquered the city. But the city was not just military conquered. The Hebrew Bible tells that on a certain occasion David bought from Ornan, a wealthy Jebusite, a territory (1 Samuel 24). It is obvious that Jerusalem belongs to the Hebrews from two reasons. One is military, as they conquered it. The second is financially, so to say, as a large territory had been bought by King David.

Nowadays out of the 7,100,000 inhabitants of Israel, 720,000 are living in Jerusalem. Along with the majority of Jewish citizens, there are living 244,000

¹¹ Ariel Toaff, “Gerusalemme nella Halakhah”, in Giuseppe Trotta (ed.), *Gerusalemme*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1990, p. 78.

¹² Ariel Toaff, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹³ J.D. Douglas (ed.), *Dicționar Biblic*, Editura Cartea Creștină, Oradea, 1995, p. 567.

¹⁴ Silviu Tatu, *Dumnezeu a vorbit în vechime prin profeți*, Editura Metanoia, Oradea, 2007, p. 128.

¹⁵ Alberto Castaldini, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹⁶ Willem J. J. Glashouwer, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

Arabs and 14,000 Christians. There are thirteen Christian churches in Jerusalem. There are also living there Christian Arabs.¹⁷

The UN plan for Jerusalem in 1947 stated a special *status*, that is of a separate territory, administrated by UN. The project was adopted in November, 29, signed by 33 countries, including United States and Soviet Union. The Zionist leaders, though they disagreed with the plan, voted for it, as they were convinced that it was a temporary plan.

In May 14, 1948, the war between Israel and Arabic world began. During the whole conflict (1948-1949), Jerusalem was the most disputed territory. Israel succeeded in occupying the new town (western part), while the old part of the city was under the control of Arab League. The truce in 1949 stated the division of Jerusalem in its western and eastern part. The eastern Jerusalem was conquered by Israel in June, 1967 in the Six Day War. In July 1980 the Knesset proclaimed Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel. The UN didn't recognize this proclamation, because it was considered a violation of the international laws.¹⁸

There are a lot of issues to be solved today in the reconstruction of Jerusalem. Among all these, we will mention just a few. Ideas are raised in the sphere of politics about how to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jerusalem is ever present in this context. To all intents and purposes, the division of the city is already under way. A number of wealthy individuals, Jews who are neither residents nor citizens of the country, try to gain property in Jerusalem, mainly in the Old City. Property in the Old City is largely in the hands of religious Muslim endowment, the Waqf.

Other property is owned by Christian church, mostly the Greek Orthodox. This property was accumulated, purchased from or granted by the Ottoman sultans. The plethora of petitions to the Supreme Court to determine its positions on various subjects represent another form of struggle. One frequently discussed topic is the status of the Temple Mount. In the meantime, the city deteriorates.¹⁹

One major issue arising from the rapid and hastily planned growth of the city is its transportation network. Thousands of additional vehicles each year and aging public bus system have created an intolerable level of congestion and pollution in the city. In recent years measures to remedy the situation were taken by a system of ring roads. The building of wider roads, tunnels for this network has not yet been fully implemented and already there is a new plan. Such an extensive project promises well the city's future.²⁰

Zion inspired the Jews in the 19th century, who created the Zionist movement. This movement was concerned with the Jewish people's rights around the world and then it promoted the returning of the Jews in the Promised Land.²¹ This was a huge step in rebuilding Jerusalem and for the destiny of Israel.

On the 12th of March 1979, Pope John Paul II discussed with Jewish organizations and said: "I intend to facilitate the spiritual dialogue and to do all in my power for the sake of these sacred territories, hoping that Jerusalem could be a center of harmony".²²

¹⁷ Alberto Castaldini, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

¹⁸ *ibidem*, pp. 171-172.

¹⁹ Meir Ben-Dov, *Carta's Illustrated History of Jerusalem*, Carta, Jerusalem, 2006, pp. 373-374.

²⁰ *ibidem*, p. 375.

²¹ Silviu Tatu, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.

²² Silvio Ferrari, "Per Gerusalemme una e indivisibile", in *Limes*, 3, 1993, pp. 149-162.

On October, the 2nd 1979 speaking from the UN tribune, John Paul II expressed his desire that Jerusalem might have a special status that gives “the respect for its uniqueness”.²³

Rabbi Ricardo Di Segni said that the religious aspect alone cannot define the whole Israel. Judaism is not only a religion, it means belonging to a people to a common national destiny. That is why Israel is tied to a territory. Jerusalem is not a utopia, but a place to live, a place to be built and where God is served with joy.²⁴ Jerusalem in geographical, historical and theological perspectives is nothing but the capital of Israel. This is its destiny and its struggle.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BEN-DOV, M., (2006), *Carta's Illustrated History of Jerusalem*, Carta, Jerusalem
- BROWN, R., FITZMYER, J.A., MURPHY, R., (2005), *Introducere și comentariu la Sfânta Scriptură*, Vol I, Editura Galaxia Gutenberg, Târgu-Lăpuș
- CASTALDINI, A., (2008) *Vocația politică a Israelului*, Editura Hasefer, București
- DOUGLAS, J.D. (ed.), (1995), *Dicționar Biblic*, Editura Cartea Creștină, Oradea
- FARHAT, E., (ed.), (1987), *Gerusalemme nei documenti pontifici*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano
- FERRARI, S., (1993), “Per Gerusalemme una e indivisibile”, in *Limes*, 3
- GLASHOUWER, W., (2007), *De ce Israel?* Alfa Omega Publishing, Timișoara
- TATU, S., (2007), *Dumnezeu a vorbit în vechime prin profeți*, Editura Metanoia, Oradea
- TENNEY, M.C. (ed.), (1977), *Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- TOAFF, A., (1990), “Gerusalemme nella Halakhah”, in Trotta, G., (ed.), *Gerusalemme*, Morcelliana, Brescia
- WILLIAMS, D., (ed.), (1989), *New Concise Bible Dictionary*, IVP Press, Leicester
- *** (1973), *Illustrated Davis Dictionary of the Bible*, Royal Publishers, Inc., Nashville

²³ Edmond Farhat (ed.), *Gerusalemme nei documenti pontifici*, Citta del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987, p. 179.

²⁴ Alberto Castaldini, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.