



URBAN CURRENT

O Jerusalem

"The history of Jerusalem is the history of the world, but it is also the chronicle of an often penurious, provincial town amid the Judean hills. Jerusalem was once regarded as the center of the world, and today that is more true than ever: The city is the focus of the struggle between the Abrahamic religions, the shrine for increasingly popular Christian, Jewish, and Islamic fundamentalism, the strategic battlefield of clashing civilizations, the frontline between atheism and faith, the cynosure of secular fascination, the object of giddy conspiracism, and internet mythmaking, and the illuminating stage for the cameras of the world and the age of twenty-four hour news. Religious, political, and media interest feed on each other, to make Jerusalem more intensely scrutinized today than ever before." So writes Simone Sebag Montefiore in the preface of his recently released epic titled *Jerusalem, A Biography*.

Today, the urban home of the first church of Jesus Christ is a tourist destination and political hot spot. In the middle of it all is Steven Khoury, Arab-Israeli and founder-pastor of Calvary Baptist Church. Born in Jerusalem and growing up a few miles south in Bethlehem, he watched his father navigate the treacherous waters of planting and pastoring First Baptist Church of Bethlehem during wave after wave of violence.

As a kid, Steven's dream was to serve in Bethlehem. An execution changed that. An uncle trusted Christ. Uncle George's passion was for the gospel advance in Jerusalem. "The vision must continue, Jerusalem must be saved," he said over and over. His love for Christ cost him his life. He was murdered on the Mount of Olives for his faith. What kind of molding and shaping of a life takes place growing up in such an environment? His uncle's passion for Jerusalem, sealed with martyr's blood, marked Steven for life.

Steven came to the states to attend Baptist Bible College, Springfield, MO. Thankfully the lure, the comfort, the attraction of America could not hold him. He returned to Jerusalem heeding God's call, founding Calvary Baptist Church in July 2004. Since opening, some 1,500 people have passed through its doors. Steven leads the congregation to be strong, bold, public. Calvary Church's refusal to go along to get along has meant an existence of constant persecution from the same adversaries that killed his uncle. The church doors have been repeatedly closed and opened. Several times pressure has caused landlords to expel this congregation of believers. Again and again God has provided a new meeting place.

Despite mounting opposition, discrimination, harassment, loss of income, physical assaults, and the always-present threat of death, this called-out assembly persists. "We are with you," a handwritten note to Pastor Steve reads, "we are ready to die for Jesus' sake."

The latest chapter of this modern move of the Holy Spirit in the ancient city has Muslim leaders prevailing over a landlord once again. At the moment of this writing, the congregation is beyond a deadline they had been given to leave their present facility. God has made it possible for them to remain on a week-to-week basis. However, they must find another place. A sympathetic Muslim realtor advises the believers that a new lease is unlikely. "Your reputation for evangelizing in this community makes it impossible for landlords to take the risk of giving you a lease."

What to do? Steven began asking God for clarity. "Is this where You want me to minister? Is this where You want the gospel to bear fruit?" The congregation faces the dilemma. The response is immediate and potent. "If our church shuts down," said a brother, "I will have no meaning to my life." A sister asserts, "If they take away our church, we will build another

with our own hands." One of the young people declares, "Even if it costs my life, I want to see the flag of Christ fly free above our church's home."

Pastor Khoury sees the best option as being the purchase of a building. Presently, there is a structure that seems ideal. Its location would permit easy access to people from all backgrounds in Jerusalem regardless of religion or nationality. Still, buying a building in Jerusalem, even if all the other barriers are surmounted, looms as impossible because of cost. Impossible? "Impossible for us," says Pastor Steve, "but not for God, and not for His family of believers standing in unity with us in the city of Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection." Steven Khoury is a fearless young man leading a brave congregation.

Learn more at www.HolyLandMissions.org. Jerusalem, the city central to God's Christmas gift. Ground zero for God's unfolding gospel drama. Jerusalem — city of David and Jeremiah, Caiaphas and Pilot, Peter and Herod.

This Christmas, pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Pray for Calvary Baptist Church to obtain a desperately needed facility. The work Jesus started 2,000 years ago needs to continue in this strategic place.

Jerusalem still needs Jesus.

by Charles Lyons, Pastor
Armitage Baptist Church,
Chicago, Illinois
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org

