

Abstract

"An Historically Grounded Approach to Resolution of the Jerusalem Issue"

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The paper opens with a key distinction when talking about "Jerusalem in History" -- the distinction between a) the history of Jerusalem, and b) the history of human beliefs about Jerusalem. It is argued that though these two are related, ultimately it is the latter, the history of human beliefs about Jerusalem, that is most relevant in the search for enduring solutions to the Jerusalem question.

In this context, with a focus on the history of human beliefs about Jerusalem, I will discuss aspects of the Hebrew Bible, not conceived as a religious text, but as surviving Israelite writings, written over several centuries, prior to the rise of Christianity.

In particular, attention will be given to the last paragraphs of the Hebrew Bible (which has a different order than the books that make up The Old Testament in the Christian tradition). In the Hebrew Bible, the final book is II Chronicles, and the final paragraph relates that God "roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia" to issue a proclamation saying that:

"God has charged me with the building of Him a House in **Jerusalem**, which is in Judah. Any one of you of all His people, the Lord God be with him, and let him go up."

This proclamation, coming from the King of Persia (Iran) is addressed to the exiles from Jerusalem, living in Babylon (Iraq). It comes some 60 years after the first exile, and allows for a Return. These events of 2500 years ago, have a startling relationship to current day issues involving Israel, the Palestinians, the right of return, the Arab world and Iran.

In considering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the paper will suggest that failure to attend to matters of history and human belief systems has given rise to the confusion of the concepts of "state" and "homeland." Such confusion can be seen in both the Clinton Parameters and the Geneva Initiative. It will be suggested that the notion of "Two States within A Common Homeland" may serve as more productive way of conceiving the two-state solution.

Within such a conception, Jerusalem becomes the symbol of the common homeland. Here, sustained attention will be given to King Hussein's idea that with respect to historic Jerusalem (the walled city which includes the Temple Mount and the Western Wall), the debate over sovereignty should be put aside with the two sides agreeing that "sovereignty belongs to God" (SBG). I will then offer a more developed analysis of the SBG concept, and present some polling data of both Israelis and Palestinians about the SBG approach.

The paper ends with a discussion of the importance of education about the history of beliefs about Jerusalem, among Muslims and Jews, as a key element in building a peace that might endure.