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AN INTRODUCTION TO JERUSALEM: THE MOVIE AND THE CITY

As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and forevermore.—Psalm 125:2

For centuries, religious pilgrims have journeyed up to Jerusalem. Even today, so many people long to walk the hallowed cobblestones of the Old City. This vibrant, ancient city continues to captivate us 3,000 years after King David declared it his capital. Now an epic new film for IMAX® and Giant Screen theatres brings us inside JERUSALEM, to holy sites cherished by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It is a gorgeous celebration of sites revered by billions of people worldwide.

For those who've always longed to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land but haven't been able to make the journey, JERUSALEM offers a rousing opportunity to explore the highlights of the region on 70 ft high screens (25 meters). At last, filmgoers can take a cinematic trip to some of the most iconic sites in the Bible: the City of David, the site of the Temples, the Mount of Olives, the Dead Sea, the Judean Desert, the River Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. This film takes audiences underground Jerusalem and inside ancient rituals as they are still practiced today during Passover, Easter and Ramadan. We see where Jesus entered Jerusalem to palm branches and "hosannas" and follow his painful steps to Golgotha. We retrace the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous night journey that made Jerusalem equally precious to Muslims.

From the executive producer of beloved films like "Chariots of Fire," "Driving Miss Daisy," and "Dances with Wolves," JERUSALEM rises above contemporary politics. It puts a human face on the Old City and gives audiences unprecedented access, swooping above the holy sites and dropping us into annual observations of Passover, Easter, and Ramadan. We follow those who cherish the city and appreciate its remarkable and complex history. In Hebrew, it is *Yerushalayim*. In Arabic, it is *al-Quds*: "the Holy City." This giant screen experience is an opportunity to be enlightened and entertained by a city brimming with abundant life: beguiling Jerusalem.

These study guides are intended to serve as a compliment to the movie. They were created in consultation with an array of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim scholars and are offered freely to filmgoers and religious audiences. The first guide delves into the Jewish connection to *Yerushalayim* and is intended for rabbis and Jewish community leaders. The second section outlines the Christian attachment to Jerusalem and can enhance pastors' sermons or Bible studies. The third section adopts an interfaith perspective, helping Jews and Christians understand the Islamic connections to *al-Quds*. While adherents of each Abrahamic faith may be drawn to a particular section of this study, the aim of the film (and this guide) is to broaden and deepen our appreciation of each other.



It offers additional background and spiritual reflection for those who've experienced *JERUSALEM: The Movie*.

YERUSHALAYIM: CENTER OF JUDAISM

*Just as the navel is in the middle of each person,
so Eretz Yisrael is in the center of the world.
From her emerge the foundations of the world.
Yerushalayim is in the center of Eretz Yisrael.
The Temple is in the center of Yerushalayim
The sanctuary was in the center of the Temple
The Ark was in the center of the sanctuary
The foundation stone stood before the Ark
That was the foundation for the Temple*
Tanhuma Kedoshim

Why is the city of Yerushalayim so revered within Judaism? From Abraham's binding of Isaac, Jerusalem has been regarded as the place where God dwells. The important Jewish midrash, Genesis Rabbah, explains how the city was named:

Avraham called the place *Adonai Yireh* for it was said, מִן־הַר־יֵרֵךְ אֵרָאָה אֱלֹהִים. "It is the mount where Adonai (yeh-rah-eh) was seen." (Gen 22). Shem (the son of Noah) called it Shalem. It says וַיֵּצֵא מֶלְכִּיצֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שְׁלֵמִים לֶחֶם וַיִּשְׂרֹף וַיִּבְרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֱלֹהִים וַיִּבְרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֱלֹהִים. "Melchitzedek king of *Shalem* took out bread and wine he was a priest to God Most High *El Elyon*" (Genesis 14). The Holy Blessed One said: If I call it *Yireh* as Abraham called it, Shem a righteous man, will be upset. If I call it *Shalem* as Shem called it, Abraham, a righteous man, will be upset. Therefore I call this place as the two of them called it Yireh-Shalem- Yeru-shalayim Jerusalem. Genesis Rabbah 56.10

Under the reign of King David and his son, King Solomon, Jerusalem became the political and religious center of the united Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. As the locus of the Ark of the Covenant and then as home to the Temple, Jerusalem was set apart as a place of profound religious practices. So much care was taken in the construction of the Temple, with artisans following God's detailed instructions. Solomon poured out the wealth of his people into the "House of God" to be a house of prayer for all nations.

