

As Joshua led the Israelites in the conquest, they conquered the territory quickly, leaving pockets and strongholds of the former inhabitants for the next generation to finish off. The Jebusites had one such stronghold in Jerusalem, and they remained there for 400 years after the conquest (Josh. 15:63; Judges 1:21).

When David had conquered much of Judah around this stronghold, he set his sights on the Jerusalem. The Jebusites are famously noted for saying to David, “You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off.” On the surface, this appears to be a taunt: “This fortress is so strong that even the blind and lame could hold it.” But that interpretation doesn’t fit with the context. The Jebusites had to know they were doomed. David had beaten the Philistines and conquered all the territory around Jerusalem. He apparently needed to incentivize someone to be the first to attack those who were “hated by David’s soul,” a very strong word associated with antagonism toward sin.

An interesting archaeological discovery may shed some light on the Jebusites’ threat. The peoples of that region believed in magic and curses. A curse called the “Soldier’s Oath” warned that enemies of the king would be struck with blindness and lameness. There were even legends of the curse working. Therefore, the theory goes that, in an act of desperation, the Jebusites cursed their front line. These may have been actual blind and lame people, by natural causes or self-mutilation. If so, then the comment threatened that whoever attacked them would be cursed with their disabilities. This explains David’s strong expression of hatred and his incentive to promote the first one to attack.

1 Chronicles 11:6 reveals that the fierce warrior, Joab, accepted the challenge. The Jebusite stronghold fell, and David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel.

For further reading, see the online article “Who Were the ‘Blind and Lame’ Defenders of Jebusite Jerusalem? It’s Not Whom You Might Think” by Christopher Eames

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