

Jerusalem: Why on Earth Is It in Heaven? A Comparison between Galatians 4:21–31 and 2 *Baruch* 4:1–7*

J. Cornelis de Vos

Introduction

Digging up parts of Jerusalem always implies destroying parts of history, identity, cosmos, heaven, and paradise. The heavenly and the earthly Jerusalem correspond to each other: the heavenly Jerusalem is a city that can be described by earthly topographical categories;¹ the earthly Jerusalem is a city that has heavenly traits.² The realms and qualities of both “Jerusalems” penetrate each other. Thus there is an imaginative vertical axis connecting these two cities and adding a third dimension to the respective horizontal dimensions. A fourth dimension, namely that of time, is provoked by meditating the history of Jerusalem, longing to be in Jerusalem, or expecting an eschatological Jerusalem and regaining paradise.

Within this four-dimensional landscape, groups which have Jerusalem as their common focus—Jews, Christians, and Muslims, all in different ways—can position themselves horizontally and vertically towards Jerusalem; this gives them their socio-religious coordinates. They do not need to be in the earthly Jerusalem, neither in reality nor in the present.

In the interplay of religion and politics or better, transcendence and socio-religious reality, conflicts are looming when the earthly Jerusalem | becomes too heavenly, or vice versa. History teaches us that the earthly Jerusalem can even descend to other *loci* than that which we know as the earthly Jerusalem. Some of my Dutch fellows, for example, conquered the German city of Münster and renamed it New Jerusalem. This meant war between them and the bishop of Münster.³ Although this happened almost 500 years ago (1532/34), it makes clear that the concept of a heavenly city can be dan-

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* I heartily dedicate this article to Margreet Steiner with whom I often discussed the relation between biblical texts and material remains. It is Jerusalem, where she had been digging—holy area and therefore very sensitive! I congratulate Margreet on reaching her 65th birthday and the many publications about archaeology and history of Jerusalem (see <http://www.margreetsteiner.nl/index.php?Research:Jerusalem>; accessed at 21 September 2012) gain the merits they deserve!

¹ Cf. Rev 21:1–22:5; the cosmological—that is, heavenly and earthly—Jerusalem has walls and gates (21:12–14), a market place (21:21; 22:2), it can be measured (21:15–17), and the substance out of which the city is made, is described extensively (21:18–21).

² See below. |

³ Cf. also the Montanists’ concept of a heavenly Jerusalem in Phrygia (second century C.E.).

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gerous. It can provoke violence, especially when a transcendental locality becomes immanent and occupies “real” space on earth. To whom does this heavenly earth-space belong? All know that the status of Jerusalem is much more contested than that of Münster. I will return to Jerusalem.

The Hebrew Bible, early Jewish literature, the New Testament, and early Christian literature all describe a heavenly Jerusalem or an earthly Jerusalem with heavenly traits. Some describe Jerusalem as a city that is renovated or substituted by God or to which God respectively his presence descends; others describe it as a city that rises to heaven or to which one can ascend.⁴ Jerusalem can come down from heaven or remain in heaven.⁵ Jerusalem seems to have coordinates that reach into heaven or, vice versa, that reaches onto earth.

In this contribution I will not deal with the topic of the heavenly Jerusalem itself; nor will I deal with the way in which the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem has influenced the shape and vision of the earthly Jerusalem or churches. Enough has been written about all this.⁶ Instead, I will describe functions of the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem for Christians and for Jews. Out of the abundance of ancient Jerusalem texts I have chosen a Christian text from the time the Second Temple still existed, namely the letter of Paul to the Galatians; and a Jewish text from the time the Temple had been destroyed, namely *2 Baruch*. They both deal with a heavenly Jerusalem, and they both try to facilitate a life with-|out the earthly Jerusalem and Temple and beyond the boundaries of the land of Israel. As for the modes of this live they give, however, contrary answers.

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Jerusalem in Heaven

Galatians 4:21–31: A Christian Perspective

In the New Testament there are only a few texts that speak of a heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:25–26; Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12; 21:1–22:5). There are, besides, texts about a heavenly city (Heb 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14) or a heavenly citizenship (Phil 3:20). Notably, they either disqualify the earthly Jerusalem or do not mention it at all. An example of the first, of disqualifying Jerusalem, appears in Galatians which I would like to present now.

⁴ For an overview see Söllner 1998. See also Ego 2007; this article deals curiously more with New Testament and early Jewish references than with those from the Hebrew Bible.

