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The City of David

Scriptus Papers



Biblical perspectives on various topics

One city or two?

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Introduction

Scriptus means 'having been written', and this *Scriptus Paper* is my writing about the City of David, or more correctly, the cities of David.

The Hebrew Bible calls Jerusalem the "City of David" over 40 times. No other city in the Bible is ever called by that name... until Luke wrote his gospel. Then, Bethlehem is also called "The City of David," twice.

Jebus

In the list of the sons of Canaan, the Jebusite occupies the third place, between Heth and the Amorite (Genesis 10:15-16, Numbers 13:29, I Chronicles 1:13-14). However, in Joshua 11:3, the Jebusite is mentioned between the Perizzite and the Hivite. On the other hand, in the oft-repeated enumeration of the tribes that occupied the land of Canaan, the Jebusite comes always at the end (Genesis 15:21, Exodus 3:8).

The Jebusites dwelt in the mountains (Numbers 13:29, Joshua 11:3), and were a warlike people. At the time of Joshua's invasion the capital of the Jebusites was Jebus, that is, Jerusalem (Joshua 15:8, Judges 19:10-11, 2 Samuel 5:6), whose king Adoni-zedek organised a confederacy against Joshua. Adoni-zedek was defeated at Beth-horon, and he himself was slaughtered at Makkedah (Joshua 10:1-27); but the Jebusites could not be driven from their mountainous position, and they dwelt at Jerusalem with the children of Judah and Benjamin (Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21).

However, before Israel entered Canaan the Lord God had commanded them to annihilate the Jebusites (Deuteronomy 20:17), and Joshua promised them that the living God would without fail will drive out from before them the Jebusites (Joshua 3:10). The fact that the Jebusites could not be driven from their mountainous position was evidence a failure on Israel's part to do what the Lord had commanded, not evidence of His weakness or failure to live up to His promise.

So, David was the first Israelite to conquer Jebus. He had been king over Judah in Hebron for 6.5 years and then proceeded to capture the Jebusite stronghold Zion, or Jerusalem. The Jebusites contested David's entrance into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6-8). Later a notable Jebusite, Araunah, or Ornan, sold his thrashing-floor to David for the erection of an altar (2 Samuel 24:18-24, I Chronicles 21:18-25). The Jebusites as well as the other tribes that had not been exterminated were reduced to serfdom by Solomon (I Kings 9:20-21). In the expression of Zechariah, "and Ekron will be as a Jebusite" (Zechariah 9:7), "Jebusite" must be taken to mean "Jerusalemite" ([Jewish Encyclopedia](#)).

David's triumph

*The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, "You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back"—thinking, "David cannot come in here." Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David. David had said on that day, "Whoever would strike down the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, those whom David hates." Therefore it is said, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house." David occupied the stronghold, and named it **the city of David**. David built the city all around from the Millo inward (2 Samuel 5:6-9).*

*David had said, "Whoever attacks the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander." And Joab son of Zeruiah went up first, so he became chief. David resided in the stronghold; therefore it was called **the city of David** (1 Chronicles 11:6-7).*

