

Augustine on Israel and Jerusalem

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Abstract

This essay is written in view of the heartbreaking crisis in the Middle East, especially the terrible Gaza war. What did the influential (and for many still authoritative) church father Augustine think about Israel and Jerusalem? From his entire oeuvre, the texts in which he discusses Israel and Jerusalem have been examined. The conclusion is that he considers their material significance to be of only temporary value: he emphasises their “spiritual” and “eternal” significance. In close connection with his view of salvation history, Augustine never speaks of a lasting land promise for Israel in Palestine: the true Israel is a spiritual entity, as is the true spiritual Jerusalem. Based on his Christian views, Augustine would reject any Zionist zeal for present-day Israel and Jerusalem; and, a fortiori, any current war practice.

Keywords: Augustine; Gaza war; Israel; Jerusalem; spiritual interpretation; Zionism

Introduction

In his large and immensely influential oeuvre, the church father Augustine (354–430) often speaks about “Israel” and “Jerusalem.” The two names function innumerable times as concepts loaded with much meaning. Today, in the current discussions about the heartbreaking crisis in the Middle East,¹ we come upon these names constantly. It may be useful to present-day reflection on the conflict to consider what Augustine—arguably the most influential Christian theologian and philosopher in history—has stated about both “Israel” and “Jerusalem.”

Augustine’s statements are first and foremost based on the biblical texts as he reads them. As with every person past and present, we should pay attention (though concisely in this context) to how his exegesis is influenced by the hermeneutics of his time and Christian tradition. In our overview, we will also look at what he appears to know about the “Holy Land” and the Jerusalem of his time. Finally, after our overview of relevant texts from Augustine’s oeuvre, we briefly discuss what his considerations might mean for today’s thinking.

“Isra(h)el” and the “Isra(h)elitae” in History

Augustine speaks of “Isra(h)el” and “Isra(h)elitae” several thousand times.² It is worth noting that in the antique manuscripts and in some modern text editions both the forms with and without “h” appear, although the shorter form prevails. As regards the assigned significance, there is no difference: “Isra(h)el” originally means “one seeing God.”³ According to Augustine, the name as such, first given to the patriarch Jacob, is a “name of choice” or “selection” (*nomen electionis*), which indicates God’s special election.⁴

Based on the biblical account (Gen 32:28), Augustine mentions the patriarch Jacob's change of name into Israel on several occasions.⁵ In his discussion of the subsequent course of Jacob's life, the designation Israel sometimes appears.⁶ Apart from several sermons and his handling of specific exegetical questions in many of his writings, it is particularly in the narrative sections of *The Catechizing of the Uninstructed* and *The City of God* that Augustine deals with the history of the people of Israel.⁷ In actual fact the history of the Israelites begins with their departure from Egypt where they had become a real "nation" (*gens*). Although Augustine, when discussing that memorable juncture, frequently speaks of "Hebrews," from the story of the Exodus onwards he usually labels them as the nation or people of the Israelites (*gens/populus Israeliticae*). This Israelite people is said to have wandered through the wilderness, after that entered the promised land, and eventually became the kingdom of Israel. After the division of the people, the ten tribes under Jeroboam were called Israelites, "though this name had been the title of the whole nation."⁸ The kingdom of Israel came to an end when the ten tribes were overthrown and transferred, as was later the destiny of Judah.⁹ From now on, Augustine only occasionally speaks of Israel and the Israelites; when telling the story of the people rescued from captivity, its members are usually designated as Jews.¹⁰

The "Carnal" and the "Spiritual" Israel Augustine thus regards the name "Israel" as dating back to Jacob's name change. In Sermon 102, he notes that unlike Abram's definitive alteration of name to Abraham, Jacob continues to be designated both by his original appellation and his new name. On the one hand, this indicates that the name of Israel belongs to "the other age, when we will see God; for the people of God, the Christian people, now is both Jacob and Israel: Jacob in fact, Israel in hope: *iacob in re, Israel in spe*."¹¹ On the other hand, and most often, Augustine applies the significance of this persisting double name to the history of the people of Israel itself, which history he considers to culminate in the history of the church:

iacob autem etiam Israel (...) vocabatur, quod nomen magis populus ex illo procreates obtinuit. Hoc autem nomen illi ab angelo inpositum est, qui cum illo fuerat in itinere de Mesopotamia redeunte luctatus, typum Christi evidentissime gerens.

(...) et tamen benedictionem ab eodem angelo, quem superaverat, impetravit; ac sic huius nominis inpositio benedictio fuit. Interpretatur autem Israel videns deum, quod erit in fine praemium sanctorum omnium. Tetigit porro illi idem angelus veluti praevalenti latitudinem femoris eumque isto modo claudum reddidit. Erat itaque unus atque idem iacob et benedictus et claudus; benedictus in eis, qui in Christum ex eodem populo crediderunt, atque in infidelibus claudus. (Civ. 16.39)

Jacob was also called (...) Israel, which was the name generally borne by the people descended from him. This name was given to him by the angel who wrestled with him when he was on his way back from Mesopotamia. This angel most evidently represents a type of Christ.