Prayers have been directed towards Yerushalayim and the Temple across the centuries, following the wisdom of Tosefta Brachot:

Those who stand to pray outside Israel direct their hearts towards Eretz Yisrael and pray, for it says "They will pray to You by way of their land, given to their ancestors" (Kings I, 8.48). Those who stand to pray in Eretz Yisrael direct their hearts towards Yerushalayim and pray, for it says "They will pray to Adonai You by way of the city chosen by You"

(Kings I, 8.44). Those who stand to pray in Yerushalayim direct their hearts towards the Temple and pray, for it says “They will pray to this house” (Chronicles II, 6.32). Those who stand in the north face the south, those who stand in the south face the north, those who stand in the east face the west, those who stand in the west face the east.

Tosefta Brachot 3.15

The film, *Jerusalem*, offers a strong sense of the gates that demarcate the ancient city and ushered visitors to and from the Temple. The *Tehillim* (Psalms in Greek) recount the glory that transpired inside the beloved Temple walls. They are a living set of prayers and praise that continues to enhance faith. There are *tehillim* for every mood and occasion. When we don’t know what to say, the Psalms give us time-tested words to sing or pray to G_d.

Judaism observes three pilgrimage festivals, known as the *Shalosh Regalim*. They are outlined in the Torah, in Exodus 23:14-17 and include the festival of *Matzahs* (unleavened bread for Passover), the reaping festival, Shavuot (known as Weeks), and the harvest festival, Sukkot (known as tents or booths). Israelites living in the Kingdom of Judah would make annual pilgrimages to the Temple of Jerusalem. They were told not to appear before G_d empty-handed (as outlined in Deuteronomy 16). So along the journey, they sang praises of joy and ascent, marching towards the temple.

Pilgrims coming into the city sang Psalms of Ascent while approaching the Temple. For example, Psalm 122 includes deep appreciation for Jerusalem as the sacred home for all of G_d’s people.

1. A Song of Ascents. Of David. I rejoiced when they said to me: “Let us go to the House of the LORD.”
2. Our feet have been standing in your gates, O Jerusalem;
3. Jerusalem, built like a city that is fully united together;
4. That there the tribes made pilgrimage, the tribes of the LORD—an ordinance upon Israel—to praise the name of the LORD.
5. Indeed, there were set the thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.
6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love you find tranquility.
7. May there be peace in your ramparts, tranquility in your towers.
8. For the sake of my brothers and my friends, I petition, “peace be in you.”
9. For the sake of the House of the LORD our G_d, I request: “Be it well with you.”

What a beautiful song of peace, of praise, of seeking prosperity. This is a psalm when everything is going right, when we feel joyous, when it is easy to thank G_d for the blessing of tranquility. Psalms of ascent are to be sung with hope and affirmation. But what if the Temple was destroyed, the site of pilgrimage demolished? Jerusalem has always been a contentious crossroads, where competing armies and claims resulted in conflict. Beside a place of joyful worship, it has also been a place of grief and mourning.

The Hebrew Bible recounts how much pain followed Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonian army. Even while marching toward exile in Babylon, the Israelites longed to return to the Temple of the Lord. In Psalm 137, by the waters of Babylon, the exiles wept and wailed when they remembered Zion. Even today, in the days preceding *Tisha B'Av*, to commemorate the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem, it is read:

- 4 How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?
- 5 If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
- 6 Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy.

They tried to remember their glorious home, now far away. Prophets like Jeremiah encouraged the Israelites to settle into exile, forewarning them that a return to Jerusalem would take more than a generation. It is easy to forget the good times of blessing from G_d when we are suffering defeat. How can we pray when things go wrong? What can we sing when times are tough? The Psalms are loaded with prayers of contrition, confusion, and defeat. G_d is clearly comfortable hearing our complaints. *Tehillim* reflect brutal honesty before G_d—from complaints to lament. What song is in your heart?

Thanks to comparatively enlightened kings like Cyrus of Persia, the Israelites were eventually able to come home to Jerusalem. The biblical books of Nehemiah and Ezra feature ambitious plans to rebuild the city walls, to restore the Temple. What an opportunity to fulfill the vision outlined in Zohar-Terumah:

The Holy Land - is the center of the world
 In the middle of the Holy Land is Yerushalayim.
 In the middle of Yerushalayim is the House of the Holy of Holies
 And all the good and nourishment for those who live there
 Comes from above.

