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The Most Important City Ever

And for Jerusalem's sake, which I have chosen..." (1 Kings 11:13)

"...and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel." (1 Kings 11:32)

"...in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there." (1 Kings 11:36)

"Rehoboam...reigned 17 years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord did choose out of all the tribes of Israel to put His name there." (1 Kings 14:21)

If Salem, ruled by the mysterious Melchizedek, is indeed Jerusalem, then the elusive king who surely ruled in righteousness is long gone when the children of Israel appear in the promised land. Jerusalem is then a heathen city, yet it is the city God chooses due to no merit, goodness, or faith of its own. God decides that city will be the city bearing His name throughout history. The choice of Jerusalem moves us to ponder the wonderful nature of God's sovereign determinations.

In Judges 19 we read of a city that is anything but holy, nothing that resembles the Zion of God. It is a lawless city of unbridled depravity and a scene of unthinkable debauchery.

Only when David is king is Jerusalem finally captured, becoming the capitol of his mighty kingdom. When Nebuchadnezzar takes Jerusalem, it begins a stretch of demoralized existence that lasts centuries. Zerubbabel's temple and Nehemiah's walls pass into the hands of the Persians under Alexander the Great, and then to the Macedo-

nian Greeks, then Antiochus the Great, then the Egyptians, then Antiochus Epiphanes. Briefly, under Macabean might, the city is retaken and the temple purified. Pompeii arrives in 63 BC. Crassus destroys the temple in 54 BC. The Parthians plunder the city in 40 BC. Jerusalem is taken again in 37 BC by Herod the Great. We are well familiar with the Jerusalem of Christ's time and the first century church. Anyone who has read the horrors of Titus' onslaught realizes God had seemingly abandoned the city. Romans are followed by Arabs, Turks, "Christians," Muslims, and then in the early 1900s, the English rule.

Marvel over God's allowance of the heathen parade dominating the Holy City. God let His city be overrun by pagans and lifeless religion. He permitted it to be besieged, conquered, misused, abused, desecrated, destroyed. The story of Jerusalem is a story of violence and degradation. Consider 2 Kings 21:16, "Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." Consider Jerusalem at the time of Christ. Surely this is the most wicked city ever to exist. This city had more Jesus than any other city ever could, ever would. This city killed Him. Is that not more wickedness than is fathomable? Think about Acts 5:28. The accusation the apostles heard was that they had filled the city with their doctrine. How could a city filled with the doctrine of Jesus be experiencing the horrors of Titus' siege within a mere generation?

From obscure Salem to modern Jerusalem; now the largest city in Israel with 732,100 residents (65 percent Jewish, 32 percent Muslim, two percent

Christian, one percent other), it is the city of which God said, "This is Jerusalem. I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries..." (Ezekiel 5:5). Jerusalem has endured because God chose it as His city at the center of His plan.

Understand this city's story and you understand something of the purposes of God. Look into Jerusalem's history and gain insight into God's forbearance and commitment to finish what He starts. Study the role of Jerusalem in God's workings in the world and you must bow before the sovereign choice of God. Read with horror the judgments of Jerusalem in Jeremiah and Ezekiel and fall silent before the holiness of God. See in Jerusalem the depravity of the human heart, the ugliness of dead orthodoxy, the brutality of unbelief.

"And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence" (Isaiah 4:3-5). See in God's dealings with Jerusalem the dealings of a holy, merciful God with every repentant sinner. "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Romans 8:30).