(...) He (Jacob) obtained a blessing from the very angel he had overcome; and so the bestowal of this name was the blessing. For Israel means "seeing God," which will in the end be the reward of all the saints. Then the same angel touched the apparent victor on the broad part of his thigh, and in that way made him lame. So the very same man, Jacob, was at the same time blessed and lame: blessed in those who among that people (of Israel) have believed in Christ and crippled in the unbelieving.¹²

Augustine repeatedly stresses this double aspect, prefigured in Jacob-Israel, when describing the history of his descendants. The people of Israel are both “carnal” and “spiritual,” both “seeing God” and “blind.”¹³ Why did they receive visible rewards? It was because of their being “carnal”: if not sustained by these *visibilia*, the Israelites would have perished altogether and slipped into idolatry.¹⁴ In accordance with an old theme of the Church’s anti-Jewish polemic,¹⁵ Augustine states that because of their carnality (*carnalitas*) the people received their temple worship:

... sacrificia illi populo pro eius carnalitate et corde adhuc lapideo talia data sunt, quibus teneretur ne in idola deflueret. (*Io. eu. tr.* 10.4)

... the (service of) the sacrifices were given to that people for their carnality and heart still of stone, with which they were kept from falling into (the service of) the idols.

In his model catechesis Augustine aptly delineates what he over and over expounds in his exegetical works and sermons about the carnal and the spiritual Israel:

Ex illo natus est populus, a quo unus Deus verus coleretur, qui fecit caelum et terram; cum ceterae gentes simulacris et daemioniis servirent. In eo plane populo multo evidentius futura Ecclesia figurata est. Erat enim ibi multitudo carnalis, quae propter visibilia beneficia colebat Deum. Erant ibi autem pauci futuram requiem cogitantes et caelestem patriam requirentes, quibus prophetando revelabatur futura humilitas Dei, regis et Domini nostri Iesu Christi, ut per eam fidem ab omni superbia et tumore sanarentur. Horum sanctorum qui praecesserunt tempore nativitatem Domini, non solum sermo, sed etiam vita et coniugia et filii et facta prophetia fuit huius temporis, quo per fidem passionis Christi ex gentibus congregatur ecclesia. Per illos sanctos patriarchas et prophetas carnali populo Israel, qui postea etiam Iudaei appellati sunt, et visibilia beneficia ministrabantur quae carnaliter a Domino desiderabant, et coerciones poenarum corporalium, quibus pro tempore terrentur, sicut eorum duritiae congruebat. Et in his tamen omnibus mysteria spiritalia significabantur, quae ad Christum et ecclesiam pertinerent. (*Cat. rud.* 33)

From him [sc. Abraham, Jacob’s grandfather, considered to be the father of the Israelites or Jews] was born a people by whom the one true God who made heaven and earth should be worshipped, while all the other nations served idols and evil spirits. In that people, without doubt, the future Church was much more evidently [sc. than in Noah’s ark] prefigured. For amongst them there was a carnal multitude who worshipped God for the sake of visible benefits. But amongst them there were also a few who contemplated future rest and sought the heavenly fatherland. To them was revealed by prophecy the future humility of God in the person of our king and Lord Jesus Christ, that through faith in Him they might be cured of all haughtiness and swelling pride. Not only the words of these holy men who chronologically preceded the Lord’s birth, but also their life, their marriages, their children, and their deeds constituted a prophecy of this time, at which the Church is gathered out of all nations through faith in the passion of Christ. By the instrumentality of those holy patriarchs and prophets this carnal people of Israel, who at a later period were also called Jews, had ministered unto them at once those visible benefits which they eagerly desired of the Lord in a carnal manner, and those chastisements, in the form of bodily punishments, which were intended to terrify them for the time, as was befitting for their obstinacy. And in all these, nevertheless, there were also spiritual mysteries signified, such as were meant to bear upon Christ and the Church.

The “Prophetic” Israel and the Church

The previous long quotation singles out an essential aspect of Augustine’s Christian interpretation, namely that in all the things pertaining to the historical Israel “spiritual mysteries are signified which are associated with Christ and the Church.” It is about this “prophetic” function of Israel that he also speaks elsewhere. “The people of Israel were by a special mysterious appointment a prophetic nation.”¹⁶ Moreover, they were themselves “a prophet of Christ.”¹⁷

This view is, once again, finely affirmed in the model catechesis of *The Catechizing of the Uninstructed*:

Populus ergo ille delatus in Aegyptum, servivit regi durissimo, et gravissimis laboribus eruditus quaesivit liberatorem Deum: et missus est eis unus de ipso populo, sanctus Dei servus Moyses, qui in virtute Dei magnis miraculis terrens tunc impiam gentem Aegyptiorum, eduxit inde populum Dei per mare rubrum; ubi discedens aqua viam praebuit transeuntibus (...): sic ex Aegypto exiens populus Dei, per aquas iter invenit, quibus ipsorum hostes consumpti sunt. Nec ibi defuit ligni sacramentum. Nam virga percussit Moyses, ut illud miraculum fieret. Utrumque signum est sancti baptismi (...). Apertius autem Christi passio in illo populo figurata est, cum iussi sunt ovem occidere et manducare. (*Cat. rud.* 34)

