

Jerusalem

Gordon Franz

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Why Did God Choose Jerusalem As The Capital Of Israel?

A Christian Perspective

Gordon Franz

Introduction

Jerusalem is a city that is sacred to the three monotheistic religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It has been and remains to this day, a contested piece of real estate for two of these religions.

Former Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, often said, "Jerusalem is the eternal, undivided capital of the nation of Israel and the Jewish people." On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority, with the help of some world politicians, wants to divide the city and create a Palestinian State with Abu Dis in eastern Jerusalem as its capital.

Within Jerusalem, the Temple Mount is the most hotly debated piece of real estate anywhere in the world. At the Second Camp David summit held during the summer of 2000, Yasser Arafat said that there was never a temple built by Solomon or Herod on what the Moslems call the Haram esh-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary). Those temples, he said, were located on Mount Gerizim near Nablus (Gold 2007: 11). The literary sources and the Temple Mount Sifting Project have clearly demonstrated that these Temples once stood on the Haram.

The Bible, history, and geography are clear: Jerusalem was chosen by the Almighty as the capital of the nation of Israel ... why? The simple answer - God's Son.

There are Better Cities to be Capital

Politically and strategically there were better sites that David could have chosen to be the capital of Israel. But God had Jerusalem in mind, primarily, it can be argued, for spiritual reasons.

The first city David could have chosen was Hebron (Tel Rumeidah). In fact, this was the first city from which David ruled when he came to the throne. David was selected by God to be king and anointed by Samuel in Bethlehem (I Sam. 16:1-13). After his flight from Saul, God instructed David to go to the city of Hebron and there the men of Judah "anointed David king over the house of Judah" (II Sam. 2:1-4)¹ and he reigned over Judah for seven and a half years (II Sam. 5:5). Finally, all the tribes of Israel came to King David and anointed him king over all Israel and Judah and he reigned for thirty-three years in Jerusalem.

The reason Hebron was David's first capital was because he was from the tribe of Judah and Hebron was in the tribal territory of Judah. The city also had a Patriarchal connection: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, along with some of their wives, are buried in the Cave of Machpelah near Hebron (Gen. 23:9, 17; 25:7-11; 49:29-32). Hebron overlooks the Patriarchal Highway the runs through the Hill Country of Judah down to Beersheva.

David's second choice of a capital could have been Gibeah of Saul (Tel el-Ful). Gibeah was King Saul's capital (I Sam. 15:34). This city had a commanding view

of the Central Benjamin Plateau from its position on the Patriarchal Highway (Judges 19:13).

A third possibility might have been Bethel (el-Birah). This city was situated on the Patriarchal Highway (Judges 21:19) and had Patriarchal connections. This was the second place Abraham built an altar after he entered the Promised Land (Gen. 12:8-9). Jacob had his hallmark “ladder dream” at Bethel and it was at that event that God reconfirmed the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob (Gen. 28:11-22; cf. John 1:51).

A fourth possibility is Gibeon (el-Jib) because “this great city, like one of the royal cities” (Josh. 10:2) was strategically located on the Central Benjamin Plateau and controlled the road leading to the Beth Horon Ridge Route. This road goes from the Central Benjamin Plateau to the International Coastal Highway and the port city of Jaffa.

The last city David could have chosen was Shechem (Tel Balatah). It too was located on the Patriarchal Highway (Judges 21:19) at a strategic junction where the road splits. One could go west between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, or go northeast down to Tirzah and the Wadi Farah. Shechem, like some of the other cities, had Patriarchal connections as well. This was the first place Abraham built an altar after he came into the Promised Land (Gen. 12:6, 7) and Joseph is buried there (Josh. 24:32). Interestingly, Shechem was made the first capital of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) by Jeroboam I following the division of the kingdom (I Kings 12:23).

These five cities may have geographically, militarily, and strategically made better capitals for the Kingdom of

Israel, yet Jebus (Jerusalem) was chosen ... why? The simple answer - God's Son.

Why Jebus (Jerusalem) Should Not Have Been Chosen

The ancient city of Jebus is situated on the ridge above the Gihon Spring. Jebus, later named the City of David, covered a small area of approximately 10 acres (Mazar 2007:12). It was not located on the Patriarchal Highway, in fact, one had to turn off the ridge route (the Patriarchal Highway) in order to get to the city (Judges 19:10-12). The city is also isolated by steep valleys (Psalm 125:1, 2). The Kidron Valley is on the east and the Tyropean Valley (Central Valley) is on the west (Neh. 2:13). The city is isolated and in a bowl because it is surrounded by hills (Psalm 125:1, 2). Strategically and geographically, Jebus (Jerusalem) should not have been chosen the capital of Israel, yet it was ... why? The simple answer - God's Son.

