

Images of Jerusalem in Rabbinic Literature

a. Pre-Historic Jerusalem

1. Midrash Tanhuma, Pekudei 3 – When the Holy One Blessed is He created His world, He created it in the manner of a child born of a woman; just as the creation of a child begins from the umbilical cord and is stretched here and there in four directions, so God began to create His world from the ‘even shetiyah’ (אבן שתיה) and from there the world was established (or: woven).



2. Sifre Deut. 152 - "Then you shall arise and ascend [to the place the Lord your God will choose"} (Deut. 17:8) - this declares that the Land of Israel is higher than all other lands, and the Temple is higher than all of the Land of Israel.

3. Midrash Tehillim 76:3 – R. Berechiah taught: “And His tabernacle was in Shalem and His abode in Zion” (Ps. 76:3) – At the beginning of the creation of the world God erected a tabernacle in Jerusalem, as if to pray in it: May it be [the] will that my sons perform my wishes so that I do not destroy my house and my sanctuary. (but cf. BT Berakhot 3a; #17 below)

4. PT Nazir 7:2 56b – R. Yudan ben Pazi said: The Holy One Blessed is he took a handful of earth from the place of the altar and created Adam with it; He said: Would that he be created from the site of the altar and thereby survive. And so it is written: “And the Lord God created Adam, dust from the earth (עפר מן האדמה); and it is written: “An altar of earth (מזבח אדמה) you shall make for me” (Ex. 20:21) – just as ‘adama’ further on is the altar, here too [adama] is the altar.

5. Gen. Rabbah 34 - "And Noah built an altar to God" (Gen. 8:20) - R. Eleazar b. Yaakov says: On the great altar in Jerusalem, where Adam sacrificed an offering.

6. Pirke Rabbi Eliezar 30 - R. Shimon says: With a finger God showed the altar to Abraham our Father, and said 'This is the altar'; this was the altar upon which Cain and Abel sacrificed; this was the altar upon which Noah and his sons sacrificed; for it [does not say]: 'And Abraham built there an altar' but rather 'And Abraham there built the altar'(המזבח) - this is the altar upon which the ancients sacrificed.

7. Pirke Rabbi Eliezer 31 - R. Judah says: Rebecca was barren for twenty years, and after twenty years Isaac took Rebecca to the place where he was bound (for sacrifice) and prayed for her pregnancy and God acceded (to the prayer).

b. Images of The "Historical" Jerusalem

8. Lamentations Rabbah 1:2 - R. Shmuel taught: There were twenty-four main roads in Jerusalem, and each road had twenty-four passages, and each passage had twenty-four markets, and each market had twenty-four streets, and each street had twenty-four courtyards, and each courtyard would discharge twice the number of the exiles from Egypt (i.e. 600,000)...

9. Avot 5:8 - Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Temple... And no man ever said to his fellow It is too cramped for me to lodge in Jerusalem.

10. PT Meg. 3:1, 73d - R. Pinḥas in the name of R. Hoshaya said: There were four hundred and eighty synagogues in Jerusalem, and each one maintained a *bet sefer* and *bet talmud*—*bet sefer* (elementary school) for learning Bible and *bet talmud* (advanced school) for Mishnah—and all were destroyed by Vespasian

11. Tosefta Meg. 3:15 (Lieberman p. 357) R. Eleazar b. R. Zadoq said: This was the practice of the associations (*ḥavurot*) that were in Jerusalem: Some [would go] to the house of the banquet, some to the house of mourning, some to the feast of betrothal, some to the feast of a wedding, some to [the celebration of] a week to the birth of a son and some for the gathering of bones [of the deceased]

12. Tosefta Sukkah 2:10, p. 265 - R. Eleazar b. Zadoq said: This was the practice of the people of Jerusalem: One would enter the synagogue—with his *lulav* in hand; he would rise to recite the *targum* or pass before the ark—with his *lulav* in hand; [when] he rose to read in the Torah or raise his hands [to bless the congregation]—he would put it (the *lulav*) down on the ground; he would leave the synagogue—his *lulav* in hand; he would enter the house of the sick or to comfort mourners—his *lulav* in hand; he would enter the *bet midrash*—and give it (the *lulav*) to his son or messenger and return it to his house.

13. BT Bava Metzia 28b - There was a Claimants Stone (אבן טוען) in Jerusalem. Anyone who lost something would turn there and anyone who found a lost article would turn there—the one would stand and declare and the other would stand and supply his identifying marks and retrieve it.

14. Tosefta Berakhot 4:9-10; ed. Lieberman p. 20 - R. Simeon b. Gamaliel said: This was a noteworthy custom in Jerusalem: They spread out a cloth in the doorway; as long as it was spread—guests might enter; when it was removed—guests were not allowed to enter. And there was another custom in Jerusalem, they would cede [preparation of] the meal to a chef. If something went wrong at the meal they punished the chef, everything (about the degree of punishment) according to the honor [due] the guests and the honor due the host

15. Lamentations Rabbah 4:2-4 - "The precious sons of Zion" (Lament. 4:2). Why were they precious? For no one would go to a banquet until he was called and invited once again...Another opinion: One would not go to a banquet until he knew with whom he would be eating.

When one of them would make a banquet, he would draw all the components of the meal on a banner. And why? Because of those with delicate constitution, so that one might not eat something that would cause his distress.