⁵ Also in Islam Jerusalem has this heavenly dimension. It is not Mecca or Medina from where Mohammad departs to heaven (*al-isrāʿ*) in his nightly vision; it is Jerusalem, the third and farthest located (*al-aqṣā*) holy city of Islam; see *Sure* 17:1 and the *ḥadīṭ* literature dealing with this verse.

⁶ To give only a brief selection from recent literature (from 2000 onwards) on the heavenly, new, and eschatological Jerusalem in different ancient text corpora: Hengel, Mittmann, and Schwemer 2000; von Haehling 2000; Kopf 2001; Müller-Fieberg 2003; DiTommaso 2005; Ego 2007; Backhaus 2009; Dow 2010. |

In Gal 4:25–26 Paul opposes a Jerusalem now (ἡ νῦν Ἱερουσαλήμ) to a Jerusalem above (ἡ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ). This is clearly an asymmetrical comparison. “Now” should be opposed to “then,” and “above” to “beneath.” If, however, we add the unsaid to the comparison, the Jerusalem now is the Jerusalem beneath, the earthly Jerusalem; and the Jerusalem above is the Jerusalem of the future, the heavenly eschatological Jerusalem. The two verses occur within the large framework of Gal 4:21–31, the so-called Hagar-Sarah allegory-typology.⁷

Paul connects negative connotations with the contemporary Jerusalem and positive connotations with the Jerusalem above. The negative aspects are slavery (vv. 22, 24, 25, 30, 31), flesh (vv. 23, 29), and Mount Sinai (vv. 24, 25) = the Law (v. 21); the positive aspects are freedom (vv. 22, 30, 31), promise (v. 23, 28), and spirit (v. 29). |

For the time being it is important that Jerusalem above is (1) present, (2) in the future, and (3) earthly. It is in the future, firstly, because of the implicit opposition to “now” (νῦν)—we already had this. Secondly, Paul connects the Jerusalem above with freedom and freedom with promise; and promise implies future.⁸ After all, some heavenly Jerusalem is already extant on earth. Paul signifies the Jerusalem above, which is freedom, as “our mother” (v. 26); that is, the “mother” of the Christians. This implies that the Jerusalem above already exists. Since the Christians are the “children” of Jerusalem and of freedom, they represent the heavenly Jerusalem, albeit provisionally and imperfectly. This “Jerusalem” is provisional and imperfectly because the promise still persists.

What does this all mean for the perspective of Paul and the Galatian Christians towards the earthly Jerusalem? First of all Paul dissociates himself from the earthly Jerusalem which he depicts negatively and which he considers being transitional (see v. 30). We do not know the voice of the Galatian addressees. We only know Paul writing to

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⁷ There is a debate about the question whether Gal 4:21–31 is to be considered a typology or an allegory. A horizontal typology is figurative and historical: the former prefigures the latter, whereby the latter is mostly considered to be better; see the ‘classical’ work on typology of Leonhard Goppelt (*Typos*). Allegory is ahistorical and uses the literal surface meaning of words and phrases and their actual, proper meaning. It takes their semantic range as a base in order to point to something else. In the first instance, the future Jerusalem above surpasses or even supersedes the contemporary earthly Jerusalem. In the second instance, the ‘now Jerusalem’ stands for something else as well as the ‘Jerusalem above’. With Söllner (1998, 148–53 [with literature]) I esteem the text to comprise both allegory and typology. Paul allegorizes (v. 24: ἄτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα) the son Abraham had by a slave women and born according to the flesh (vv. 22–23) and says that it stands for the Sinai covenant and slavery. This allegorized son, the Sinai covenant, prefigures the Jerusalem now (typology; c v. 25: συστοιχεῖ). The Jerusalem now, on its turn, is an antitypos of the Jerusalem above. On the question of typology and allegory in Gal 4:21–31, see in addition to the work of Söllner, DiMattei 2006; and Sängner 2011. |

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⁸ I cannot understand why Söllner (1998, 143–69) ignores the eschatological aspect of the Jerusalem above in Gal 4:21–31.

