

## Jebusite Control of Jerusalem

### Commentary for April 15, 2013 — Why David Needed to Conquer the City

We are told in 2 Samuel chapter 5 and 1 Chronicles chapter 11 how King David of Israel conquered Jerusalem and made it the capital city of his kingdom. But why was this conquest necessary? Are we not told in Judges 1:8 that the tribe of Judah conquered Jerusalem?

**“Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and [1] had taken it, and [2] smitten it with the edge of the sword, and [3] set the city on fire.”**

• *Judges 1:8*

These three actions against Jerusalem were specific and detailed. It says they took the city of Jerusalem, put the inhabitants to the sword, and set fire to the city. This taking of Jerusalem happened after the king of Jerusalem allied together with four other regional kings to attack the people of Israel (Joshua chapter 10). Their attack failed and all five kings were captured and executed. That is when the city of Jerusalem, known as Jebus by the Canaanite inhabitants, was attacked and taken by the tribe of Judah. So why do we read these statements a few verses later in chapter 1?

**“And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem UNTO THIS DAY.”**

• *Judges 1:21*

Still later in Joshua we read a similar statement:

**“As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem UNTO THIS DAY.”**

• *Joshua 15:63*

“The children of Judah” and “the children of Benjamin” each attacked Jebus, probably separately, and each failed to drive out the Jebusites and capture the entire city. What does the phrase, “unto this day” mean? It was written by the person who compiled the Book of Joshua. This was likely the prophet Samuel, during the reigns of Kings Saul and David.

We read later in Judges that Jerusalem was still under Jebusite control when the event that caused the near destruction of the tribe of Benjamin in Judges chapters 19–21 occurred:<sup>1</sup>

**“But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem; and there were with him two asses saddled, his concubine also was with him.**

**And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, ‘Come, I pray you, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it.’ And his master said unto him, ‘We will not turn aside there into**

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<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Martin’s article “[The Tribe of Benjamin](#)” which tells of Benjamin’s early history, its near elimination as a tribe, and its later close relationship with Jerusalem and its brother tribe, Judah.

the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel'; ..."

• Judges 19:10–12

Can these passages be reconciled? Yes. Note these two passages:

2 Samuel 5:6–9	1 Chronicles 11:4–8
<p>“And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spoke unto David, saying,</p> <p>‘Except you take away the blind and the lame, you shall not come in hither’: thinking, David cannot come in hither.</p> <p>Nevertheless David took <b>THE STRONG HOLD</b> of Zion: the same is the city of David. ...</p> <p>And David said on that day, ‘Whosoever gets up to the gutter, and smites the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind [<i>i.e.</i>, the weakest could defend the city], that are hated of David's soul, ...</p> <p>So David dwelt in <b>THE FORT</b>, and called it the city of David. And David built [added fortifications] round about from Millo and inward.”</p>	<p>“And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus; where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land. And the inhabitants of Jebus said to David,</p> <p>‘You shall not come hither.’</p> <p>Nevertheless David took <b>THE CASTLE</b> of Zion, which is the city of David.</p> <p>And David said, ‘Whosoever smites the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain. So Joab the son of Zeruiah went first up, and was chief.</p> <p>And David dwelt in <b>THE CASTLE</b>; therefore they called it the city of David. And he built the city round about, even from Millo round about: and Joab repaired the rest of the city.”</p>

The people of Judah and Benjamin each attacked the city of Jebus. They had limited success, killing many inhabitants, and burning the lower city (Judges 1:8, 21, 15:63). They then left the remaining Jebusites and lived alongside these Canaanite people.

Like most cities from remote ancient times to the Middle Ages there was a citadel, a fortress, a castle at the highest portion of the city. That citadel usually had its own source of water. All ancient armies were composed of herdsman and farmers who needed to tend to the land and animals during planting and harvesting seasons. Only between those times could they fight. The Israelites could only besiege the Jebusite citadel for a short period of time.

So, while the armies that had some success attacking Jebus did not conquer the citadel. From the time of Judges until the time of King David the Jebusites lived in a state of uneasy peace with the surrounding people of Judah and Benjamin. Only later when King David chose Jerusalem as his capital did he conquer the city, including the stronghold of the citadel.

This citadel was the outlet for the amazing water system below at the Gihon Springs. Water was propelled to the top of the citadel. This made the citadel a highly desirable place to later put David's palace (2 Samuel 5:9 and 1 Chronicles 11:8) near the Temple built by Solomon.