Alas, Greeks and Seleucids dominated the region prior to the rise of the Roman Empire. Later King Herod the Great dominated Jerusalem, turning it into a Roman outpost. In an effort to live up to his name, Herod greatly expanded the Temple Mount. The splendor returned physically in the Second Temple, but the specter of Roman occupation also created a certain ambivalence. Psalm 126 anticipates the other side of pain and defeat.

- 1 A Song of Ascents. When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like unto them that dream.
- 2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the nations: 'The the Lord hath done great things with these.'
- 3 the Lord hath done great things with us; we are rejoiced.
- 4 Turn our captivity, O the Lord, as the streams in the dry land.
- 5 They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.
- 6 Though he goeth on his way weeping that beareth the measure of seed, he shall come home with joy, bearing his sheaves.

Sometimes we are down; sometimes we are lifted up. There are Psalms that match our circumstances, appropriate for every season of life. For the Jewish people, the restored Temple would not last. In an attempt to put down the Jewish revolt, the Roman army would eventually march on Jerusalem, leveling beloved Zion and on the 9th day of the month of Av in the year 70 A.D. (the same day as the Babylonians destroyed the Temple of Solomon), they set fire to the Temple. What a catastrophe unleashing so much weeping and mourning. A band of Jewish rebels held out atop the hilltop fortress at Masada while being besieged by the Roman forces. Under subsequent Roman rule and especially after the Bar Kokhba revolt from 132-136 A.D., Jews were banished from Jerusalem except for a single day of grieving over the lost temple and city (Tisha B'Av). At first, sources indicate they gathered on the Temple Mount itself, then later on the Mount of Olives. Finally, they came to rent their garments and air their grievances in front of the giant ashlar stones set down by King Herod: the Western Wall. Today in gathering at the Western Wall to lament and celebrate, Jews continue to bring their most fervent hopes and prayers.

The second half of Psalm 126 remains a fitting prayer for those who wail and wait:

- 4 Restore our fortunes, LORD,
like streams in the Negev.
- 5 Those who sow with tears
will reap with songs of joy.
- 6 Those who go out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with them.

This is an ongoing hope, a living Psalm. JERUSALEM the movie brings us back in time and inside rebuilt Jerusalem, to feel the glory and the grief that has marked the Jewish experience. It is a celebration of the past and an update of the present, a historical bridge of continuity, of prayers offered to G_d across the centuries.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:

1. So many Psalms recount Israel's experiences within Jerusalem. What is your relationship to Yerushalayim?
2. What rabbinic teaching or Psalm of ascent do you find inspiring?
3. When have you felt angry with God or frustrated by your circumstances? Which Psalm of lament has provided comfort?

JERUSALEM: FROM ASCENT TO LAMENT

“When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’”—Matthew 21:10

For centuries, Christians have flocked to Jerusalem to retrace the footsteps of Jesus. Christian pilgrims begin their remembrance of Holy Week with the waving of palm branches and shouts of “Hosanna.” These are times for Psalms of Ascent. Jesus rode into Jerusalem as a venerated prophet but ended up on trial for sedition, sentenced to death for crimes against the Roman Empire. The disciples who expected Jesus to overturn Roman authority were shocked and frightened to see him paraded around town and crucified instead. What Psalms were appropriate for Jesus as he went from a time of ascent to lament? How to turn sacrifice into strength and death into life?

Jesus entered Jerusalem during a time of political turmoil. With the Romans in power, questions of allegiance were in the air. How to balance the claims of empire with devotion to God? During the preparation for the festival of Matzahs and Pesach (Passover), thousands of Jewish pilgrims were entering Jerusalem. They didn’t want to arrive at the Temple empty handed (as commanded in the Torah). A bustling marketplace developed aimed at facilitating the life of the pilgrim, selling animals for sacrifices or offering to change money. One couldn’t use Roman or Greek money to purchase a pure sacrifice to God. Moneychangers would provide a purifying service for a fee. Jesus undercut the greed surrounding these ritual sacrifices and temple taxes by overturning the tables in the Temple, casting out the moneychangers. He called for the Temple to be set apart as a place of prayer rather than commerce. This surprising action may have signaled revolution to Jesus’s followers and the Temple authorities. While this could have been interpreted as political upheaval, Jesus chose a different way to undercut Roman power.