That people [sc. of Israel], then, having been brought down into Egypt, served a most hard-hearted king, and having been taught by the most severe labours, sought God as their deliverer. And there was sent to them one from their own people, Moses, the holy servant of God, who in the power of God, terrifying at that time the impious nation of the Egyptians through great miracles, led forth from there the people of God through the Red Sea, where the water parted and opened a way for them as they crossed it (...). So God’s people [sc. Israel], when they went forth from Egypt, found a way through the waters by which their enemies were destroyed. Nor was the sacrament of the wood [sc. Christ’s cross!] lacking there. For Moses struck (the sea) with his rod, in order that that miracle might be affected. Both are signs of holy baptism (...). But even more clearly prefigured was Christ’s passion in the case of that people when they were commanded to slay and eat the lamb.

Specifically in *Against Faustus* Augustine again and again points to the “prophetic” significance of (nearly) everything pertaining to Israel’s earthly history and its ceremonial rites.¹⁸ Yet once more the model catechesis¹⁹ contains the obvious examples of all these things considered to be “visible sacraments” (*sacramenta visibilia*) and “signs of spiritual matters” (*signa rerum spiritualium*). And particularly the earthly kingdom of Israel and its capital Jerusalem are such “signs of things to come” (*signa rerum futurarum*), things “we now see fulfilled in the Church.”²⁰

The “True” Israel

In view of the preceding exposition, it may be asked which Israel for Augustine is the real or “true” one. In fact there are two Israels, like there are two Jerusalems and two seeds of Abraham and Jacob. The first one is always described as an earthly, temporal, and carnal reality; the second one as its heavenly, eternal, and spiritual fulfilment. There is a certain continuity between the two entities, but the Israel of the flesh is only a passing phenomenon, while the Israel of the spirit will be lasting.

This second Israel is the real Israel;²¹ the real “seed of Israel” are the Christians.²² “Let nobody say, ‘I am not a son of Israel’ (...) The Jews are not the sons of Israel: we are.”²³

Although Augustine recurrently quotes the apostle Paul’s words about the cultivated olive tree on to which the oleaster’s branches are grafted (Rom 11:11–24), and repeats the apostle’s warning, “Do not be arrogant, but be afraid” (Rom 11:20), he nevertheless considers only the believers in Christ to be the real Israel. All this is, according to Augustine, due to the fact that this very same Christ was the only focal point and centre of all real believers, i.e., those among Israel’s forefathers; those among the people of Israel itself; and even those outside of Israel.²⁴ It is for this reason that Augustine, frequently too,²⁵ refers to Nathanael as being “the real Israelite” (John 1:47) because he acknowledged Christ as the son of God and the king of Israel.²⁶

Israel’s Restoration in the Eschaton

However, not everything has been said in the above. Augustine has also read the prophecies of Israel’s prophets about the end times, and he indeed believes that a mass conversion of “the Israelites according to the flesh” will then take place. In *The City of God* he discusses prophecies such as those in Hos 3:5,²⁷ Mal 4:5–6²⁸ and especially Zech 12:9–10. In the latter case it reads, among other things:

Poenitebit quippe in die illa Iudaeos, etiam eos qui accepturi sunt spiritum gratiae et misericordiae, quod in eius passione insultaverunt Christo, cum ad eum adspexerint in sua maiestate venientem, cumque esse cognoverint, quem prius humilem in suis parentibus illuserunt; quamvis et ipsi parentes eorum tantae illius impietatis auctores resurgentes videbunt eum, sed puniendi iam, non adhuc corrigendi. Non itaque hoc loco ipsi intelligendi sunt, ubi dictum est: “Et effundam super domum David et super habitatores Ierusalem spiritum gratiae et misericordiae; et aspicient ad me, pro eo quod insultaverunt,” sed tamen de illorum stirpe venientes, qui per Eliam illo tempore sunt credituri. (*Civ.* 20.30)

For in that day the Jews—that is, those of them who shall receive the spirit of grace and mercy—when they see him (i.e. Christ) coming in his majesty, and recognize that it is He whom they, in the person of their parents, insulted when He appeared in his humiliation, shall repent of insulting him in his passion. And their parents themselves, who were the perpetrators of this huge impiety, shall see him when they rise, (which resurrection) will be only for their punishment, not for their correction. Therefore they are not to be understood in this place [sc. text], where it is said: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and mercy, and they shall look upon me because they have insulted me” (Zach. 12:9–10). But we are to understand the words of their descendants, who shall believe through Elijah at that time.

