

BEERSHEBA

Beersheba was located in the Negev, and it was considered to be Israel's southern border. The phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" was used to refer to the whole land, from the north (Dan) to the south (Beersheba) (Judg. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20).

The name Beersheba means "well of the seven" or "well of the oath." It originated from a dispute between Abraham and Abimelech. Abraham gave Abimelech seven ewe lambs to serve as a witness that he had dug a certain well, and the men made an oath in that place (Gen. 21:22-33). Abraham lived at Beersheba (Gen. 22:19), and, in later times, Isaac lived there too. The servants of Isaac also dug a well at that place and made a covenant with Abimelech. (This name was a title used for Philistine rulers; it means "my father is king.") At Beersheba, Isaac also built an altar to the Lord (Gen. 26:22-33). Isaac must have settled there, for his son Jacob left Beersheba in order to go to Haran (Gen. 28:10). Later, when Jacob went down to Egypt, he sacrificed to God at Beersheba, and God spoke to him in visions (Gen. 46:1-5).

After the conquest of Canaan, Beersheba was located in the territory of Judah and Simeon (Josh. 15:28; 19:2). The city had a cultic area people used to worship the Lord (or perhaps a pagan god). After the kingdom divided, even Israelites in the north went to worship there (Amos 5:5; 8:14). The shrine at Beersheba may have been destroyed in Hezekiah's reformation (2 Kings 18:4), or perhaps it was destroyed later when Josiah broke down the high places at Beersheba (2 Kings 23:8).

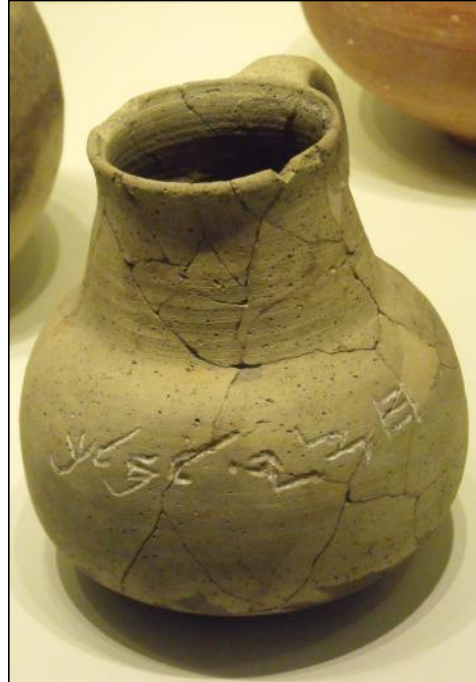
Finds at Beersheba include a well and gateway, casemate walls, four-room houses, and stables or storehouses. (See the schematic in Murphy-O'Connor, 499.) The most famous discovery is a four-horned altar, which was made from finely-hewn sandstone blocks (contrary to Deut. 27:5).



Four-horned Altar from Beersheba
10th-8th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)



Jug with Inscription
“(Belonging) to Neriysu,
(belonging) to Amariyahu”
8th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum)



Jug with Inscription
“Half (a measure,
belonging) to the King”
8th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum)



Bowl Inscribed with *qdsh* (*qodesh*),
the Hebrew Word for “Sacred” or “Holy”
8th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum)



Churn from Beersheba
4500-3500 B.C.
(Israel Museum)

Used to make butter from milk, the churn was first introduced in the Chalcolithic period. It was suspended by a rope that was tied to each of the handles, allowing it to more swiftly be rocked back and forth. This sped up the churning process.

Today, Beersheba is the largest city in the Negev and (according to some listings) the eighth largest city of Israel, boasting a population of nearly 210,000 people. Through the years, the city has been settled by Jewish immigrants from a number of countries (such as Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union). It is home to Ben Gurion University. Because of its proximity to the borders of Gaza and Egypt, the Jewish city is vulnerable to rocket attacks.