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them. But we may surmise that all or most of them were non-Jewish Christians.⁹ To those people Paul says—I say it in paraphrase—that the earthly Jerusalem is worth hardly anything. For the Galatian Christians this meant that they could, so to say, remain in Galatia¹⁰ and had, nevertheless, a connection with Jerusalem—with the Jerusalem that is and will be above them. This, however, also implied a breach with most of the Jewish Christians for who the earthly Jerusalem remained important.¹¹

In the letter to the Galatians Paul is rather polemical. His attack on the earthly Jerusalem is surely also an attack on those who are commonly called “Judaizers” (see Gal 2:14). These Judaizers tried to turn the so-called pagan Christians to the Jewish law and customs.¹² We do not hear anything about the status of Jerusalem but it is likely that the Judaizers | tried to stress the importance of the earthly Jerusalem.¹³ With Gal 4 Paul also attacks the claim of the Judaizers that the male pagan Christians should be circumcised. As Paul says that they are the children of a free heavenly Jerusalem, their “mother,” they already belong to the people of Israel without being circumcised. How? According to the manner of Isaac (v. 28), according to the spirit (v. 29), and: via no less than heaven itself.

We can see here that the city of Jerusalem plays a pivotal part in the making of identity both now and in the future.

2 Baruch 4:1–7: A Jewish Perspective

The *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* or *2 Baruch*, an early second century C.E. book from Israel/Palestine, writes about the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the impending destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. This historical scenery, however, is used as a means to cope with the fact of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.¹⁴ The crucial questions of the book are: Why could this destruction happen? What are the roles of the Jews, the pagans, and God? And very important: what is left for the Jews now that the temple is not there anymore and the Jews dispersed? I quote a verse from 2

⁹ See the relevant introductions that all refer to Gal 4:8; 5:2–3; 6:12–13.

¹⁰ As is well known there is a debate about Galatia. Does it refer to a province or to a landscape? For the present argument, however, this is of no importance.

¹¹ The importance of Jerusalem can be observed in the gross of the early Jewish writings. This pertains even to Philo of Alexandria who allegorizes/spiritualizes almost everything in the Bible which has to do with the corporal; see Klauck 1986; Schaller 1983; de Vos 2012, 90–94.

¹² It is heavily debated if an emic, and even an etic concept of religion existed in antiquity. Steve Mason defends that that which we call religion nowadays is only one part of and embedded in the overall concept of ethnicity; see his article, ‘Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism’; see further, among others, Baker 2011; Stegemann 2010; Schwartz 2011. |

¹³ See Berger (2006) for a method to “distillate” the implicit opponents out of texts.

¹⁴ This is *communis opinio*; cf. the subtitles in the monograph of Lied (2008): “*2Baruch*: Destruction and Consolation” (pp. 1–5) and “Questioning Survival: The Land in the Context of Destruction” (pp. 31–58).

Baruch (85:3) which can be seen as the summa of the book:¹⁵

... we have left our land, and Zion has been taken away from us, and we have nothing now apart from the Mighty One and his Law.¹⁶

The importance of God and the Law is strongly emphasized throughout the book. The author makes clear that Jews can also live without the Jewish land, Jerusalem, and the Temple and thereby remain Jewish. The condition is that they adhere to God and the Law. However, the author also heavily stresses the importance of the land of Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple.¹⁷ This is an obvious tension which the author tries to overcome by two concepts. Firstly, at the end of times God will restore | the land of Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple (2 *Bar.* 85:4). He will save all those, or better: only those who are in the land at that time (2 *Bar.* 29:2; 40:2).

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This all applies to the future. What about the presence of the author and his addressees? Now, secondly, the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem comes at the fore: 2 *Bar.* 4:1–7. Narratively we are still in the time before the destruction of the First Temple. God says to Baruch that the city will be delivered up for a time (v. 1). Then we can read that God says (vv. 2–3):

Or do you think that this is the city of which I said: *On the palms of my hands I have carved you?* [Isa 49: 16] It is not this building that is in your midst now.

The earthly city of Jerusalem and its temple—“this building” refers to the temple (see also v. 5)—are not identical with the city and the temple God had planned. Then the text continues:

It is that which will be revealed, with me, that was already prepared from the moment that I decided to create Paradise.

Together with God’s revelation at the end of times the city and the temple will be revealed. Thus they are not only in the mind of God they are also ready, finished. To say more, Jerusalem was prepared before God decided to create Paradise.¹⁸ This means two things: First, the preexistent Jerusalem is *connected* with Paradise (see also v. 6) and with a paradisiac state at the end of times. In Paradise people—and one can say here Jews—do not transgress the law. They do not sin. By the way, only those Jews who do not sin will survive the end of times according to 2 *Baruch*. Thus paradisiac state and living according to the law are intertwined.¹⁹ The accounts of the visions of Adam,

¹⁵ Thus, Harrington 2003, 672. I consider 2 *Bar.* 78–87, the so-called *Epistola Baruch*, an integral part of 2 *Baruch*, which is more or less *communis opinio* nowadays; see Lied 2008, 24–26.