The restoration of the Jews in the end times is one of Augustine’s central teachings. Through the returned Elijah they will convert *to Christ*.²⁹ “When, therefore, he [sc. Elijah] has come, he shall give a spiritual explanation of the law which the Jews at present understand carnally.”³⁰ According to Augustine, the restoration of the Jews only applies to those Jews who have converted to Christ. In essence, it is a spiritual restoration: nowhere is it said that it involves an earthly kingdom or state with Jerusalem as its centre. It should be emphatically noted that Augustine also nowhere explains Rev 20 in this way.³¹

Summary

Based on the above exposition we conclude that, in Augustine's oeuvre, the noun "Israel" is ambiguous. To a certain extent it has its place between the (mainly positive) noun "Hebrew" and the (predominantly negative) noun "Jew."³² The name "Israel" has a positive meaning insofar as it is related to (the prefiguring of) Christ. But it has a negative meaning insofar as it is related to earthly, temporal, and "carnal" matters. It is for this reason that—as I will further argue below—some sort of "Israel theology" with its focus on the visible promised land of Canaan does not play any role in Augustine's biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. Besides, for him the "Israel of the spirit" is composed not of one nation only, but of all nations.³³

Jerusalem

As is the case with Israel, Jerusalem is also an essential concept in Augustine's theology. This not only goes for his ecclesiology, but also—and in particular—for his doctrine of the two cities.

In Augustine's Latin oeuvre, the English noun "Jerusalem" usually appears as Ierusalem, Hierusalem, Hierosolyma, Hierosolima, and Ierosolyma. The ablative case Hierosolymis/Ierosolymis rather frequently occurs as an *ablativus loci*: "in/at Jerusalem."

As may be expected, the name frequently occurs in his Explanations of the Psalms and in his sermons. Yet it is conspicuous in several other works such as the City of God. Curiously, in Augustine's earliest works the noun "Jerusalem" is missing. Its first occurrence is in his *Explanation of Genesis against the Manichaeans* which is usually dated to 388–389. There he markedly defines its meaning:

Sicut Hierusalem, quamvis sit visibilis et terrenus locus, significat tamen civitatem pacis spiritualiter et Sion, quamvis sit mons in terra, speculationem tamen significat, et hoc nomen in scripturarum allegoriis ad spiritalia intellegenda saepe transfertur. (*Gen. adv. Man.* 2.13)

Just as Jerusalem, although it is a visible and earthly place, nevertheless signifies spiritually the city of peace; and Zion, although it is a mountain of this earth, yet signifies contemplation; so this name (of Jerusalem) in the allegories of the Scriptures often conveys spiritual understanding.

During the rest of his career, Augustine time and again gives the self-same explanation: Jerusalem means *visio pacis*, "vision of peace," just as Zion means *speculatio*, "gaze" or "contemplation."³⁴ From the earliest passage in Augustine, as from so many other texts, it seems that his explanation of the significance of the name Jerusalem follows standard ecclesiastical practice.³⁵

Already in the biblical traditions, the meaning of Jerusalem is very fluid: there is the Jerusalem below and the Jerusalem above, old and new, temporal and eternal, profane and holy, human and divine.³⁶ From Augustine's works, a similar variety of meanings can be inferred. Bearing in mind that the transitions between one sense and the other are variable, the following two most important meanings can be discerned.

First, according to its literal meaning, Jerusalem is the earthly, physical, and historical city in Palestine. From time to time, Augustine relates historical details about this city: its original name was Jebus; king David took it from the Amorites and made it the capital of the kingdom

of Israel; Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem; both temple and city were destroyed.³⁷ Besides, Jerusalem is the city where Christ suffered, was crucified, died, and arose from the dead; moreover, from this city the Gospel began to be proclaimed.³⁸

Augustine rarely refers to the city in Palestine of his own day: when he mentions the empirical city of Jerusalem from post-Old Testament times, he usually has in mind the city at the time of Jesus and his apostles or at the time of its destruction in 70 CE. In one of his sermons on the Psalms, he seems to suggest that the Christian bishops now “guard” Jerusalem.³⁹ Contemporary Jerusalem is meant when he tells the story of a certain Hesperius who had received from a friend a sample of sacred earth taken from Jerusalem.⁴⁰ But Augustine’s contemporary Jerusalem is above all the city that was Van Oort 125 rightly condemned because of the “murder” of Christ.⁴¹ Ever since it is abandoned by the Jews: “Now you look for a Jew in the city of Jerusalem and you do not find one”;⁴² “that Jerusalem is not inhabited by Jews.”⁴³ Nevertheless, in *Sermon 19* (usually dated to Dec. 417), Augustine relates a very curious story:

Terrae motus magni de orientalibus nuntiantur. Nonnullae magnae repentinis conlapsae sunt civitates. Territi apud Hierosolimam qui inerant Iudaei, pagani, catechumeni, omnes sunt baptizati. Dicuntur fortasse baptizati septem millia hominum. Signum Christi in vestibus Iudaeorum baptizatorum apparuit. Relatu fratrum fidelium constantissimo ista nuntiantur. (S. 19.6)

Great earthquakes are reported from the east. Some big cities collapsed suddenly. The Jews, pagans and catechumens who were terrified at Jerusalem were all baptized. Perhaps seven thousand people are said to have been baptized. The sign of Christ appeared in the clothes of baptized Jews. These things are reported with the most constant report of the faithful brethren.