In an upper room, over a shared meal (the traditional Jewish “Seder”), Jesus revealed what kind of leadership and posture his followers should adopt. Jesus spells out his dark and painful future. Rather than defeat, he adopts the attitude of a servant in the Gospel of John, Chapter 13.

13:1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

By washing his disciples’ feet, Jesus was preaching humility and servitude, something not normally associated with a revolutionary. Wasn’t Jesus entering Jerusalem to cast out the



Romans, to purify the temple once and for all? His discussion of blood and sacrifice, the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine mystified his closest friends. Why would Jesus talk of his blood being poured out for many? Didn't he intend to defeat the Romans? The Gospel of John continues the narrative:

13:6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

This isn't the path his disciples had in mind. One of his followers, Judas, sells out this servant Jesus to the local authorities. Jesus will feel the bitter sting of betrayal. We all will have times when friends disappoint us, when they fail to do what they promised. But active betrayal, the selling out of our confidence, the attempt to entrap and unravel our best plans--that truly hurts. And yet, Jesus responded to Judas's betrayal with love. He advocated an ethic that turned the other cheek.

13:33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

36 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." 37 Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." 38 Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Love will distinguish the community Jesus is developing. Yet, even his seemingly closest friend and follower, Peter, would deny Jesus in a time of trial. Jesus will pour out his life in service and in sacrifice, and even those who spoke loudest, who believed the proudest, will fall away in fear.

We may boast of our fervent faith, but the Passion week of Jesus reveals how far faith can waver. Those who claim to know and love us may abandon us. How do we deal with those times when we are disappointed, when we feel alone?

After dinner, the Gospel of John, chapter 18 says, "Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples

went into it.” During this Passover season, thousands of lambs and doves would have been sacrificed in the temple. The blood of the sacrifices would have been drained down the valley. Jesus literally would have crossed a stream laden with blood enrooted to the garden of Gethsemane.

During a soul-searching night in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks his friends to engage in a night watch, to stay up and pray. Yet, they slowly fall asleep, leaving Jesus alone in his despair. They failed to grasp the gravity of the events unfolding. Jesus is tracked down by Judas and arrested by Roman soldiers. But Jesus doesn’t resist arrest; he goes willingly. During his interrogation and trials before Caiaphus, the Sanhedrin, Herod and Pilate, Jesus never begs for his life or kowtows to the authorities. He has much to be angry about, injustices to protest. Judas has betrayed him with a kiss. Peter has denied that he knows Jesus. Yet, Jesus willingly stands before the people and takes on the death sentence he’s given. A crown of thorns is placed on his head. Whiplashes pierce his back. Soldiers vie for his sole possession—a robe. On the long, bloody walk through the streets of Jerusalem, Jesus faces all manner of verbal and physical abuse. A few compassionate people stand out, remembered via the Stations of the Cross. Simon the Cyrene helps bear the weight of the cross, carrying it when Jesus cannot. Simon rises to the occasion where others had fallen away.

The march ends at Golgotha, where Jesus is nailed to the cross. Tears, confusion, and grief surround the gory scene. Jesus gasps for breath, struggling to hold himself up on the cross. Slowly, his followers drift away, afraid of being associated with a criminal and potentially being subject to the same fate. A week that began in triumph seems to end in defeat. What words are appropriate in this atrocious scene? Jesus experiences total abandonment, taking on the sin of the entire world. He utters the first line of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

In this ancient Psalm, composed a thousand years prior to the Crucifixion, a powerful and poignant song of lament remains.

- 6 But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
- 8 “He trusts in the Lord,” they say,
“let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.”
- 12 Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
- 13 Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.
- 14 I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.

15 My mouth[d] is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

16 Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce[e] my hands and my feet.

17 All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.

18 They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

19 But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

20 Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.

21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

22 I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.

23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

24 For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.

So much of Jesus's experience on the cross is captured in this Psalm. The mockery, the piercing, even the division of his clothes are expressed in this song of abandonment. When Jesus's mouth was so dry he could no longer speak, he uttered this ancient Jewish prayer, Psalm 22. Jesus became despised, scorned and afflicted.

Jesus is laid to rest in a sepulchre near Golgotha. On one long, painful Saturday, grief hovered over the disciples in defeat. They also felt abandoned, alone, and afraid. A cadre of women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. The risen Christ first appears to women and then the disciples. After a painful time of silence and burial, Jesus responds with resurrection. He rises above sin and death, overturning all forces which seek to rob, to steal, to destroy. He serves and forgives despite all the betrayals. This is the enduring power of love. On Easter, Christians celebrate the living Lord who overcame the sting of death and promises us eternal life. When visiting Jerusalem, Christians remember Jesus's life and death and glorious resurrection.

