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The Incredible Origins of Ancient Jerusalem

An inspiring overview of the world's most important and famous city

- Gerald Flurry
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"The history of J erusalem is the history of the world." That is the opening line of*Jerusalem,* an illuminating book chronicling the history of this city, written by British historian Simon Sebag Montefiore.

In the introduction, Montefiore describes how absolutely central Jerusalem is in the history of human civilization, especially in the history and theology of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Using examples and anecdotes, he shows that Jerusalem has been a focal point for humanity from the beginning.

He then asks this crucial question: "Of all the places in the world,*why Jerusalem?"*

This question gets to the essence of understanding Jerusalem. Montefiore writes, "The site was remote from the trade routes of the Mediterranean coast; it was short of water, baked in the summer sun, chilled by winter winds, its jagged rocks blistered and inhospitable." Despite these disadvantages, Jerusalem became the "center of the Earth." Why?

Anyone who is even the slightest bit familiar with the Bible knows that Jerusalem is at the heart of the biblical narrative. This city is introduced in Genesis and is featured all the way through Chronicles. But the Bible doesn't just record events that happen in and around Jerusalem. It also ANSWERS the essential question: Why Jerusalem?

In this article, I will show that the exciting history and prophecy of Jerusalem began all the way back in Genesis. In fact, there is evidence that the history of this utterly unique city started *even before human beings were created.*

The Garden of Eden

The history of mankind begins in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 1, God renewed the face of the Earth and, on the sixth day, created human beings. Genesis 2 shows that He placed the first man in this magnificent garden, a small area in the eastern part of a much larger area called Eden (verse 8).

Where was Eden, and this garden within Eden, located? The Bible gives some fascinating clues.

Notice the remarkable geography described in Genesis 2: A great river originated at a point outside the garden, flowed through it, and then divided into four branches (verse 10). The first branch was the Pishon River, which flowed through the land of Havilah. The second, the Gihon River, wended through the land of Cush. Third was the Tigris, which ran through Asshur. And finally, the Euphrates flowed through Shinar (verses 11-14).

The historian Josephus shed further light on these four rivers in his epic work*Antiquities of the Jews.* He wrote that the Pishon was associated with the Ganges River, and the Gihon with the Nile. The Tigris and Euphrates retain their original names today.

As we will see, the biblical record suggests that the greater land of Eden was what we now think of as the entire coastal region on the east side of the Mediterranean Sea—*the general area surrounding Jerusalem.* It may also have included the region of the Red Sea in the south, down to the conspicuously named port city and gulf of *Aden* (a location tradition claims is as old as human history).

It is possible that this garden, where God placed Adam and Eve, was located precisely where present-day Jerusalem is located.

Genesis 2 strongly indicates that the garden existed near the opening of the Gihon Spring. This spring, which is today a mere trickle compared to what it once was, originates just outside of what is now the Old City of Jerusalem.

The picture in the Bible suggests that the Earth at this time was a paradise with a mild climate, and that these four tributaries were wide, gentle rivers that flowed eastward toward the seas. Geologic changes, especially caused by the biblical Flood, would have since altered the drainage pattern. As a result, these rivers now have separate sources and flow in different directions.

Verse 10 says the source that divided into four rivers "went out of Eden." This indicates that the Garden of Eden was perhaps the highest point in the land. Jerusalem is not the highest point in the region today. However, Scripture reveals that when the Messiah comes, a great earthquake will *elevate Jerusalem*—and open up rivers of living waters (Zechariah 14:8-10). A great river will flow eastward out the door of God's temple into the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47). Once this sea becomes full of living water, it will spill over and streams will flow through the surrounding region.

Jerusalem is repeatedly named in the Bible as God's "holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:9; Joel 3:17, etc.). Ezekiel 28:13-14 use exactly the same same language in connection to the Garden of Eden: "Thou wast in *Eden the garden of God;*... thou wast upon the *holy mountain* ...."
Could it be because these two are one and the same—*Jerusalem* and the *Garden of Eden*—both God's "holy mountain"?

Isn't it logical to think that when God makes this change, He will be restoring the region's geography to the way it was when He first created man? *The picture the Bible paints for the future could reveal how conditions were in the past.*

Genesis 3:23-24 show that after Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, God removed them from the Garden of Eden. He then placed an angel with a flaming sword "at the *east* of the garden of Eden," indicating that Adam and his family settled in territory east of the Garden of Eden.

There is further evidence of this in Joshua 3:16, which records that when the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land around 2,500 years later, they returned through "Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan." This city was in the region of "the sea of the Arabah, even the Salt Sea," an obvious reference to the Dead Sea, further confirmation that Adam and Eve settled on land east of the garden.