16. BT Shabbat 119b - R. Abbahu said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because the reading of the Shema morning and evening was neglected...Rav Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected [the education of] school children...Rav Yehuda said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because scholars were despised therein (בשביל שביזו בה תלמידי חכמים)

17. BT Berakhot 3a - R. Jose says, I was once travelling on the road, and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah of blessed memory appeared and waited for me at the door till I finished my prayer... He further said to me: My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin? I replied: I heard a divine voice, cooing like a dove, and saying: **Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world!**

18. BT Mo'ed Kattan 26a -[On seeing] Jerusalem in its[state of] ruin, one recites: Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned with fire and all our pleasant things are laid waste, and rends his garment...As soon as he reaches the Scopus he rends...

c. 'Future Jerusalem' and 'Heavenly Jerusalem'

19. Pesikta deRav Kahana, ed. Mandelbaum p. 322 – R. Hoshaya in the name of R. Afas: In the future Jerusalem will become a lantern for the nations of the world, and they will proceed to its light, and why, for it is written: “And the nations shall go by your light...” (Isaiah 60:3)

20. Exodus Rabbah 23:10 - R. Yoḥanan said: In the future God will make Jerusalem a metropolis for all the lands, as is written: ‘Ashdod and its daughters (ובנותיה; Josh. 15:47)’ .

21. Tanhuma Noah, 11 - R. Samuel b. Naḥmani said: There is an aggadic tradition that Jerusalem will not be built until the exiles are gathered. And if someone should tell you that the exiles have been gathered but the city of Jerusalem has yet to be built—do not believe. Why? For it is written: “The builder of Jerusalem” (first), and afterwards “[He] will gather the exiles of Israel” (Ps. 147:2).

22. Pesikta deRav Kahana, Roni Akara, ed. Mandelbaum p. 316 - R. Eleazar b. Azariah said to R. Eleazar ha-Moda’i: But can Jerusalem contain [all these]? He replied: In the future God will tell [Jerusalem] “Extend thyself, enlarge thyself, receive thy hosts...”.

23. BT Ta’anit 5b; Midrash Tehillim 122:4 – Said the Holy One: I will not enter Heavenly Jerusalem until I enter earthly Jerusalem. Is there a ‘heavenly Jerusalem’? Yes, as it says: “Jerusalem built up, is like a city knit together (חוברה לה יחדיו). R. Joshua ben Levi says: It means a city which makes all of Israel ‘haverim’.

24. Tanhuma Pekudei, I – Jerusalem is directly above, opposite earthly Jerusalem. It was because of the great love [God] has for earthly Jerusalem that He created another in heaven, as it says: “See, I have engraved you on the palm of my hands, your walls are ever before me” (Isaiah 49:16)...God has sworn that his presence will not enter heavenly Jerusalem until earthly Jerusalem is rebuilt; how beloved are Israel before the Holy One blessed is He.

(compare: Athanasius, Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi, 40 – If the Jews had maintained their institutions they could deny the coming of the messiah. But now all is decided, and everything – prophecy, their holy city and their temple – all these have been taken forever.)

see also: Julian, Letter to the Jews - ...this you should do, so that when I successfully complete my campaign with the Persians I will be able to rebuild with my own funds the Holy City of Jerusalem, that you have waited so many years to settle; and there I will praise – together with you – the most high God.

d. Legal Status of Jerusalem

25. Tosefta Ma'aser Sheni 1:12 - “Houses are not rented in Jerusalem because they are [the property] of [all] the tribes. R. Eleazar b. R. Simeon says: Nor do they rent beds” .

26. Avot of Rabbi Nathan, vers. a, p. 35 - The hides of the sacrificial beasts are not for sale there. What was done with them? Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel says: They were given to the innkeepers. The guests would stay indoors and the innkeepers out of doors. The guests would...[buy] ... painted (or: wooly) sheep whose hides were worth four to five *selá'*, and these were left as compensation for the men of Jerusalem.

27. BT Bava Kamma 82b - “No dunghills are made there”—on account of reptiles; “no kilns are made there”—on account of the smoke, “no gardens or orchards are cultivated there”—on account of the bad odor... “no fowls are bred there... no dead persons are kept there overnight” .

28. Mishna Shekalim 4:2 - ...the upkeep of the water channel, the city wall, the towers thereof and all the city’s needs were provided from the residue of the shekel-chamber.

e. Remembering Jerusalem

29. Tosefta Sotah 15:12-14 - Thus said the sages: A man puts plaster on his house but leaves a small area as a memorial to Jerusalem; a man prepares all that is needed for a meal but leaves some small matter out, as a memorial to Jerusalem; a woman prepares all her ornaments but leaves out some small matter as a memorial to Jerusalem, as it says: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem..."

30. Tosefta Berakhot 3:14-16 - A blind man and one who cannot determine directions direct their heart toward their Father in heaven and pray, as it says "And they pray to God," etc. Those who are standing outside the Land direct their hearts toward the Land of Israel... those standing in the Land of Israel direct their hearts toward Jerusalem and pray... those standing in Jerusalem direct their hearts toward the Chamber of the Holy of Holies and pray.... And thus those standing in the north face south, those in the south face north, those in the east face west, those in the west face east. Thus all Israel turn out praying towards one place.

31. Midrash Psalms 121:3, ed. Buber p. 506 - When does he remember [Jerusalem]? When standing in prayer he must remember Jerusalem and say 'To Jerusalem, Thy city, return in mercy'; when he recites the Grace after Meals, he says: '[The Lord] who comforts Zion and rebuilds Jerusalem'. (But see already Ben-Sirah, 36:12-13 : "Take pity on your holy city, Jerusalem, the foundation for your throne; Fill Zion with your majesty, your Temple with your glory"; *ibid.*, 51:27: "Give thanks to him who rebuilds his city, for his mercy endures forever.")