

Shechem in the Bible

Commentary for October 1, 2016 — Many Things Happened There

The city of Shechem figures prominently in this month's article, "Israel and Judah: 20. Civil War and Division."¹ In the Bible, Shechem is known by several names in the King James Version: Sichem, Sychem, and Sychar (Joshua 20:7; Judges 9:9; 1 Kings 12:25, and John 4:5). To understand the history of Shechem, all of the information must be considered.

- The first place YHWH appeared to Abram (later renamed Abraham) was at Shechem:

"Then Abram passed through the land as far as the place of Shechem to the high oak. The Canaanite was then in the land. Yet Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him: 'To your seed I shall give this land.' Then Abram built there [at Shechem] an altar to Yahweh Who had appeared to him."

• *Genesis 12:6–7, Concordant Literal Version*

Let me present a chronological list of events that took place at or near Shechem:

- Jacob, grandson of Abram, when he re-entered the Promised Land, he bought land to live on and built an altar at Shechem (Genesis 33:18–20).
- After buying the land and agreeing to live peacefully, during a feast, Shechem, son of Hamor, raped Jacob's only daughter Dinah at Shechem. (Yes, Shechem the son was named after Shechem the city). Dinah agreed to marry Shechem. The settlement required all men of Shechem to be circumcised before the marriage. Jacob's sons Simon and Levi murdered every male in the city. Jacob's other sons (not Joseph), looted the city, taking all livestock and taking captive the women and young children (Genesis chapter 34).
- Jacob buried "strange gods" given to him by those in his household (probably part of the loot from sacking the city) under an oak tree in Shechem (Genesis 35:1–4).
- Jacob built an altar at Bethel, a few miles from Shechem (Genesis 35:7).
- After his dreams from God of his future glory, Joseph is sent to seek his brothers and the flocks grazing at Shechem (Genesis 37:13–14). They are not there. Joseph finds them but at Dothan, where the brothers sell Joseph to Midianites (37:15–28).
- Jacob designated that territory to the people of his son Joseph (Genesis 48:22; Joshua 24:32; John 4:5, where Sychar was another name for Shechem).
- Moses predicted that the tribes of Israel would gather near Shechem. Half the tribes would be placed on the foothills of Mt. Gerizim and the other six tribes on the foothills of Mount Ebal. Shechem, which means "shoulder" or "back," was situated between these two mountains (Deuteronomy 27:12–13). They would renew their covenant with YHWH at that time.

¹ Read the "[October 1, 2016 Newsletter](#)" first for interesting background information.

- Shechem was within the territory allotted to the half tribe of Manasseh, one of Joseph's two sons (Joshua 17:7).
- Shechem was one of the six refuge cities where those guilty of manslaughter could live in sanctuary. This was done to avoid blood feuds (Joshua 20:3–7).
- Shechem was also a city allotted to the Levites (Joshua 21:19–21).
- Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem to renew their Mosaic Covenant to YHWH. Fire came down from heaven showing God's approval (Joshua chapter 24). The people acknowledged Joshua's request and gave a reply which has great bearing on events in the October 2016 article, "Israel and Judah: 20. Civil War and Division."

"Then the people answered and said:

'Far be it from us to forsake Yahweh to serve other elohim. For Yahweh our Elohim, He is the One Who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, from the house of servants, and Who did those great signs before our eyes. He guarded us all along the way on which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. Yahweh drove out before our face all the peoples, also the Amorite, who were dwelling in the land. We too, we shall serve Yahweh, for He is our Elohim.'"

• *Joshua 24:16–17, CLV*

Good words. The people of Israel during the time of Solomon's successor say and do the exact opposite of these excellent words spoken toward the end of Joshua's life.

- Close to the time of Israel's covenant renewal, Joseph's body, which was brought from Egypt, was finally buried in a field at Shechem that Jacob had bought (Joshua 24:32).
- Abimelech killed his 70 brothers by his father Gideon, a Judge of Israel. Abimelech, born in Shechem, convinced the men of Shechem to make him king of Israel. Of course, God did not choose Abimelech. He ruled for 3 years, but fell out with the men of Shechem. Abimelech burned the city. Abimelech died in the siege (Judges chapter 9).

Then, after Solomon's death come the events of this month's article. Read the account there.

- During the period between the Old and New Testament, Shechem became a chief Samaritan city. The Samaritans were settlers the Assyrians brought into northern Israel to populate the land. They were originally pagans who worshipped YHWH along with other gods (the same sin the people of Israel committed). The Samaritans had a temple at Mt. Gerizim, which is within sight of Shechem. Jacob's well is nearby (John 4:5). Today that city near Shechem (but apart from it) is known as Nablus.
- Jesus stayed at Sychar (= Shechem) for two days. While there, He spoke with a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob for an extensive discussion (John 4:1–42). This took place within eyesight of Shechem, a populous city at that time.
- Because of Jesus' preparatory work, after Jesus' resurrection Philip the evangelist successfully converted many people, assisted by Peter and John (Acts 8:4–25). This also took place at and near Shechem.

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