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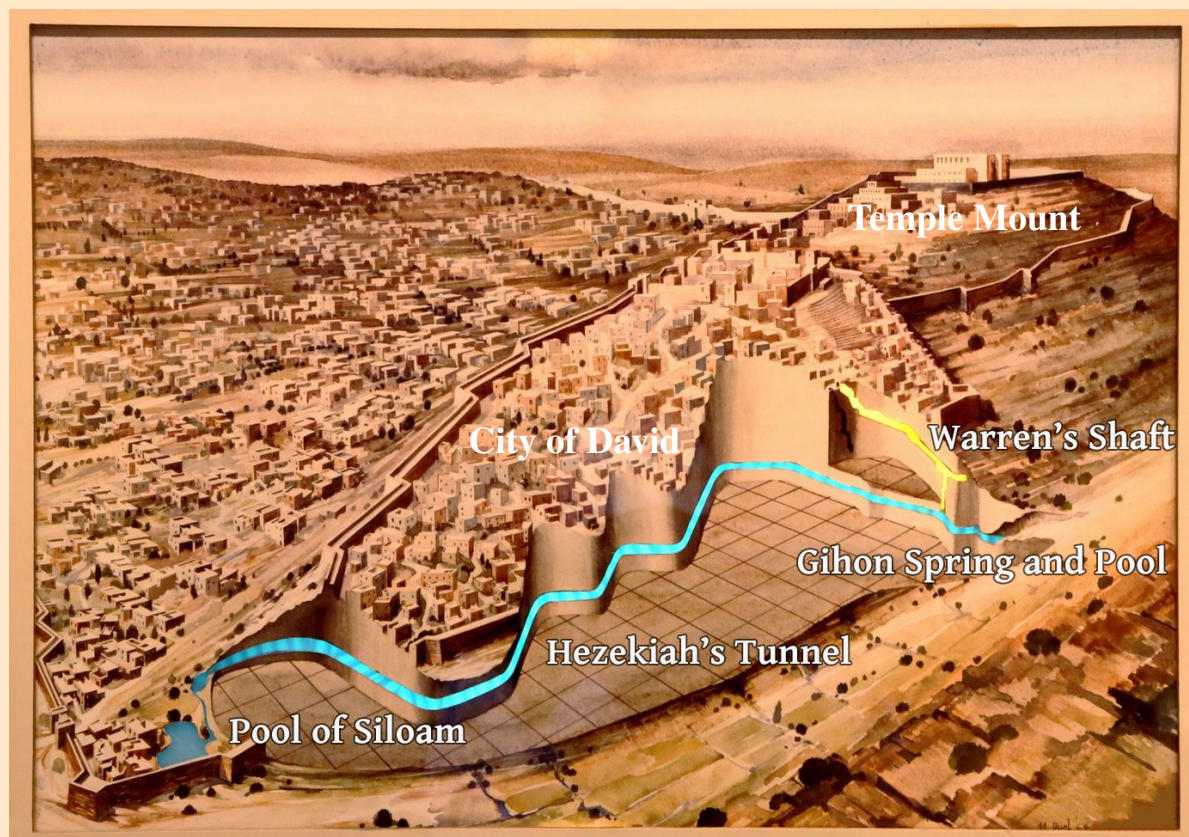
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City of David continued

The graphic below depicts the Jerusalem City of David and how he captured it.



Reclaiming the stolen

The first thing we learn about the City of David is that it was a 'stronghold', a fortress, which suggests a defensive structure against enemies. For the city's inhabitants it was a net, or snare for capturing those who ventured to capture it. Because Zion was originally not Israeli, the name Zion comes to us possibly from a language other than Hebrew. It could have an Arabic root s-w-n, meaning to protect or defend, which may give Zion the meaning of fortress ([Abarim Publications](#)).

This was certainly the attitude of the Jebusites and the king of Jebus who challenged David and his advancing men with, *"You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back"*. Such remarkable overconfidence breeds dangerous complacency and arrogance, for David and his men with brilliant military strategy overcame the Jebusites and took away their identity by renaming it the city of David.

A millennium later, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were just as hostile to the Son of David as they were to king David. Interestingly, the only cases that Jesus conquered in Jerusalem were *the blind, and the lame* (John 5, 9. Matthew 21:14). The blind was cured at the Jewish Siloam pool, and the lame at Bethesda, the Gentile pagan pool of Asclepius the god of healing. He is the Saviour of Jew and Gentile, and greater than all gods.

So, the first thing we learn about the City of David is that no matter how evil men may be in thwarting the purposes of God, they can't. Both David and the Son of David were triumphant over evil at the City of David. But more than overtaking Jebus, David dwelt in the City of David. His triumph was permanent as he went from settling down in the place to building the city all around from the Millo house (2 Samuel 5:9). David occupied the stronghold, but he was not content with the level of security it provided, so he secured it more fully by building around it.

