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“Oh Jerusalem, the city of sorrow / A big tear wandering in the eye / Who will halt the aggression / On you, the pearl of religions? / ... / Who will save man?”¹

Nizar Qabbani here captures the intensely sorrowful allure of Jerusalem, heart of the Holy Land. The Holy Land: the birthplace of the three Abrahamic religions,² the witness of countless power struggles, the setting of the best-selling book of all time.³ Arguably the most coveted and contested real estate in the world.

And my intended destination this fall break.

Characterized by the often violent interactions between the three religions that have arisen from its arid soil, the imprecisely delineated region comprising Israel, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and various other parts of the Middle East – colloquially referred to as the “Holy Land”⁴ – is the ideal setting for theological and historical study. Over fall break, I am travelling to the Holy Land as part of in a one-credit course, “Explorations in the Holy Land,” which takes students on an academic tour of Jerusalem and several other locations of biblical importance. I believe the trip will help lay the groundwork for my senior thesis, in which I hope to explore themes of the complex interactions between the three Abrahamic religions throughout history. For this reason I am applying for funding from the Center for Undergraduate Scholarly Engagement to help subsidize the cost of airfare to Jerusalem.

The class will depart South Bend for Tel Aviv on October 17, arriving in Israel October 18. Throughout the course of nine days we will travel to a variety of cities and historical sites, including

¹ Nizar Qabbani, “Jerusalem,” PoemHunter.com, August 25, 2015, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/jerusalem-12/>.

² The three Abrahamic religions here referred to are Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

³ “Best Selling Book of Non-Fiction,” Guinness World Records, 2015, accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/best-selling-book-of-non-fiction/>.

⁴ Michael Balter, “The Holy Land’s Prehistory: In the Beginning,” *National Geographic*, November 2009, accessed August 26, 2015, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/11/holy-land/balter-text/1>.

Caesarea, Megiddo, Sepphoris, Tiberias, Nazareth, Bethlehem, Qumran,⁵ Masada,⁶ the Sea of Galilee, the Dead Sea, and Jerusalem, where we will spend several days. We will primarily be visiting holy sites, among these Jacob's Well, a site recognized as sacred by Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike;⁷ the Southern and Western Walls of the Temple Mount, which numbers among the most revered sites in Jewish and Muslim heritage;⁸ the Mount of Olives, a Jewish gravesite and a place of Christian pilgrimage;⁹ the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; and many more besides. Each of these sites holds incredible cultural and historical significance, and each retains a central place in the traditions of one or more of the three Abrahamic religions. We will depart from Israel on October 25, arriving back in the States later that same day.

I believe the course will be of inestimable value to me in my academic career for a number of reasons, one of the primary being that I will expand my cultural, religious, geographical, and historical horizons. In order to do this, I have several learning objectives. First, I aim to gain a better understanding of important archaeological and historical discoveries concerning various sacred sites in order to comprehend more fully the significance of those sites in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. I am confident I will be able to achieve this goal, in part because the class will specifically be discussing historical and archaeological points of interest throughout our travels. Second, I hope to learn about the terrain of the Holy Land in order to gain a better spatial understanding of an area so frequently described in academic texts. Because we will be visiting a variety of landscapes, including Galilee, the Mediterranean coast, the Judean desert, the central hill country, and the Jordan River valley, I will have the opportunity to see in person the Israel about which I have so often read. Finally, by exploring

⁵ Archaeological site associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls. See Adrian Curtis, *Oxford Bible Atlas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pg. 5, accessed August 24, 2015, ProQuest ebrary.

⁶ Site of a fortress built by King Herod the Great, as well as the 73 A.D. last stand of a Jewish revolt against Roman rule. See Curtis, *Oxford Bible Atlas*, pg. 147, 155.

⁷ D. J. Wieand and W. Ewing, "Jacob's Well," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pg. 955.

⁸ J. Peter Burgess, "The Sacred Site in Civil Space: Meaning and Status of the Temple Mount/al-Haram Al-Sharif," *Social Identities* 10, no. 3 (2004): p.311, accessed August 25, 2015, EBSCOhost.

⁹ John Briggs Curtis, "An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957): 137-80, accessed August 27, 2015, EBSCOhost.

firsthand many of the cities of Israel, I hope to appreciate more fully the layers upon layers of history which constitute present-day Israel.

My ultimate objective in partaking in this course is to jumpstart the research for my senior thesis, a requirement for the [REDACTED] Honors Program of which I am a member. As a [REDACTED] major concentrating in [REDACTED] studies, I am hoping to write my thesis on the interactions between Muslims, Jews, and Christians in the late middle ages. Specifically, I want to research the relationship of the three groups in Spain, where they have a rich and complicated history of cohabitation.¹⁰ While Spain seems vastly removed from the Holy Land, in reality, visiting the Holy Land—a place so fiercely contested by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adherents—will give me a comparative framework to begin my research on the interaction of the three groups in Spain and help me contextualize the preexisting tensions and prejudices between the religions.

Having the Holy Land to hold up as a comparative study will be of particular use to me because I have had little background in the history of the coexistence – violent or otherwise – of the three religions. Without understanding the historical context for the relationships between the three groups, without understanding the roots of antipathy between the religions’ believers, I cannot hope to examine a single snapshot in history of the political, theological, linguistic, and cultural factors governing the interaction of the three groups in late medieval Spain. Only by first researching the sources of conflict between the religions, and how they evolved over the years, can I begin to research one instance of conflict in the religions’ history.

I am convinced this experience will greatly help me in my academic endeavors, and I hope to be considered for the financial assistance provided by a grant. Thank you for your time.

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¹⁰ Felicia Waldman, “Mystical Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Mystics in 13th – 14th Century Spain,” in *Studies on the Children of Abraham: Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times*, ed. Antii Laato and Pekka Lindqvist, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 275-90.

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