

HEBRON

The ancient city of Hebron was located about twenty miles south of Jerusalem, in the hill country of Judea. The area was known for having vineyards, orchards, and olive groves. The name Hebron means “friend,” “league,” or “confederation.” Some suggest that the place derived its name from Abraham, who was known as “God’s friend” (Jas. 2:23). Another possibility is that the name reflects the fact that the city was in league with other cities and villages in southern Canaan (Josh. 10:37). Previously, it had been known as “Kiriath Arba” (“City of Arba”); Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim (Josh. 14:15).

After Abraham entered Canaan, he lived at Hebron, “near the great trees of Mamre” (Gen. 13:18). It was here that the three angels visited him, reconfirming the promise of a son (Gen. 18:1-15). At that time, God also revealed to Abraham his intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-33). After Sarah died, Abraham bought the field of Machpelah at Hebron, for it had a cave in it that he could use for her burial (Gen. 23:19). Later, when Abraham died, he was also buried in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 25:9). The tomb was used for others in his family, including Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah (Gen. 35:29; 49:30-31; 50:13). In the first century B.C., Herod the Great built a monument with dressed stones over the cave. It is referred to as the Tomb of the Patriarchs and is the main biblical attraction of Hebron today—being honored by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. (For more information on the tomb, see *BAR* [May/June 1985]: 26-43.)

In the days of Moses, when Israel was encamped at Kadesh, twelve spies were sent to scout out the Promised Land, and they came to Hebron (Num. 13:22). After the forty years of wilderness wandering due to sin, the Israelites finally conquered Canaan. During the southern campaign of the conquest, Joshua defeated the city of Hebron and its king (Josh. 10:36-37; 11:21; 12:10). Hebron was later allotted to Caleb and the tribe of Judah (Josh. 14:13-14; 15:13-14; Judg. 1:9-10). It also served as a levitical city and one of the six cities of refuge (Josh. 20:7-8; 21:10-13).

During the time of the monarchy, Hebron was the site where David was anointed as king (2 Sam. 2:1-4). There he ruled over Judah for more than seven years before transferring his capital to Jerusalem and reigning over all Israel; he reigned for a total of forty years (2 Sam. 5:1-5; 1 Kings 2:11). Later, David’s son Absalom moved to Hebron when he rebelled against his father’s rule (2 Sam. 15:7, 10).

In modern times, Hebron has been a troubled area for the Jewish people. The city was occupied by Jews until a pogrom against them in 1927. Later, after the Six Day War in 1967,

Jews re-inhabited the area, but this number is marginal (1,000 or less). Sources vary widely regarding the population of Hebron in 2022, but a good average would be 200,000. This number is predominantly comprised of Arab Muslims. Yet, the nearby community of Kyriat Arba has approximately 8,000 Jews. Hebron has periodically experienced outbreaks of violence between Muslims and Jews, which requires the presence of Israeli military forces to keep the peace.