

BeerSheba

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BIB: 381 Land of the Bible

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If you happened to look through a Bible at any point in your life, you might've passed by the name Beersheba. In reading the Bible, Beersheba seems to be a key location in the history of the Patriarch of the Jewish faith and the people of Israel. This paper will give a small glimpse into Beersheba, its importance to the Judeo-Christian community and history.

Beersheba, or Hebrew Be'er Sheva', is a biblical town of southern Israel, now a city and the main centre of the Negev (ha-Negev) region. Beersheba is first mentioned as the site where Abraham, founder of the Jewish people, made a covenant with the Philistine king Abimelech of Gerar (Genesis 21).¹ The Hebrew name means "well of seven" or "well of oath." Both Hebrew words, "to swear" and "oath," are derived from the word "seven."² This may be because Abraham set 7 ewe lambs before Abimelech as proof that he dug up the wells. The two men swore an oath and made a covenant.³ Beersheba symbolized the southern boundary of the Land of Israel, as in the phrase "from Dan to Beersheba"

An interesting part of Beersheba's history is that it has been destroyed and rebuilt many times over the centuries. The city of Beer-sheba was destroyed by King Sennacherib of Assyria, during his campaign against Judah in 701 BCE. During the 7th century BCE a small settlement existed on the site, its poor and sparse construction indicative of royal neglect; it came to an end when the Babylonians conquered the Kingdom of Judah in 587-6 BCE.⁴

Throughout the years, Beersheba has been the site for great archeological discovery. Tel Sheva, an archaeological site containing the ruins of an ancient town believed to have been the Biblical Beersheba, lies a few kilometers east of the modern city. A mound has been excavated

¹ www.britannica.com > place > Beersheba

² David Freedman "

³ Genesis 21:27-30

⁴ Israel.org

which according to Oeane “ is about 1 ha (2.5 acres) in area, located in the Beersheba valley, east of the modern city of Beersheba in Israel's Negev desert The settlement was built on a hill at the fork of the Beersheba and Hebron riverbeds, which provided the site with natural protection and close proximity to cultivable alluvial soil, as well as to the main crossroad.”⁵ This mound has remains from many different eras such as the Chalcolithic period (which is also known as the Copper Age, was an era of transition between the stone tool-using farmers of the Neolithic and the metal-obsessed civilizations of the Bronze Age roughly 3500 to 2300 BCE.) and the Iron Age I period (which was a period in human history that started between 1200 B.C. and 600 B.C.). An interesting finding was a large horned altar that was uncovered at the site. It was reconstructed with several well-dressed stones found in secondary use in the walls of a later building. This altar attests to the existence of a temple or cult center in the city which was probably dismantled during the reforms of King Hezekiah. (1 Kings 18:4).

According to Israel.org, “The large area of the site was excavated between 1969 and 1976, producing several layers of the remains of settlement, including fortified towns of the early Israelite period and the monarchic period of Judah, covered by remnants of small fortresses dated from the Persian to the Roman periods.”⁶ The site was excavated by Y. Aharoni and the last season by Z. Herzog, on behalf of Tel Aviv University.

Today Beersheba has very hot summers, with temperatures up to 42 °C (110 °F). In the winter, the temperature at night can be as low as 0 °C (30 °F). The average precipitation in the city is 260 mm a year. Between summer to winter, Beersheba is prone to sandstorms that cover the whole city in dust. About 200-250 tonnes/sqkm of dust are dumped in the area. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Beersheba had a population of 185,400 by the end of

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⁶ Israel.org

2006,⁷ compared to 110,800 in a survey conducted 20 years earlier. This makes Beersheba the sixth largest city in Israel. The largest employers in Beersheba are the municipality itself, Israel Defense Forces, Ben-Gurion University, and the Soroka Medical Center.

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⁷ Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, Table 3: Population of Localities Numbering Above 1,000 Residents and Other Rural Population, 12.31.2007, *www.cbs.gov.il*.

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