¹⁶ Text of 2 *Baruch*: Dederig 1976; Translation: Klijn 1983.

¹⁷ See de Vos 2012, 80–83. |

¹⁸ Paradise is not pre-existent but created; cf. Lied 2008.

¹⁹ For Lied (2008), this is the basis for her concept of a dynamic space in 2 *Baruch*; in short: sinlessness produces space and vice versa. |

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Abraham, and Moses in *2 Bar.* 4:3–5 exemplify this connection:

And I showed it to Adam before he sinned. But when he transgressed the commandment, it was taken away from him—as also Paradise. After these things I showed it to my servant Abraham in the night between the portions of victims. And again I showed it also to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed him the likeness of the tabernacle and all its vessels.

Secondly, the heavenly Jerusalem is extant *before* Paradise. Thus, it becomes even more important than Paradise. This is the highest distinction Jerusalem and its temple can receive. |

For the addressees of *2 Baruch* the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem has three functions:

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1. It comforts them because Jerusalem was already there before the earthly Jerusalem; and ever since it has been being much better than the earthly Jerusalem and even than Paradise. Also in the Diaspora, Jews have this Jerusalem in heaven which is everywhere above them.
2. This heavenly Jerusalem will be revealed at the end of times. God himself will restore the earthly city by this heavenly one; all in the land of Israel, the land of salvation. Thus via the heavenly Jerusalem the Jews persist to orientate themselves towards the land of Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple; both now and for the future.
3. The combination of the heavenly Jerusalem with Paradise and sinlessness admonishes the Jews to adhere to the Jewish law wherever they are.

Galatians and 2 Baruch in Comparison

A few concluding remarks with respect to the function of the heavenly Jerusalem for the addressees of the respective writings:

1. In Gal 4 the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem functions as a device to *dissociate* Paul's addressees from the earthly Jerusalem and even to disqualify the importance of the earthly Jerusalem. In *2 Baruch* the same concept functions as a device to associate the addressees with the location of the earthly Jerusalem and the land of Israel.
2. For Paul, the importance of Jerusalem persists. He uses the metaphor of this very city and connects the city with Jewish parentage. Thereby he integrates his probably non-Jewish Christian addressees into the Jewish ethnos; and he relativizes or even disqualifies in Gal 4 the importance of the Jewish law. In *2 Baruch* Paradise and the heavenly Jerusalem are connected with sinlessness. This means that obeying the Jewish law is indispensable for the salvation at the end of times.
3. For Paul and his addressees there is no need to go or to return to the land of Israel. In *2 Baruch* the salvation will only take place in the land of Israel where the heavenly Jerusalem will be revealed. In other words: Something better than Paradise. |

In short, via the heavenly Jerusalem the Christians and the Jews of the two texts we dealt with can position themselves in the world as a group and define their relationship to the earthly Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

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Digging Up Jerusalem ...

Can we take the above presented Christian and Jewish perspectives as characteristic for a Jewish respectively Christian view of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem in antiquity? Yes and no. In general, one can say that the land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, and its temple are more important for Jews than for Christians. And in general, it is also true that Christians have more spiritualized concepts of them. However, also in ancient Jewish text there are enough texts that spiritualize the land of Israel, Jerusalem, and especially the Temple.²⁰ And also idealizing or mythifying land, city, and temple is some sort of spiritualizing as the “real” objects are mingled with concepts (metaphorical and metonymical) of them.²¹ I think, however, that there is one pivotal difference between Jewish and Christian concepts in antiquity. It is not the degree of spiritualizing, it is the connection between the spiritualized and the concrete poles. In Jewish text—as far as I know—the relation between the spiritualized land, city, and temple on the one hand and the real counterparts on the other hand are never disrupted.²² In early Christian texts the heavenly Jerusalem *can replace* the earthly, and the topographical-dynamic realm of the kingdom of God *can replace* the land of Israel.²³ |

Israel and Jerusalem are of minor importance for “official” Christian theology. Jerusalem is only of historical importance because of the Jesus event. The theme of the land of Israel hardly occurs in Christian theology; at the most as *terra resurrectionis*, which makes it similarly only historically relevant.²⁴

This has to do with the following, thus my conviction: Every socio-religious com-

²⁰ De Vos 2012.