JERUSALEM: The Movie takes you inside the ancient Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Christians have worshipped for centuries. It is built atop what is believed to be the historic site of Jesus' death, Golgotha, as well as the location of his tomb. It is the place of sacrifice, and death, as well as resurrection. It offers us a vivid sense for why Christians have made an annual pilgrimage to the Jerusalem, to follow Jesus's journey from ascent to descent, from death to eternal life.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:

1. Sometimes it is easy to shout, "Hosanna." At other times, we experience betrayal, abandonment, and defeat. Which part of the Passion Week resonates most with you?
2. Are you having a season of Palm Sundays, feeling blessed by God? Or are you sharing in the suffering that characterizes so much of Jesus' final days in Jerusalem?
3. What would be your prayer to God?

FOR ALL FAITHS: WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

"The view of Jerusalem is the history of the world; it is more, it is the history of the earth and of heaven." –Benjamin Disraeli

Jerusalem has always involved a collision of cultures, serving as a crossroads for travelers coming east from Europe, north from Africa, west from the Middle East and Asia. This mix of peoples and beliefs creates a dynamism and a danger. How do we address people who do not speak the same languages? What happens when we encounter different traditions and beliefs? Can we learn to co-exist? How do we live out our calling to love one another during trying times?

The golden rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" resides at the core of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the Torah, the Hebrews are told, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord" and "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:18, 33-34). Jesus summoned the spirit of these verses in his parable of the Good Samaritan. The Quran challenges Muslims to "Serve God, and join not any partners with Him; and do good- to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess [the slave]: For God loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious" (Q:4:36). There will always be the temptation to read these verses as an inside conversation, to extend love to and kindness solely to those within one's faith

community. Yet, the emphasis upon embracing the foreigner suggests we cannot turn a call to love into an opportunity to exclude.

Jesus was constantly being challenged to define what it means to follow God. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus, asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded to his question by referring back to the Torah.

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

We may think of neighbors as people living beside us. Sometimes it is convenient to ignore them, to live and let live. There could be people down the block who are struggling to pay the bills or a family dealing with divorce. Our thoughts might stretch across the tracks to a questionable part of town. We may erect walls or security cameras to protect ourselves from some neighbors. One way to think about this story is to consider who scares us. Who do we try to avoid? If we saw them walking towards us on the sidewalk, whose appearance would prompt us to cross the street?

Jesus answered the question, “Who is my neighbor?” with a story.

30 Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

In the Torah, in the Quran, in the New Testament, we are called to compassion, to comfort those in need. We are asked to reach into our pocket and even pay for the proper care and recovery of those who have need. The stinging power of Jesus’ story comes from the three examples. Jesus’s questioner may have identified himself with the first two

characters, a priest or a Levite. Yet, in the parable, they are either too busy, too scared, or too indifferent to be bothered. They don't get involved.

Who steps up and lives out the greatest commandments? Jesus cites a Samaritan as the stirring example. But Samaritans were viewed with suspicion in ancient Israel. They were half-breeds, seen as impure, outsiders to Jerusalem. Jesus subverts expectations by turning the suspicious outsider into the noble hero. Jesus lifts up Samaritans who might have been judged as potential thieves as the most admirable instead. He upholds the ethic of Psalm 133, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

So, the question arises, who are the modern Samaritans? We all have a tendency to turn those not like us into "the other." Who do we view with the most suspicion? Who would we cross the street (or even an ocean) to avoid? And what would be Jesus's attitude towards such neighbors? Perhaps we have pre-judged those who are fulfilling God's call towards love. The film JERUSALEM offers us valuable perspective, important background we may need to understand our global neighbors today.

