



# I am Jerusalem

*John N. Tleel*

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## **I am Jerusalem** John N. Tleel

The book, entitled 'I Am Jerusalem', is the memoir of retired dental surgeon John Tleel. Born in Jerusalem, to a long-standing Palestinian Greek Orthodox family, Tleel lived in Jerusalem from the 1930's through the 1970's. The book is made up of personal memoirs, historical background of many of the events of this period, and in-depth description of many of the places and people in Jerusalem. One of the unique focuses of the book is the descriptions of the Greek Orthodox monasteries, churches, and religious ceremonies. The memoirs are replete with personal events in the life of Dr. Tleel; for example, he describes taking a room as a boarder in Beirut while studying dentistry, conversations with the patients who come to him to be treated, traveling in the Middle East before and after the establishment of Israel, and learning Hebrew after the 1967 Israeli occupation of the city. Larger events which effected the entire population of Jerusalem are described from his own perspective-- for example, taking refuge in the Old City of Jerusalem during the 1948 war, attending 'Sebt an- Nour' on the Saturday before Easter in the church of the holy sepulcher, and being under curfew so the Israeli census could count the population of the city in June of 1967. In general, the book is written for someone with limited knowledge of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Tleel often gives basic background on various issues either before or after telling a related story. In addition, the book is written from a distinctly Christian perspective. For example, 'As imperfect beings as we all are, we should continuously pray and ask God the common Father to show us the way of accepting one another'. Other sections of the book are fascinating and useful for everyone, including persons who are extremely knowledgeable of this period of history. For example, Tleel details the little-documented changes in Jerusalem after 1967 War -- the closure of Jaffa Gate and the New Gate, the influx of refugees into the old city, and the efforts of the monasteries to temporarily house them. He also describes the days of the 1967 war and seeing the Israelis for the first time in the streets of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Tleel was the dentist of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch and other clergy and tells many personal stories about them as well as his observations of them and events during highly significant political occasions. At least one third of the book is devoted to the Israeli occupation of the city following the 1967 war. Tleel is a self-described proponent of peace , and in the book he talks about what he sees as many of the lost chances of peaceful settlement to the conflict. To this end he describes meetings and organizations he participated in with Israelis. Critical of both the Arab policies and the Israeli occupiers, he sees Jerusalem as an eternal city, not to be ruled or governed by anyone permanently. The book is entertaining and at times very successful in creating a vivid and moving description of an event or analysis of a situation. For example, 'Jerusalem after the 1967 war became a physically united city, but at the same time became schizophrenic mentally. The Jewish population of the western section is always celebrating and rejoicing and the Arab and Eastern part is in deep mourning; when our city is silent, asleep and in complete darkness, our next-door neighbors are dancing and singing in their streets which are decorated with banners and multicolored bulbs.' The book is a readable and interesting picture of Jerusalem during the significant times before the partition of the city, the 1948 War, the Jordanian regime, and continuing through the Israeli occupation of the remainder of Jerusalem in 1967. It also provides a unique perspective on the Greek Orthodox community through the eyes of Dr. Tleel who is one of its most active lay members.

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