Second but most important, Jerusalem has a spiritual meaning. This symbolic or allegorical meaning is stressed by Augustine. Although I think it is impossible to deduce an unequivocal system of “the four senses of Scripture” from the abundance of texts in which a metaphorical meaning of Jerusalem occurs,⁴⁴ without a doubt the various *spiritual* meaning is by far the most prevalent. Thus Jerusalem, i.e., “vision of peace,” is a metaphor for heaven.⁴⁵ It is also a metaphor for the heavenly city of which the believers are already the fellow citizens of the angels.⁴⁶ Besides, Jerusalem stands for the celestial church.⁴⁷ It is also a metaphor for the church on earth,⁴⁸ here on pilgrimage towards the heavenly city which is her real home.⁴⁹

In his early work *On the True Religion*, Augustine mentions the *allegoria sacramentis* as one of the four types of allegories.⁵⁰ Throughout his writings, Jerusalem turns out to be such an *allegoria sacramentis* par excellence. The earthly city Jerusalem is a visible sign (*signum*), figure (*figura*), and shadow (*umbra*) of another reality, be that reality earthly and temporal (such as the church on earth) or heavenly and eternal (such as the heavenly Jerusalem). Typical passages which illustrate one or more of these occurrences of Jerusalem as an “allegory of a holy sign” are:

Ibi [sc. in regno terreno] Ierusalem condita est famosissima civitas dei, serviens *in signo* liberae civitatis, quae caelestis Ierusalem dicitur, quod verbum est Hebraeum, et interpretatur visio pacis. (*Cat. rud.* 36)

There [sc. in the earthly kingdom of Israel] Jerusalem was founded, the most famous city of God, serving *in the sign* of the free city [cf. Gal. 4:26], which is called the heavenly Jerusalem, which name is a Hebrew word and is interpreted as “vision of peace.”

Ideo vetus testamentum promissiones habet terrenas, terrenam Ierusalem, terrenam Palaestinam, regnum terrenum, salutem terrenam, hostium subiugationem, abundantiam filiorum, fecunditatem frugum. Omnia istae promissiones sunt terrena. In figura spiritualiter intelleguntur, quomodo Ierusalem terrena umbra erat regni caelestis, et regnum terrenum umbra erat regni caelorum. (*En. Ps.* 119.7)

Therefore, the Old Testament has earthly promises, earthly Jerusalem, earthly Palestine, earthly kingdom, earthly salvation, subjugation of enemies, abundance of children, fertility of crops. All these promises are earthly. They are understood spiritually in a figure, how the earthly Jerusalem was the shadow of the heavenly kingdom, and the earthly kingdom was the shadow of the heavenly kingdom.

... cum Hierusalem *figurate* posita et spiritualiter intellecta uniuersam ecclesiam *significet* ... (*Cath. fr.* 26)

... when Jerusalem is *figuratively* placed and spiritually understood, it signifies the universal church ...

As in *The Catechizing of the Uninstructed* 36, in many of the other pertinent texts Augustine turns out to be directly inspired by the apostle Paul’s words in Gal 4:26.⁵¹

One last but important feature should be briefly mentioned. Augustine’s various metaphorical interpretations of Jerusalem reached its most influential expression in his doctrine of the two cities. “Two kinds of love found two cities: the love of God founds Jerusalem; the love of the world founds Babylon.”⁵² The concept of the two antithetical cities, called, respectively, Jerusalem and Babylon,⁵³ was inspired by several biblical texts.⁵⁴ The full-fledged doctrine, however, which became of worldwide importance through Augustine’s *The City of God*,⁵⁵ is indebted to the preceding and multifarious Jewish-Christian tradition, especially the baptismal traditions and their associated catechetical instruction.⁵⁶

Conclusion and Actualisation

In the just given overview, I have listed Augustine’s essential statements and ideas. It may be abundantly clear: for Augustine the true Israel is a spiritual entity; the true Jerusalem is the heavenly city of (in particular) Gal 4. The Israel of this dispensation is earthly (*terrenus*) and carnal (*carnalis*): it has a positive meaning only insofar as it refers as a type or “foreshadow” to the spiritual Israel.⁵⁷ The same applies to the earthly Jerusalem and its relationship to the heavenly city.