While Christians and Jews may appreciate the sacred connections of Jerusalem to their faith, they may not know why Muslims also consider it a holy city. It begins with the status of Jerusalem and the land surrounding the city, referred to early in Islamic writings as the "land of the Prophets". The Qu'ran and indeed all Muslims venerate Jewish biblical Prophets, including Moses (Musa), David (Daoud), Solomon (Suleiman). They also revere Jesus, whom they call Isa, as well as Mary (Maryiam). The prophet Muhammad is a descendent of Ishmael. For the first 14 years of Islam, Muhammad instructed his followers to pray towards Jerusalem (as Jews did). This is why it is called "the first qibla" (direction of prayer). This indicated Islam was not simply an Arabian faith, but connected to earlier monotheistic traditions in the region. Later the "qibla" became Mecca, location of the Kaa'ba, an ancient house of worship. The second reason Jerusalem became "al-Quds" (the Holy City) is because of the common Islamic belief that Jerusalem is the gate to God. Muslims noted that the Prophet Jesus ascended from Jerusalem, as opposed to Rome or elsewhere, so it was only natural that Muhammad would be taken to Jerusalem to meet God. As recounted in the Qur'an, Muhammad was transported from the sacred mosque in Mecca (al-Masjid al-Haram) to the farthest mosque (*al-Masjid al-Aqsa*) during a miraculous night journey. The location of the farthest mosque was quickly identified as Jerusalem.

How was Muhammad transported to Jerusalem? *Hadith* (sacred writings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad) fill in a detailed account of Muhammad's night journey. In the first part of the journey called *Isra*, the angel *Jibreel* (Gabriel in English) appeared to Muhammad and led him to a white winged spirit horse called the *buraq*. The *buraq* transported Muhammad over the Sinai (where Moses received the 10 Commandments) and over Bethlehem (where David and Jesus were born) and finally to Jerusalem.

In the second part of the journey (*Mi-raj*), Muhammad ascended to the heavens. There he met key fore-bearers like Adam, John the Baptist and Jesus. Muhammad also met Joseph, Aaron, Moses, and Abraham. (Many Christians and Jews may not grasp how Islam recognizes the historical prophets from their faith—all three traditions trace their roots through Abraham). While in heaven, God decrees that humanity (through Muhammad) should pray fifty times daily. Moses recounts his own difficulties getting Israel to remain faithful to God's calling. Muhammad asks God to reduce the number of daily prayers. After several entreaties, the daily prayers are ultimately reduced to five. These are the daily observations that begin with a clarion call to prayer. Muslim devotion to regular prayer is humbling to those of other traditions who often pray on the fly or only when a need arises. Muhammad was also tested with a choice between wine or milk. Muhammad resisted the disorienting temptation of wine (and to this day Muslims abstain from alcohol).

Muhammad's night journey was commemorated by the later construction of the Dome of the Rock monument by the Umayyad Caliphate that ruled Jerusalem in the late 7th century after earlier Muslims defeated Byzantine armies and conquered the city. Made to similar specifications as the domed rotunda of Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Dome of the Rock is built upon the same stones where Jews and Christians believe Abraham offered Isaac in sacrifice, where David prayed, and Solomon built the 1st Temple. Today the Dome of the Rock guards this stone, sitting in the middle of the enormous stone platform that was once the site of the Temple complex built by King Herod, now considered a sacred area by Muslims.

It is easy to understand why Jerusalem has so often been the site of armed conflicts over the centuries. Temples have been torn down only to be rebuilt as pagan shrines or churches. Churches have been burnt down. Mosques have been converted into churches. There have been 118 conflicts in and for Jerusalem over the past 4,000 years. Jerusalem has been conquered 44 times. It has been besieged 23 times, completely destroyed twice and has seen 11 transfers from one religion to another. It has only changed hands peacefully twice.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims have plenty to be angry about. We could hold grudges across the centuries. Yet, our calling is toward love, to be neighbors. Muslim rulers like Saladin and Suleiman the Magnificent permitted worship of all religions in Jerusalem. They were good neighbors. The city has seen periods of reigns marked by intolerance and injustice followed by periods of peace and prosperity. Diversity has distinguished Jerusalem across the centuries and even today. The four major quarters of the Old City—Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Armenian—reflect the rich history and the deep love that each community feels for Jerusalem.

The challenge remains to fulfill the ancient Psalms. The cultures in Jerusalem are inextricably interwoven. It is home to so many people. It is sacred ground to several

faiths. Neighbors are figuring out how to know and love one another. We continue to strive toward the prayer of Psalm 128:5, “May the Lord bless you from Zion; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.”

QUESTION TO DISCUSS:

1. Have you had conflicts with neighbors and classmates, relatives and friends? How heated have they gotten?
2. We all have reasons to be angry, to hold grudges. Have you been able to practice forgiveness, to learn to love your neighbor as yourself?
3. What makes it difficult to put this challenge to love into practice?
4. How can we ask God to encourage our understanding, to expand our patience, to make us better neighbors both locally and globally?