When Abram came into Canaan, the Canaanites were there, but the Lord said to Abram, *"To your offspring I will give this land"* (Genesis 12:6-7). The Jebusites were on land that was not theirs, and David was reclaiming it in accordance with God's promise.

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Reconstructing the stronghold

*David built houses for himself in **the city of David**, and he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it (1 Chronicles 15:1).*

Returning the Divine Presence

*David was angry because the Lord attacked Uzzah; so he called that place Perez Uzzah which remains its name to this very day. David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, "How will the ark of the Lord ever come to me?" So David was no longer willing to bring the ark of the Lord to be with him in **the city of David**. David left it in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite.*

*King David was told, "The Lord has blessed the family of Obed-Edom and everything he owns because of the ark of God." So David went and joyfully brought the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to **the city of David**. As the ark of the Lord entered **the city of David**, Saul's daughter Michal looked out the window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him. They brought the ark of the Lord and put it in its place in the middle of the tent that David had pitched for it. Then David offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before the Lord. When David finished offering the burnt sacrifices and peace offerings, he pronounced a blessing over the people in the name of the Lord of Heaven's Armies (2 Samuel 6:9-18, 1 Chronicles 13:1-14).*

All of David's actions about the City of David were worthy and honourable. He reclaimed an important landmark for God, built up the city for residences, prepared for returning the ark, and eventually brought it back. He restored the presence of God as the centre of the city's life.

David had reigned over Israel 40 years, 33.5 of these in Jerusalem. Then:

*David passed away and was buried in **the City of David** (1 Kings 2:10).*

The good and the bad

The City of David as David's burial place was true of many other kings who were buried there, some whose lives were commendable, others not, and some were a mixture.

*Solomon made an alliance by marriage with Pharaoh, king of Egypt; he married Pharaoh's daughter. He brought her to **the City of David** until he could finish building his residence and the temple of the Lord and the wall around Jerusalem (1 Kings 3:1-3).*

*Solomon transferred the ark of the Lord's covenant from **the City of David** (that is, Zion). The priests brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its assigned place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, in the Most Holy Place, under the wings of the cherubim (1 Kings 8:1-6).*

*Eventually, Pharaoh's daughter moved up from **the City of David** to the palace Solomon built for her (1 Kings 9:24).*

While Solomon demonstrated his loyalty to the Lord by following the practices of his father David, on the other hand he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places, which were places of worship that were naturally or artificially elevated because the temple had not yet been built to honor the Lord.

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The good and the bad continued

While many of the City of David's kings were buried without comment, others, however, had positive or negative death notices. Asa, for example was both good and bad:

Asa did what the Lord his God desired and approved (2 Chronicles 24:1). Near the end of his reign Asa developed a foot disease and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease, he did not seek the Lord, but only the doctors. He was buried in the tomb he had carved out in the City of David (2 Chronicles 16:12-14).

Jehoshaphat Asa's son was good for most of his life but at the end made an alliance with King Ahaziah of Israel, of which the Lord disapproved and was buried in *the City of David* (2 Chronicles 17-20).

Further, *No one regretted Jehoram's death; he was buried in the City of David, but not in the royal tombs* (2 Chronicles 21:20).

On the other hand, Jehoiada was a good king. *Jehoiada grew old and died at the age of 130. He was buried in the City of David with the kings, because he had accomplished good in Israel and for God and his temple* (2 Chronicles 24:16).

Joash was a bad king because in his reign *Judah abandoned the temple of the Lord God of their ancestors and worshiped the Asherah poles and idols. Because of this sinful activity, God was angry with Judah and Jerusalem. So, Joash's servants plotted against him because of what he had done and murdered him on his bed. He was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings* (2 Chronicles 24:18-25).

Amaziah was a mixture. *He did what the Lord approved, but not with wholehearted devotion. Amaziah turned from following the Lord, conspirators plotted against him in Jerusalem, so he fled to Lachish. But they sent assassins after him and they killed him there. His body was carried back by horses, and he was buried with his ancestors in the City of David* (2 Chronicles 25:2, 28).