It may be shocking to read that for Augustine the true Israel is the church. “We are the (true) seed of Israel”; “Let nobody say, ‘I am not a son of Israel’ (...) The Jews are not the sons of Israel: we are.”⁵⁸ It should be emphasised, however, that for Augustine such statements are purely based on his Christian belief. Basic and permanently essential for him is true faith in Christ. That faith is so essential that it even applied to those who placed their expectation in Christ outside the designated people of God, i.e., historical Israel.⁵⁹ “Who will really see God? Those who are ‘born to a new life.’”⁶⁰

After the rejection of Christ by the Jews (according to Augustine, their “murder” of Jesus Christ is entirely their responsibility)⁶¹ they are no longer the people of the covenant. In God’s covenant with one nation (Israel) they have been replaced by the Christian church from all nations. That church, as Augustine repeats endlessly in his sermons, bears the heavy responsibility of following the footsteps of Christ.

Nor is there any longer a special place for an earthly and tangible Jerusalem in Palestine.⁶² When he mentions the city, he is speaking specifically about the spiritual, the heavenly city. Every chiliastic expectation in which there would be a place for an earthly Jerusalem is radically rejected by Augustine.⁶³ In his opinion, the real Jerusalem of John’s Revelation is the city “coming down from God out of heaven” (Rev 21:2).

A Zionist ideal of a state of Israel in the land of Palestine is in fact unthinkable for Augustine. Such a state would only serve earthly (*terrena!*) expectations and fall short of the Christian expectation of the gracious arrival of a heavenly Jerusalem. That heavenly city comes from God, not from man. In addition, according to the prophetic word, Zion will be redeemed by justice (Isa 1:27), not by violence. Moreover, essential to Christ’s message is the conviction: “All who take the sword will die by the sword” (Matt 26:52).

Notes

¹ Here I use this common and often classic designation that some say is now “colonial.” But is the real alternative “Southwest Asia”? I think one may doubt this on various grounds (which need not be explained in detail here, but cf. e.g., “Southeast Asia” or even the name of “Australia”).

² My essay is based on the original texts of Augustine’s oeuvre, primarily sourced through the *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*, ed. C. P. Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2023) and cited according to the best scholarly editions. In my quotes Latin u or v in the best editions is always represented by the most common rendering v. The abbreviations of Augustine’s works are after the manner of the *Augustinus-Lexikon* (=AL), ed. C. P. Mayer et al., 5 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1986–2023).

³ See e.g., *En. Ps.* 75.3, 97.3, 120.6, 121.8, 124.10. In this explanation of Psalm texts Augustine seems to follow common Christian etymology (cf. e.g., Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 11.6, which in turn seems to be influenced by Philo); see G. Harvey, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). The form with “h” more specifically seems reminiscent of ancient popular derivation from Hebrew: a man (*’îš*) who sees (*rā’â*) God (*’el*).

⁴ *En. Ps.* 49.14: “Israel nomen electionis est: *Non vocaberis, ait, Iacob, sed uocaberis Israel* (Gen. 32:28). Ergo audi sicut Israel, sicut uidens Deum; etsi nondum specie, sed iam fide. Hoc enim interpretatur Israel: Videns Deum.”

⁵ See the previous note. In S. 122.3 it runs: “Nostis qui in schola Christi eruditi estis, Iacob ipsum esse et Israel.”

⁶ Cf. e.g., *Civ.* 16.41. ⁷ *Cat. rud.* 33ff.; *Civ.* 16.43, 17; parts of *Civ.* 18.

⁸ *Civ.* 17.21.

⁹ *Civ.* 17.23.

¹⁰ See *Civ.* 18.26 ff. and cf. e.g., *Cat. rud.* 33: “carnali populo Israel, qui postea etiam Iudaei appellati sunt.” After *Cat. rud.* 37, when dealing with the post-exilic people, Augustine consistently speaks of “Jews” (except for *populus Israel* in *Cat. rud.* 41, when he harks back at the celebration of Pascha as told in Exod 12).

¹¹ *S.* 122.4, *inter alia*: “Nomen Abrahae in hoc saeculum explicandum fuit: hoc est enim factus pater multarum gentium, unde nomen accepit. Nomen autem Israel ad alterum saeculum pertinet, ubi videbimus Deum. Populus ergo Dei, populus Christianus, in hoc tempore et Jacob est et Israel; Jacob in re, Israel in spe.”

¹² The same reasoning with additional references to Bible texts in e.g., *Qu. hept.* 1.104: “unus ergo atque idem Iacob et claudus et benedictus: claudus in latitudine femoris tamquam in multitudine generis, de quibus dictum est: ‘Et claudicaverunt a semitis suis’ (Ps. 17:46); benedictus autem in eis de quibus dictum est: ‘Reliquiae per electionem gratiae salvae factae sunt’ (Rom. 11:5)”: “Jacob, then, is one and the same, both the lame and the blessed: lame in the width of the thigh, as in the multitude of the nation of which it has been said: ‘And they staggered from their paths’ (Ps. 17:46); but he was blessed in them of whom it was said: ‘The remnant are saved by the election of grace’ (Rom. 11:5).”

¹³ For the notion of the *caecitas* (often provoked by Rom 11:25: “quia caecitas ex parte Israel facta est”) of both the Israel and the Jews, see e.g., *Ver. rel.* 9; *Ep. Rm. inch.* 20; *C. Faust.* 13.11.12.14.