²¹ See de Vos 2012, 36–46, 59–60.

²² A case of doubt lies in the works of Philo of Alexandria. Firstly, he mainly comments on the Pentateuch, and in this corpus Jerusalem does not occur. Secondly, he allegorizes in such an amount that one can question how much his allegories have to do with the textual and material starting points. Thirdly, the actual land of Israel and the Temple of Jerusalem seem hardly to be of interest for Philo. Fourthly, he considers the cosmos—which is also over Alexandria—to be the real temple (*Spec. Leg.* 1.66). We know, however, that he once visited the temple (*Prov.* 2.107; although he writes more about the pigeons in Ashkelon than about Jerusalem itself). And albeit his seeming disinterest, he never loses sight of the land of Israel; cf. Schaller 2001, 13–27; de Vos 2012, 87–100.

²³ For a dynamic concept of the Kingdom of God see Marcus 1988. For the New Testament use of semantics from the Old Testament land concepts to describe the Kingdom or the entering into the Kingdom, see Haacker 2006. |

²⁴ See, in reverse, the denigrating words of Tertullian about the Jews who, according to him, have set their hope in the earthly and lose sight of the heavenly. They even hold the Jewish land as holy land (*sicut et ipsam terram sanctam Judaicum proprie solum reputant; Res.* 26.10); cf. de Vos 2012, 21–22.

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community has a spatial-religious centre by which it becomes and is a socio-religious community. This centre does not have to be within the actual space of the socio-religious community. It can be an orientation or perspective; both this-worldly as well as eschatologically. It all has to do with striving for nearness to God as holy space, as the holy centre.²⁵ Striving for nearness to God is connected with space. It can only take place in space conceived by a socio-religious community, and at the same time the socio-religious community produces this space. Focused on the Jewish-Christian tradition, every socio-religious community defines itself by means of the triad God—people—land. Every part of the triad can have different shapes:

1. The “land” does not necessarily have to be physical. Every space, whether on earth or in heaven, can become holy; and, mostly the heavenly and the earthly traits, the transcendental and the immanent realms, as well as denotations and connotations are inextricable in the concepts of this space.
2. However, also “people” can have different shapes. In the New Testament, for example, we can see that the authors deal with new definitions of the people of God, not only in our exemplary text from Galatians.²⁶
3. And also the concept of God can have different shapes. I mention three aspects:
 - a. First spatially: Is God lord of a town, a land, or the whole cosmos? |
 - b. Then socio-religiously: Whose God is God? In the Hebrew Bible we can, by the way, see that God adopts traits of, among others, Canaanite Gods.
 - c. Thirdly, in general, how immanent and how transcendent is or becomes God?

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Every change in one part of the triad produces a shift in one or two of the other parts. Again, no single part of the triad can be seen independently from the other two.

There is, however, a totally different approach towards the land of Israel and Jerusalem in Christianity (the Temple hardly plays any role). As previously stated, every religion needs space to be somewhere as a socio-religious entity, to feel being near God or the Holy. There is, however, a fourth aspect that we have to add to the triad, that of time: history and future. Being near God or the Holy can be performed by reiterating history. One can recreate the unity of space, community, and the Holy from the past by approximating or becoming one or more of the three parts. Applied to space, for Christians being in the land of Israel is being there where Jesus was. Not the land itself is of importance but the holy places. By pilgrimages to those holy places one can reiterate the Biblical history *in situ*. By being at holy places and performing cultic activity at this very spot the performer connects him- of herself with the religious community of once and with those contemporaries who join in the ritual.

Holy places *are* not, they are to be roused. This is exactly what Christians did from

²⁵ De Vos 2012, 25–26.

²⁶ See Kraus 1996. In Rev 21: 1–22:5 a merging of people and place can be observed. The “gates” are, for example, “apostles,” and the whole city is a paradigm of ultimate nearness of Christian believers to God. See on this aspect especially Gundry 1987. |

the fourth century onwards. With respect to Jerusalem, this is why churches were built in Jerusalem; and this is why Jerusalem is also holy for Christians.²⁷

Maybe one can make a simplification: For Jews digging up parts of Jerusalem is revealing and destroying a pole of the axis between heaven and earth. For Christians digging up Jerusalem is revealing and destroying the holy history.

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²⁷ See Wilken 1992.

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