Jotham was a very good king with nothing bad to say of him. *He did what the Lord approved and grew powerful because he was determined to please the Lord his God. Jotham was buried in the City of David* (2 Chronicles 27:1-9).

Hezekiah was largely a good king. *Hezekiah energetically rebuilt every broken wall. He erected towers and an outer wall and fortified the terrace of the City of David. Hezekiah dammed up the source of the waters of the Upper Gihon and directed them down to the west side of the City of David. Hezekiah succeeded in all that he did. So when the envoys arrived from the Babylonian officials to visit him and inquire about the sign that occurred in the land, God left him alone to test him, in order to know his true motives. Hezekiah was buried on the ascent of the tombs of the descendants of David* 2 Chronicles 32:5-33).

Isaiah, who wrote in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, *saw many breaks in the walls of the City of David* (Isaiah 22:9). It was in Nehemiah's day that at least some of these breaches were repaired.

And Shallum son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he rebuilt it and covered it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars; and he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David (Nehemiah 3:15).

At the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went straight up by the stairs of the City of David at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east (Nehemiah 12:37).

City of David in the New Testament

*Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to **the city of David** called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David (Luke 2:4).*

*To you is born this day in **the city of David** a Saviour, who is Anointed Lord (Luke 2:11).*



Bethlehem: The City of David

The noun *soter* means saviour. This word was fairly common in the classics and could denote anyone who taught useful, life-saving information, or who owned and managed an estate where people lived and worked. Further, the noun (*soteria*), means safety, deliverance, preservation, security, salvation: that which the soter provides.

Also, the verb (*sozo*) means to save. It's part of a cluster of words that revolves around wholeness and soundness: (*soma*), meaning body; (*sophia*), meaning wisdom. As such, our word reminds of the familiar Hebrew word (*shalom*), peace, from the verb (*shalem*), to be or make whole or complete.

Christ, or christos is not really a name but an appellative, or even a title. The noun (*christos*), meaning anointed, comes from the Greek verb (*chrío*), meaning to smear or anoint. Ritualistically, the act of anointing was performed upon people who had no earthly superior and were as such sovereigns (kings, priests, prophets). So yes, the literal meaning of the name Christ is Anointed, but practically it means much rather Inaugurated or even Highest Earthly Rank. Politically speaking, it describes the individual's autonomy ([Abarim Publications](#)).

'Lord' (*kurios*), derived from the verb (*kureo*), means sir, mister, master, lord or Lord. A related verb (*kuroo*), means to acknowledge or demonstrate the inherent authority of someone or something; to validate, prove or confirm something so that it can be believed or accepted by more people.

The social power structures of the ancient world obviously worked differently to those of our modern ones. 'Kurios' is actually surprisingly parallel with our words "sir" (which is short for "sire", which in turn is short for "senior" and means "elder" in the honorary and governmental sense) and "mister" (which is the same as "master", which comes from the Latin term of authority magister, which in turn comes from the same root as the familiar prefix 'mega')([Abarim Publications](#)).

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City of David continued

But the key point about *kurios* is that this word expresses inherent authority rather than assigned or forcibly wrought authority — it originally described the alpha male of a small tribe or household (and as such is on a par with the Hebrew "father") and although an alpha status must obviously be acquired by demonstration, once that is done this status remains in place by the merit of social consensus. Obviously, in more complex societies, the alpha male is the wiser one rather than the stronger one, but wisdom is demonstrated by results just the same (Luke 7:35).

It's precisely this principle that is referred to when Jesus amazed the people, teaching, not alike the scribes but having authority (Matthew 7:29) and although the word used here is (*exousiazō*), it illustrates the second important nuance of '*kurios*', namely that the *kurios* is an intimate part of the society he so fatherly governs. The *kurios* is the alpha male of the group he himself grew up in, or whose members are all his closest family or offspring. He's the kind of leader who loves his people because they are his own, and his people love him for the same reason. It's the kind of authority that comes from love and admiration, that brings about offspring, prosperity and great joy.