Why Was It Chosen the Capital?

There are two reasons Jerusalem was chosen the capital of Israel. The first, from David's perspective, is political. The second, from God's perspective, and more importantly, is spiritual.

Political Reason

Jerusalem was not conquered during the initial conquest of the Land by Joshua (Josh. 15:63). Thus it was still controlled by the Jebusites. During the period of the Judges, Judah and Benjamin could not drive the Jebusites out of the city (Judges 1:21; cf. 19:12).

When David came to the throne, he first ruled from Hebron. In order to unify the country, he had to find a “neutral” site that was not in the tribal territory of Judah. The unconquered city of Jebus was in the tribal territory of Benjamin (Josh. 15:7, 8; 18:16, 28). Also, there were not any Benjamites living in the city because the Jebusites were able to regain the city after Judah took the city and burned it during the period of the Judges (Judges 1:8; Mazar 2007:47-48).

David also understood the geo-political realities of the tribal territory of Benjamin. The easiest and most convenient road from Jericho, and thus the Transjordanian Plateau, to the International Coast Highway in the west was via the Central Benjamin Plateau. The tribal territory of Benjamin is lower in elevation than the territories of Judah to its south and Ephraim to its north. David wanted to keep the tribe of Benjamin on Judah’s side so he could control these east-west roads and not let them fall under Ephraim’s control. Eventually, David and his men were able to take the city of Jebus and he moved the capital to the city (II Sam. 5:6-10; I Chron. 11:4-9).

Spiritual Reason

God used David as a human instrument to bring about His divine purpose of placing His name in the capital of Jerusalem. Just before the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land, the LORD instructed Moses to tell the people of Israel that they were to meet the LORD three times a year in a place that He would choose to place His name (Deut. 12:1-11). “But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit ... then there will be the place

where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD” (12:10-11).

God does not reveal the identity of this place until nearly 400 years later when Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem. Solomon prayed: “O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which your servant is praying before You today: that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, ‘My name shall be there,’ and You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place” (I Kings 8:28, 29; see also 8:44, 48; cf. II Chron. 6:20, 33, 34, 38; Ps. 78:67-69; 132:13, 14). The LORD affirmed Solomon’s prayer when He said: “I have heard your prayer and supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually” (I Kings 9:3; cf. II Chron. 7:12, 16).

God chose to place His name in Jerusalem because of the two events that transpired in the city that are recorded in the book of Genesis. Both events foreshadow the Person and Work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first event is recorded in Genesis 14. In this account, Abram delivers his nephew Lot from the Mesopotamian kings at the city of Laish (Dan). On his way back to the Negev he stops at the Valley of Shaveh (cf. II Sam. 18:18) and meets Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the king of Salem and also the priest of the Most High God (El Elyon). The King / Priest blessed Abram

and Abram in turn gave a tithe to Melchizedek (14:18-20; cf. Heb. 7:1-4).

The Book of Hebrews gives a divine commentary on this passage as well as Psalm 110 where David stated, "The LORD (Yahweh) has sworn and will not relent, 'You (David's Lord) are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'" (110:4). In Hebrews 5:5, 6, God (the Father) said to David's Lord (God's Son), "You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (a quotation from Psalm 2:7), and also "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (a quotation from Psalm 110:4). Later, Jesus is identified as the Son who is the "High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 6:20).

King David composed Psalm 110, a beautiful and prophetic psalm, by the inspiration of the Spirit of God (Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36). In this psalm, David's Lord is commanded to "Sit at My (Yahweh's) right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!" (110:1). David, also being a prophet (Acts 2:30), foresaw the day when his descendent would rule forever from Zion (cf. Luke 1:31-33; Matt. 22:41-46; II Sam. 7:4-17; I Chron. 17:3-15). Zion is another name for the City of David, Salem, or Jerusalem (II Sam. 5:7; Ps. 76:1, 2; I Kings 8:1).

The first reason God chose Jerusalem as the capital is because one day, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Triune God, will return again to the Mount of Olives with His saints and sit upon the throne of David and establish His Kingdom over all the

earth in Jerusalem as a King / Priest (Zech. 14; cf. Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:5-8; Zech. 12:10; Rev. 19:11-19).