More recently, archaeologists have associated Tel ed-Damiyeh, ancient ruins near the Jabbok River, with the "city of Adam." Nearby is Damia Bridge, or Adam Bridge, an ancient bridge that crosses the Jordan River.

All these signs agree that Adam and Eve settled in territory *adjacent east* of the Garden of Eden, in the region we now call the Jordan Valley. Considering how important Jerusalem is to God and the central role it plays in God's master plan both historically and in the future, isn't it logical to think God would have established this city in the same place that He created mankind?

When Adam's son Cain murdered his brother Abel, God exiled him from the land of his mother and father. "And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (Genesis 4:16). We do not know the precise borders of the land of Nod, but this passage makes clear that it was *further east* of the Jordan Valley region, where Adam and Eve had settled. "Land of Nod" means "land of wandering," an apt description of the barren deserts of Arabia.

Verse 17 says that after they arrived in the land of Nod, Cain and his descendants built the first city, called Enoch. Some have associated Enoch with Eridu, an archaeological site in southern Mesopotamia and one of the world's oldest cities. Enoch has also been associated with Babylon, which is in the same general area. Both biblical as well as ancient Sumerian and Babylonian records clearly identify Babylon as the seat of rebellious government and pagan religion. Genesis 10 and 11, for example, record that the arch-rebel Nimrod, the tyrant who built the tower of Babel, was headquartered in Babylon. Isn't it rational to think that Nimrod would have established his headquarters in the same region—and perhaps rebuilt the city—of his forefather Cain, the original rebel and tyrant?

Eden

Melchizedek Founds Jerusalem

Roughly 2,000 years after Cain, God founded His chosen nation through a man named Abram. Genesis 12:1 says that God told him, “Get thee out of thy country … unto the land that I will show thee.” Abram lived in the city of Ur in Babylon, in the same general region as Cain and Nimrod—a region historical records show was steeped in paganism. God told Abram to leave and relocate to a land He had chosen.

Abram obeyed and “went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came” (verse 5).

When Abram left Ur and traveled to Canaan, he reversed Cain’s journey. Rebellious Adam and Cain traveled away from Eden. Obedient and faithful Abram traveled west from Babylon *back toward Eden.*

After Abram obeyed God and returned to Canaan, God made this wonderful promise: “Unto thy seed will I give this land” (verse 7). This promise is what made this land, Canaan, the “Promised Land.” It was to this land that God would later bring the nation of Israel, which comprised the descendants of this patriarch. This land was clearly very special to God. Why was it special? Isn’t it logical that the Garden of Eden, the place where God first created man, was in this same area?

Abram moved to Canaan around 1900 B.C.E.; this is when God made this epic promise. Archaeological excavations and ancient writings confirm that the land of Canaan at this time was already home to some important cities, including Jerusalem.

Genesis 14 describes Abram’s encounter with “Melchizedek king of Salem.” Who was this great king? Verses 1 through 17 describe Abram’s great military victories over four powerful Assyrian kings. Verses 18-20 record that following these victories, “Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was priest of God the Most High. And he blessed him, and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God the Most High, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.’ And he [Abraham] gave him [Melchizedek] a tenth of all.”

Abram and Melchizedek clearly had a close relationship. Melchizedek had tremendous affection for Abram, and this great patriarch, whom God later renamed Abraham, *tithed* to this “king of Salem”! Melchizedek was not only a king, he was also a *“priest of God the Most High.”*This unique individual was called “king of Salem.” “Salem” is translated as “peace” and

"completeness."

The city of Salem eventually became known as *Jeru*-salem. In the Bible, *Salem* is synonymous with the terms *Zion, City of David, Jebus, Moriah* and *Jerusalem.* For example, Psalm 76:3 says, "In Salem also is set His tabernacle, And His dwelling-place in Zion." A number of scriptures indicate that Melchizedek FOUNDED the city of Jerusalem! (See *Archaeology Reveals Jerusalem's Origins* on page 22).

Who was Melchizedek, exactly?

Ancient Jewish records, including text on the Dead Sea Scrolls, show that certain Jews in the second and first centuries B.C.E. believed Melchizedek was a divine being. Many Jews referred to him using the same Hebrew terms used to describe God, and believed that he would one day atone for, and later judge, his people. This early Jewish belief is consistent with the later writings of the New Testament Apostle Paul, who recorded in Hebrews 7:3 that Melchizedek was "[w]ithout father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life …" (King James Version).

If we believe these early Jews, their testimony that Melchizedek was a divine being adds additional significance to His establishment of Jerusalem, underscoring that city's importance to God.