Shepherds

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people (Luke 2:8-10).

God selects 'insignificant' shepherds

Announcing the good news to shepherds seems unusual because they were uneducated, unclean in their work, constantly on the move with their flocks, often accused of being thieves, looked on with suspicion and so social and religious outcasts. Consequently, they couldn't give testimony in legal proceedings because they weren't considered trustworthy. But God invited them to go and see Jesus. It's wonderful that God does not discriminate - He reaches to the lowest outsider, and draws them in. Indeed, now favoured of all the strata of society, the shepherds alone heard the good news from heaven. This view was supported by [Strack and Billerbeck](#), described as a deep-seated uncritical strand, which is not altogether foreign to their theological conservatism ([Loader, Stein, and Butler](#)).

However, the insignificant shepherd's view is seriously contested. [Croteau](#), for instance, demonstrates that Luke's text confirms the opposite.

And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them (Luke 2:18).

If shepherds were viewed as societal outcasts, the recipients of their message would have been shocked that the shepherds were entrusted with such heavenly news. Further, he notes that three shepherds were pillars of the Hebrew Bible and Israel's history; Abraham, Moses, and David, and were greatly esteemed in Jewish society (Genesis 13, Exodus 3, 1 Samuel 17).

God selects an 'insignificant' city

Bethlehem Ephrathah

Some 700 years BC, Micah foretells that a future ruler for all Israel will come from Bethlehem Ephrathah, a place "too little to be among the clans of Judah," too small to merit the status of sub-clan. While Bethlehem and Ephrathah are used interchangeably (Genesis 35:19), the point Micah makes is that the place is insignificant, yet will produce a significant king confirmed by the religious leaders at the time of Christ's birth (Matthew 2:6) ([Abarim Publications](#)).

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Bethlehem Ephrathah continued

So, why did God select a town so small that it wasn't even listed in the registry of towns in Joshua 15 or Nehemiah 11? God often chooses what is small and lowly in order to achieve His own purposes without human effort or strength (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Bethlehem was the city where David was born, and heaven now calls it the City of David. So, the promised king and Messiah would be a Davidic ruler. The hopes for David's line would be restored in the same place where David was born and raised as a shepherd.

So, it was not so much that Bethlehem's shepherds were insignificant, but rather the city itself.

Conclusion

- In Israel, two locations less than 10km apart were both called the City of David. In and of itself, that is very unusual, but not so when the purposes of God are considered. Bethlehem was the city where David and Christ were born, and Jerusalem was the city where both died and were buried.
- In terms of status, Bethlehem was insignificant, too small to get on the roll of Israel's listed cities. It was a 'nobody' place (Micah 5:2). That's how God works. He picks nobodies from the nobody place to do His work so that He gets the glory for it, and men do not. Bethlehem was the city where David and Christ both were announced as anointed for their respective ministries, and began their work (1 Samuel 16:1, 4, 13, Luke 2:11).
- In contrast to Bethlehem, Jerusalem was called the great city (Jeremiah 22:8, Revelation 11:8). It was a fortress, but here both men conquered the lame and the blind (2 Samuel 5:6, John 5, 9, Matthew 21:14), David by brilliant military strategy, and Jesus by physical and spiritual healing. In Jerusalem's City of David both men ended their ministry. They started small and ended great. That's God's ordered, and still is so.
- But despite the parallels between David and Christ, there is this contrast. In both cities of David was Jesus declared to be Saviour, Anointed and Lord; in Bethlehem by an angel (Luke 2:11), and in Jerusalem by Peter (Acts 2:21, 36-38, 4:12). He is beyond compare, so nothing more needs to be said.

As for you, **Bethlehem Ephrathah**, seemingly insignificant among the clans of Judah—from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origins are in the distant past (Micah 5:2-5).

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