The second event recorded in the book of Genesis was Abraham offering up Isaac on a mountain in the Land of Moriah (Gen. 22), called in Jewish tradition Akedah, for the “binding” of Isaac. The Temple built by Solomon was located on Mount Moriah (II Chron. 3:1).

In this touching account, God tested Abraham by commanding him to “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the Land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (22:2). In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, it says, “Take thy son, the beloved one, whom thou hast loved – Isaac.” The Greek word for “beloved one” in the LXX is the same word used of Jesus at His baptism and transfiguration. The voice from heaven, God the Father, said at His baptism: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Again at the transfiguration He said: “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matt. 17:5).

Abraham took his son Isaac, two young men, and a donkey that carried the wood for the sacrifice to the Land of Moriah. When they could see the mountain, Abraham said to the young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you” (22:5). Abraham said, “we (plural) will come back”, fully anticipating that Isaac would return with him, even though God had said to sacrifice him!

Rabbis and commentators have had a field day trying to figure out this paradox. How could Abraham kill his son

as a sacrifice, yet they were going to return together from worshipping God? Again, the book of Hebrews gives us a divine commentary on this event. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it is said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (11:17-19). Abraham fully believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead, if he killed him.

As the father (Abraham) and the son (Isaac) walked together to the mountain with the wood on the son's shoulders, and the knife and fire in the father's hands, Isaac asks, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (22:7). Abraham solemnly responded, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (22:8).

Abraham built an altar and bound his beloved son and placed him on it. As he was about to slay him with the knife, the Angel of the LORD stopped him with these words: "Do not lay your hands on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (22:12).

Abraham lifted up his eyes, probably filled with tears, and saw a ram caught in a nearby thicket. He took the ram and sacrificed it in place of his son Isaac and named the place, "The LORD will provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided'" (22:13, 14).

The Lord Jesus was visiting the Temple during the Feast of Succoth (Tabernacles) in AD 29 when He had an

encounter with the religious leaders. The topic of discussion was Father Abraham. They asked Jesus if He was greater than Abraham and the prophets. Jesus answered in the affirmative and said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). The religious leaders said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" (8:57). With that, the Lord Jesus asserted His deity by saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (8:58). The religious leaders understood that Jesus was attributing the divine name I AM WHO I AM (cf. Ex. 3:14) to Himself and so they picked up stones to throw at Him for blasphemy (John 8:59).

But what did Jesus mean by, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad"? What day was he talking about and why was he glad? I believe this statement goes back to the account in Genesis 22. Abraham, the friend of God, somehow knew of the Person and work of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, because he called the name of the place "The LORD Will Provide" which meant "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided." Abraham said to Isaac that God would provide a lamb as a burnt offering, and a ram was caught in the thicket. The ram is not a lamb! The ram was a substitute for Isaac, the ram died in Isaac's place. It is not until 2,000 years later that John the Baptizer [remember, John was a Jew, not a Baptist!!!] was at Bethany beyond the Jordan (Batanea) when he saw Jesus approaching him after His 40 days of testing (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1-13) and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the

world!" (John 1:29). Jesus was the Lamb that God would provide Himself (Gen. 22:8).

It was on Mount Moriah that Solomon built a Temple (and later the Second Temple stood) where people could bring sacrifices that could only atone for, or cover sins, but could never take away sins. It was on a nearby hill, called Calvary, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect, sinless, Lamb of God, died as the perfect sacrifice in order to pay for all the sins of all humanity (Heb. 9:11-10:18; 13:13; I John 2:2; John 19:16-42). The final cry from the cross was "It is finished" (John 19:30). This word was used of a financial transaction that stated a bill was paid in full.

In the Mount of the LORD, eternal redemption was provided by God and He offers His righteousness to any and all who would put their trust in the Lamb of God. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi in Macedonia and said if anyone could gain salvation by their good works, or their own merits, it was himself (Phil. 3:4-6). But he came to realize the great truth, "and be found in Him [the Lord Jesus], not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (3:9).

The Apostle Peter stated that redemption was not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but it was by "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1:18, 19).

The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes [trust in, or rely upon] in

Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The Answer to the Question

God chose Jerusalem as the capital of Israel because of the priority He placed on His Son and His Son’s coming to redeem sinners. Jerusalem figures prominently, practically, and prophetically into Jesus’s coming to earth. The two Jerusalem-centered events in the book of Genesis foreshadowed the Person and work of the Lord Jesus in His first and second comings to earth. The first time He came, He was the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world on a cross outside Jerusalem. The second time He will come, He will be the King / Priest who will rule the world from the Davidic throne on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

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1 All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version.