Abraham's Sacrifice

The patriarch Abraham loved family. He yearned for a son, yet for decades he and Sarah could not conceive. Nevertheless, God promised him that a son would come—a son through whom He would give Abraham descendants without number (Genesis 15:1-5). Abraham waited 25 years for this promised son and was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

It was through Isaac that God later gave Abraham the most difficult test of his life—a test unlike any He gave to any other man. This test occurred *in the region of Jerusalem.*

Genesis 22:1-2 state, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: 'Abraham'; and he said: 'Here am I.' And He said: 'Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee INTO THE LAND OF MORIAH; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.'"

The land of Moriah *includes Jerusalem.* 2 Chronicles 3:1 records that the first temple was later constructed by King Solomon "at Jerusalem in mount Moriah."

Genesis 22:10-12 show that Abraham, in a supreme act of faith, was prepared to sacrifice his son—but that God stopped him just in time. After this, God knew that Abraham would withhold *nothing* from Him. *This was not a mere act of obedience.* IT MAY HAVE BEEN AN ACT OF FAITH WITHOUT PARALLEL BY A CREATED MAN! And it happened right around Jerusalem, God's special city.

God Establishes His Chosen Nation

God had promised Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:5, 7). This promise transferred down through Isaac, then Jacob. Sometime around the 17th century B.C.E., Jacob and his large family were forced to move to Egypt where his son Joseph was a high official. The Israelites lived in Goshen, the choicest region in Egypt, found favor with the Egyptians, and prospered.

After Joseph died, a new king arose in Egypt "who knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). He was concerned about the rising power of the Israelites and grew to despise them. For many years, the Israelites received terribly harsh treatment from the Egyptians. God heard their anguished cries and promised to RETURN the Israelites to the land He had promised Abraham *—back to the area of Jerusalem!*

God then raised up a man of character who feared God and obeyed His commands: Moses. Under Moses's leadership, God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. He brought them through the Red Sea and led them to Mount Sinai through a series of spectacular miracles. At Sinai, God gave Israel an unparalleled gift: His law (Exodus 20). This was a detailed, codified form of God's spiritual law, which had existed even before human beings were created. This God-given system of law distinguished Israel from every other nation on Earth.

God also gave Moses detailed plans for the construction of a tabernacle (Exodus 25-30). At the heart of this sacred tent was the ark of the covenant, which was covered by the mercy seat, symbolizing God's own throne. The Israelites built this impressive, movable tabernacle, where God came down and dwelled in it in spirit (Exodus 35-40). This tabernacle would later be replaced by a spectacular temple at the headquarters in Jerusalem.

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Inheriting the Promised Land

Before He took Israel to the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to send spies into the land to preview the marvelous inheritance He was giving them (Numbers 13). However, all but two of the spies brought back a faithless report, and the people grew fearful. They didn't trust God to deliver the land to them—and God cursed them (Numbers 14). That generation of Israelites ended up wandering around the wilderness for 40 years.

After that generation of Israelites died, the next generation entered the Promised Land under Joshua. With a high hand, they crossed the Jordan River, routed the walled city of Jericho, and settled in Canaan. This prosperous land, flowing with milk and honey, was the land of their father Abraham. An abundance of archaeological evidence today confirms the biblical record of Jericho, including its miraculous destruction by God—evidence that the walls really did "come tumbling down."

During the period of the judges, Jerusalem was called *Jebus* (Joshua 18:28; Judges 19:10). Although the city was the inheritance of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, Jebus remained inhabited by the Jebusites, a Canaanite people descended from Ham. The city was well fortified, and the Jebusites were confident it could not be conquered.

David Conquers Jerusalem

Israel's greatest king, David, assumed rulership around 1000 B.C.E. He was about 30 years old. For the first seven years, David ruled Israel from the city of Hebron, which was situated about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem in the land assigned to the tribe of Judah. But King David wanted to control Jebus. He knew this was God's special city; he was aware of its glorious history with Abraham and Melchizedek. As soon as he was coronated king over the northern tribes of Israel, uniting the nation, he set about conquering Jebus. These events are recorded in 2 Samuel 5 and 1 Chronicles 11.

2 Samuel 5:6 records the Jebusites taunting Israel's king, telling him that even blind and deaf people could defend the well-fortified city. David then made a bold offer to his troops: "Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain" (verse 8; KJV). Joab accepted the challenge and penetrated the city through underground tunnels used to collect water.

"Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion; the same is the city of David. … And David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward. And David waxed greater and greater; for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him" (verses 7, 9-10).

King David's conquest of Jerusalem marked the start of a golden period in Israel's history. FOR A BRIEF MOMENT, THE ENTIRE NATION UNITED UNDER A GODLY KING WITH JERUSALEM AS THE CAPITAL.