¹⁴ E.g., *Io. eu. tr.* 3.19: “... per visibilia tenebantur. Quare tenebantur? Ne penitus interirent et ad idola laborarentur”: “... they were held by visible rewards. Why were they held? Lest they perish altogether and slip away to idols.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Simon, *Verus Israel. Étude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l’Empire romain* (Paris: De Boccard, 19642 [repr. 19833]), 201 and n. 6.

¹⁶ *Ep.* 102.15: “... in ipso populo Israel, quae speciali quodam mysterio *gens* prophetica fuit.”

¹⁷ *Bon. vid.* 7.10: “et ipse populus per ea, quae *in figura contingebant in illis* (1 Cor 10:11), sive in his qui scirent sive in his qui illa nescirent, nihil aliud esset quam propheta Christi, ex quo nasceretur etiam caro Christi.”

¹⁸ See esp. *C. Faust.* 22 and 12. For excellent interpretations, see A. Massie, *Peuple prophétique et nation témoin. Le peuple juif dans le Contra Faustum manichaeum de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 2011) and *Contre Fauste le Manichéen. Contra Favstvm Manichaevm, Livres I–XII*, sous la direction de M. Dulaey (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2018).

¹⁹ Another outstanding example is *S.* 352.3.

²⁰ *Cat. rud.* 35 and 36: “nunc in ecclesia videmus impleri.”

²¹ E.g., *en. Ps.* 52.9, 75.2: “... et de Israel sic debemus accipere, quomodo de Iudaea; quomodo illi non sunt veri Iudaei, sic nec verus Israel. (...) illi ergo digni sunt Israel dici, qui meruerunt Christum intellegere Deum in carne positum”: “... and we must understand ‘Israel’ in the same way as ‘Judea’; just as they are not true ‘Judaei’ (Jews), so neither the true Israel. (...) those, then, are worthy to be called Israel, who have deserved to understand Christ as God come in the flesh (...).” Cf. e.g., *En. Ps.* 47.11, 65.1 and, not least, *Ep.* 149.19.

²² E.g., *En. Ps.* 21.25: “Nos sumus semen Israel.”

²³ *En. Ps.* 148.17: “Nemo dicat: Non sum filius Israel. Ne putetis Iudaeos filios Israel esse, et nos non esse filios Israel (...) illi non sunt, et nos sumus.”

²⁴ Among the nearly innumerable instances, reference may be made to the rather long exposition of S. 352.3 that winds up as follows: “Tunc enim Christus venturus, modo Christus venit. Venturus et venit, diversa verba sunt, sed idem Christus”: “Once Christ was coming, now He has come. He was coming and He has come: these are different verbs, but it is the same Christ.” For Augustine’s rather curious statements about the individuals from other nations such as Melchizedek, the Edomite Job, Rahab, the pagan Sybil and the inhabitants of Nineveh all of whom, before Christ’s coming, belonged to “the company of the true Israel” (*Civ.* 18.36 and elsewhere), see e.g., J. van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon. A Study into Augustine’s City of God and the Sources of his Doctrine of the Two Cities* (Leiden: Brill, 1991 [repr. Leiden: Brill 2013]), 98–99.

²⁵ E.g., *C. Faust.* 12.26.44; *Bapt.* 3.26; *Civ.* 16.38; *Io. ev. tr.* 7.16.

²⁶ E.g., *Io. ev. tr.* 7.20.

²⁷ Cf. *Civ.* 18.28.

²⁸ Cf. *Civ.* 20.29.

²⁹ The theme of *Civ.* 20.19 based on Mal 4:5–6.

³⁰ *Civ.* 20.29: “Cum venerit ergo, exponendo legem spiritualiter quam nunc Iudaei carnaliter sapient ...”

³¹ See esp. *Civ.* 22.

³² Cf. e.g., J. van Oort, “Augustine and the Jews. Overview and Open Questions,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 103 (2023): 135–57, esp. 137–39.

³³ E.g., *Doctr. chr.* 3.34.48: “Sic fit Israel spiritualis, non unius gentis, sed omnium quae promissae sunt patribus in eorum semine, quod est Christus”: “Thus spiritual Israel is made up, not of one nation, but of all the nations promised to the fathers in their seed, which is Christ.”

³⁴ Both explanations in e.g., *Cat. rud.* 36; *Civ.* 17.16; *En. Ps.* 9.12, 50.22, 64.3–4. Originally Augustine stressed the difference between Zion as the church on its pilgrimage and Jerusalem as the eternal city of God (e.g., in *En. Ps.* 9.12), but later this distinction hardly ever occurs: Jerusalem and Zion are (nearly) equivalent concepts. See e.g., É. Lamirande, *L’Église céleste selon saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1963), 102–3.

³⁵ Cf. e.g., Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 118–23 and 312–18. To the testimonies mentioned there (e.g., Philo and Origen), I add Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.29.

³⁶ Cf. e.g., K. L. Schmidt, “Jerusalem als Urbild und Abbild,” *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 18 (1950): 207–48.

³⁷ E.g., *Qu.* 6.15, 7.17; *En. Ps.* 61.7; 64.2; S. 40.40; *Civ.* 17.3–4.10.12.

³⁸ E.g., *Civ.* 18.52.54; *Adv. Iud.* 9; *En. Ps.* 49.4–5; S. 111.2; S. Dolbeau 10.8.

³⁹ *En. Ps.* 126.3.

⁴⁰ *Civ.* 22.8.

⁴¹ E.g., *Ep. Io. tr.* 2.3: “Manifestum est enim omnes interfectores Christi, id est Iudaeos, expulsos esse de illa civitate: For it is evident that all the murderers of Christ, that is, the Jews, were expelled from that city [sc. Jerusalem].”

⁴² *En. Ps.* 124.3: “... modo quaeris Iudaeum in civitate Ierusalem, et non invenis.”

⁴³ *En. Ps.* 64.1: “... illa quidem Ierusalem modo a Iudaeis non incolitur ...”

⁴⁴ Despite the suggestion of N. Staubach, “*Quattuor modis intellegi potest Hierusalem. Augustini Civitas Dei und der vierfache Schriftsinn*,” in *Alvarium. Festschrift für Christian Gnillka*, ed. W. Blümer, R. Henke, and M. Mülke (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002), 345–58.

⁴⁵ E.g., *Cat. rud.* 36; *Civ.* 19.11; and repeatedly in *En. Ps.*

⁴⁶ E.g., *F. et symb.* 13; *Ep.* 55.10; *Civ.* 11.7, 17.3, and many other passages in *Civ.* and *En. Ps.* in particular.

⁴⁷ E.g., *En. Ps.* 9.12, 149.5 and many other passages in *En. Ps.* in particular. Note, however, that the

literal expression *ecclesia caelestis* (“heavenly church”) is *not* familiar to Augustine. See Lamirande, *Église céleste*, 115.

⁴⁸ E.g., *En. Ps.* 61.7, 64.2, 121.4.

⁴⁹ E.g., *En. Ps.* 121.2 and many other passages in *En. Ps.* and *Civ.* in particular; cf. Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 131–42.

⁵⁰ *Ver. rel.* 99: “et quid intersit inter allegoriam historiae, et allegoriam facti, et allegoriam sermonis, et allegoriam sacramenti.” Cf. e.g., *En. Ps.* 103, S. 1.13 and, for the Holy Land as *sacramentum* of the “Ierusalem libera mater nostra, quae in caelis est,” *En. Ps.* 105.22.

⁵¹ See e.g., *Doctr. chr.* 4.39; *Civ.* 11.7, 15.2; *Gest. Pel.* 14; *C. mend.* 33; *C. ep. Pel.* 3.12; *Ench.* 29 and many passages in his *En. Ps.* and *S.*

⁵² E.g., *Civ.* 14.28: “Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo ...”; *En. in Ps.* 64.2: “duas istas civitates faciunt duo amores: Ierusalem facit amor dei; Babyloniam facit amor saeculi.”

⁵³ Listing of the most important evidence in Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 118–23.

⁵⁴ Cf. Van Oort, 313–18, to which can now be added *S. Dolbeau* 4.8 (reference to Rev 18:6).

⁵⁵ Although *Civ.* is on the two *civitates*, Augustine prefers to name his *opus magnum* “after the better one,” i.e., *the city of God* “Jerusalem.” Cf. the remark in the late work in which he reviews all his writings, sc. in *Retr.* 2.43.

⁵⁶ Cf. Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 199–359.

⁵⁷ Cf. G. W. Lee, “Israel between the Two Cities: Augustine’s Theology of Jews and Judaism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24 (2016): 523–51, e.g., 531: “... he [sc. Augustine] nevertheless locates Israel within the earthly city and not the heavenly. (...) Israel serves to signify *the City of God* as a shadow of the heavenly city ...”

⁵⁸ See above, p. 7 and nn. 22–23.

⁵⁹ Above, p. 7 and n. 24.

⁶⁰ E.g., *en. Ps.* 21,2,25.

⁶¹ See for texts e.g., Van Oort, “Augustine and the Jews” (n. 28), esp. 142. Curiously (because different from most of “orthodox” Christian authors of his age), Augustine does not accuse the Jews of “deicide” (*God-killing*), but in the case of Jesus he does accuse them of “homicide” (*human-killing*).

⁶² Augustine only occasionally speaks of Palestine (“Palaestina,” cf. the quote from *En. Ps.* 119.7 on p. 12 above) and then mainly in connection with the city of Diospolis (Lydda), which city played a role in the Pelagian controversy. Since about 150, “Iudaea” was known as the Roman province of Syria Palaestina, dependent on Syria. See e.g., A. Fürst, “Palaestina,” *AL* 4 (2012–2018): 455–58.

⁶³ See esp. *Civ.* 20.

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