Under King David, Jerusalem was once again at the center of God's work on Earth! The history of this city from the period of King David onward is well documented, not only in the Bible but also in secular historical records and by archaeological evidence.

House for God

Sometime after David took control of Jerusalem, he was inspired to build a permanent home for the ark (2 Samuel 7). God was pleased with David's desire to build the temple, but He did not want David constructing the building. So God told him only to plan and *prepare* for the temple construction. David embraced the opportunity with all his heart!

1 Chronicles 22:5 says that from the moment he received this instruction, David "prepared abundantly"! He gave and gathered a hundred thousand talents of gold and a million talents of silver, as well as vast amounts of brass and iron, timber and stone (verse 14). During the latter years of his reign, King David devoted his energies to preparing for the construction of the temple in Jerusalem.

Why did David want to build God's house in Jerusalem? "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains" (2 Samuel 7:2) David was bothered by the fact that he lived in a magnificent palace and the ark of the covenant remained in a tent. To him, this was a travesty, and he wanted to rectify it. David wanted to build God a house so impressive that it would be famous throughout the whole world—to magnify God's name forever!

David wanted the temple in Jerusalem to be the center of worship for the whole nation. That is why he was so excited to build God's house. Everything in Israel would revolve around Jerusalem and the temple!

Toward the end of his life, David learned another powerful lesson. 1 Chronicles 21 records that the devil, who was aware of God's exalted plans for David, convinced him to take a census. God was upset by this faithless act and cursed the nation. Seventy thousand people died as a result of David's sin (2 Samuel 24:15). But then something truly inspiring happened.

When David repented, God sent the Prophet Gad with a message for him: "Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (verse 18). The king visited this man and offered to buy his land. But this Jebusite man offered to simply give it to his king (verses 20-23). David insisted on paying for it (verse 24). He wanted to give an offering to God, and he wanted there to be some *sacrifice* in it.

Once he acquired the land, King David built an altar on it and made offerings to God.

The location of that altar ended up being the exact location of the holy place in the temple that Solomon would build.

Building the Temple

The beginning of Solomon's reign as king of Israel truly was magnificent (2 Chronicles 1:1). Solomon had a humble attitude before God, and that made it easy for God to use him. *Solomon* comes from the Hebrew *shalom,* which means peace. The words Salem and Solomon share the same root: *shalam,* meaning *peace, completeness.*

Solomon had 200,000 workers build the most magnificent structure ever to grace the Earth. He commissioned the most skilled laborers available. God said of Solomon, "He shall build a house *for My name* …"
(1 Chronicles 22:10). Solomon's temple in Jerusalem was *God's temple!*

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When the temple was finished, Solomon had the ark of the covenant brought in with unparalleled pomp and pageantry, including a huge orchestra with 120 priests blowing trumpets! (2 Chronicles 5:12). God was so pleased that "the house was filled with a cloud … for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God" (verses 13-14). After all the fanfare, King Solomon stood up and said, "The LORD hath said that He would dwell in the thick darkness. But I have built Thee a house of habitation, And a place for Thee to dwell in for ever" (2 Chronicles 6:1-2).

Solomon reminded the people what God had told his father David: "Since the day that I brought forth My people out of the land of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house in, that My name might be there; neither chose I any man to be prince over My people Israel; BUT I HAVE CHOSEN JERUSALEM, THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE THERE; AND HAVE CHOSEN DAVID TO BE OVER MY PEOPLE ISRAEL" (verses 5-6).

When King Solomon told his people that God had chosen Jerusalem, he was referring to the past, present AND FUTURE! King Solomon was no doubt aware of Jerusalem's history with Abraham and Melchizedek. Perhaps he was also aware that Jerusalem was situated in the same region as the Garden of Eden.

If you study the Scriptures, including Proverbs and the book of Ecclesiastes, it is evident that King Solomon—like his father David, and Abraham long before him, and all the Jewish prophets—understood God's future plans for Jerusalem. He understood that the temple he constructed for God was just a type of a *future* temple, the third temple that will be erected when the Messiah comes.

Like the first and second temples, the third temple will be constructed in Jerusalem. This is made clear by the prophets, including Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This coming temple is described in Ezekiel chapters 40 through 48. "In the visions of God brought He me into the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain, whereon was as it were the frame of a city on the south" (Ezekiel 40:2).

In many ways, this is perhaps the strongest proof that Jerusalem today is situated in land that was part of the Garden of Eden. God does everything with great purpose, logic and design. He plans meticulously, and He follows through perfectly. It makes perfect sense that when the Messiah comes, He will establish His headquarters, the third temple, in exactly the place from which God has worked with man from the very beginning!

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